

Free guided snowshoe at Van Sickle Park

Explore Tahoe: An Urban Trailhead and the Tahoe Rim Trail Association are putting on a snowshoe trek through Van Sickle Bi-State Park in South Lake Tahoe on Feb. 2 from 10am-1pm.

The nearly 3 miles is rated as “moderate” in terms of difficulty.

Meet at the Heavenly Village Parking Garage at 10am.

Participants must provide snowshoes, dress appropriately and bring plenty of water and food to last through the hike.

The event is free.

Study: Test children's hearing more often

By Anna Gorman, Los Angeles Times

Parul Bhatia, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, remembers the patient well. The girl was 3 years old and profoundly deaf. Even though she had failed a hearing test at birth, she hadn't been treated for hearing loss.

Currently, children are only screened at birth and again just before entering kindergarten. Bhatia launched a study to see if there was a way to bridge that gap.

In the three-year study, local children were tested during routine pediatric visits at the Venice Family Clinic and at

clinics run by AltaMed Health Services Corp. Of nearly 2,000 children screened, 10 percent failed initial screening in at least one ear and five had permanent hearing loss.

Bhatia said the study, which was published in the January issue of the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, highlighted the importance of doing periodic screening and showed that such tests could identify more children and lead to earlier intervention.

“These are critical years for language and communication development,” she said. If the hearing loss isn’t found until the child is 4 or 5 years old, she said, “it is much harder to catch up at that point.”

The equipment costs on average about \$5,000 and the screening takes less than 10 minutes. The costs can be recuperated in about a year, she said.

The study was conducted in collaboration with Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, the Saban Research Institute, the John Tracy Clinic and the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine.

Bhatia’s initial patient is now 10, has cochlear implants and is doing well, she said.

Inaugural ball food: from foie gras to peanuts

By Tim Carman, Washington Post

Even in 1889, as crews prepared for President Benjamin Harrison’s inaugural ball under the eerie artificial light of the Pension Building’s newfangled incandescent lamps, planners

had a bad case of Gotham envy.

Hired to mastermind the massive feast for the ball, Philadelphia hotelier George C. Boldt told a *Washington Post* reporter that he was “determined to show the New York Delmonico idolaters that there was no monopoly of the feasting business in that city.”

Now, I can’t vouch for the accuracy of that quote because, despite describing the evening’s dresses, grand marches and banquet preparations with the kind of baroque detail that would make Michener blush, the *Post* reporters assigned to Harrison’s inauguration apparently couldn’t be bothered to use quotation marks when interviewing sources. But I can safely assume that Delmonico’s, then our country’s best gustatory stab at French sophistication, could not match the spread that Boldt and his team had prepared for the new president and his 15,000 guests.

According to the paper’s account, the throng gobbled down 40,000 raw oysters, 20,000 steamed oysters, 20,000 oysters a la poulette, 300 gallons of consomme, 7,000 chicken croquettes, 7,000 sweetbread patties, 7,000 roll sandwiches, 300 gallons of chicken salad, 200 gallons of lobster salad, 150 beef tongues, 150 Virginia hams, 150 turkeys, 1,000 quail, 800 pates de foie gras “a la Harrison,” 500 pounds of terrine of “game a la Morton” (a reference to Vice President Levi Morton), 300 quarts of Roman punch and 300 gallons of terrapins.

Compare that sumptuous 19th-century banquet to the food expected at President Obama’s Commander-in-Chief’s and Inaugural balls on Monday at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. According to the Presidential Inaugural Committee, the reception-style meals will include “similar items from previous years, including an assortment of pastas and crudites.”

The architect of the 2013 inaugural ball menus will not be a self-made millionaire like Boldt, who virtually invented the luxury-hotel lifestyle. It will be Centerplate, the giant food service company better known for feeding us roller-grilled weenies at ballparks. The food appears to be such an afterthought that neither the Presidential Inaugural Committee nor Centerplate is releasing menus for review.

Organizers, however, did feed us a little spoonful of sugar to help the crudites go down: "In keeping with our efforts to keep the costs down and make this accessible to the American public, the menu is both celebratory and appropriate given the nation's ongoing economic recovery," a committee spokeswoman e-mailed me.

So how did official inaugural balls go from a feast fit for the four-star appetite of Diamond Jim Brady – or at least the mythical Diamond Jim Brady – to one that requires a trip to the Mickey D's drive-through afterward? Most people I spoke to indicated that budget and security have been the driving factors in keeping food in check.

Eric Michael, co-founder of Occasions Caterers in Washington, remembers when he attended one of Ronald Reagan's official balls in 1981. It was held at the Kennedy Center and, unlike some sumptuous soirees tied to the Great Communicator's inauguration, this one offered a spread of peanuts and pretzels, Michael recalls. There was a cash bar, too.

"I think it's, frankly, an economic issue," Michael says. "They want to keep ticket prices as low as possible."

Design Cuisine of Arlington has supplied snacks for seven official balls, all at Union Station, dating from the '80s. "With the first one and second one, it was a little bit more food, but from then on, it began diminishing," says co-owner Bill Homan.

Although Obama's inaugural ball food is meant to signal

gustatory austerity in tough economic times, other presidents have used their grand celebrations to make different statements. Historical accounts credit James Madison in 1809 with the first official inaugural ball held at Long's Hotel on Capitol Hill, a party that attracted 400 of Washington's elite. A *Washington Post* retrospective look at balls in 1933 pegs first lady Dolley Madison as the instigator of this tradition. "She loved society and all its doings," wrote an unnamed author.

Subsequent galas sometimes had a more egalitarian air, like President Lincoln's second-term ball in 1865. Tickets were \$10 each for the party at the Patent Office, but as a *Post* story told it, "each gentleman could bring as many ladies as he chose and some brought half a dozen." The scene turned ugly during a midnight supper of terrapin stew, foie gras, leg of veal, cakes and tarts.

"As soon as the doors were thrown open, one thousand hungry persons tried to push their way in at one time," The *Post* account relates. "The crush which followed can better be imagined than depicted."

Incoming presidents seemed to play a game of one-upsmanship with their inaugural balls in the mid- to late 19th century: James Buchanan, James Garfield and Harrison each staged parties with Brobdingnagian banquets worthy of NFL training tables. A Los Angeles Times report noted that Garfield's 1881 inauguration dinner featured 15,000 "assorted cakes." Only Rutherford B. Hayes, whose controversial election was confirmed only days before his swearing in in 1877, did not have an inaugural ball in that era.

The 20th century, that period of world wars and psychoanalysis, coincided with American presidents casting a cynical eye on inaugural balls. Woodrow Wilson, in fact, canceled the whole affair. It took Harry Truman – that Missouri farm boy – to revive the official ball in 1949, and

John F. Kennedy took it to new heights. He attended a then- - record five balls, one featuring two 500-pound cakes decorated with the president's and vice president's visage in icing.

Leave it to Jimmy Carter, who lived in public housing for a year, to bring the inaugural ball back down to earth. He refused to call them balls. To him, they were "parties." The final touch for Carter's parties? An homage to his roots and staple of his family's business: peanuts.

To Carter, the peanut was a sign of hope. He had reversed his own fortunes with the lowly legume, but the snack would turn out to be a metaphor for the food to come at future inaugural balls: It would soon be "peanuts."

Sullivan top U.S. contender in downhill at 13th

By USSA

WENGEN, Switzerland – Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) led the U.S. Ski Team Saturday by finishing 13th in the fabled Lauberhorn, one of the most punishing downhills on the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup.

"Today was not my best performance here. It was not a bad result, but I was really hoping to capitalize on my early start number which is always seen as an advantage on this long course that gets continuously more bumpy as the day wears on," Sullivan said. "The result did move me back into the top 10 in the season downhill standings."

Italian Christof Innerhofer took the win.

Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) was 21st. Ted Ligety (Park City) did not ski the downhill, but caught a break when World Cup overall challenger Aksel Lund-Svindal of Norway went out.

Gambling may be available on airlines

By Daisy Carrington, CNN

Two French aviation design studios are betting on gambling in the air.

Jean-Pierre Alfano of AirJet Designs and Frédérique Houssard, the founder of Designescence, have teamed up to create the Casino Jet Lounge, a luxe bar-cum-casino they hope will one day become standard on long-haul commercial flights. The Casino Jet Lounge features trendy seating, a drinks area and a blackjack table.

"We're trying to bring back the glamor of the '50s and '60s a little bit; the kind you see in the James Bond movies," says Houssard.

The concept is relatively new (launched last October), so as of now, Houssard and Alfano are still in talks with various airlines.

The idea of in-flight gambling may seem like a new one, principally because no airline is currently doing it. But in reality, the concept has been around for decades.

Singapore Airlines took gambling up in the air in 1981, when they installed lightweight slot machines in the aisles on a flight that operated between Singapore and San Francisco. It was an experiment that lasted a mere two months. The company admits the machines posed “an operational challenge”, and had them removed.

In the 1990s, Swissair installed gambling software that allowed passengers to bet up to \$350 on a variety of casino classics, including poker, keno and blackjack. It seemed other carriers were going to follow suit, that is, until a Swissair plane crashed in 1998. Air crash investigators implicated a failure of the jet’s in-flight entertainment system as a reason for the disaster.

However, the idea of in-flight gambling re-emerged a few years ago. Virgin Atlantic Airways tycoon Richard Branson announced in 2005 that a handful of recently purchased A380 planes would include double beds and in-flight casinos.

“You’ll have two ways to get lucky on a Virgin flight,” he joked with The New York Times.

The company seems to have backtracked since then.

“Casinos were just an idea, along with many other ideas we talked about a few years ago,” a Virgin spokesman told CNN. “Truthfully, we did not really get any further with it.”

They declined to comment as to why they didn’t ultimately implement casinos on their A380s.

Ryanair announced in 2004 that it would introduce gambling through an in-flight entertainment system, though this too has yet to come to fruition. Ryanair’s head of communications, Stephen McNamara, said the company still hopes to do so in the future.

“We don’t have the technology in place at the moment, but

hopefully we will in the next two or three years," he says. "Really, the reason we don't currently is based on the expense of the Wi-Fi technology that would be required for it. We're waiting for the price to come down."

Aside from the initial investment, there are several other barriers to introducing casinos on airplanes. For starters, as more carriers are unrolling Wi-Fi on their flights, passengers could feasibly just gamble online from their mobile devices. One wonders if this wouldn't defeat the purpose of airlines investing in their own gaming systems.

McNamara says that Ryanair plans to combat the issue by ultimately offering "closed loop" Wi-Fi, so that passengers will have to go through the airline's own system to gamble.

Houssard and Alfano also don't see online gambling as competition to their own concept.

"When you're gambling on your screen, or on your phone, you're still cramped with other people. If you get out of your seat and enter another space with your friends and colleagues, it gives you a completely different experience," notes Alfano.

"When you're on a 14-hour flight, even when you're in business class, all you can really do is eat, drink, watch movies and sleep. The Casino Jet Lounge isn't just a bar or entertainment idea. We see it as a social space."

It's difficult to imagine that airlines would be willing to give over potential passenger space (and the fares that come with it) to a social arena, but Alfano says if designed properly, there shouldn't be a conflict.

"Most big aircrafts have crew rest areas and lavatories in the cargo area down below. The space could be easily rearranged to include a social space, without representing a loss of revenue," he says.

The biggest obstacle to in-flight gambling, however, is a legal one. Since 1994, gambling has been prohibited in U.S. airspace. Still, Houssard believes that this might change in the future.

“A few years ago, it was forbidden to play games for money on the internet. It was not open then, but now you can play online. A lot of things are changing.”

Opinion: The woes of Roe

By Gail Collins, New York Times

Forty years ago this month, the Supreme Court handed down the great abortion rights decision *Roe v. Wade*. To be honest, you're not going to be seeing a whole lot of cake and Champagne. Time magazine recognized the occasion with a downbeat cover story. (“They’ve Been Losing Ever Since.”) Gallup polls suggest support for abortion rights is fading, particularly among young Americans, and that more people now regard themselves as “pro-life” than “pro-choice.”

On the other hand – I know you had faith that eventually we’d get to the other hand – the polls depend on the question. According to the Quinnipiac poll, if you ask Americans whether they agree with the *Roe* decision, nearly two-thirds say yes.

It’s always been this way. Americans are permanently uncomfortable with the abortion issue, and they respond most positively to questions that suggest it isn’t up to them to decide anything. “Should be a matter between a woman and her doctor” is usually a popular option.

Whatever recent changes there are in public opinion may be

less about abortion than about the term “pro-choice.” This week, Planned Parenthood unveiled a pile of new research, some of which suggests that younger women don’t like labels. Or at least not that one. “We’ve been discussing changing our name for the past year or so,” said Kelsey Warrick, a Georgetown University student who’s president of Hoyas for Choice.

Maybe it’s like feminism, a word with a glorious history that’s rejected by many young people who are staunchly in favor of women’s rights. Maybe, as Dawn Laguens, the executive vice president of Planned Parenthood, suggested at a press conference this week, it’s just that young women feel as though they’re up to their ears in choices already.

We may never know, although if pro-choice activists want to rebrand themselves the Movement for Leaving Women Alone, it’s likely nobody under the age of 50 would object.

One way or another, the abortion rights cause needs all the help it can get. Abortion clinics around the country are reeling under crazy new rules that make it impossible for them to operate. In Virginia, the state board of health is demanding that clinics follow the same architectural standards as hospitals, including 5-foot-wide hallways. In Texas, the Legislature is considering a law that would require that all abortions be performed in ambulatory surgical centers. When the state passed that requirement for pregnancies beyond 16 weeks in 2004, every single clinic doing that procedure was forced to shut down. Only a handful managed to reopen – in a state that encompasses more than 261,000 square miles.

In Mississippi, the state’s one and only abortion clinic, the Jackson Women’s Health Organization, is in danger of closing because of a new law requiring that any doctor who does abortions have admitting privileges at a local hospital. This would be less of a problem if the local hospitals were not all terrified of giving privileges to anybody who performs abortions. When the clinic tried to advertise for a doctor who

already had the requisite affiliation, the state medical journal refused to take the ad.

"We're just doing business as usual. Trying to be there for the women of Mississippi," said Betty Thompson, the former director who stayed on after she retired and is now working as a counselor.

Over the last 40 years, women seeking abortions have been put through a lot of unnecessary trauma. Trips of hundreds of miles to the nearest clinic. Requirements that they have ultrasounds, or have ultrasounds and listen to the physician describe the ultrasound, or have ultrasounds and then wait 24 hours before the procedure. (In Texas, the doctor who does the abortion also has to conduct the ultrasound, creating a scheduling nightmare.)

They're caught in the middle of a political fight over a deeply personal issue that leaves most Americans feeling uneasy. If you want to rack up a real positive response on a poll, ask people whether the women or the politicians should make decisions about their pregnancies. One of the surveys commissioned by Planned Parenthood showed 83 percent of likely voters picked the women, including 64 percent of those who called themselves pro-life.

If there's been any permanent message in this long battle, that's been it. No matter how conservative the state, sooner or later you will hit the point where the people object to politicians messing with a woman's private business. Mississippi voters rejected a statewide referendum to give any fetus the right of "personhood." Voters in South Dakota, another state with a single, struggling, abortion clinic, have twice rejected total abortion bans.

Every time the anti-abortion movement pushes too far, it reminds people that its cause, no matter how filled with moral fervor, is basically about imposing one particular theology on

the rest of the country. Over the long run, the nervous, ambivalent, uncomfortable public won't let that happen.

Full moon snowshoe on West Shore

California State Parks and West Shore Sports will host a full moon snowshoe on Jan. 26 along Tahoe's West Shore at Ed Z'Berg Sugar Pine Point State Park.

For those new to snowshoeing, there will be a beginner's clinic at 6:30pm.

The full moon hike starts at 7pm and ends at 8pm.

Cost is \$20/adults and \$5/children under 12 years, which includes parking and snowshoe rentals.

Vonn returns to podium

By USSA

CORTINA d'AMPEZZO, Italy – Lindsey Vonn (Vail) climbed back on the top step of the podium Saturday winning the Cortina downhill, with teammate Leanne Smith (N. Conway, N.H.) third – her second podium of the season.

It was the 58th career Audi FIS Alpine World Cup win for Vonn – fifth of the season – and left four Americans in the top six

in the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup downhill standings.

Super G is on tap for Sunday in Cortina.

Despite missing a large number of races due to illness this season, Vonn still stands fourth in the World Cup overall standings, leading three Americans into the top 10.

Vonn continues to lead to World Cup downhill standings, with Stacey Cook (Mammoth Mountain) second, Alice McKennis (Glenwood Springs, Colo.) fourth and Smith sixth.

In the final World Cup downhill before the World Championships, Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) was ninth, McKennis 11th, Cook 15th and Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) 27th.

Ski report: Know the code



National Safety Awareness Week begins today.

Here is the Jan. 19 ski report.

– *Curtis Fong*

Stay at home Oscar benefit for TAP

Tahoe Arts Project is having a No Show Oscar Party.

This means watching the Academy Awards Feb. 24 at your house, but still helping the nonprofit that helps bring arts into the schools.

Select the amount for your donation:

\$25 Best Screen Play

\$50 Best Song

\$100 Best Supporting Actor/Actress

\$250 Best Actor/Actress

\$500 Best Director

\$1,000 Best Picture

\$_____Other

Mail donations to: TAP, P.O. Box 14281, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.