Tahoe Derby Dames looking for skaters

Tahoe Derby Dames are recruiting new skaters.

The South Lake Tahoe roller derby team is having a recruitment meeting Jan. 21 at 7pm upstairs at Steamers Bar and Grill, 2236 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Practices are open for all to check out and/or participate this month on Sunday and Tuesdays at 8pm at Kahle Community Center in Stateline.

1987 parking deal between South Lake Tahoe, Heavenly Mountain Resort surfaces

By Kathryn Reed

While the South Lake Tahoe City Council keeps making decisions about paid parking, the issue won't go away. And it's not going away because of a 1987 agreement with Heavenly Mountain Resort that has come to light.

The staff report dated Nov. 18, 1987, says, "Any costs related to the use of these streets for parking by Heavenly Valley will be reimbursed to the city by Heavenly Valley. This will result in no direct cost to the city's general fund."

The agreement approved by the City Council at the Dec. 1, 1987, meeting called for the ski resort to implement and enforce a parking permit system on some of the streets leading to the California Lodge, as well as provide snow removal in the permitted parking area.

While Mayor Tom Davis indicated a partial recollection of the agreement, the details of it have not been enforced in the last quarter century.



Paid parking on Ski Run Boulevard is in a state of flux. Photo/LTN file

Police Chief Brian Uhler, whose department is responsible for parking, has been talking to Heavenly officials about the 25-year-old deal.

“I’m optimistic we can reach an agreement,” Andrew Strain, head of government affairs for Heavenly, told the council last week.

He told the council the resort has plowed and sanded the streets when the city crews could not do so, that the resort has paid for one-third of the cost of the message board signs on Ski Run Boulevard, $240,000 was spent on a repaving project, and that overflow parking is needed no more than 20 days a season.

All four councilmembers agreed they want the 1987 agreement to be analyzed, revised and an update on what aspects of it will be enforced this winter.

When it came to voting on the parking meter-permit plan it was a 3-1 vote with Davis voting note. He didn’t give a reason for doing so.

Paradise Avenue from Ski Run Boulevard to Wildwood Avenue has been designated a parking meter zone. Free permits will be issued to residents impacted by paid parking areas.

Fees associated with paid parking will come back to the council. It’s possible Paradise Avenue will allow overnight parking – at a cost – because this is currently where some guests of Embassy Vacation Resort park instead of paying the hotel.

In other action:

• The council collectively voiced its frustration with the Tahoe Transportation District in light of a letter received by Executive Director Carl Hasty. The council expected the loop road discussion to be more in depth and for one meeting to be in council chambers for city residents, which in turn would be televised for more people to see. “I thought it was a dog and pony show,” Councilman Hal Cole said of the presentations he went to. “That is not how you select a $60 million project.” A stern letter will be sent to Hasty saying just how the council feels.

• The council agreed to use a recruiter to find a city attorney. Patrick Enright will be leaving when his contract expires at the end of May.

• A workshop will be scheduled to prioritize capital improvement projects.

• The city will be taking employee and community surveys in

the coming weeks, with results available in March.

• A request for proposals to be the concessionaire at Bijou Park, Lakeview Commons and Regan Beach has been released. A business or person may apply for one or all three. The City Council is expected to make a decision in late February or early March.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Caesar is a very fun-loving, energetic 7-month-old purebred Akita.



He obeys well, plays great with people and other dogs and will do well with a family with teenage children. Caesar knows all his basic commands and even some tricks, including roll over, shake and high five as well as sit, come, stay and down.

He is a very big puppy and will be a large adult dog.

Caesar is neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated. He is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go online to see photos and description of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

Editorial: Give California cities, counties more tax leeway

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Jan. 7, 2013, Sacramento Bee.***

With Democrats firmly in control in both houses of the Legislature, and Democrat Jerry Brown sitting in the governor's seat, now is an opportune time to reform California's convoluted tax laws.

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg of Sacramento says he has no plans to launch a full frontal assault on Proposition 13, the 1978 property tax-slashing measure. Certainly no serious efforts are under way to fiddle with the residential side of Proposition 13.

A split roll that allows commercial property taxes to rise while retaining limits on residential properties has been discussed for years, but it would necessitate a gigantic political war with the state's business community. At a time the economy remains very fragile, that seems foolhardy.

It makes far more sense for the Legislature to target its tax reform efforts toward giving local government greater authority to raise revenue.

Cities, counties and special districts are closer to the people and have the bulk of the responsibility to carry out governmental functions, but they are short on resources and face constraints on their ability to raise revenues. The two-thirds vote rule for special local tax measures is one unnecessary hurdle the Legislature can and should address.

In the November election, less than half – 19 of 43 local special tax measures – passed. Many of those that failed did so very narrowly.

Alameda County's special transportation measure B1 stands out. It garnered 66.5 percent of the vote, less than 800 votes shy of the two-thirds vote threshold needed for passage. Another transportation measure in Los Angeles County failed after winning 64.7 percent of the vote.

While special taxes require two-thirds approval, state law allows a simple majority vote approval for general tax increases, those tax measures that essentially give local governments a blank check to spend the extra taxes voters approve for any legitimate governmental purpose.

The distinction between general and special taxes grew out of a California Supreme Court decision interpreting Proposition 13. It provided that cities, counties and special districts could impose a "special tax" only after a two-thirds vote of the people. But Proposition 13 drafters neglected to define "special taxes." The state's high court defined a special tax as any that was earmarked for a specific purpose.

Voters reaffirmed the two-thirds vote requirement for special taxes when they approved Proposition 218 in 1996.

It's not right that a minority of voters in Alameda County, Los Angeles or anywhere else in the state can thwart the will of a sizable majority, but it happens every election cycle.

Voters have already reduced the two-thirds vote threshold for

school bond measures to 55 percent. Two constitutional amendments have been introduced this legislative session that would reduce the voter thresholds to 55 percent for school parcel tax measures and library taxes. More are expected.

Rather than this piecemeal approach, it would be cleaner and, frankly fairer, if all local tax increases were decided by a simple majority vote.

Such a change requires a constitutional amendment, which means a two-thirds vote in the Legislature, something that Democrats with supermajorities in both houses now have the numbers to achieve. Of course, the final decision would be made by the voters, probably in 2014.

So as they ponder what of real significance they can accomplish with their supermajorities, giving local governments more flexibility to raise their own taxes should be high on Democrats' list.

K's Kitchen: Scoring with tortilla soup

By Kathryn Reed

Sue was celebrating two winners Saturday night – the San Francisco 49ers and her new favorite soup.



Her enthusiasm for the Niners may not be long lived. While she has been a Colin Kaepernick fan all season, her true love is the Pittsburgh Steelers. And if the Niners were to win the Super Bowl (yes, there's still the NFC Championships to get through next weekend), it would mean they would tie the Steelers for the most Super Bowl wins at six.

Time will tell if her taste buds will be as fickle as her football allegiance – or as strong – since time will also reveal if Franco Harris or Kaepernick are her favorites.

At least today, Crock Pot Tortilla Soup is her favorite soup. She says the spices and heartiness are what she loves about this soup.

We have my friend Patty to thank for the recipe. She was right in knowing I could make it into a vegetarian creation that we would like. This is the link to the original recipe from We Are Not Martha.

Below is my adaptation of it. Patty made the original version with chicken. She thought it could use more beans.

The next time I think if I had tortilla chips in the house, I would crumble them on top instead of making the tortilla strips. I used Monterey Jack cheese because that's usually what we have in the house.

Crockpot Tortilla Soup

1 medium onion, chopped

2 T garlic, minced

1 jalapeno, minced

¼ C cilantro, chopped

2 cans diced tomatoes, drained

4 C veggie broth

2 cans black beans, drained

1 can corn, drained

2 T tomato paste

1 T chili powder

1 T ground cumin

1-2 avocados, chopped

Flour tortillas

Canola oil

Shredded cheese of choice

Put all of the ingredients up to the avocados into the crockpot. It could cook all day, but does not need to.

When you are ready to serve the soup, heat the oil in a pan. Put cut up tortilla strips into the hot oil, which should be about one-quarter inch deep.

Put tortilla strips, some cheese and avocado on top of soup.

Pipe bursts in LTCC's PE building

A broken pipe in the fitness education center at Lake Tahoe Community College means no classes in that building through at least Jan. 16.

LTCC officials discovered the burst pipe Jan. 13. They are still assessing the situation and as of Sunday night did not have an estimated value of the damage.

All other classes scheduled for the Physical Education Building will continue as scheduled.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nevada in a slow climb out of recession

By David McGrath Schwartz, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Nevada's hard fall from its peak seems to be over. The ugly years of shuttered businesses, massive layoffs and relentless cuts in education and government services are, for the most part, past.

But if this is the tenor of the state's recovery, it will be a long and slow slog toward economic health, an improved education system and a government that doesn't struggle to take care of the state's neediest.

Gov. Brian Sandoval is set to deliver his State of the State

address on Wednesday, the chief executive's assessment and vision for the state delivered every two years, before the Legislature meets.

If Sandoval's history holds, the address will be optimistic, emphasizing the progress Nevada has made since he was inaugurated in January 2011.

But in reality, job creation rates are sluggish. The state still leads the nation in unemployment. More Nevadans than ever are seeking food stamps from a strained government. More than a thousand people – children with autism or Down syndrome, adults with brain injuries, single mothers looking for child care – are on waiting lists for state services. And the state's education system, marred by contentious labor disputes in Clark and Washoe county, is not performing.

Sandoval is confronted with a raft of challenges.

How does the job market recover, when one of the pillars of Nevada's economy was based on construction workers building houses for other construction workers?

How can the education system, which struggled even when the state was flush with cash, be improved?

How does the state raise more money when it would mean going to businesses that continue to struggle to keep their doors open or Nevadans whose homes are severely underwater?

Sandoval has said he will support extending most of the $620 million in taxes passed in 2011 that would otherwise expire this year, in order to prevent cuts to education. But he will also seek to reduce some business taxes while finding more money for education.

Meanwhile, state employees have had to endure pay cuts for four years and the Clark County School District said it has cut $600 million over the past four years.

Sandoval will answer pressing question on how he will keep those promises – raising education funding while cutting taxes and keeping government spending cuts to a minimum – when he releases his budget the morning of the State of the State address.

As Sandoval enters his third year in office, here is a sobering reminder of where Nevada stands on the economy, education and it's overall government.

The economy

The Great Recession, according to state economists, started in December 2007 and ended in June 2009. That was the burst of Nevada's economic heyday. And don't expect to get back there anytime soon.

"We're in recovery, but we're not out of the hospital," said Stephen P.A. Brown, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at UNLV.

Brown said that the recovery is slow, and it will be long, hampered by a construction sector that is still 50,000 jobs below its peak and a fragile housing market, where many properties are owned by banks or homeowners who aren't making payments.

"We're essentially overbuilt," Brown said. And it's not only in the residential market.

The Strip casinos and commercial development were overbuilt too, in part fueled by easy lending that allowed homeowners to take out second mortgages on their homes to finance vacations to Las Vegas.

Jeremy Aguero, principal of financial firm Applied Analysis, said that we need to stop comparing the state today to the peak years in 2006 and 2007,

"Employment is growing, the economy is showing some signs of

economic diversification. Incomes are rising," Aguero said. "I don't think you could ask for a whole lot more. Are we good? no. Are we better? Yes."

Sandoval has made economic development a priority for Nevada. But so far tax incentives have been granted for 2,900 jobs, according to records provided to the *Las Vegas Sun*.

In a state where 147,000 jobless Nevadans are still claiming unemployment insurance, and thousands more are underemployed or have given up looking for work, that's just a drop in the bucket.

Since the number of Nevada jobs bottomed out at 1,109,300 in September 2010, the state has gained just 38,900 jobs, according to employer surveys.

Brown said Sandoval faces difficult decisions about raising taxes, which could hurt consumer spending and businesses, or cutting government services and education.

He noted that states with a more educated workforce have recovered more quickly from the recession. Nevada is not one of those states.

Education

If there was one vivid news fact last year on education, it was this: Nevada had the lowest graduation rate of any state in the U.S.

It was a reminder of what many education experts on both ends of the political spectrum say – that our state's education system is not performing well.

The poor rankings come amid contentious labor negotiations in both Southern and Northern Nevada school districts. Clark and Washoe school districts lost their bids to prevent teachers from receiving pay increases. The Clark County School District had to eliminate 1,000 teaching positions as a result.

Nevada Department of Education Superintendent James Guthrie, appointed by Sandoval, said the governor will propose a funding increase of about 2 percent.

“Is that enough? I don’t know,” he said. “But it’s in the right direction, that’s for sure.”

Sandoval will propose new resources and programs, committing new revenue generated in the economic recovery to education.

“He’s really dug deep into the state treasury,” Guthrie said.

Sandoval also has a new board of education, which is more accountable to him. And a new council of business leaders, from a variety of sectors, will be formed to advise the state. That makes Guthrie hopeful about the future of education in Nevada.

Clark County Superintendent Dwight Jones said “progress is being made.”

He pointed to turnaround schools, where principals are given more control over personnel along with additional accountability measures, and improvements in the state’s graduation rate from the previous year.

“But the conversation both internally, as well as externally, is, is it enough?” Jones said.

Part of the reason some schools are struggling is because of money, he added.

Class sizes in Clark County, for example, went up roughly two to three students per class on average.

When he became the Clark County superintendent two years ago, Jones made a point not to “just ask for more money,” he said. He wanted to evaluate how money was being spent. Now he’s ready to start asking for additional funding.

“The system is making some progress doing more with less,” he said. “But we’re getting to that pivotal place where it’s difficult to sustain that. Less is almost becoming less.”

He said increased prices of gas and electricity add between $30 million and $40 million in costs each year. Additionally, the district faces another round of negotiations with its labor unions.

More students in poverty are entering the school system, and more are coming in speaking English as a second language.

Asked how much additional money the district would need, Jones said, “I don’t know for sure what would be adequate.”

General government

In the summer 2011, after the last Legislature adjourned and lawmakers went home, the state sent out chilling notices to parents of children with disabilities receiving services through the state. Their children would get fewer services or not be able to get them at all, because of a lack of money.

Cutting services for children with autism and Down syndrome would, it seems, be a last resort for the state. But often times, cuts to programs used by the poor, disabled and mentally ill are unnoticed or ignored by the media and public at large. And it also demonstrates just how fragile Nevada’s social safety net is.

Sandoval’s budget puts more money into some programs, including the state’s Early Intervention Program, which serves newborns to three-year-old.

And part of his commitment to extend taxes was to preserve the “essential services” in state government.

But in health and human services, more than a thousand of people are on wait lists for things like child care, mental health services and help to be able to stay in their homes.

More broadly, other areas of state government are also looking for more money. Agencies asked for $419 million over the cap Sandoval put on spending requests. Some of those “items for special consideration” are for items that agencies would like to have, such as more money to spend on economic development, to incubate businesses. Another request was for a new, more reliable computer system for law enforcement to run background checks during police stops.

But other spending requests that came in over the cap are for what department heads termed “essential.”

In a speech billed as the “progressive State of the State,” former Sen. Sheila Leslie called them “items Nevada really needs but can’t afford.”

Douglas County first in state to win broadband certification

By Anne Knowles, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

Douglas County has added another feather to its economic development cap.

It is the first county in the state to be certified as a Connected Community from Connect Nevada, the state affiliate of Connected Nation, a nonprofit advocating for widespread broadband access.

To receive certification, the county conducted a detailed analysis of its broadband capabilities. A committee of 15 assessed broadband access, use and adoption, according to

Tammy James, communications manager in the county's technology services department.

Based on the committee's findings, the county scored 109 points out of a possible 120, exceeding the required 100 points for Connect Nevada certification.

The certification provides county planners with a tool to reassure businesses looking to locate or launch there that the community can meet most of their technology needs.

More important, the snapshot of its broadband capabilities gives the county a roadmap for improvements.

"It doesn't mean we've got services everywhere," says James. "This is a platform for us to build on and to look at how do we improve if we want to be a community that entices businesses into the area."

For example, James says the evaluation highlighted a need to upgrade broadband access at the county's business parks. "Higher bandwidth is critical for businesses that might have a need to back up data to an East Coast location," says James.

Based on its assessment, the county has 16 broadband providers offering 3 megabits per second service to 96.16 percent of Douglas County households. More than 75 percent of homes have access to 10Mbps service while 92.5 percent have the option of more than one provider. Almost 100 percent have access to mobile broadband.

In the area of adoption, the county has eight digital literacy programs that have trained more than 700 people in the last year and 36 computers available to the public in four public computing centers, including the library.

And in terms of county use, the study identified 10 broadband uses, including education, government and healthcare.

The report also recommends 17 action items, including further

analysis of underserved areas, reassessment of telecom contracts, more public computers and development of a broadband training program for small- and medium-sized businesses. The study was presented to the Douglas County commissioners this week.

Connect Nevada is working with other counties to map the state's broadband landscape. Lyon County is expected to submit its report this month and Humboldt, Esmeralda and Storey counties are preparing drafts, according to Lindsey Niedzielski, program manager with Connect Nevada in Carson City. Other counties are in various stages of evaluation.

Niedzielski says some of the counties face various obstacles, especially the high cost of broadband access in some rural areas.

"Some counties are struggling with this and we're helping them figure out what they need to do to move into the 21st century," she says. "It's an economic development tool and that's the primary reason most counties are interested in it." Connect Nevada is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

Discarded hot ashes catch S. Tahoe house on fire

Placing hot ashes on a combustible wood deck caused a South Lake Tahoe house to catch fire Jan. 12.

The fire at 1394 Matheson Drive started at 12:30pm on the deck, moved up the exterior wall and started to move into the

residence as firefighters arrived on scene.

“It was in between the wall and sheet rock, trying to make its way into the attic,” Karl Koeppen, shift commander with the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A resident was home at the time and was temporarily evacuated. The house is habitable.

Koeppen warns people that ashes should be placed in a metal container with a lid and then stored on a non-combustible surface and not near anything that could catch fire.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Family Fun Carnival in Placerville

Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Dorado County and Inter-cal Real Estate are putting on a free Family Fun Carnival on Jan. 26 from 10am-3pm at the County Fair Shopping Center, at the corner of Fair Lane and Placerville Drive in Placerville.

There will be free food, games and a bike rodeo.

For more information the carnival or becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister, email info@mentors4youth.org or call Cathie at (530) 626.1222.