Ski report: Off piste thawing

Some firm pack off piste is softening.

Here is the Feb. 13 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

Free snowblowing for military families in S. Tahoe

Alpine Smith Inc. of South Lake Tahoe will participate with snowplow and landscape professionals from across the country by donating services and time to ease the burden on military families seeking help on the home front.



SnowCare for Troops is a national program underwritten by The Boss.

Alpine Smith urges interested military families to register in the SnowCare for Troops program by calling them at (530) 541.0250 or email info@alpinesmith.com. Along with the participation of Alpine Smith, Inc., there are many

opportunities for the community to get involved, including loaning snow removal equipment to volunteers or groups, and donating money, transportation or gas cards to offset snow removal and maintenance costs.

Big 5 entertaining thoughts of opening in S. Tahoe

Big 5 Sporting Goods is eyeballing South Lake Tahoe as a possibility for a store location.



The Southern California-based sporting good retailer has long been rumored to want to operate on the South Shore. In the past, they had been linked to the resurrection of the old Millers Outpost. With T.J. Maxx opening there last fall, the athletic store chain has being looking elsewhere.

Now the spot of choice is at the Factory Stores at the Y in the old Adidas location. (They also looked at the old Sports Ltd. spot near Raley's at the Y.)

An out of town sign maker contacted the city's planning staff on Feb. 12.

"It is not an application for signage, which is the official

document. It is a proposal to see if the signage would work," associate planner Judy Finn told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Please be aware that we have had many inquiries similar to this for businesses that have not panned out."

Officials from Big 5 did not return a call. It is not known what Big 5 officials know about the financial troubles the owners of the Y stores are having.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Shore locals to participate in Dancing with Your Stars

Tahoe Arts Project is bringing the Utah Ballroom Dance Company to Stateline on March 1 at 7pm at the MontBleu Theater.

This company, which features some of nation's top ballroom dancers, has performed nationally and internationally receiving numerous accolades and awards such as the coveted U.S. National Formation Championships.



Twenty of the best dancers in the industry will be here to perform numerous styles of ballroom dance including the Viennese Waltz, Swing, Tango, Cha Cha, Paso Doble, Samba, Foxtrot, Rumba, Mambo, Quickstep, Charleston and the Hustle.

Included is this special evening, six members of the community will be participating in Dancing with Your Stars – Carol Chaplin, executive director of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority; Joel Dameral, South Tahoe High School teacher; Wendy David, Lake Tahoe Unified School District board member; Curtis Fong, TGFT Productions-Bike the West; Deb Howard, Realtor; and Bueno Ketelsen, owner of Bert's Café.

Similar to the popular TV show, they will be paired up with one of the professionals to learn a ballroom dance routine, complete with costumes.

Judges for the evening will be Marcia Sarosik, Pat Ronan and Paul Middlebrook. The final decision will be made by audience vote.

Tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for children – (530) 542.3632.

Letter: Does South Lake Tahoe have a fiscal policy?

To the community,

Spending, borrowing, taxing. The fiscal policies and practices of the city are a jumble. The city has a large debt. It claims to have a large deficit. It has laid off several city employees to cut costs.

But the City Council is prepared to gamble thousands of dollars on parking meters. The council assumes meters are the answer for increasing city revenue. Where is the money for buying and installing the meters?



Bill Crawford

And the council will spend thousands on hiring headhunters to recruit candidates to fill city staff positions, which is another roll of the dice. Headhunters are not necessarily successful at providing good candidates for the city. Examples: I think of David Childs and Tony O'Rourke who were supposed to be the cat's meow, topnotch city managers. Both resigned after two years. The city doesn't have to send money for headhunters to recruit candidates.

And how much money has been spent on the contract for provide management of the city ice rink? Where is the accounting? Is the deal paying off for the city? A Bud anyone? The city's working on it.

Fiscal policy. Spending, borrowing, taxing. That is the question. What is the answer?

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Plane bound for Tahoe crashes, 2 hurt

By Tri-County Newspapers

Two Ukiah men were injured when their plane crashed into the edge of an almond orchard near Williams on Tuesday.

The identities of the men were not immediately available, but Colusa County sheriff's Sgt. Kevin Erdelt said that heavy smoke in the cockpit forced the two-seat Lancair 360 to the ground.



This is they type of plane involved in the emergency landing.

The two men were on their way from Ukiah to Lake Tahoe, Erdelt

said.

“There was some light smoke in the cockpit so they started to descend,” Erdelt said. “Then the smoke got heavier and they ended up crashing.”

The craft, considered an experimental plane, hit some almond trees west of East Camp Road and about a mile south of Highway 20.

One man was airlifted to Enloe Medical Center in Chico with what was described as major injuries. The other man was taken by ambulance to Colusa Regional Medical Center, but also was expected to be airlifted to an area hospital, Erdelt said.

The accident, which happened about 11:30am Feb. 12., is under investigation by the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

STHS boys basketball team advances in postseason

South Tahoe High School’s boys basketball team prevailed over Churchill County on Tuesday, 66-54.

Brandon Cramer led the Viking charge Feb. 12 with 24 points.



For a team full of seniors, this was the last home game for most of the players. And this was the first home playoff game in more than a decade.

There was a time when STHS was a force to be reckoned with on the hardwood. Before Tom Orlich left a dozen years ago, in 25 years of coaching his teams won 521 games. Among those were 17 division titles, nine regional championship and two state titles.

Before the Vikings can play in another championship game they must travel to Wooster on Friday where they are likely to meet No. 1 seed Elko. Elko will be formidable opponent coming in undefeated. (Elko was beating Spring Creek 62-22 in the fourth quarter Tuesday night.)

But it was a squeaker when STHS and Elko met in December. Elko won 52-47.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Driver takes out wall of South Tahoe post office

By Kathryn Reed

Almost an entire side of the post office at the Y in South Lake Tahoe is damaged.

A 61-year-old South Lake Tahoe woman twice drove through the wall on the left side of the building on Feb. 12.

When officers arrived the 2002 Ford Explorer was still in the building. The woman was given a field sobriety test, which was negative. She was not cited.



Two gaping holes were left from one vehicle Feb. 12 at the Tahoe Valley Post Office. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“She said the accelerator stuck, which caused her to go into building. She put it in reverse and as she was backing up she tried to put it in neutral, but she hit drive again and she went through post office again, at which time she shut the car off,” police Officer Donna Kingman told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The vehicle appeared to be totaled, with the windshield smashed and major damage sustained to the front end.

An ambulance was not called, but Kingman said the woman was spitting out glass.

While it caused quite a commotion Tuesday afternoon, it was business as usual inside the post office.

The building was to be secured, though just before 5pm the post office was wide open except for the yellow tape across the holes. People who have postal boxes in that area may obtain their mail from the front counter.

The local postmaster deferred comment to corporate PR. He was not available for comment.

Toxic emissions rise in California

By Edward Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

Toxic chemicals released into the environment by manufacturing plants and facilities in California rose in 2011 after steady annual declines since 2007, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's yearly Toxic Release Inventory report.



The TRI report also found that releases decreased in Sacramento and Solano counties, but increased year over year in Placer and Yolo counties in 2011, the latest year for which the EPA has toxic release information.

Agency data show that the Valero Refining Co.'s petrochemical refinery in Benicia – in Solano County – was one of the state's top 10 largest releasers of toxic chemicals in 2011, accounting for more than a half-million pounds of toxics released.

The largest emitter of toxics in Sacramento County was the Procter and Gamble plant on Fruitridge Road, which released more than 427,000 pounds of toxics, according to EPA data.

Nationwide, overall releases of toxic chemicals rose in 2011 for the second year in a row, the TRI report shows. Total toxics released increased by 8 percent from 2010.

In California overall, the EPA's data found a 10 percent increase from 2010 in total pollution added to the environment.

In the state report, pollution released into the air statewide fell 13 percent in 2011, but releases to water and land increased by 10 percent and 9 percent, respectively.

The TRI yearly reports are used as indicators but do not establish what caused the numbers to change.

"There could be any number of different reasons for these numbers to go up or down," said Lily Lee, toxics release inventory coordinator with the EPA.

Economics, however, may be a factor, she said.

"I have heard from individual facilities that have told me that economic activity may explain why release amounts have gone up in their facilities," Lee said.

But Lee said the EPA analyzed a 10-year period of national TRI data in order to establish whether there is a link between economic indicators and increases or decreases in toxic releases. That analysis did not find a direct link between the two.

"The caveat is that the TRI report is a national grouping together of a lot of places and all kinds of industries," Lee said.

Established by a 1986 law, the TRI report is one of the most comprehensive U.S. public pollutant databases. It offers a big-picture look at what is released into the environment in several industry sectors that include manufacturing, metal mining, electric utilities, commercial hazardous waste

facilities and petrochemical facilities.

The public report – which encompasses 682 chemicals and categories of chemicals considered by the EPA to be harmful to the environment or human health – is used as an indicator of releases and not whether, or to what degree, the public is exposed to a certain chemical.

The broad strokes of the TRI report may be its biggest limitation, said Anthony Wexler, director of the Air Quality Research Center at the University of California, Davis.

“When you’re talking about any increases or decreases – that’s too crude a measure,” said Wexler. “Some toxic compounds may be emitted in large quantities but have very low toxicity, whereas other compounds may be emitted in small quantities but be very toxic. It’s the combination of these two factors that govern how ‘bad’ a release is.”

Some of the most problematic substances released are those that persist in the environment and in body tissue. In 2011 there was a 24 percent rise in such chemical releases in California.

One of those substances is lead, which saw a 3 percent increase in 2011, with about 4.9 million pounds added to the environment. Lead has been linked to nerve and brain damage – and other health problems – in children and adults.

For Wexler, of equal or greater concern may be what gets sent into the atmosphere under our noses daily – tailpipe emissions.

“Those kinds of releases are not like from an industry, where releases have to be reported,” Wexler said. “It’s you and me, as well as trucking and bus companies – these are also emitting these (carcinogens).”

Fabrication business to add jobs at Zephyr Photonics

By Northern Nevada Business Weekly

Zephyr Photonics Inc., a manufacturer of highly sophisticated optical devices, said last week it's offering manufacturing services at its plant at Lake Tahoe to outside customers.

The upshot may be increased employment over the next couple of years for the company, which has employed about 30 people in recent years.

The company previously handled only its own work at the 17,000-square-foot Zephyr Cove facility which includes a 10,000-square-foot clean room.

Tom Steding, chief executive officer of Zephyr Photonics, said the company's new semiconductor fabrication and foundry services unit was created to meet the needs of companies that design and sell semiconductors but outsource the actual manufacturing to businesses known as semiconductor foundries.

The production services are an outgrowth of development and testing that Zephyr Photonics has provided under contract with customers in the technology sector, Steding said.

Zephyr has developed and manufactured optical-interconnection equipment that’s used in harsh environments. Its customers include the U.S. Defense Department and industrial companies in the aerospace and energy sectors.

Tim McAllister, Zephyr Photonics’ vice president of business development, said the company believes that the standards established for defense and intelligence contracts will help it win private work as well.

McCallister said the company expects to ramp up the contract manufacturing through 2013 and 2014, hiring at first to cover additional shifts within its current facilities.

Zephyr Photonics plans to further increase its production capacity with new facilities and new equipment next year, he said.

The new business unit marks another step in the repositioning of the company under new ownership.

The company was launched more than 25 years ago as Opticomp, and it operated as a small, stealth research firm that handled more than 60 research grants for federal agencies and defense contractors.

Torch Hill Investment Partners of Washington, D.C., bought the Lake Tahoe company in 2011 with a plan to move its work into the light of product-oriented commercial operations.

Since then, it’s been developing contracts with companies such as Teledyne Microelectronic Technologies of Los Angeles to move its technology into commercial applications.