Red Hawk Casino takes a gamble on foodies

By Cathie Anderson, Sacramento Bee

Let gamblers enjoy the card tables and slot machines at the front of the house at Red Hawk Casino. Foodies would prefer to play in the rear.

Evan Smith holds the keys to much of this domain as the new vice president of food and beverage. His is the largest department, 400 of 1,400 workers. Six restaurants include Henry's Steakhouse, Pearl and Waterfall Buffet.

Smith took me behind the scenes where we chilled with salads and hors d'oeuvres in the garde-manger. He asked the head butcher to take a break from cutting beef short ribs to show me the prime short loins and rib-eyes that hang out in the dry-aging room for 25 to 30 days.

When we finally arrived at the front of the house at Henry's Steakhouse, he pointed out the $2,100 bottle of Louis XIII cognac and wines that sell for $20 to $400.

Smith basked in the activity of each kitchen. His formal culinary training was with an Austrian chef at Contra Costa College, and he also worked for a French chef at Le Marquis in Lafayette.

"I worked six days at the restaurant, and I went to school five of those days," he said. "I pretty much lived, ate and breathed culinary arts every day of my life."

After college, he worked for two years at Chez Panisse in Berkeley before venturing out as a chef. He worked for 20 years in Lake Tahoe casinos, but he comes to Red Hawk from Chukchansi Gold Resort & Casino, north of Fresno, where he led

the food and beverage unit.

As a senior manager at Red Hawk, Smith works closely with general manager Bryan deLugo to help improve the casino's fortunes. Owned by the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians and managed by Lakes Entertainment Inc., Red Hawk has struggled amid a poor economy.

The downturn heightened demands on food and beverage managers, who already faced stiff competition from a growing number of regional casinos, said Jean Hertzman, assistant dean of operations at the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration at UNLV.

"Because a smaller percentage of the casino's revenue is from gaming than it used to be, particularly after the last recession, now it's switched to where food and beverage also needs to be profitable," Hertzman said.

Casinos have stopped using $3.99 buffets as loss leaders to draw gamblers. Meals now go for about the same price as those at comparable local eateries. Red Hawk's buffet ranges from $10 to $20.

Snowboard sales decline, more people buying skis

By Hugo Martín, Los Angeles Times

At the height of the nation's snowboard craze, Rod Rice was a so-called blazin' raisin – an older dude who loved to bomb the slopes at breakneck speeds.

That is, until he wiped out and dislocated his shoulder on a trip to Canada. The 65-year-old engineer still loves to carve fresh powder, but now he does it on a pair of extra-wide skis.

“I’m not planning on going back to snowboarding,” said the Lakewood grandfather.



A mix of skis and snowboards at Northstar. Photo/LTN

Once the king of the mountain, snowboarding is on the down slope.

The rage that transformed the nation’s ski resorts and planted such terms as “jib,” “face plant” and “biff” into America’s lexicon is cooling off partly because many older riders are shifting to new, easier-to-ride skis to preserve their aging bodies.

Sales of snowboards and snowboard equipment have slipped 21 percent over the last four years, while sales of skis have climbed 3 percent in the same period, according to SnowSports Industries America, a trade group that tracks the $3.5-billion snow sports and apparel industry.

Baby boomers aren’t the only ones bailing. Last season alpine skiing replaced snowboarding as the most popular snow sport among kids ages 6 to 17, according to the trade group. That’s the first time in nearly a decade and a troubling sign for snowboard makers battling for a key demographic.

The once hip, ultra extreme sport may have lost its lure when

mom and dad began snowboarding a few years ago.

“Kids don’t want to do what their parents do,” said Chris Riddle, a spokesman for Snow Summit and Bear Mountain ski resorts near Big Bear Lake. He said he’s seen an increase in skiers in the terrain park typically dominated by snowboarders.

A snow-loving member of the millennial generation, 17-year-old Arten Yegikyan from La Crescenta tried snowboarding on Bear Mountain a few months ago. He said he gave it up because he felt beat up and frustrated when he was done.

“It felt like you had no control over the direction you are going,” said Yegikyan, who now prefers skiing. The limitations snowboarders face in powder and flat terrain are a reason Kristy Chocholaty, 35, of Truckee has given up on the sport.

She jumped on the snowboard bandwagon in the late 1990s. “I wanted to check it out because so many people were snowboarding at the time,” she said.

But she said she gets frustrated when she tries to keep up with her skier husband and gets stuck in places that he can simply push through with his poles.

Ski and snowboard manufacturers acknowledge the factors weighing on snowboards. But they predict sales will rise again as manufacturers push new board designs that will make them easier and safer to ride.

“Like anything else, you will see the snowboarding trend wax and wane,” said Nick Castagnoli, a spokesman for Rossignol Skis USA, a longtime manufacturer of skis, snowboards and other snow gear.

Meanwhile, new ski designs are making it easier than ever for ski fans of all ages to enjoy the sport. Thanks to so-called shaped skis, many beginners are gaining proficiency quickly,

while some veterans are mastering tricks that would have been difficult on conventional skis.

Shaped skis are shorter than traditional straight skis. They're also wider at the front and back. That hourglass shape enables skiers to turn with less effort – and with fewer wipeouts. These wider skis are also better for schussing over powder and cruddy snow. Plus, skis with upturned tips on both ends can be ridden forward and backward, just like a snowboard.

As a result, powder hounds who want to try downhill skiing, backcountry trekking and terrain park tricks can do it all and save money by buying one set of skis.

Thanks to such new designs, skiers will compete for the first time in slopestyle and half pipe competitions at the 2014 Winter Games, the International Olympic Committee recently ruled.

"It's interesting where the industry is going now," said Josh Holm, who manages the ski rental shop at Squaw Valley Ski Resort. "You can ski on a half pipe and land backward just like a snowboarder."

Modern snowboarding was invented in the 1960s, but most ski resorts refused to let riders on their slopes until the 1990s when the sport's popularity began to boom. Snowboarders made their debut in the Winter Olympics in 1998, and by 2004 they outnumbered skiers on U.S. slopes.

From 1990 to 2004, the number of Americans who participated in snowboarding jumped about 340 percent, from 1.5 million to 6.6 million, according to the National Sporting Goods Association. In the same period, the number of skiers dropped 48 percent, from 11.4 million to 5.9 million, the trade group said.

Since 2004, however, snowboard participation has dropped 22 percent while skiing has climbed 16 percent, according to the

trade group.

Gun rights advocates gather in Carson City

By KTVN-TV

Thousands of people gathered in state capitals across the nation Saturday to rally against stricter gun control measures.

One of these “Guns Across America” rallies happened in Carson City.

Hundreds gathered outside the capitol and Legislature buildings in Carson City around noon Saturday. They waved signs about the second amendment as passing drivers honked in support.

Participants do not agree with the gun control proposals being discussed in Washington, D.C.

“We are not criminals,” said Corey Hornemann of Carson City. “These are the faces of actual, working, adult people that own weapons and we go out shooting and we have a good time. It’s a sporting event.”

A couple of days ago, President Obama unveiled a sweeping package of gun control proposals. Those proposals come after last month’s deadly school shooting in Newtown, Conn.

“Every time we have an incident like this in our country, all of the progressives, the liberals, the elites, they think they know better,” said Bill Miller of Carson City. “Well, you know

what? We the people know better. Been that way for 300 years. Not going to change."

The crowds also say Saturday's rallies are about protecting the Second Amendment.

"This is not a partisan issue," said P.J. DeGross, an organizer of the event. "This is not Republican. It's not Democrat, black, white, old, young. This is about our Constitution, and this should be important to every American citizen to preserve our rights. We can't afford to have legislation to take away our rights."

DeGross says the second amendment also protects Americans in their right to protect themselves.

Early morning blaze destroys S. Lake Tahoe house

A house in the middle of South Lake Tahoe was completely destroyed early Sunday after flames swept through the dwelling.

No one was injured in the 12:30am Jan. 20 blaze, but the house is gone.

"Flames were raging and the house was completely engulfed," Fire Chief Bruce Martin said in describing what firefighters found when they arrived at the structure on Carson Avenue between Knox and Armstrong avenues.

A small marijuana grow was discovered in the remnants.

"They are going to spend some time looking at that electrical

to see if it may be the cause," Martin told *Lake Tahoe News*. He said now it would be speculating to say the rewiring in the house was the cause of the fire. But based on the burn pattern it appears the fire started near the electrical junction box.

Initial reports were that someone was in the house, but firefighters did not find this to be true.

Martin did not know if people live at the residence full time or where they were during the fire.

Liberty Utilities workers cut power to the house. No neighboring houses caught on fire.

Firefighters did have to shovel snow from a hydrant to get to water, but Martin said that is not unusual.

The investigation is ongoing.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Ski report: Plenty of open terrain



Most every resort in the Tahoe area is 100 percent open. Go explore!

Here is the Jan. 20 ski report.

– Curtis Fong

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Alder Inn in South Lake Tahoe is No. 15 on TripAdvisors' travelers' choice for hotels with best service in the U.S.

• Coyote Grill in the Round Hill Center has set Jan. 25 for its grand reopening. The expansion has doubled the size of the restaurant so the venue can also have entertainment. The celebration starts at 2pm.

• Nikki's Café in South Lake Tahoe is temporarily closed as it goes through a remodel.

• The Family Resource Center is taking orders for the tamale fundraiser until Jan. 25. Call (530) 542.0740 for info and to place an order.

• Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules from Caltrans.

Resorts don’t limit their fun to skiing, boarding

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Don’t ski? Don’t worry. Ski resorts have something even for guests who don’t want to strap a board or two to their feet.

They can provide a different way for you to slide or let you strap other devices on your feet that are less scary than skis or a snowboard.

“At Sierra we are so passionate about progression. We hope they go down the sledding hill and then want to ski,” resort spokesman Steven Hemphill told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We don’t look at it as just a tubing option. We look at it as getting them on the snow and then intrigued about sliding on skis or a snowboard.”

Plus, Sierra-at-Tahoe offers other activities that aren’t snow related – like the Cal band that is playing this weekend and various wine events throughout the season.



Tubing at Sierra is an

option for those who don’t ski or want a break from schussing. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Most Tahoe area resorts have something other than skiing or snowboarding for their guests.

Chris Sathre, 46, of San Juan Capistrano brought his 4- and 6-year-old to Sierra’s tubing hill. It was hard to tell which of the three was having more fun. Sathre liked the hill because it’s safe and you “get a little speed.” While he skis, the tubing allows him to have fun with his kids.

Twelve-year-old Sonya Pinsky of Alameda gets a running start to fly down the tubing hill at Sierra-at-Tahoe. As she goes over the rollers she pulls up on the tube to get some air.

Scary? Not to her. Pinsky is all smiles talking about the fun at the resort’s Blizzard Mountain.

Two routes are available for tubers; both with curves where riders can go up embankments. When the worker spins the tuber there is no telling what direction one is going – except down. What might be around the corner or even when the next corner is can’t be ascertained unless the rider only received a normal push to get going.

For the more experienced tubers like Pinsky, it was all about running about 15 feet from the start line, landing on her stomach on the tube and going fast.

“So many people may not have seen snow. It’s a great way to ease into it,” Hemphill said.

The tubing hill used to be on the Broadway run. Three years ago the resort created Blizzard Mountain near Lot E.

In addition to the tubing lanes, there is a bouncy house, snow

fort and sledding.

It costs $25 to tube for two hours. The number of runs one can get in all depends on how many people are there – just like skiing. Food and beverages are sold at the bottom where the tickets are purchased. The sledding is at the top of the tubing hill.

The top of the tubing hill is also a turn-around point for snowshoers.

Jen Soto and her mom Patti Brecht, both of El Dorado Hills, have opted to snowshoe while others in their party are skiing. Soto is recovering from a back injury, so she wanted a less strenuous activity. This was her first time on snowshoes, second for mom.

They rented their equipment from the little telemark hut near the Grandview lift. All-day rentals are $25 – which includes access to the trails. For those with snowshoes, the three-mile roundtrip trek is free.

Starting off the signs clearly point where to go. Then markers lead us into the woods where it's incredibly quiet and no longer do we realize we're at a bustling ski resort on a Sunday.

But then the signs are gone and the packed snow goes in opposite directions. One route is over a creek with no clear indication there is any sort of bridge other than snow covering the water, while the other leads out of the woods to the trail that is wide as a road.

We choose the safer route. However, a resort official later said that the true route crosses the creek and goes to a lookout where Pyramid Peak looms tall in the distance.

An option for those who don't want to be outdoors is to participate in the Wednesday wine tastings from 3-4pm in the

Pub. El Dorado County’s Madrona Vineyards pours a variety of wines.

Besides the Cal band, various musical acts come to the resort at different times.

All of Sierra’s events are online.

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1-night show by LTCC improv players

Lake Tahoe Community College’s Theater Arts Department is putting on a night of laughter and off-the-wall comedy with Random Acts of Improv.

This one-night-only performance is provided by the department’s improvisation group. The show will feature seasoned improvisation performers, including members of the Tahoe Improv Players, as well as a few fresh faces.

The Jan. 25 event is at 7:30pm in the Duke Theatre. Cost is $5.

All proceeds benefit the Theater Arts Department. For more information, call (530) 541.4660, ext. 240.

Federal Rural Schools Act money allocated to 3 basin counties

Lake Tahoe Unified and Douglas County school districts will be receiving money through the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

The money is distributed to counties and then to school districts.

“These payments are part of the Department of Agriculture’s long-standing commitment to rural communities, schools and American youth,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a press release. “Our century-long support of America’s public schools and roads is one of many ways in which the Forest Service, as a good neighbor and partner, contributes to rural communities becoming self-sustaining and prosperous.”

The federal government is giving more than $323 million to 41 states and Puerto Rico. El Dorado County is projected to get $2,269,335, Douglas County $30,130, and Placer County $924,886.

Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit in the past has used some of these funds for Generation Green.

The money may be used for supporting public schools and public

roads, for projects to help maintain and improve the health of forests, and for county projects including “Firewise Communities” programs, reimbursements for emergency services on national forests, and development of community wildfire protection plans.

Since 1908, the Forest Service has shared with states 25 percent of gross receipts from timber sales, grazing, minerals, recreation, and other land use fees on national forests to benefit public schools and public roads in the counties in which the forests are situated. With timber sales decreasing, schools suffered. That is how the act came about. It keeps being reauthorized, but in 2012 it was only re-authorized for this one distribution so future funding is not guaranteed.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placer County supes move forward on Kings Beach project

The Placer County Board of Supervisors last week approved three items related to the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project.

There are 294 parcels within the proposed district’s boundaries, of which the county owns eight.

In its first action, the board authorized the county executive officer to vote “yes” on county-owned parcels to be assessed

to pay for maintenance of the streetscape improvements.

The supervisors at their Jan. 22 meeting in Kings Beach will have a public hearing regarding the consideration of levying the assessments.

In the second action, the board approved an agreement between the North Lake Tahoe Public Utility District and the Placer County Department of Public Works to perform water and sewer line relocations within the Kings Beach Core Project.

The third action involved right-of-way property acquisitions as part of the project.

The $48 million project is designed to improve and revitalize a 1.1-mile stretch of Highway 28.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report