8-acre controlled burn on N. Shore scheduled

North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District's fuels crew will continue the hazardous fuels reduction project in the Hunter Creek area on March 11, weather permitting.

This is projected to be a one-day event and crews will be monitoring and mopping up March 12.

This project is a cooperative effort between North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, Reno Fire Department, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and Washoe County Parks Department.

This 8-acre slash pile project was created as a result of a hazardous fuels reduction and defensible space project over the last year, to help minimize the risk of wildland fires in the area.

For further information, call (775) 831.0351, ext.0.

Letter: Say 'yes' to the loop road

Publisher's note: ***This letter was originally sent to South Lake Tahoe's elected officials and the author asked for it to be published in Lake Tahoe News. It is partially original content, part form letter that Weidinger Public Relations sent via Tahoe Transportation District to proponentsd of the loop***

roa.

To the community,

As a resident and member of a management team at a local nonprofit in South Lake Tahoe, I urge you to consider all the facts about the loop road project before making any decision at the March 12 South Lake Tahoe City Council special meeting. I hope you hear the multitude of community members in support of the loop road and don't let a few, loud voices with personal, vested interests overshadow the many real, positive benefits this project would provide our community.



Erica Eng

You have already started to make positive changes with Lakeview Commons, improving sidewalks and bike paths, continued development of the tourism Stateline corridor, Van Sickle Park, and community planning meetings. Let's build on this momentum and shape an identity for our city that we can all be proud of!

We are at a critical juncture in our city's evolution and potential. The state and nation's economy are starting to rebound and domestic leisure travel is projected to increase by 1.6 percent with a corresponding increase in leisure travel spending of 4.5 percent (as quoted in your January 2011 Strategic Planning document).

Now, more than ever, is the time to make broad changes to revitalize and change our cities' appearance, so South Lake Tahoe can truly become a destination city. Your personal

responsibility for the fate of our city and your critical decision on this project will directly shape whether South Lake Tahoe continues its status quo of a declining economy, shrinking population, and old infrastructure, or whether we decide to be proactive and take meaningful steps to make our city more attractive, accommodating, and forward-moving for U.S. and international tourists and the residents that love this special place.

I encourage you to consider the specific consequences the loop road project will have on our city and community. Please review all the benefits that the realignment of Highway 50 and the development of a local main street could bring including:

• A recent study indicated the potential for increased retail sales could be up to $25 million annually.

•Increase in revenue would benefit California and Nevada.

• Tourism and visitor-services are the largest economic drivers for South Shore and account for more than half of total jobs in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

• The town needs a face lift – the current appearance is a road that stretches along segmented communities accented by casinos, lake and mountain-side property, motels with vacancies, strip mall-type commercial areas with vacant stores and poorly designed, unsafe parking lots. The current look is from the ‘70s while other tourist areas re-invest and advance their destination.

• Redirecting traffic behind the casino core opens room for other possibilities: increasing sidewalks from 5 feet to 11 feet, allowing for street-side dining, landscaping and benches. This will create more of a quaint city feel and a defined, fluid business and residential strip that is also more accessible by walking and biking. Improving the lay-out will naturally encourage people to slowly and easily move between different parts of the town, so visitors stay at

stores for longer, visit more locations, spend more money, and enjoy the surrounding environment.

• Making positive improvements would be a catalyst to entice other investors who will want to capitalize on the growing potential for an increase in customers and revenue. The new Basecamp Hotel is a good small-scale example of this with its recent media attention from Time, New York Times, Travel and Leisure to name a few, and top-businesses like Google selecting it as a destination for a management retreat.

• It will address safety and traffic flow issues (i.e., wider sidewalks and biking areas to increase safety for pedestrians, drivers and cyclists, more lighting, slower traffic, less traffic and congestion on Highway 50, etc.).

• Residents being relocated will get assistance and access to better housing.

• A built environment that reflects and enhances the natural environment.

• Improved air quality, upgraded BMPs, and a reduction in "village" noise through realignment of traffic flow.

• Improvements consistent with the city's General Plan.

You have heard inaccurate claims from the project's opponents that say it will result in a loss of business and the project is an eminent domain issue. Realistically, both business and residents will see improvements by being located in a newly revitalized downtown where shopping, restaurants, residences and recreation areas connect to each other and are more accessible by walking, biking or using the local road. It will provide upgraded housing for affected, nearby residents and safer neighborhoods by redirecting pass-through traffic traveling at high speeds. It will finally provide the city with a cohesive identity where both tourists and residents have an attractive, central area to gather together.

I hope you seriously consider your responsibility as an elected official to make a decision that advances and benefits the larger community, and does not serve to benefit a few select interests, prior to voting on the South Shore Revitalization Project/Loop Road. Your decision will directly impact the perception and marketability of our city, the number of tourists who will visit and spend money, the growth of existing and new business, and a connected, cohesive city layout that further encourages more tourism and residents. Ultimately, your decision has the potential to make South Lake Tahoe a top destination and place to live, or a fragmented, crumbling blight with increasing social and economic problems. I believe a brighter future for South Lake Tahoe is a reality, and I hope you do as well. Please do your part so together we can take positive, intentional steps toward a brighter future for the community that we love.

Thank you for your consideration and your dedication and service to our city.

Sincerely,

Erica Eng, South Lake Tahoe

MV Transportation woes go beyond Tahoe

Publisher's note: ***MV Transportation is the company that used to run BlueGo on the South Shore. MV has sued STATA, the organization that ran BlueGo before it filed for bankruptcy. All parties are working on finding a mediator to help find a***

resolution to their differences.

By Zusha Elinson, California Watch

Cash-strapped cities embracing private contractors as saviors of their public transportation systems may find a cautionary tale in Fairfield.

The suburban city halfway between Sacramento and San Francisco was the headquarters of MV Transportation, a rising star in public transit outsourcing. But the company failed to deliver the bus service it promised its hometown, emails, documents and interviews show.



Between 2008 and 2010, the company was fined 295 times by local transit officials for poor performance, including too many accidents, missed bus runs and late buses.

The use of private contractors has grown dramatically in California. Contractors ran 223 million miles of bus and train service in the state in 2011, a 42 percent increase in a decade, according to the National Transit Database. Last year, they picked up 166 million riders in California, up 29 percent. Government-run public transit systems still carried far more riders last year with 1.2 billion, a slight dip from a decade ago.

Even in the Bay Area, a stronghold of public employee unions, officials are more eagerly considering outsourcing public transit to save money. Alameda County is mulling contracting out bus routes in the growing suburbs of Fremont and Newark, managed for decades by AC Transit. Last summer, Marin County officials considered outsourcing bus service to a private company, deciding against it only when the public agency cut

its price to compete.

But the arrangements are not all unmitigated successes. Some fall short of heralded savings. Others bring lower wages and less bus service. In Fairfield, then-Transit Manager George Fink said he couldn't hold politically connected MV Transportation to the contract, calling it a wake-up call to transit agencies thinking about outsourcing.

Riders like retiree Albert Sanchez are the collateral damage. One sunny afternoon, Sanchez and his wife waited for a bus from the mall in Fairfield to their home a few miles away, in Suisun City. Sanchez said the outsourced Fairfield and Suisun Transit – known as FAST – has failed to live up to its optimistic acronym.

"The bus is always late. It's always late," said Sanchez, an inveterate public transit user who moved from San Francisco eight years ago.

Sanchez said that the previous week, he'd waited at the stop for two hours. One Friday, he walked four miles home because buses stop running at 8:30pm.

Documents and interviews reinforce Fink's allegations that the Fairfield City Council and his bosses frequently intervened. Once, Fink said, he clocked the time between his criticism of MV Transportation and a call from his boss, Assistant Public Works Director Wayne Lewis, at 32 minutes.

Lewis, who now leads FAST, said Fink was a rigid manager who always stuck to the "letter of the law." Lewis added, however, that he understood the frustration city employees feel when contractors "have access to elected officials and staff doesn't."

MV Transportation has been a generous donor to local charities and pumped tens of thousands into low-dollar Fairfield City Council races.

“Anything that was critical, 89 percent of the time, it would circle back to us,” Fink said. “They would engage the City Council, and they would call the city manager and then he would talk to me and tell me to back off.”

During Fink’s five-year tenure in Fairfield, which ended in 2010, records and interviews show he was ordered not to issue an audit critical of MV Transportation and to stop penalizing the company for poor performance, and his staff was ordered to halt regular bus inspections.

Chuck Timm, a city councilman until 2011, said the company gained no special access to city leaders and praised its performance.

“As a councilmember and as a citizen, they were great community partners, and they did an excellent job,” Timm said.

Timm prefaced his comments by noting that he was “friends with the boss,” former MV Transportation CEO Jon Monson. Timm also received a $10,000 campaign donation from the company in 2007, according to state campaign finance filings.

Cristina Russell, an MV Transportation spokeswoman, declined to comment, saying, “A response would unnecessarily cast a negative light on a positive relationship.”

Friction with transit staff

With public transportation in the suburbs, some problems are embedded in city planning, or lack thereof. Cities like Fairfield are built for cars and often are too spread out to justify extended hours or more regular service. But problems such as late buses and accidents are more closely related to management and oversight.

When Fink arrived in Fairfield in 2005, MV Transportation already was running the bus system, which carries about 1 million passengers a year. When the city put the contract out

to bid again, he and other city officials added penalties for poor service. MV won an $18.2 million, four-year contract. Soon after, the fines started rolling in.

Over a two-year period beginning in 2008, the company was fined 295 times for a total of $164,000, according to a 2010 city audit, released in place of the one Fink sought to issue. MV was fined for the 14 months when the preventable accident rate exceeded the allowed 1 per 100,000 miles. FAST officials fined MV nine times for not meeting the agreed-upon 90 percent on-time arrival rate and 18 times for buses that never showed at all. The company was penalized twice for drivers using cellphones while driving, six times for drivers speeding and 13 times for drivers being out of uniform.

MV executives were furious about the fines. In meetings with the FAST staff, they complained they were “losing money” and the deal they signed was too punitive, according to meeting notes and internal memos.

As the friction between Fink and the company peaked in the summer of 2009, Monson, then MV’s board chairman, made $10,000 campaign donations to City Councilman John Mraz and City Councilwoman Catherine Moy. Those were hefty sums, even in a city with no campaign contribution limits. When contacted for comment, Mraz called Fink an expletive and hung up the phone. Moy did not return emails or phone calls.

Fines, inspections put aside

Monson and other executives began to meet directly with the City Council instead of city transit staff. In a 2010 memo, Lewis – the assistant public works director – complained that the “city has allowed MV to circumvent the normal management chain. Often, local issues are discussed and resolved without the input of transit staff by the City Manager’s office, City Council, and MV executives.”

Fines against MV were halted by the city for months, and old

ones weren’t paid as the city manager overruled some on appeal. Bus inspections that had been yielding fines also were stopped.

In an interview, Lewis said he killed an audit of MV ordered by Fink because it was too punitive. He said that while many of the fines were valid, “there were enough of them that … would seem like they were frivolous,” such as one for a bus driver’s untucked shirttail.

Lewis added that Fairfield and Suisun Transit and MV Transportation are “in a good place now.”

But problems persisted after Fink left in 2010. The bus service performance “exhibited mostly negative trends in all areas” related to efficiency and productivity, according to a 2010 audit by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which oversees transit funding in the Bay Area. An MV spokeswoman declined to comment, and Lewis did not return calls seeking comment on the audit.

And in June 2011, an MV Transportation bus operator was involved in a fatal collision. The bus driver, identified as Dale Lee Karuza in multiple lawsuits, was turning left across a Suisun City street when he collided with an oncoming car, killing a passenger. Police cited the primary cause of the collision as the bus failing to yield right of way, according to the California Highway Patrol’s summary. Investigators also concluded that the car was speeding.

Fink now works at the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission in Stockton. Reflecting back on his time in Fairfield, he said it taught him a lesson about outsourcing public transit.

“If you had a contractor that wanted to run the business and not maximize their profit at every turn, then it would be fine,” Fink said. “As it tends to work out, you’re spending 85 percent of the time making sure that they’re doing everything in the contract instead of doing the things you need to be

doing, like getting grant money doing transit planning.”

South Shore to host military reunion

There will be a veterans-military reunion March 16-17 at Lake Tahoe.

It benefits Operation Rebound.

This is an opportunity for those who have served to reconnect with fellow vets from past and present conflicts. The event is designed to provide an opportunity to reconnect with first responders and rehabilitation personnel from your past in a healthy and supportive place far from the battlefield.

For more info, go online.

Free meditation session

The March meditation put on by Rosemary Manning will be a heart-centered meditation. In addition to calming oneself with meditation, people will learn how to stop energetic leaking of heart energy from the fourth chakra and learn how to create the highest receptivity to positive energy into ones hearts.

The meditation is March 27 from 7-8pm at Tahoe Wellness Center

(in the Bijou Center, next to Hot Gossip) in South Lake Tahoe.

The event is free.

For more info, email tahoehealthtouch@gmail.com.

Douglas County crosswalk enforcement increasing

Douglas County sheriff's deputies will be stepping up traffic enforcement at intersections and crosswalks to look for red light and stop sign violations, pedestrian violations, speeders and distracted drivers throughout the county from March 11-19.

Key factors in many of the recent fatal highway traffic accidents have been driver inattention and failure to yield to pedestrians, according to deputies.

DCSO deputies will continue to enforce all traffic violations on all roadways throughout the county; these violations in particular will be targeted and enforced. Citations will be issued to violators.

This enforcement detail is partially paid for by a grant from the Nevada Department of Public Safety, Office of Traffic Safety.

Global temps highest in 4,000 years

By Justin Gillis, New York Times

Global temperatures are warmer than at any time in at least 4,000 years, scientists reported Thursday, and over the coming decades are likely to surpass levels not seen on the planet since before the last ice age.

Previous research had extended back roughly 1,500 years, and suggested that the rapid temperature spike of the past century, believed to be a consequence of human activity, exceeded any warming episode during those years. The new work confirms that result while suggesting the modern warming is unique over a longer period.



Lake Tahoe has had record highs this winter. Photo/LTN file

Even if the temperature increase from human activity that is projected for later this century comes out on the low end of estimates, scientists said, the planet will be at least as warm as it was during the warmest periods of the modern geological era, known as the Holocene, and probably warmer than that.

That epoch began about 12,000 years ago, after changes in incoming sunshine caused vast ice sheets to melt across the Northern Hemisphere. Scientists believe the moderate climate of the Holocene set the stage for the rise of human civilization roughly 8,000 years ago and continues to sustain it by, for example, permitting a high level of food production.

In the new research, scheduled for publication on Friday in the journal Science, Shaun Marcott, an earth scientist at Oregon State University, and his colleagues compiled the most meticulous reconstruction yet of global temperatures over the past 11,300 years, virtually the entire Holocene. They used indicators like the distribution of microscopic, temperature-sensitive ocean creatures to determine past climate.

Like previous such efforts, the method gives only an approximation. Michael E. Mann, a researcher at Pennsylvania State University who is an expert in the relevant techniques but was not involved in the new research, said the authors had made conservative data choices in their analysis.

“It’s another important achievement and significant result as we continue to refine our knowledge and understanding of climate change,” Mann said.

Though the paper is the most complete reconstruction of global temperature, it is roughly consistent with previous work on a regional scale. It suggests that changes in the amount and distribution of incoming sunlight, caused by wobbles in the earth’s orbit, contributed to a sharp temperature rise in the early Holocene.

The climate then stabilized at relatively warm temperatures about 10,000 years ago, hitting a plateau that lasted for roughly 5,000 years, the paper shows. After that, shifts of incoming sunshine prompted a long, slow cooling trend.

The cooling was interrupted, at least in the Northern

Hemisphere, by a fairly brief spike during the Middle Ages, known as the Medieval Warm Period. (It was then that the Vikings settled Greenland, dying out there when the climate cooled again.)

Scientists say that if natural factors were still governing the climate, the Northern Hemisphere would probably be destined to freeze over again in several thousand years. “We were on this downward slope, presumably going back toward another ice age,” Marcott said.

Instead, scientists believe the enormous increase in greenhouse gases caused by industrialization will almost certainly prevent that.

During the long climatic plateau of the early Holocene, global temperatures were roughly the same as those of today, at least within the uncertainty of the estimates, the new paper shows. This is consistent with a large body of past research focused on the Northern Hemisphere, which showed a distribution of ice and vegetation suggestive of a relatively warm climate.

The modern rise that has recreated the temperatures of 5,000 years ago is occurring at an exceedingly rapid clip on a geological time scale, appearing in graphs in the new paper as a sharp vertical spike. If the rise continues apace, early Holocene temperatures are likely to be surpassed within this century, Marcott said.

Mann pointed out that the early Holocene temperature increase was almost certainly slow, giving plants and creatures time to adjust. But he said the modern spike would probably threaten the survival of many species, in addition to putting severe stresses on human civilization.

“We and other living things can adapt to slower changes,” Mann said. “It’s the unprecedented speed with which we’re changing the climate that is so worrisome.”

Time to spring forward

Before going to bed tonight, remember to turn the clocks forward one hour.

Daylight-saving times begins March 10 at 2am.

This means the evenings will be lighter longer.

Tahoe drug agents busy with heroin, pot

By Kathryn Reed

Bad guys don't like to commit too many crimes in the winter. Not the obvious ones, any way. Still, narcotics officers on the South Shore are plenty busy.

Indoor grows is one activity that increases in winter. And it's not for medicinal purposes. People are shipping marijuana back and forth from Tahoe.

"We pick off packages full of weed or money," Jeff Catchings told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Catchings is the commander of the South Lake Tahoe El Dorado Narcotics Task Force – or SLEDNET for short.

Working on finding the big dealers is SLEDNET's goal – no matter the drug.

Heroin use is back up after declining for a spell. On the California side of the South Shore there were 26 heroin overdose deaths in an 18-month period starting in November 2010.

"Heroin deaths are higher than vehicle, homicide … it beats everything," Catchings said. "We do have a drug problem, that is obvious."

SLEDNET has been operating since 1988. It was threatened with being shutdown a little more than a year ago because of funding. And, still, the agency that is run by the state and staffed with mostly local law enforcement officers remains on unstable ground.

El Dorado County Sheriff John D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News* he sees value in the task force and is doing what he can to keep it going.

The state Department of Justice is weighing whether to keep the 27 task forces in California going. June is the latest a decision is expected.

South Lake Tahoe Police Department has two officers in SLEDNET, EDSO one. Catchings is with DOJ.

While the California Highway Patrol is supposed to be part of SLEDNET, it does not currently have an officer assigned to the

group. This could change as people go through upcoming academy classes.

Douglas County used to be part of SLEDNET, but with standards between the states changing, those deputies could no longer participate. Alpine County had a member in the past who was funded via a grant.

While those counties are not part of SLEDNET, the agencies still work together in other ways.

D’Agostini would like a member of probation to be part of the team. Probation can’t do forced searches, Catchings said, so some details with that agency need to be worked out.

“It’s not just narcotics. We are doing everything,” Catchings said of his workload.

SLEDNET was integral is tracking down the phone use of the girl who died following SnowGlobe, and eventually locating the last friend to see her alive.

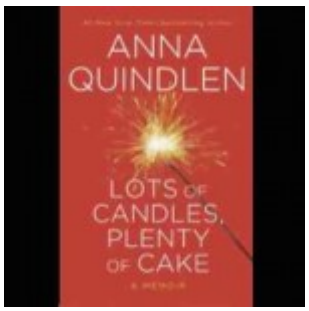
Quindlen book doesn’t connect on all levels

By Kathryn Reed

There was a time when I couldn’t wait to get my copy of *Newsweek* each month. It was all because of Anna Quindlen. She

is one of the few columnists I have ever read with regularity.

The magazine was never the same after she left.



She had a way of connecting with readers about topics that ran from the mundane to the serious, from hysterical to tear-inducing sadness.

When her latest book – "Lots of Candles, Plenty of Cake" – came out, Sue bought it. She raved about it. At times I would see her dabbing at her eyes. There goes, Anna, I would think.

That's the thing about Quindlen's writing, it makes you think of her as friend, to want to call her by her first name when you've never even met her.

And while, I, too, cried at times reading the book, this was far from my favorite of hers. I know a lot of it has to with our age difference putting us in very different places in our lives. She's turned 60; I haven't turned 50. She talks of retirement; I'm still trying to make enough to put into savings.

But when she talks about friendships, that is a place most women can relate to.

"We trust our friends to tell us what we need to know, and to shield us from what we don't need to discover, and to have the wisdom to know the difference. Real friends offer both hard truths and soft landings and realize that it's sometimes more important to be nice than to be honest," she writes.

Later she writes, "The women I know who are the happiest today are the ones who have close female friends." "In other words, friends are what we women have in addition to, or in lieu of, therapists."

Clearly, I liked parts of the book. Maybe I will connect to more of it down the road.

The difference with Quindlen’s columns that didn’t strike a cord with me is that they were shorter, nowhere close to a book chapter. So one week of not liking something is much different than a whole book.

The other problem is that I had high expectations for the book because of the author and Sue’s recommendation.