LTCC looking to cast ‘Rent’

Lake Tahoe Community College’s Theater Arts Department will be putting on the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning musical “Rent” in June.

Auditions will be Feb. 4 at 7pm in the Duke Theatre. Callbacks will be Feb. 9 at 12:30 p.m.

Director Susan Boulanger seeks an ethnically diverse cast of strong singers and actors who are comfortable with rock, pop, and gospel music. All actors are required to sing. A short dance audition will follow the vocal audition.

Rehearsals are Mondays through Thursdays beginning April 8. Performances are June 14-23.

“Rent” follows the lives of a group of impoverished young artists and musicians as they struggle to survive and create in New York’s Lower East Side in the thriving days of Bohemian Alphabet City, under the shadow of the AIDS epidemic.

For more information, call (530) 541.4660, ext. 240.

Opinion: Pessimistic about online poker

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

It was clear as the “fiscal cliff” deadline closed in on federal lawmakers last month that there was no way an online

poker bill would reach the floor of the Senate for a vote.

It was a disappointing way to end the year for millions of poker players who believed there was a slim chance for Congress to act on legislation that most Nevadans believe is a no-brainer to legalize an activity that already occurs and could provide badly needed revenue for federal coffers.

Don’t worry, some say. The feds will act when state lawmakers take matters into their own hands and begin approving play through a patchwork of regulations from state to state.

After sitting through several sessions organized by the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States last week at the Rio, I’m not so sure even that will happen.

Because gaming is all around us in Las Vegas, it’s easy to develop a false sense of security that neighboring states understand the industry and want to see online poker play as badly as we do. Based on conversations during the three-day conference, it appears that isn’t the case.

Many believe that now that Arizona Sen. Jon Kyl has retired, Majority Leader Harry Reid needs a new Republican sidekick to push federal legislation through. If that turns out to be Sen. Dean Heller, any bill proposed immediately would be perceived as beneficial to Nevada and possibly detrimental to other states, lawmakers at the conference said.

The council opposes federal legislation. They say the Reid-Kyl bill “would create an unnecessary federal gaming licensing regime and bifurcate authority over regulation of gaming and … put at risk critical revenues derived from state-regulated gaming.”

Directors of several state lottery organizations oppose it, too, and the governors of Idaho, Maryland, Rhode Island and Utah, along with the treasurer of Massachusetts, have written letters of opposition. (Gov. Brian Sandoval wrote a letter of

support.) The lottery directors are irritated that the bill wouldn’t give them the same legislative benefits as operators of online poker.

Several Indian tribes also oppose federal and state oversight, saying their sovereign nation status would supersede regulation.

Meanwhile, the Nevada Legislature, which opens next month, will likely debate state legislation to allow the governor to negotiate compacts with other states that have legalized online poker and broaden the marketplace across state lines. That group could include New Jersey, which has a bill awaiting the signature of Gov. Chris Christie, and California, which is retooling its online poker proposals.

Passage of that legislation would almost certainly attract the attention of the federal Justice Department. Maybe that’s the strategy – a play to force the feds to move.

There’s still a strong contingent that doesn’t want Internet gambling approved. A Fairleigh Dickinson University study found that 67 percent of Americans want Internet gambling to remain illegal.

On top of that, Frank Fahrenkopf, one of the strongest lobbying voices for the gaming industry, announced this month he will step down as CEO of the American Gaming Association later this year.

It’s looking more and more like online poker proponents are going to have to fold.

Where is the best place in the basin to watch sports on TV?

Chaos in California could be boon for Wisconsin cheesemakers

By Rob Schultz, Wisconsin State Journal

MADISON – Wisconsin's cheese producers are poised to profit – perhaps mightily – from a feud that has buckled the knees of California's dysfunctional dairy industry.

California cheesemakers have prospered for decades because the price of milk used to make cheese has been set lower than what competitors from other states, including Wisconsin, pay. Now, California's financially strapped dairy farmers are saying their future depends on whether their state's cheese producers can be forced to pay the same price as everybody else, according to a Wisconsin State Journal report.

If California cheesemakers are forced onto a level playing field, sales of Wisconsin cheese – estimated at about $5 billion – could increase by $200 million, according to a top dairy industry executive from Wisconsin.

"It could be very significant," said David Fuhrmann, chief executive officer and president of Foremost Farms, a Baraboo-based company that is Wisconsin's No. 1 cheese producer.

Foremost makes cheese and other dairy products for sale worldwide.

At issue is that California sets its own milk prices, and those prices are usually lower than those paid in the federal system followed by most states, including Wisconsin.

California's dairy farmers didn't complain about the low prices until recently when feed costs began to soar. Most farms there don't have room to grow their own feed, so they must buy it, usually from another state. Factor in higher regulatory costs, and environmental and water concerns, and it all led to more than 100 of the state's 1,600 dairy farms closing in 2012, according to Michael Marsh, CEO of Western United Dairymen, a group that represents about 65 percent of California's dairy farmers.

California cheese is as much as 10 to 15 cents a pound cheaper.

"That's huge," he said.

Nobody knows that better than California's dairy farmers.

The thought of California producers losing that milk-price advantage has Wisconsin cheesemakers salivating.

"If they have to pay more for the milk, and get on a more level playing field with us, we will gain market share because the majority of their cheese is being shipped to the Midwest or the East, and we have a huge transportation advantage," Fuhrmann said.

"That should allow us to be a lot more competitive and gain market share at their expense."

Vail Resorts CEO talks about expansion, off season offerings

By Danny King, Travel Weekly

Like many ski resort operators around the U.S., Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz had a relatively happy new year, as the 2012-13 winter season has been an improvement over last season's warm, dry winter. This year Vail, whose resorts include Heavenly Mountain Resort in addition to its eponymous Colorado resort, expanded its reach by acquiring Lake Tahoe's Kirkwood Mountain Resort, Minnesota's Afton Alps and Michigan's Mount Brighton. Katz has served as Vail's CEO since 2006.

Q: How's business this season?

A: Lake Tahoe's got a massive amount of snow. Kirkwood's got a base of about 10 feet, which is well ahead of last year. The early part of the season was tough for Colorado, but conditions got much, much better just in time for Christmas.

Q: Vail already has a large presence at Lake Tahoe with its ownership of Heavenly and Northstar. Why buy Kirkwood, and what are your plans?

A: Kirkwood gave us a very unique ski experience that was very different from Heavenly and Northstar. It's more undeveloped, and it gets one of the largest snowfalls of any resort in the U.S. It's really beloved particularly by Bay Area skiers. We'll look at food services, lift operations, providing more parking, making the base area better. But our goal is not to make Kirkwood like Northstar or Heavenly. Part of its charm is that it's high-alpine terrain.

Q: Hotel industry analysts talk about how more people than

ever are booking last-minute trips. Are you finding the same trend with ski resorts?

A: Well, there are two types of people. There's the day skier, who often makes his decision based on weather conditions. And there are plenty of those both in Colorado and the Bay Area. But we've moved a lot of our skiers and snowboard riders to season passes, so we've locked in that revenue. About 40 percent of our lift ticket sales are from season passes, which we stop selling at Thanksgiving. That number was probably under 20 percent a decade ago.

Q: Why the acquisition of the Michigan and Minnesota resorts?

A: Both are much smaller [than the Colorado and California resorts], but they're within fairly close proximity of about 450,000 skiers. … So we can reach out and get close to our guests, get them to buy a pass for a local resort and possibly buy a pass out here. Also, we can improve the experience at the smaller resorts. Things like terrain parks and half-pipes, those don't really need 5,000 acres of space. They can be done in a small area.

Q: You added three days of skiing at Switzerland's Verbier resort to your Epic Season Pass. How'd that come about?

A: Our Epic Season pass-holders are a fairly elite group, and other resorts such as the folks at Verbier want to get access to them. So it's a win-win all the way around. Ultimately, how many people from the U.S. will take advantage [of the Verbier inclusion] is unclear, but what helps is that people know they could go, and sometimes, that's as important as whether they do go.

Q: How important is the off-season to your annual performance, and how has that changed?

A: We've spent the past five to six years working with Congress to allow for a greater range of activities [on the

U.S. Forest Service-owned land where the ski resorts are located]. The goal is to put new activities on the mountain, things like ziplines, ropes courses, horseback riding, bungee jumping, rock climbing. … We do lose money [in the off-season]. So the goal is to take a big chunk out of those losses, in addition to helping provide year-round employment in the resort towns.

El Dorado County sheriff writes Biden about gun control

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

The El Dorado County sheriff has fired off an anti-gun control letter to Vice President Joe Biden.

“It is well known and proven with facts, not emotional inference, that gun control of any kind, has no effect on the reduction of crime, anywhere,” wrote Sheriff John D’Agostini.

The letter, also sent out as a press release, was written to Biden Jan. 17.

Here is the El Dorado County sheriff’s letter to Biden.

The Obama administration is trying to get congressional support for a package of gun-control proposals, including an assault rifle ban. Biden helped formulate the proposals.

The gun control proposals come following the December shooting at a Newtown, Conn., elementary school that left 20 children and six staffers dead.

Harbaughs set to meet biggest fan – each other

By Judy Battista, New York Times

Until last season, when they faced each other across a football field for the first time, John Harbaugh had never rooted against his little brother, Jim. Except for the one time they were on different American Legion baseball teams in high school – and John wants it known his team won, 1-0 – the brothers were always on the same side, whether it was on their high school football team or on the ice rink they made in the backyard of their childhood home.

On Feb. 3, the brothers, separated by just 15 months but alike in so many other ways, will be on different sides of the country's biggest sporting event when the Baltimore Ravens – the team John has coached for five seasons – play the San Francisco 49ers – the team Jim has coached for two – in the Super Bowl. The Harbaughs are the first brothers to be head coaches in the N.F.L. There are only 32 such jobs, making the odds of brothers securing two of them at the same time slim. But for two weeks at least, the Harbaughs will supplant the Mannings as the first family of football, the title game serving as the next installment of a sibling rivalry that used to include competitions to see who could throw a football over a towering tree and fights over which brother was scheduled to mow the big backyard lawn at their parents' home in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The brothers, who had not spoken to each other by late Monday

afternoon, do not seem impressed by their impending meeting.

“Is it really going to be written about?” John Harbaugh said. “It’s not exactly like Churchill and Roosevelt.”

Maybe not. But when Jim Harbaugh arrived in San Francisco to rebuild the 49ers last season, he took with him an exhortation his father used to dispense to the entire family.

“Who’s got it better than us?” their father, Jack, a former college coach to whom the sons still send game film, would ask.

“Nooobody!” the family would respond in unison.

Certainly nobody in the N.F.L. has it better than the Harbaughs do right now. In seven combined seasons, John and Jim have never failed to get their teams into the postseason. Indeed, the brothers act as if they expected this extraordinary confluence all along, indicating they are already tired of the sentimental story line.

Jim Harbaugh said that playing his brother in the Super Bowl was “a blessing and a curse.”

“We’re not that interesting,” John Harbaugh said. “There is nothing more to learn. It’s just like any other family. We get it, it’s really cool and it’s exciting and all that. It’s really about the players.”

Good luck with that. Last year, both teams lost in their conference championship games. This year, Jim’s team beat the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday afternoon, leaving him to cheer on the Ravens as they beat the New England Patriots a few hours later. Their father and their mother, Jackie, watched from their home in Mequon, Wis. And when asked what his father might have been thinking Sunday night, John Harbaugh said he hoped he had drunk four or five beers.

The elder Harbaughs are expected to attend the Super Bowl in

New Orleans, though, just as they attended the Thanksgiving night game during the 2011 season, when the Ravens beat the 49ers, 16-6, on the day before Jack and Jackie’s 50th wedding anniversary.

That the brothers have reached the pinnacles of their careers at exactly the same moment seems fitting, because their lives have wound around each other, fierce competition and football since they were children. Among many stops in his long coaching career, Jack Harbaugh was an assistant to Bo Schembechler at Michigan. The boys would go to practice, but they were also budding businessmen. They would take wristbands and write the name of the starting quarterback at the time on them, selling them to their classmates as if they were all game-worn wristbands.

John was supposed to be the starting quarterback his senior year at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor. But by then, Jim had grown taller — and better. He started as a sophomore and John switched to fullback and defensive back.

John Harbaugh has joked that he dominated his brother for most of their lives, but Jim had the far better athletic career, going on to become an all-American at Michigan and then a first-round draft pick of the Chicago Bears. John was mostly a nonstarting defensive back at Miami of Ohio.

But while his brother played 15 years in the N.F.L., John Harbaugh’s coaching career began in anonymity, and after 10 years as an assistant with the Philadelphia Eagles, he became the coach of the Ravens in 2008 — after Patriots Coach Bill Belichick, whose team the Ravens vanquished Sunday night, called the Ravens’ owner, Steve Bisciotti, to recommend Harbaugh.

Even while Jim Harbaugh played in the N.F.L., he served as an assistant to his father, who was then the coach at Western Kentucky. In 2002, his playing days final over, Jim Harbaugh

became the Raiders' quarterbacks coach.

But the job that led him to the N.F.L. was at Stanford, where he tutored Andrew Luck — who was the first pick last year — and returned the Cardinal to national prominence.

On Monday, Jim Harbaugh was asked if, while growing up, he ever dreamed of coaching in the Super Bowl, and he flashed the sense of humor that his brother has said he possessed.

"I don't think I had that dream," Jim Harbaugh said. "I will share this with you, just the way Colin Kaepernick runs, the gracefulness of his stride, it reminds me of me when I run. Then I wake up."

After Sunday's games, John Harbaugh said he would like to think the Ravens and the 49ers are mirror images: physically imposing, able to run the ball, but with quarterbacks who throw well, and possessing "roughhouse" defenses. It is impossible, though, to miss the brothers' differences in personality.

John Harbaugh smiles more, making a point to thank everyone for coming when he begins his postgame news conferences. Jim Harbaugh, who seems to wear the same black 49ers sweatshirt tucked into khaki pants every day, has been known for his wild-eyed, emotional style since his playing days.

He had an epic meltdown after what he considered a bad call Sunday, sending the marker that always hangs from a lanyard around his neck swinging furiously.

The brothers said they had not fought since they were about 25, but they used to fight so vigorously that their mother cried as she begged them to stop.

"He's an incredibly competitive person," John Harbaugh said of his brother. "He will fight you for anything. That's what made him a great player. What makes him the man he is. The gym

teacher in fourth grade said he was too competitive, and he needs to ease off. My dad said ‘No, he doesn’t need to ease off.’”

Last year, John Harbaugh told an associate that the brothers had vacationed together recently. They were goofing off in the water and their horseplay – as it has since they were schoolboys – got a little heated.

Jim Harbaugh held his brother under the water, the Ravens’ public-relations chief Kevin Byrne said, until bubbles started coming out of his nose. Then he finally let go of him.

But when the Harbaughs surface with their teams at the Superdome, they will not ease off, any more than they did in grade school.

Award-winning Placer County winery expanding

By Jon Tourney, Wines & Vines

AUBURN – After expanding wine production and sales for five years at its original location, Lone Buffalo Vineyards has roamed to a larger property in Placer County and built a new and larger winery and tasting room that opened Jan. 11.

The new 12-acre property is located northwest of Auburn, and north of Interstate 80, placing it within the Sierra Foothills American Viticultural Area and closer to a more heavily traveled section of the expanding Placer County Wine Trail. The new site is within three miles of a cluster of newer wineries and tasting rooms that include Dona Dal Cielo

Vineyard and Winery, PaZa Vineyard and Winery and Wise Villa Winery.

Family-owned and operated by Phil, Jill and Jocelyn Maddux, Lone Buffalo began commercial operation in 2007 at a smaller, off-the-beaten path property with a one-acre vineyard south of Auburn.

Phil Maddux is a native of Sonoma County who practices real estate law, but he is increasingly devoting more time to the winery. He began making wine in 1971 and has taken winemaking and chemistry classes at UC Davis and Sonoma State University, and cites Sonoma County winemaking legends Dick Arrowood and Cecil DeLoach as mentors.

Maddux was an award-winning amateur winemaker for many years, and Lone Buffalo wines are now winners in commercial wine competitions. Most recently, Lone Buffalo won medals for each of its five wines entered in the 2012 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, notably taking a gold medal for the 2010 Sierra Foothills Thunder Beast Zinfandel.

Jill Maddux, with a 25-year career in sales and marketing, manages Lone Buffalo's sales and accounting and assists Phil with vineyard management, including managing three 1-acre vineyards in Placer County, where the winery sources grapes.

Their daughter Jocelyn Maddux handles public relations, manages graphic media and the winery's website, electronic and social media in addition to operating her own marketing consulting business – jbrandmarketing.

All three Madduxes staff the tasting room on weekends. "Each of us brings our own skills and strengths to the business," Jill said. "We're a three-legged stool, and we complement one another in how we divide up the duties."

Success enables move Lone Buffalo's success and growth enabled the move and expansion.

“We’ve been profitable since our third year in business,” Phil said, “and we’d been looking for a new location for almost two years.”

Direct sales through the tasting room, a wine club and the website account for a significant part of sales, with the remainder of production sold through local retailers and restaurants along the I-80 corridor from Sacramento to Lake Tahoe. The new location on the Placer County Wine Trail is expected to draw more customer traffic.

Placer County to talk about future of West Shore

Placer County is hosting a meeting Feb. 6 at 6pm about the proposed community plan and zoning changes for the West Shore.

The meeting is at the Granlibakken Conference Center in Tahoe City.

The community plan is still a work in progress and there are many details to be determined, such as density, setbacks and parking.

For more information, contact Crystal Jacobsen, Placer County Planning Services Division, (530) 745.3085, cjacobse@placer.ca.gov.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Bookworks, the Family Resource Center used bookstore next to Freshies, is looking for volunteers. For info, call Delicia Spees at (530) 542.0470.

• Getaway Café in Meyers is open after going through a remodel.

• Tahoe Truckee Unified School District on Jan. 15 refinanced bonds from its 1999 and 2000 measures, resulting in $2.77 million in savings to its taxpayers over the next 17 years.

• Togo’s sandwich chain is on a growth spurt. It opened 11 shops in 2012, including in Truckee. A franchise agreement has been signed for a store to open in South Lake Tahoe.

• Harrah’s Lake Tahoe is completing a major remodel and rebranding of its nightclub. The new name is PEEK Nightclub. Paris Hilton will be on hand to help celebrate the grand opening Feb. 16.