Ski resort safety bill passes first hurdle

By Elyce Kirchner, Jeremy Carroll and Kevin Nious, NBC-Bay Area

A bill aimed at improving safety standards at ski resorts moved one step closer toward becoming law on Wednesday. This comes following an NBC Bay Area investigation that exposed numerous safety hazards at resorts across the state.

Senate Bill 564 would require ski areas to prepare an annual safety plan and make the number of accidents and fatalities available to the public.

The bill passed a Senate committee hearing Wednesday by a 6-1 margin.



It would be impossible to mark every obstacle at a ski resort. Photo/LTN file

Snowboarder Brian Kirby testified in support of the new regulations. In 2011, Kirby told NBC Bay Area that he nearly died after falling into an unmarked raven at a ski resort in Big Bear. He said the area has since been boarded up and blocked off to prevent future accidents.

“Why would you let someone enter the death trap before

blocking it off," Kirby told NBC Bay Area. He believes that with more oversight, his accident could have been prevented.

Julie Kozberg knows all too well that accidents like Kirby's are not uncommon at ski areas. In 2008, Kozberg's sister Olga Stepakova fell and hit her head on an unmarked bolder while skiing near Lake Tahoe. The 26-year-old was later pronounced brain dead and died at a local hospital.

"There were boulders, three stumps right over the snow that you could never see," Kozberg remembered. "A couple of days later, we had to bury my sister and life has never been the same. She was the only sister I've ever had."

Kirby and Kozberg hope a new ski safety bill sponsored by state Sen. William Monning, D-Carmel, will prompt resorts to be more transparent about the risks.

"When there are injuries or deaths, that should be a matter of public record," Monning told NBC Bay Area.

The bill would require ski resorts to prepare an annual safety plan and create a monthly accident report that will be made available to the public.

In February, former ski patroller Dick Penniman showed NBC Bay Area and NBC Los Angeles some of the safety hazards that lurk on the slopes. Penniman pointed out steel cables at neck height, rundown chairlifts, exposed metal poles, and degrading signage among other correctable safety concerns.

President of the California Ski Industry Association, Bob Roberts, says that ski resorts track every incident that happen on the mountain; however, his organization only supports making serious accidents public.

"In Sacramento, with three hearings to go, amendments happen and so our full board will reserve until we get to the end and see what the final document looks like," Roberts said.

The next hearing will be before the Senate committee on judiciary. Similar ski safety bills have been brought before Govs. Jerry Brown and Arnold Schwarzenegger and were ultimately vetoed. If SB564 manages to pass the state Legislature, it is not expected to reach the governor's desk until later this fall.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Senate Bill 125 would have exempted a property owner of a structure that is within a State Responsibility Area as designated by CalFire and within the boundaries of a local fire protection district from having to pay the $150 tax. But the bill by state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Rocklin, didn't make it out of committee on April 23.

• Sonora Pass is open for the season and Tioga Pass is projected to open May 11.

• The Nature Valley U.S. Alpine Championships is returning to Squaw Valley in 2014. The March 19-23 championships is likely to feature Julia Mancuso, Ted Ligety, Lindsey Vonn, Bode Miller and Mikaela Shiffrin.

• April is National 911 Education Month. Here is a 911 guide.

• Carnelian Bay, based on ZIP codes, is the least polluted in California as shown on an EPA interactive map developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment.

Profits down at El Dorado Savings Bank

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Placerville-based El Dorado Savings Bank reported a quarterly profit of $1.66 million for the three months ended March 31.

That was a 22 percent decrease from a profit of $2.13 million in the first quarter of 2012.

“The drop in earnings is the result of the low- interest-rate environment that has persisted now for over four years,” said Thomas Meuser, chairman and CEO. “Our higher-rate loans and investments continue to pay off, and the funds are reinvested at the current low rates, which puts pressure on our profit margin.”

Total assets as of March 31 were $1.83 billion, up from $1.76 billion in the year-ago period.

The bank operates 32 branches in California and three in Northern Nevada.

Leadership Lake Tahoe applications available

Do you want to take your leadership skills to the next level? Are you interested in learning more about the South Shore

community?

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is accepting applications for the 2013-14 Leadership Lake Tahoe program. This professional development program is designed to increase knowledge and awareness of the issues and challenges facing the South Shore of Lake Tahoe.

Leadership Lake Tahoe began in 2003 with a mission of identifying and developing current and future leaders and since its inception, has graduated more than 100 community leaders.

This is an intensive, 10-month commitment. Courses are the second Wednesday of the month (September-June), from 8am-4pm. Topics to be covered include leadership development, education, government, media/communication, tourism, public safety, environment/transportation, social services/community resources, economic revitalization/redevelopment and more.

For more information and to apply, go online. The deadline for all application materials is June 14.

Bid docs force STPUD to delay water line work

Publisher's note: ***This is one of a few stories about construction planned for the Lake Tahoe Basin this summer.***

By Kathryn Reed

Inadequate bids are forcing the state streets water project in South Lake Tahoe to be delayed for what will probably be at least until 2014.

While it’s possible the South Tahoe Public Utility District board and staff could decide to do some of the work this building season, it’s doubtful. At a meeting last week the board agreed with staff that it was best to reject all bids. (Board member Kelly Sheehan was absent.)

Two of the three bids did not adequately comply with the disadvantaged business enterprises clause that requires the general contractor to contact a certain class of subcontractor. It doesn’t say they have to hire them, just reach out to see if they could do the work.



The third bid was $1 million higher than the other two.

“In all of our bid documents its says we reserve right to withdraw the bid. That is basically what happened,” South Tahoe PUD spokesman Dennis Cocking told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting.

It is possible STPUD crews could work on some of the area this summer, but that is dependent on where crews are needed for everyday work.

With the city pushing back its overlay project in this area to probably 2015, the water district is not feeling the pressure to get its work done this season.

What will be done at some point is putting in a 12-inch water line down Tahoe Keys Boulevard. The side streets – known as the state streets because most are named after a state – are to have 8- and 10-inch water lines installed. Most of what is in the ground is 6-inch lines.

Hydrants will also be installed at 500-foot intervals for better fire protection.

Where there are dead-end lines, those will be converted to loops. When the South Shore was full of tiny water districts the norm was to cap a water line. Now standard practice is to have the system loop, which provides for better water quality.

One aspect of the project that was included in the bid documents was work on Pioneer Trail. That is still going to be done this summer, but now by district employees.

“We knew we couldn’t go out to bid again and get it done this year,” Cocking said.

Timing is critical to replace that undersized water line before the city begins its sidewalk project in the same location.

It’s likely water will be shut off for a time in that area. Water customers will be notified 24 hours in advance.

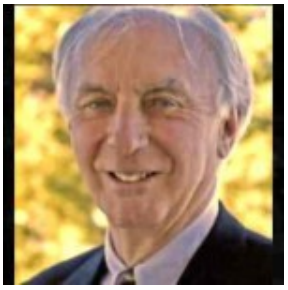
Questioning law enforcement’s war on drugs

By Ted Long

This week’s meeting of the Sheriff’s Citizen Academy was with the drug enforcement unit of the sheriff’s office. Led by two young, undercover drug officers, it was the hottest so far.

The leaders were, like all those before, very likable and willing to answer questions. While I cannot say they admitted that the war on drugs was not working, they sure seem to

wonder in the way they answered that question. The problem is the policy is not their job. They are paid to follow orders and enforce the law as it exists.



Ted Long

The bulk of the evening was spent sharing stories with great detail on the growing of marijuana on the hillsides of El Dorado County. We saw photos of the helicopter drops and the removal of tons of plants ripped from the landscape. We heard how the growers called “Mexican grows” lived and attempted to harvest their crop for payment of $5,000 for the year. That they were threatened with death of their families in Mexico if they talked and how the process goes on over and over again each year.

The most difficult part for me was understanding how they could not see that it is not only not working, but the continued enforcement is only making it worse. For example, they explained how marijuana in New York is worth about $5,500 a pound because it is a felony there and only $2,500 here because of the lesser penalties. Therefore shipping to the East Coast has grown greatly in the past few years.

It seemed hard to get the point across that the issue is not the danger of using drugs and that we need to stop it, or at least slow it down. We all agree it’s a bad thing. The issue is what we are doing to make any difference? As I listened to many of my fellow participants I could not help but think of the prohibition discussions of the ’20s. No one seems to understand that the repeal of prohibition did not end alcohol

consumption; it only ended the crime associated with it. The same is true of drugs. We have created major criminal cartels by making it so profitable to grow and distribute. It is the profit that buys the guns and provides the incentives. Like any business without profit it dies.

If it were legal and therefore regulated like alcohol, the emphasis would be on the regulation, and education, issues like the obvious abuse of medical use cards could be stopped, doctors should be held responsible for issuing them to unqualified users. Dispensaries today remind me of the speakeasies of the ’20s. Take the profit out, add reasonable regulation, education and tax the sales to pay for it and we may make some progress. And by the way, our jails are filled with mostly drugs users at incredible cost to taxpayers.

More people are killed and families ruined over the use of guns than drugs, yet we do little or nothing. Last week, on the same day, when the terrible bombing took place in Boston and the 8-year-old was killed, a dozen kids were killed in ghettos in New York and Los Angeles by guns. Boston in headlines; their deaths, no one noticed on page 23 of the San Francisco papers.

I say we need a better discussion of what works and what only feeds the problem. After hearing from the experts, my view is that drug wars are going the same way as the alcohol wars and the one war that we actually are winning goes unnoticed, cigarette smoking, seems to be going well, and no one is in jail over it.

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

Opinion: Time to live every day without violence

By Diana Meza Cabrera

On March 29, President Obama nationally proclaimed April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month in an effort to bring these global issues to the national spotlight for all Americans.

Our leaders have demonstrated that there are steps to be taken toward achieving a safer nation. This year's first step was the reauthorization of VAWA (Violence Against Women Act). VAWA was established in 1994 to provide funding for the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against all victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

This year the legislation was improved to include the protection of Native Americans living on reservations, victims who are undocumented, and the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) community as well.

The passing of VAWA allows agencies such as Live Violence Free to provide continued services and education to members in the community, spreading awareness of the effects of such violent acts.

April 24, was Denim Day, an international campaign that is held every year to promote the deconstruction of the destructive attitudes toward sexual assault. In 1997, a teenage girl in Italy was picked up by her 45-year-old driving instructor for her first lesson. He drove her to an isolated location, pulled her out of the car, and forcefully raped her. The girl was courageous and despite his threats she reported

the incident and he was arrested.

After his conviction the perpetrator appealed the sentence and the case went to the Supreme Court. In the final ruling, the Italian Supreme Court overturned the rape conviction claiming the sex act to have been consensual. The statement by the chief judge read: “Because the victim wore very, very tight jeans, she had to help him remove them, and by removing the jeans it was no longer rape but consensual sex.”

The women in the Italian Parliament were outraged by the verdict and protested the court by wearing jeans to work. This action began the annual international demonstration known as Denim Day.

The culture that has developed around violence and rape has desensitized our communities, thus creating the need for awareness events such as Denim Day to remind us just how real and heinous these crimes are.

Every two minutes a person in the United States is sexually assaulted. This means that there is an average of 207,754 victims over the age of 12 that report being sexually assaulted per year. It is important to note that this number does not take into account anyone under the age of 12 or anyone who does not report being assaulted.

Sexual assault is one of the most unreported crimes as 54 percent of sexual assault crimes go unreported each year. Victims are often silenced because of their feelings of shame and fear that occur with these forms of attacks. Most often a victim’s abuser is someone that they know and trust. Nationally, two thirds of victims reported knowing their attacker and 34 percent of rapists are a friend or acquaintance of the victim. Sexual assault is not a problem that only happens out in the community; is most often carried out within the walls of our homes.

It is time we take a stand against these acts of violence and

as this year’s national campaign for Sexual Assault Awareness Month says, “It’s time to talk about it.”

A report for child abuse is made every 10 seconds; that’s 3.3 million reports made each year. More than five children’s lives are lost every day due to child abuse. Although sexual abuse only accounts for 9.2 percent of reported child abuse cases, the number of victims is still shocking, at 91,412 minor victims of sexual assault per year. Moreover, child abuse is not an isolated problem that only affects the one victim; 30 percent of children who were abused or neglected will later abuse their own children.

Violence is a never ending cycle within relationships. It is important for our services to always be available so that we may educate and empower survivors. The instilling of positive values in our clients will go on to be reflected in our community. Children are ultimately the ones who will run our world in the future; therefore, we should be doing our best to provide them with a healthy and nurturing upbringing.

Locally, April has also been proclaimed as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month. It is great to have local elected leaders support our cause, recognizing the need for our services in the community.

Throughout 2012 Live Violence Free was able to serve 208 clients who were under the age of 18. Of these 208, 20 percent were survivors of sexual assault. Our Child Abuse Prevention and Rape Prevention Education programs provided over 300 presentations to over 7,000 of El Dorado and Alpine counties’ youth. Our Home Visiting Program helped seven families parents to learn nurturing parenting skills in the comfort of their own homes. With these programs in place, we are doing our best work to prevent these crimes from happening.

We hope that you join us on our journey to create a violence free community and consider becoming a volunteer.

We will be offering Crisis Counseling Training through the Lake Tahoe Community College Connect Community Education workshop, classes will begin April 29. Our agency's greatest need is crisis line volunteers. If you're interested in becoming a volunteer, contact Scarlet Caldwell at (530) 544.2118, ext. 7634 or scaldwell@liveviolencefree.org.

Be sure to be on the lookout for our first Clothesline Project display on April 29 outside our main office.

Diana Meza Cabrera is with Live Violence Free in South Lake Tahoe.

Nevada reverses policy on busing mental patients unescorted

By Andrew Doughman and Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Nevada's health department on Wednesday reversed its practice of sending patients discharged from state psychiatric hospitals alone on bus trips out of Nevada.

Gov. Brian Sandoval's spokeswoman said today that the state will now require escorts to accompany patients who are bused out of state.

"We made a decision to formalize the policy," Mary-Sarah Kinner, Sandoval's spokeswoman, said. "This is part of the new strengthened procedures."

The Rawson Neal psychiatric hospital in Las Vegas has come under fire in recent months for sending 1,500 discharged

mental health patients on unescorted, one-way bus journeys to other states. The health department has said most of these trips involve transportation home for patients visiting Las Vegas from other states.

Last week, health department officials said that most patients didn’t need escorts.

“When a patient is discharged, they are considered safe,” said Tracey Green, Nevada state health officer, during an interview last Friday. “So really that wouldn’t require the need for an escort. When we look at best standards for care, I think that the safety is really what is supported by the fact that the client is considered safe when they’re discharged from our hospitals.”

Prior to the April 24 announcement, medical personnel made the decision on whether the patient needed a state-provided escort.

Patients discharged from the psychiatric hospital have conditions that run the gamut from “acute intoxication” to “schizophrenia,” Green said. Each patient might require a different level of supervision after being discharged.

“So really our policy is to ensure that the system appropriate for our client is set up,” Green said of the prior practice.

Green said policy changes happen periodically, but in this case the media stories about this particular policy drove the change.

“Our policy stands that it has been the determination of need, but at this time we are erring on the side of caution,” she said. “Given the events in the media, we have determined it’s better to err on the side of caution.”

The change from discretionary option to mandatory practice allows for a number of chaperones to accompany a discharged

patient: state mental health staff, family members of a family-designee, domestic partners, legal guardians, or “other appropriate caregivers,” said Mary Woods, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services spokeswoman.

Woods said she did not have an estimate of what this new policy would cost the state.

The policy change comes on the heels of a review of 1,500 patients shipped out of state from Rawson-Neal, finding five or six cases in which the hospital’s discharge policy was not followed.

Mike Willden, director of the state Department of Health and Human Services, said earlier today that officials were considering whether to continue sending discharged patients by bus out of state, to scrap the policy or require a chaperone to accompany the patient.

Shortly before the announcement, Willden was seen waiting for a meeting in the lobby of the governor’s office.

The health department did not disclose what in the review led to the requirement for a chaperone.

“It’s just a part of strengthening our policy,” Woods said.

The initial review found that the majority of patients involved were not considered a “threat to themselves or to others” and expressed a desire to return to their families, friends or to an out-of-state treatment facility.

Two staff members at the Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital were disciplined, but Willden refused to say if they were higher-echelon officials or what penalty they faced.

The review of the 1,500 cases – prompted by a series of stories in the *Sacramento Bee* – was completed at midnight Tuesday. The *Bee* first broke the story of Nevada patients being put on a buses and sent to other states, prompting

officials in California to call for an investigation.

The policy governing how patients in Nevada are discharged out of state has since been tightened. Now, two physicians instead of one must sign a discharge, and the hospital administrator must approve the decision.

TRTA backcountry camps just for youth

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association is offering a series of summer youth backcountry camps.

They are an opportunity for teens to develop backcountry skills mountains of Lake Tahoe. Youth will be introduced to wilderness survival and first aid; backpacking; maps, gps and compass; backcountry cooking; leave no trace; and more.

Maintaining part of the Tahoe Rim Trail is also part of the activities.

For questions, contact Hayley at (775) 298.0238.

Defensible space even more critical in dry year

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

CalFire will begin defensible space inspections Monday in

Amador County and on the West Slope of El Dorado County.

“Hopefully people have been working on their defensible space this spring as it has been a relatively dry one,” Kelly Keenan, chief of CalFire’s Amador-El Dorado Unit, said in a written statement. “With the strong potential for drought this year, it is critical that everyone get to work today to give their home the best chance of surviving a wildfire.”



Proper defensible space spared this house in the Angora burn area. Photo/Lake Valley Fire

In an area extending 30 feet from each structure on the property, or to the property line, whichever is closer, fire officials advise people to:

• Remove all dead and dying vegetation.

• Remove leaf litter from the roof and rain gutters.

• Relocate wood piles well away from the home.

• Trim trees so that they are at least 10 feet from the chimney and roof line.

• Remove “ladder fuels”, low-level vegetation that could allow fire to spread from the ground to shrubs and bushes, and to tree canopies.

In the area extending between 30 and 100 feet from structures, or to the property line, officials say the key is to keep plant material separated from each other both horizontally and vertically. This prevents the vegetation from acting like a ladder and allowing fire to move from the ground to tree canopies. Annual grasses should be cut so that they are no more than 4 inches high.

Residents also are advised to:

• Check the chimney to make sure it has an approved spark arrestor, or screen, covering the opening and that it is in good condition. The screen should have openings no smaller than there-eighths of an inch and no larger than a half-inch.

• Keep the area under decks and balconies free of combustible material. Never store firewood under a deck.

• Consider having multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area and any other structure on the property.

For more detailed information, see CalFire’s Ready-Set-Go website or call (530) 644.2345 to request a free brochure.