Douglas County considering changes to graduation

Douglas County School District board of trustees is seeking input concerning the formal graduation ceremony at the two high schools.



Currently, there is a formal ceremony for students receiving a standard, special education adjusted, advanced or honors diploma and a separate ceremony for the adult diploma recipients.

The standard, advanced and honors diplomas require a minimum of 23 credits, passage of all high school proficiencies, and completion of district competencies. The adult diploma requires 20.5 credits and passage of all high school proficiencies.

Students not meeting the graduation requirements do not participate in either ceremony.

Trustees are considering combining the two ceremonies. Take this survey to have your opinion heard.

S. Tahoe policymakers stall on Lakeview Commons rules

By Kathryn Reed

Lakeview Commons is described as a success beyond anyone’s

imagination. But it’s not a moneymaker. Not yet, any way.

Most events take a few years before they operate in the black. But the city of South Lake Tahoe can’t be in the business of subsidizing businesses. That would be called a gift of public funds.

Last year the music and standup paddleboard vendors were able to operate at Lakeview Commons for free. No other city owned venue allows private businesses to operate without paying a rental fee.



Thursday night Live at Lakeview concerts brought out hundreds of people each week. Photo/LTN file

While the events brought locals and tourists to the waterfront location, the city lost money by having to provide personnel for upkeep to the area. That was unbudgeted money.

On Tuesday, the council had before it an item that would have set guidelines for renting Lakeview Commons. Instead of acting as the policymakers they were elected to be, they put off making a decision until the March 19 meeting.

“We received a lot of input. We cannot write a policy that favors one business or person over another,” City Manager Nancy Kerry said at the Feb. 19 meeting. “My job is to protect

the city.”

Rob Giustina, who owns On Course Events and put on the free Thursday night Live at Lakeview concerts, said he lost $30,000 in 2012. Chris Brackett with South Tahoe Standup Paddle, said he operated the Wednesday night races in the red – $18,700.

Both men agreed a fee is reasonable. What they take issue with is the proposed amount – $500 to $1,000 each day/night. The range depends on the day of the week and the number of people expected. It’s estimated these events might just need to pay the half-day rental price of $325. However, Giustina mentioned how he needs time for set up and clean up, so he could be tying up the site the better part of the day. How this would affect an event going on at the site earlier in day was not discussed.

The staff report says, “Fees are calculated based on cost of maintaining the facility as a result of events during the inaugural season 2012. Rates are reduced by 35 percent of midweek rental. Private parties or weddings will be charged hourly per approved master fee schedule.”

One of Giustina’s biggest issues was the proposal to not close Lakeview Avenue to vehicle traffic. He said his insurance rates would skyrocket without that provision.

Brackett said his projection for this summer is that the standup paddle races will again be a money-losing event.

“In the future we see it as being sustainable,” he told the council.

What he said the city is not taking into consideration is how the races bring in money to the whole town because it’s not just locals participating. Plus the Race the Lake of the Sky event in June has attracted international attention for South Lake Tahoe. Brackett said his events brought in $26,000 in hotel taxes for the city last year.

Also at the March 19 meeting the council is expected to award the concessionaire contract for Lakeview Commons as well as Regan Beach and Bijou Community Park. Those entities operate seasonally and pay the city a percentage of gross revenue.

This differs from the standup paddle and concerts that at least in 2012 didn’t directly pay the city a dime, but had free access to put on events at a $6 million taxpayer funded venue.

Tahoe Snowcial combines sports, social media

Officials from Facebook, GoPro and Nestle will speak at this month’s Tahoe Snowcial event.

Dean Eckles is a social scientist, statistician, and member of the Data Science team at Facebook. He investigates how interactive technologies affect human behavior by mediating, amplifying and directing social influence.



Paul Crandell is vice president of marketing for GoPro, the world’s leading activity image capture company.

In her role as brand manager for Nestle, Stephanie Naegeli is responsible for the digital communication, social media and branding for the Nescafe and Nesquik product lines.

The speaker roster that already includes:

· Tariq M. Shaukat, Caesars Entertainment

· Patrick Harrington, Targeting@WalmartLabs

· Stanley Hainsworth, Tether

· Christopher Steiner, Aisle50

· Ian Swinson, Salesforce.com

· Chris Heuer, Deloitte Digital.

Called the Sundance for the Facebook generation, Tahoe Snowcial is sponsored by Heavenly Mountain Resort, and Harrah's and Harveys Lake Tahoe.

The event is Feb. 27-March 2. It is designed for any and all technology, social media and snowsports enthusiasts looking to increase their knowledge base and connect with other brands in the changing digital landscape.

Locals are being offered $100 off the conference only package. Go online and under Register and the Conference Only, use the promo code "Local".

Opinion: Suing TRPA doesn't

help Lake Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

Following years of public process and serious discussions to improve one of the strictest environmental plans in the nation, the Sierra Club recently filed suit on the update of Lake Tahoe's Regional Plan, a blueprint for the region's long-term sustainability. As the litigation deadline loomed, the options were clear – further extend discussions that started a decade ago, or stand up for the positive progress that Lake Tahoe residents and visitors have made toward true environmental stewardship. We chose to stand up for the lake and the thousands of stakeholders who have brought us to this critical moment in time.



Joanne Marchetta

It's relatively easy to make regulations, and Lake Tahoe has no shortage of them, but ensuring they continue to work toward the underlying goal takes real commitment. Changing them to improve environmental benefits takes courage and insight. What the proponents of the litigation have failed to understand, despite best available science and repeated documentation, is that maintaining the status quo at Lake Tahoe will not only fail to restore the ecosystem but it also will not address the communities surrounding this national treasure that are in decline and crisis.

Under 30-year-old rules, rows of outdated motels and strip

development were locked in place, complicating efforts to update needed environmental protections. Environmentally beneficial change requires investment, either public or private. Without investment in change, Tahoe's struggling communities can only dream of ever achieving the scale of environmental restoration that Lake Tahoe needs.

But the plan gave something far more important than new tools to encourage environmental investment. A side effect of the process to update the Regional Plan is a new positive spirit in Lake Tahoe – something we haven't seen in the region for decades. The culture surrounding Lake Tahoe has tended to be cynical and focused on what isn't possible. An intangible benefit of the groundswell of support for the 2012 Regional Plan is new-found momentum toward renewal and possibility. More people have shown they are willing to step in, participate, engage, and even lead Lake Tahoe's communities forward. More than ever we are hearing about what is possible when people come together and work together—environmental improvement, economic sustainability, and positive social change.

Litigation by well-meaning but uninformed activists throws a wrench into the spirit of the possible. Pointless litigation, without solutions, by those who cling to an outdated environmental strategy works only to kill the renewed spirit of a community just when we are taking responsibility and stepping up more collectively than ever before. Why would the Sierra Club want to kill a community's new-found vitality which is grounded in environmental restoration?

Besides missing the opportunity to play a role in Lake Tahoe's future, the litigants are not offering any new arguments or groundbreaking information. TRPA staff spent hundreds of hours in stakeholder meetings with representatives of these groups and never hesitated to consider and respond to concerns. Each of our reasoned responses was met with the same negativity: "It can't be done.'"

Worse still, the lawsuit espouses a backward-looking philosophy for Tahoe that appears hostile to local residents and the millions of visitors who marvel at this spectacular natural wonder. This philosophy fails to acknowledge a key fact – that we can live in harmony with our fragile environment.

Let’s be clear, the 2012 Regional Plan is not a development plan, it is an environmental restoration plan that focuses on the largest contributors of pollutants to Lake Tahoe. The plan keeps regional caps on growth and requirements to preserve open space, and prohibits land subdivisions.

With a few modest amendments in defined high-use areas, the plan works to accelerate restoration of Lake Tahoe’s famed water clarity and is projected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Basin by 7 percent per capita by 2035. By that time, the basinwide population is projected to equal only what it was in 2000.

Looking at the details of the plan under litigation, you might join me in asking the question, why exactly are the litigants suing?

If you supported the plan, or even if you simply recognized the need for a renewed approach to save Lake Tahoe and support its communities, now is the time to stay the course. Let’s keep moving forward.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Gar Woods to host polar swim in Lake Tahoe

Gar Woods Grill & Pier will be hosting the 23rd annual Coolest and Largest Shrinkage event – the Polar Bear Swim on March 2 at 2:30pm following the SnowFest parade in Tahoe City.



Each year hundreds of spectators line the pier and deck to watch hardy souls brave the frigid waters of Lake Tahoe. Participants swim approximately 250 yards in 39 degree water before returning to Gar Woods.

Additional information and the entry form is available on online.

30-year-old billionaire rules the burger world

By Seth Lubove, Bloomberg Business Week

The closely held In-N-Out Burger chain, celebrated by fans for its Double-Double and fresh ingredients, has made third-generation owner and President Lynsi Torres the youngest female billionaire in the U.S. and one of the youngest in the world.

Just 30, Torres oversees the fast-food company her family built from a single hamburger stand into an almost 280-

restaurant empire in five states that's worth about $1.1 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

"We will remain a private and family-owned company that ensures quality by owning all of our restaurants, growing slowly and not franchising," Torres said in a statement. She has never appeared on an international wealth ranking and generally keeps a low profile. Few in the restaurant industry have met or know much about the hamburger heiress, who has little formal management training and no college degree. "I was even surprised there was a granddaughter," said restaurant consultant Janet Lowder.



Torres' most visible presence has been on the drag racing circuit, where she competes in the National Hot Rod Association's Super Gas and Top Sportsman Division 7 categories. She inherited that passion from her grandfather and her father, whose 1999 estate included 27 vehicles. Her third husband, Val Torres Jr., is also a race car driver. She popped up in real estate blogs in September after buying a $17.4 million, 16,600-square-foot mansion in Bradbury, a wealthy Los Angeles County enclave.

When Harry Snyder, who founded In-N-Out with his wife, Esther, in 1948, died in 1976, his son Rich became president, expanding the chain to 93 restaurants from 18. Torres' father, Harry Guy Snyder, took over following Rich Snyder's 1993 death in a plane crash at age 41.

The chain expanded to 140 locations under Guy Snyder, who died at age 48 of a prescription-drug overdose.

Esther Snyder maintained control of the company until her death in 2006 at age 86, which left Torres the sole family

heir. She now controls the company through a trust that gave her half ownership when she turned 30 last year and will give her full control when she turns 35. The company has no other owners, according to an Arizona corporation filing that lists Torres as president and a director.

The Bloomberg valuation for In-N-Out is based on earnings multiples of similar publicly traded companies, including Yum Brands and McDonald's. Carl Van Fleet, the company's vice president of planning and development, said in an email, "In-N-Out Burger is a private company and this valuation of the company is nothing more than speculation based on estimates from people with no knowledge of In-N-Out's financials, which are and always have been private."

Whether the mother of twins will maintain ownership in the chain after she gains full control in five years is uncertain, says John Gordon, founder of restaurant consultant Pacific Management Consulting Group. "I don't know that she has restaurant blood in her veins," he said.

It's at least clear Torres inherited her uncle Rich's religious faith. She's funded a nonprofit called Healing Hearts & Nations that proselytizes in Africa, according to a 2010 Form 990 foundation filing that lists her as chief financial officer.

Former In-N-Out Vice President Richard Boyd alleged in a 2006 California state court filing that Torres attempted to fire him because he was not a "man of God." She denied Boyd's claims in the company's legal rebuttal, which alleged breach of contract through fraud and embezzlement on his part. The litigation was dismissed after a confidential settlement in which Boyd resigned.

In her statement, Torres said the company remains "steadfastly dedicated to the values instilled in us by my grandparents."

If she wants to devote herself to racing full time, though,

she’ll have no trouble selling the family business. In-N-Out store openings often resemble product releases from Apple, with customers lined up hours in advance.

“They have done a fantastic job of building and maintaining a kind of cult following,” said Bob Goldin, executive vice president of food industry research firm Technomic. “Someone would love to buy them.”

Tahoe Prosperity Center funding divides City Council

By Kathryn Reed

The majority of the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday decided to spend $10,000 in taxpayer money on the Tahoe Prosperity Center without knowing what it will be spent on.

Councilmembers Tom Davis, Hal Cole and Angela Swanson think increasing the city’s allocation to this nonprofit is a good idea. The city has now contributed $30,000 to the group.

Center officials have 60 or 90 days, whatever works for them the majority of the council said, to come back with a clear business plan.



“I would rather see the plan before we give them money,” Councilwoman JoAnn Connor said at the Feb. 19 meeting. And she’s the city’s rep to the center’s board.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine took issue with giving one nonprofit cash when the process has not been opened up to others as was done years ago.

Laine went on to say of the center, “It just feels like an additional layer of bureaucracy.”

Usually staff makes a recommendation to the council about the action to take. In this case, none was offered. It’s also not in the budget. The staff report from City Manager Nancy Kerry says, “If approved, funding would need to come from unassigned excess reserves for 2013.”

The Tahoe Prosperity Center’s website says this about itself, “Promoting regional sustainability through economic vitality, environmental stewardship and healthy communities in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin.”

Tom Greene, chairman of the center, presented to council, along with Christina Proctor. She called herself the interim executive director, while just a month ago she sent out a press release saying she was the flak for the group. There are no employees now – just people working as independent contractors. And there is nothing in the current budget, which operates on a calendar year, for projects – just staff.

“What this comes down to is this is an investment,” Greene told the council. “Our desire is not to come here every year.”

B Gorman, who is on the TPC board and as leader of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in developing the Tahoe Prosperity Plan, said, “Capital generation will be a 10-year project when we dive into that.”

What the center has been spending the bulk of its time on is trying to bring broadband to the basin.

Working regionally, the center proponents say, is how best to attract outside capital to get things done. The idea is broadband capability would open doors to potential businesses or entrepreneurs who would relocate to the Lake Tahoe Basin.

In Greene’s letter to the council asking for the money, he wrote, “The TPC is also working in coordination with the Tahoe Transportation District to facilitate productive Basin-wide dialogue aimed at fostering regional transportation initiatives.”

That and the mention by Proctor of a TTD meeting last week that Swanson attended unbeknownst to her colleagues nearly cost the center the city’s contribution. And then it was unearthed that the TPC is going to be the facilitator, while at the same time being a member, of the business group meeting to analyze the fiscal analysis of the loop road.

Cole was clearly unaware there was an analysis going on despite its being mentioned at several meetings and being written about.

In the end, though, it was the belief in broadband that swayed the majority of the council, even though they didn’t know how their $10,000 was going to help accomplish that.

In other action:

• The council made appointments to various commissions. Parks and Recreation – Rebecca Bryson, Peter Fink, Steven Noll, Bonnie Turnbull and Scott Valentine; Clean Tahoe – George Alm;

TRPA Advisory Planning – Joy Curry; and El Dorado Commission on Aging – Gerry Grego.

• No longer can the council use any electronic device while the meeting is in session – only at breaks. This has to do with adhering to the Fourteenth Amendment and due process.

• People speaking to the council will be given three minutes. No letters will be read into the record.

• Expenses by councilmembers must be preapproved by the other four electeds. The city manager's expenses are OK'd by the mayor.

Search and rescue missions a monetary dilemma

By Laura Zuckerman, Reuters

After an all-terrain vehicle accident in the Utah desert last spring, 53-year-old Mikki Babineau expected a long recuperation for collapsed lungs and 18 broken ribs.

What the Idaho woman didn't expect was a $750 bill from the local Utah sheriff's office for sending a volunteer search and rescue unit to her aid, a service for which the sheriff in that county regularly charges fees.



CalStar is the main helicopter company helping with search and rescue in Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

Just a handful of states, including Oregon, Maine and Babineau's home state of Idaho, have laws authorizing local agencies to bill for rescues when factors such as recklessness, illegal activity or false information led to the predicament.

Lawmakers from the Rockies to the Appalachians periodically question why adventurers who incur costs should not have to pay the price – literally. That debate has heated up this year as legislators in at least two states have sought, so far unsuccessfully, to enact laws to allow fees for rescues.

"In the rare case where a person took unnecessary risks, that person should be sent a bill," said Wyoming Republican Representative Keith Gingery, who tried but failed to pass such a law in his state.

That few states currently allow such billing is chiefly due to objections by national search and rescue groups, who say the prospect of payment could prompt people to delay seeking needed aid, possibly making a dangerous situation worse.

But that has not stopped lawmakers from considering such laws. Legislators in New Hampshire, for example, are seeking to shore up search and rescue funds by establishing fees ranging

from $350 to $1,000.

That legislation, designed to address deficits in a state rescue fund paid through licensing of hunters, snowmobilers and other outdoor recreationists, is pending before a New Hampshire House committee.

A similar effort to impose payment in Wyoming came to naught this year after Gingery failed to persuade a state House panel last month to approve a provision to give county sheriffs – who in many Western states oversee search and rescue teams – the right to recover rescue costs.

The issue came to the fore last winter in the state's Teton County, home to mountains as perilous as they are scenic, when a group of snowmobilers entered the back country near a steep pass northeast of Jackson Hole and required a helicopter rescue.

When the county later asked them to contribute to the $14,000 cost of the operation, an attorney for the snowmobilers wrote a letter contending local officials had no authority to ask for reimbursement.

Wyoming's Gingery and other backers of billing those saved say the issue is broader than money. Billing for rescues, they argue, would place ill-prepared hikers, skiers and snowmobilers, especially those engaged in extreme sports, on notice.

Recent advancements in outdoor equipment, navigational devices and off-road vehicles are allowing greater access to remote areas by more people with fewer outdoors and survival skills, complicating rescue missions, Gingery said.

Rescue expenses are also rising in states like Idaho, where gas taxes cover part of the tab. Since July, nearly $85,000 has been distributed for searches from a state fund. That compares to roughly $63,000 for all of fiscal year 2012 and

about $71,000 the year before, Idaho State Police documents show.

Search and rescue groups say their services make up just a fraction of the emergency costs incurred by law enforcement and medical agencies nationwide, and that efforts to bill for rescues are tied to rare but highly publicized incidents in which the stranded made foolish errors in judgment.

“There is a lot of hue and cry about recovering rescue costs, but we never question people’s right to dial 911 for authorities, fire departments and paramedics and we don’t begrudge those costs,” said Howard Paul, spokesman for the Colorado Search and Rescue Board, which oversees 50 volunteer teams in that state.

Colorado logged 1,428 missions in 2010, the most recent year data was available. While that was a high for search and rescue operations compared to the four preceding years, the record since 1995 was set in 2002 with 1,582 missions.

Dan Lack, chairman of the Rocky Mountain Rescue Association, said the specter of paying for a rescue can instill fear in some of those in need.

He was on hand in August when a climber became wedged between rocks in the Colorado mountains and ordered people who became aware of his plight not to call for help because he didn’t want to be charged. They dialed 911 anyway.

“If others had not alerted us, he wouldn’t have called for help until the sun went down, thunderstorms came in and my teammates and I would have been in danger,” Lack said.

“I, for one, am happy to go out and rescue someone, free of charge, who’s had a bad day,” he said.

That ethos has underpinned 40 years of rescue work for Roger Beckett, resource coordinator for Olympic Mountain Rescue in

Washington state, where lawmakers have unsuccessfully floated bills to force payment for rescues. Volunteer teams have opposed those proposals every time, he said.

Beckett said poor judgment, if defined loosely, and the lesser evil of inexperience are chief reasons for rescues.

“Inexperience won’t get you in trouble but it will keep you from getting out of trouble,” he said, adding he finds no fault in the relative few whose misadventures trigger a rescue.

“Every day you get out of bed, you take a risk,” he said. “Should we bill you?”

St. T kids provide food for others

Danette Winslow’s third- and fourth-graders at St. Theresa School in South Lake Tahoe helped fill the parish pantry.

The youngsters collected 100 cans of food in commemoration of the 100th day of school last week.

Students experienced how learning benefits them and those who are less fortunate.



St. Theresa students give back with canned food drive. Photo/Provided

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Study: What's on TV affects aggression level in kids

By Catherine Saint Louis, New York Times

Experts have long known that children imitate many of the deeds – good and bad – that they see on television. But it has rarely been shown that changing a young child's viewing habits at home can lead to improved behavior.

In a study published Monday in the journal Pediatrics, researchers reported the results of a program designed to limit the exposure of preschool children to violence-laden videos and television shows and increase their time with educational programming that encourages empathy. They found that the experiment reduced the children's aggression toward others, compared with a group of children who were allowed to watch whatever they wanted.



“Here we have an experiment that proposes a potential solution,” said Dr. Thomas N. Robinson, a professor of pediatrics at Stanford, who was not involved in the study. “Giving this intervention — exposing kids to less adult television, less aggression on television and more prosocial television — will have an effect on behavior.”

While the research showed “a small to moderate effect” on the preschoolers’ behavior, he added, the broader public health impact could be “very meaningful.”

The new study was a randomized trial, rare in research on the effects of media on children. The researchers, at Seattle Children’s Research Institute and the University of Washington, divided 565 parents of children ages 3 to 5 into two groups. Both were told to track their children’s media consumption in a diary that the researchers assessed for violent, didactic and prosocial content, which they defined as showing empathy, helping others and resolving disputes without violence.

The control group was given advice only on better dietary habits for children. The second group of parents were sent program guides highlighting positive shows for young children. They also received newsletters encouraging parents to watch television with their children and ask questions during the shows about the best ways to deal with conflict. The parents also received monthly phone calls from the researchers, who helped them set television-watching goals for their preschoolers.

The researchers surveyed the parents at six months and again after a year about their children’s social behavior. After six months, parents in the group receiving advice about

television-watching said their children were somewhat less aggressive with others, compared with those in the control group. The children who watched less violent shows also scored higher on measures of social competence, a difference that persisted after one year.

Low-income boys showed the most improvement, though the researchers could not say why. Total viewing time did not differ between the two groups.

“The take-home message for parents is it’s not just about turning off the TV; it’s about changing the channel,” said Dr. Dimitri A. Christakis, the lead author of the study and a professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington.

“We want our children to behave better,” Christakis said, “and changing their media diet is a good way to do that.”

Until she began participating in Christakis’s trial, Nancy Jensen, a writer in Seattle, had never heard of shows like Nickelodeon’s “Wonder Pets!,” featuring cooperative team players, and NBC’s “My Friend Rabbit,” with its themes of loyalty and friendship.

At the time, her daughter Elizabeth, then 3, liked “King of the Hill,” a cartoon comedy geared toward adults that features beer and gossip. In hindsight, she said, the show was “hilariously funny, but completely inappropriate for a 3-year-old.”

These days, she consults Common Sense Media, a nonprofit advocacy group in San Francisco, to make sure that the shows her daughter watches have some prosocial benefit. Elizabeth, now 6, was “not necessarily an aggressive kid,” Jensen said. Still, the girl’s teacher recently commended her as very considerate, and Jensen believes a better television diet is an important reason.

The new study has limitations, experts noted. Data on both the

children’s television habits and their behavior was reported by their parents, who may not be objective. And the study focused only on media content in the home, although some preschool-aged children are exposed to programming elsewhere.

Children watch a mix of “prosocial but also antisocial media,” said Marie-Louise Mares, an associate professor of communications at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. “Merely being exposed to prosocial media doesn’t mean that kids take it that way.”

Even educational programming with messages of empathy can be misunderstood by preschoolers, with negative consequences. A study published online in November in The Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology found that preschoolers shown educational media were more likely to engage in certain forms of interpersonal aggression over time.

Preschoolers observe relationship conflict early in a television episode but do not always connect it to the moral lesson or resolution at the end, said Jamie M. Ostrov, the lead author of the November study and an associate professor of psychology at the University of Buffalo.

Preschoolers watch an estimated 4.1 hours of television and other screen time daily, according to a 2011 study. Ostrov advised parents to watch television with their young children and to speak up during the relationship conflicts that are depicted. Citing one example, Dr. Ostrov counseled parents to ask children, “What could we do differently here?” to make it clear that yelling at a sibling is not acceptable.

He also urged parents to stick with age-appropriate programming. A 3-year-old might misunderstand the sibling strife in the PBS show “Arthur,” he said, or stop paying attention before it is resolved.