Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Where have you been wearing your *Lake Tahoe News* shirt? Sue Wood of South Lake Tahoe was wearing hers this week at the Troon North Golf Course in Scottsdale. Send us a picture of you in your *LTN* shirt, tell us where it was taken and we'll put it on our LTN Facebook page. Send it to info@LakeTahoeNews.net. If you don't have a shirt, send $15 with your T-shirt size to: LTN, PO Box 13406, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.

• Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation's Celebration of Education is May 15 from 4:30-6pm at Lakeland Village's Lakeshore Pavilion.

• On May 18 at 6pm at South Tahoe Ice Arena the STAHA State Championship Banner will be raised.

• State Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Rocklin, along with others will be hosting a dedication ceremony honoring the late Sen. Dave Cox in naming the Highway 50 interchange at Hazel Avenue in Sacramento County as the Senator Dave Cox Memorial Interchange. The dedication in May 3 at 10:30am at the Nimbus Lake Overlook.

• The road to Van Sickle Bi-state Park is open for the season from sunrise to sunset daily.

'Oliver' features Zephyr Cove

kids

Two Lake Tahoe youth will be performing in this month’s stage production of “Oliver” in Carson City.

Logan Chapman will star as Oliver, and his sister, Drue Chapman, will play a member of Fagin’s gang.

The Western Nevada Musical Theatre Company’s production of “Oliver” plays at the Carson City Community Center the weekends of May 10-12 and May 17-19.

The story is about a child who is sold by a London orphanage because he asked for more food. Oliver eventually escapes to the streets of London, finding adventure and a loving home.

To purchase tickets and find out performance times, go online.

The Carson City Community Center is located at 851 E. William St., on the corner of Roop Street and Highway 50 East. Tickets will also be sold at the venue one hour before showtime.

Lack of moisture triggers early fire season

There was no snow to be found today during the final survey of the season near Echo Summit, which comes as no surprise considering temperatures in the Lake Tahoe area have been running above normal for most of this spring.

Statewide, the snowpack as of May 2 is 17 percent of normal for this date.

Electronic readings show water content in the northern mountains is 16 percent of normal for the date. Electronic readings for the central Sierra show 23 percent of normal water. The numbers for the southern Sierra are 9 percent of average.

While Lake Oroville in Butte County, the State Water Project's principal storage reservoir, is at 103 percent of its average level for the date (86 percent of its 3.5 million acre-foot capacity) and Shasta Lake north of Redding, the federal Central Valley Project's largest reservoir with a capacity of 4.5 million acre-feet, is at 95 percent of its normal storage level for the date (83 percent of capacity), it won't take long for those numbers to change with water users downstream tapping into the supply and normal evaporation with summer's high temps in these areas.



The Upper Truckee Marsh on April 22 is drier than normal. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Already the Department of Water Resources is projecting to deliver 35 percent of the requested amounts of water for SWP customers. Snow normally provides about one-third of the water for California's homes and farms as it melts into streams, reservoirs and aquifers.

Sprinklers coming on in April was a sure sign the ground is abnormally dry in Tahoe.

The average temperature in the Lake Tahoe Basin has been running 10 to 15 degrees higher than normal for this time of year, which just helps to dry things out faster.

However, with the unsettled weather moving in, the mercury will be returning to normal – back to the low 60s.

Even though rain is in the forecast for the Lake Tahoe Basin starting on Saturday and continuing through Tuesday, the amount of wet stuff will not be enough to make up for the dismal snowpack.

The good news with thunderstorms in the forecast is there is still plenty of snow in the higher elevations. This means little chance of lightning starting a fire.

"Once this system moves out of the area, it will give a little reprieve before the start of fire season. But once it starts to heat up, fire season will be here earlier than typical," Scott McGuire, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

For other areas of the state, fire season is in full force. The Santa Ana winds have whipped up multiple fires in Southern California that as of this afternoon were still out of control. Fire is also eating up grasslands in Sonoma and Napa counties. Fire season usually starts in June in California.

All indicators point to 2013 likely being a bad year for fire.

"Our firefighters have responded to an increased number of wildfires due to the very little rainfall we have received over the past few months," CalFire director Ken Pimlott said in a statement. As of the end of April, CalFire had responded to more than 680 wildfires this calendar year. This is about 200 more than the average for this time of year.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Disney music to come alive in Tahoe

The Lake Tahoe Choir and Lake Tahoe Community College Chorus present Disney Dazzle featuring favorite Disney songs, with special guests the Children’s Honor Choir.

The shows are May 3 at 7pm at LTCC’s Duke Theatre and May 5 at 2pm at MontBleu in Stateline.

Tickets are $10 adults, and $8 students and seniors.

Skilled nursing facilities clear first hurdle

Skilled nursing facilities throughout California are cautiously optimistic about their future with this week’s 17-0 bipartisan vote that would reverse Medi-Cal cuts to health care providers.

Assembly Bill 900 was before the Assembly Health Committee on April 30.

Now it goes to the Assembly Appropriations Committee and then to the full Assembly. If AB900 were to move out of the Assembly, then it would go through a similar path on the Senate side.



Barton Skilled Nursing Facility's healing garden. Photo/Provided

"This is anticipated to be a tough process and we still have a long way to go. The results of AB900 not passing will be that many facilities will have to close their doors," Mary Bittner, vice president of nursing and ancillary services for Barton Health, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Barton Memorial's Skilled Nursing Facility is one of those care centers that is threatened with closure if reimbursements are cut. The 48-bed skilled-nursing and short-stay rehabilitation facility often runs at capacity.

Mostly it's lower income older people who live at the South Lake Tahoe facility. The center provides around-the-clock care for aging adults.

In the last five years, approximately one-third or 40 hospital-based skilled-nursing facilities in California have closed because of financial reasons, according to the California Hospital Association.

Throughout the state Medi-Cal beneficiaries make up nearly 80 percent of the patients receiving hospital-based skilled-nursing care. Barton relies on these reimbursements, too.

The California Hospital Association believes AB900 is necessary to reverse Medi-Cal cuts to health care providers.

“Although these reductions amount to a 10 percent reduction for doctors and most other health care providers, the payment cuts are much deeper – averaging 25 percent or greater – for hospital-based skilled-nursing units,” the association said in a statement. “The consequence would be cutbacks and closures that would tear a hole in California’s safety net, rip families apart, and punish the most vulnerable and sick among us. Families would be forced to relocate their loved ones to another facility, perhaps hundreds of miles away.”

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Boats must be inspected before entering Tahoe

Boat inspections in the Lake Tahoe Basin have resumed.

All motorized boats and watercraft are required to be inspected for aquatic invasive species prior to launching into Lake Tahoe.

Knowingly transporting AIS into Lake Tahoe is against the law, and violators may be subject to monetary penalties.

Locations, hours of operation and opening dates are as follows:

Effective now:

Sunday-Wednesday 8:30am-5:30pm; Thursday-Saturday

Meyers: at the junction of highway 50 and 89

Spooner Summit: at the junction of highway 50 and 28

Alpine Meadows: Highway 89, off Alpine Meadows Road north of Tahoe City.

Starting May 23:

Thursday-Sunday 8:30am-5:30pm; Monday-Wednesday closed

Northstar: Highway 267, at Northstar Drive south of Truckee

Homewood: Highway 89, at Homewood Resort.

The annual watercraft inspection fees remain unchanged from 2012. The “Tahoe In & Out” sticker ranges from $35 for personal watercraft and vessels less than 17 feet and up to $121 for vessels longer than 39 feet. The “Tahoe Only” sticker fee is $30. An additional fee of $25 is being charged for any boat requiring decontamination and an additional $10 fee for the decontamination of each raw water system such as ballasts, generators, live wells, etc.

For more info, call 888.824.6267.

Fire fee to be topic of teleconference

George Runner will host a teleconference townhall on May 7 at 6pm regarding the confusing and controversial fire prevention fee.

The tele-townhall is co-sponsored by state Sen. Ted Gaines and Assemblymembers Frank Bigelow and Beth Gaines and is part of a series of regional townhalls Board of Equalization Member Runner is having for taxpayers in his district.

Taxpayers in Alpine, Amador, Calaveras and El Dorado counties are specifically invited to participate in the May 7 teleconference event, but others are welcome to join the call as well.

During the call, Runner and other participating elected officials will discuss the latest fire “fee” news, including the lawsuit and pending legislation, and answer questions from callers.

Those who would like to participate must register by May 6 by calling (916) 445.3032.

Taxpayers who pre-register will receive a telephone call at the start of the event inviting them to connect to the townhall.

Northstar ramping up for summer operations

By Kathryn Reed

Zipping through the trees is soon going to have a different meaning for people visiting Northstar.

No longer will skis, a snowboard or mountain bike be necessary.

The Forest Flyer is expected to be in operation next winter. It’s a toboggan of sorts that is on wheels on a track. People will be towed to the top of the track, then gravity will take them through the bank turns, loops, over bridges, through the forest and back to the starting point at the bottom of the Vista lift at mid-mountain.

This will be an attraction that is designed to be open year-round. (Pricing has yet to be set.)



A ride similar to this could be operational at Northstar this winter. Photo/Provided

“People have a need to get out in the woods and some don’t have the ability or skill to do it,” Bill Rock, chief operating officer of Northstar, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “One thing about this project and ziplines is they make the outdoors more accessible to people. You really can get a sense of flying through the forest.”

Since Vail Resorts took over the Truckee resort, the location of the flyer has been changed. This is in large part to accommodate those who had voiced concerns.

Plans still need to be approved by Placer County. Then the state needs to sign off on the designs, too.

Also working its way through the halls of the county’s planning department is the resort’s master plan. The draft environmental impact report is expected to be released for public comment in June.

It’s possible some of the items in the plan could be implemented in 2014. A priority list has not been disclosed.

Events continue to be huge draw for Northstar. This year Tough Mudder will be over two weekends – one in July, the other in

September.

Rock said last year it attracted so many people to the resort who had not been there before, that the organizers and Northstar thought doubling the exposure of the endurance event would benefit everyone.

This will be the third summer Northstar has hosted the Tahoe Trail 100. The amateur mountain bike race is a qualifier for Colorado's Leadville 100.

On a less intense note are the Strider bike series for those who are new to cycling. Rock's twins, who are now 8, learned at age 2 on Striders.

"It's revolutionizing how to ride bikes," Rock said. "We do it on the ice rink so it's a contained environment."

And when the rink isn't full of little kids learning to ride a bike, that rink is for roller skating this time of year.

While Rock would like Northstar to be as popular in summer as it is winter, he knows it will take more work to make that happen. But he said the interest in the resort *sans* snow is growing.

Power of SWAT team can be impressive

By Ted Long

The SWAT team gave its presentation this week and it was impressive. That is to say if you are impressed by firepower.

Once again the presenters were young, friendly and obviously love their job. Both of them said so repeatedly. I guess it takes a certain sort to do it, with all the danger and everything, but there is also the element of liking to be on the chase, seeing fun in it and both of them definitely do.

They demonstrated the bombs they use for entry and the various guns they carry. The vehicles were dark and scary and looked very uncomfortable to ride in; part of the role to be played.



Ted Long

As a citizen, I am constantly tested on my desire to be protected and my fear of the power of the state. I do not consider myself a conspiracy type or paranoid, but in the course of my years as a lawyer I have seen abuse and the great potential of it, by the guys with the guns and with the power to remove us from society. It is clear that I am in a minority in our group. Some of the participants, in my view, overplay their excitement about the show of force, and the bad guy notion. There is an attempt at balance by the checks and balances of the justice system; the Constitution and I hope my some deep seeded sense of fairness in those entrusted to protect us. However. all deals seem to be off when you are shot dead and the SWAT team is a front line example of that possibility.

There is also the issue of leadership. The police are a paramilitary operation, heavily trained to just react and to follow orders. So while the majority may be sound, what if a leader goes astray? Kind of like that great movie “Doctor

Strangelove”. The boys talked about the controls, the need to account for every bullet, etc. I am not so sure all that process is public, and it would be easy to hide facts in the bureaucracy.

All that said, the presentation was great, the officers forthright and the overall tone of the group was go get’em. And while I very much appreciate the community support for our law enforcement personnel, I continue to waive the flag of caution, and of a great public awareness of those who protect us. Let us never forget lessons from history and what can be done with power gone bad. As citizens it is our job to keep the fox form guarding the hen houses.

Ted Long is a South Lake Tahoe resident participating in the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Citizens Academy.

Generic drugs help CVS’ bottom line

By John Kell, Wall Street Journal

CVS Caremark Corp. said its quarterly earnings rose 23 percent despite flat revenue, as strong demand for new generic drugs bolstered its bottom line.

The drugstore retailer and pharmacy-benefits manager has now reported better-than-expected earnings for five consecutive quarters. Chief Executive and President Larry Merlo said the latest quarter showed stronger-than-expected prescription volumes.

CVS will be up against lofty comparisons from 2012, when the

company began to serve millions of clients forced to leave Walgreen Co.’s pharmacies as a result of a rate dispute with PBM Express Scripts Holding Co. Walgreen and Express Scripts have since resolved their differences, and though CVS expects to keep a majority of the new clients it gained from the impasse, some have returned to Walgreen.

At the company’s PBM business, sales inched up 0.1 percent as higher volumes and drug-cost inflation were offset by new generic offerings, which are a mixed blessing for the industry as the low-price treatments hurt the top line but lift margins.

Processed claims rose 4.3 percent amid new clients, the strong flu season and CVS’s Medicare Part D program.

Sales at the company’s retail segment climbed 0.2 percent, as increased generic-drug sales at the pharmacy counter offset weakness in front-of-store items such as soap and greeting cards.

For the quarter, CVS reported a profit of $956 million, or 77 cents a share, up from $776 million, or 59 cents a share, a year earlier. Excluding costs related to acquisitions, the company’s adjusted profit rose to 83 cents a share from 65 cents. CVS had predicted 77 cents to 80 cents.

Revenue was roughly flat at $30.76 billion. Analysts surveyed by Thomson Reuters expected revenue of $30.36 billion.

Gross margin widened to 18.1 percent from 16.6 percent.

The company raised the low end of its view for the year by three cents a share, now expecting per-share adjusted earnings of $3.89 to $4.