Horizon hotel-casino lays off workers; Edgewood considers options for Stateline property

By Kathryn Reed

Horizon hotel-casino in Stateline is struggling to keep its door open and find people to rent one of the 539 rooms.

Tahoe Horizon LLC, a subsidiary of Columbia Sussex Corp., runs the South Shore business. Horizon employees were laid off before the December holidays. This is usually one of the busiest times of the year for lodging properties at Lake Tahoe as well as for casinos.

While General Manager Corinna Osborne did not return *Lake Tahoe News'* phone calls, one of the fired employees who spoke off the record, said about a dozen workers were let go. Valet, bellmen and restaurant workers are out of work. One of the employees had been with the property for more than 30 years.



Horizon hotel-casino operators have just more than 16 months on their lease. Photo/LTN file

“Business is just real bad right now,” a fired worker said.

The Four Seasons restaurant used to serve three meals a day. Now it just serves dinner.

Tahoe Horizon’s contract to operate the hotel-casino expires March 31, 2014. The next day Edgewood Companies takes control of the building. Edgewood has owned the land for more than 50 years.

While Edgewood is aware of the recent layoffs, officials said the hotel-casino operator is not contractually required to report those dealings to them as the landlord.

“We don’t have any indication they won’t stay open,” Patrick Rhamey, vice president of real estate for Edgewood, told *Lake Tahoe News*. The company is not making contingency plans if the Horizon wants to close before the contract expires.

Rhamey would not say what the Horizon may become after Edgewood takes over. However, the property will stay open over the long haul.

“It possibly could close temporarily for a short period of time, but not an extended period of time,” he said.

With gaming licenses difficult to get in Nevada, it’s probable a portion of the 30,000-square-foot casino floor will forever have some form of gambling.

Rhamey said the company is discussing what the property will become, but said nothing has been decided.

The company’s website says, “Edgewood Companies has been conducting research and analysis to evaluate potential reuse or redevelopment options for the Horizon site. Options ranging from the preservation of the status quo to a complete scrape and redevelopment are under consideration. The full redevelopment of the site may include a destination resort with a recreation and entertainment focus. Amenities could

include a live entertainment venue, a recreation hub to serve as a gateway to Tahoe’s great outdoors, a casino, and an indoor spa and fitness facilities with complimentary retail and restaurants. A redevelopment would include significant water quality improvements to improve clarity in Lake Tahoe.”

While the future of the Horizon is up in the air, Edgewood Companies is going forward with plans to develop Edgewood Lodge on the nearby Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course. A business plan is being created which will include who is going to build the facility as well as operate it.

Site work and the pier will be done this summer, with actual ground breaking of the lodge likely occurring in 2014.

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3 flu vaccination clinics set for South Lake Tahoe

The El Dorado County Public Health Division in South Lake Tahoe has three walk-in flu vaccination clinics this month.

The dates are Jan. 16, Jan. 18 and Jan. 23 from 1:30 to 4pm. The location is 1360 Johnson Blvd., Ste. 103.

The cost for the flu vaccine is $10, but no one will be turned away.

The vaccine is available for those age 6 months and older.

Individuals who cannot attend one of the walk-in flu clinics may schedule an appointment to receive the flu vaccine at another time.

For more information or to schedule a flu vaccination appointment, call (530) 573.3155.

Anderson wins slopestyle at U.S. Grand Prix

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. – Jamie Anderson of South Lake Tahoe and Chas Guldemond of Reno swept the slopestyle finals Jan. 11 at the Paul Mitchell Progression Session at the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix at Copper Mountain.

Anderson got back on track after a disappointing practice session and nailed her backside 540 mute-grab that earned her a score of 83.

Despite snowy conditions that made for slow in runs, Guldemond was able to float his signature double 1260 that earned him a winning score of 92.50.

The Grand Prix marked the first opportunity for athletes to garner Olympic qualifying points and 5Star World Snowboard Tour points.

Northstar opening superpipe

The 22-Foot superpipe at Northstar opens for public riding Jan. 12.

The Tahoe region’s only superpipe was designed by Northstar team rider Shaun White. It is located on the Cat’s Face trail, and can be accessed from the Vista Express chairlift.

Following the public preview on Saturday, the superpipe will be closed through Jan. 20 while Northstar hosts the U.S. Revolution Tour. This is a three-stop tour featuring halfpipe, slopestyle and cross events for freeskiing and snowboarding athletes.

Northstar also plans to open its 18-foot superpipe in the next week on the Pipeline trail which can be easily viewed from the mid-mountain area and the Big Springs Day Lodge.

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3 teenagers accused of robbing Incline gas station

Three people were arrested Jan. 10 in connected with the Jan. 2 armed robbery at the Incline Village Chevron station.

Two 17-year-old boys and 18-year-old Jorge Miranda-Rivas, all of Incline, were charged with robbery with a deadly weapon, conspiracy to commit robbery, grand larceny of an automobile and conspiracy to commit grand larceny of an automobile.

Washoe and Placer counties' sheriff's detectives are working the case together because the Incline incident has similarities to the Dec. 30 robbery at the Kings Beach Liquor Store. The investigation is ongoing.

Anyone with information, should call (775) 328.3336, Secret Witness at (775) 322.4900.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

S. Tahoe's Bowman wins U.S. Freeskiing Grand Prix

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. – Despite snow and wind Maddie Bowman of South Lake Tahoe displayed great athleticism on Jan. 11 with her left and right 900s that landed her in first at the Visa U.S. Freeskiing Grand Prix.

Colorado native and 16 year-old U.S. Rookie team member Aaron Blunck (Crested Butte) beat tough competition and weather to take second in the men's competition at his third FIS World Cup appearance. Teammate David Wise (Reno) played it safe in the treacherous conditions and placed third place.

Canada's Mike Riddle won the men's competition and fellow Canadian Rosalind Groenewoud came in second.

Brita Sigourney (Carmel) was able to secure third with a more conservative second run at the FIS World Cup.

This is the first domestic stop for athletes to gain Olympic qualifying points and AFP Platinum level event points.

Bowman winning run included a right 900 into a left 540 mute-grab, straight air with safety grab, left 900 to right 720 and switch 540.

“My right 900 is a new trick. I learned it last year and I used it for the first time at the Dew Tour and so far it is working out for me,” Bowman said.

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3 people complete application for S. Tahoe council seat

Three people have submitted applications for the vacant South Lake Tahoe City Council seat.

The three are Kathay Lovell – who stepped down from the council in 2010 after serving two terms; Austin Sass – who has run twice and not been elected, the last time being in November; and Scott Valentine – a newcomer to the scene, who is a geology professor at Lake Tahoe Community College.

The seat is open because Claire Fortier quit in December halfway through her four-year term.

People have until 5pm Jan. 25 to turn in the forms. Forms are available from the city clerk. Interviews will be before the council in open session on Jan. 29 at 9am. The person is expected to be sworn in that day assuming consensus is reached by the council. If no one is chosen, an election would be conducted in June.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

More bears mean more strife at Lake Tahoe

By Mike Anton, Los Angeles Times

HOMEWOOD – She was born under a house on the west shore of Lake Tahoe and quickly became a beloved fixture in this rustic community.

She rambled through backyards and climbed into open windows to snack. She swam in the lake's impossibly blue water and sunned herself on the beach as if on an extended vacation.

Residents nicknamed her Sunny. She was one of Lake Tahoe's "celebrity bears" – animals so familiar, so seemingly at ease around humans that they've become de facto residents of this forested idyll where the boundary between wilderness and civilization has all but disappeared.

"She was the epitome of how bears and humans can coexist," said Ann Bryant, an animal rights activist here. "Until she was murdered."

The morning of July 30, Sunny was found dead on the beach, felled by a shotgun blast.

The killing infuriated Lake Tahoe's large and vocal community of bear lovers, who raised $35,000 for a reward leading to the arrest and conviction of Sunny's killer.

Others thought that wasn't enough.

When no arrest was made, the suspected shooter's name and address were posted on a Facebook page established by a bear advocate to shame businesses with unlocked and overflowing dumpsters.

Reaction was swift – and, at times, disturbing:

I hope the person who did this is not only prosecuted to the fullest, but suffers the same fate Sunny did.

Can we have open season on the person who shot the bear??

Burn his cabin down.

Early November, and Lake Tahoe is dozing. Boats are gone for the winter, the notorious summer traffic has ebbed and neighborhoods of vacation homes are silent as ghost towns.

The bears, though, are hard at work.

An adult black bear will consume upward of 25,000 calories a day to prepare for hibernation. That's a lot of berries and pine nuts. Or, in the case of Lake Tahoe's bears, a lot of dumpster diving.

More than a thousand bear complaints a year are reported to officials on the lake's California side alone. They break into homes to forage in refrigerators, at times surprising terrified residents. They den under porches and have learned to twist the tops off food jars. They make the trash-can

exploits of the Southern California bruin nicknamed Glen Bearian look like the fumblings of an amateur.

“It’s been an enormous evolutionary change,” said Bryant, who runs the Bear League, a self-styled detachment of some 250 volunteers who respond to calls round the clock from residents who’ve had a bear encounter. “The bears living here with us are evolving far faster than we are. They’ve learned to take advantage of us. We haven’t learned to coexist with them. And they’re dying for it.”

At any given time, there are between 500 and 1,500 black bears around the lake. A mild winter in 2011-12 meant more cubs, and the parched backcountry was forcing more bears to scrounge for food in populated areas.

At one resort, three bears were legally killed after they entered numerous cabins; a cafe was evacuated when a bear strolled in during dinner.

The killings – among the approximately 90 bears handed death sentences here by game officials since 2009 – angered bear lovers.

Those killings lit the fuse. Sunny’s death turned the anger to fury.

To say Sunny’s poaching has spawned conjecture, rumors and conspiracy theories is like saying Lake Tahoe is kind of deep.

After the shooting, suspicion immediately turned to the owner of a property near where Sunny bled to death. Game wardens found no physical evidence; the shotgun left no ballistics. The man whom they call “a person of interest” got a lawyer, left town and has refused to be interviewed.

People reported hearing shots fired at 11:30pm – and at 6am. It was said that blood was found on the man’s property and that he baited Sunny; there’s no evidence of either,

authorities say. A video taken earlier by locals purportedly showing the man loading a shotgun on his porch while Sunny was in a tree is of such poor quality it's impossible to tell who the person is and what he's doing.

"It's still a very active investigation," said Lt. John Lawson of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. "But we need solid evidence. I've been trying to convey that to people – you can't arrest and convict somebody without evidence."

The bar is considerably lower in the anonymity of the Internet. The threats made in the aftermath of Sunny's death are not taken lightly in Lake Tahoe.

It's not uncommon for people who have sought state approval to have a bear killed to receive an onslaught of threats. Homes have been vandalized. Even complaining about a problem bear to game wardens – who some see as the enemy – can bring scorn.

"People have been approached and yelled at in grocery stores simply for reporting bear activity," said Placer County sheriff's Capt. Jeff Ausnow. "They'll say, 'You can't do that because they're going to kill it.' This is a very emotional issue here."

Russ Tonda has owned property in Lake Tahoe for 40 years. He and his wife are self-described bear lovers. Their home decor had a bear motif: A carved wooden bear stood sentry in a bedroom; when the cuckoo clock chimed, dancing bears celebrated.

In early 2005, a sow and two cubs that had denned under the Tondas' home broke in while they were away and trashed the place. The Tondas sought state approval to kill the mother. When the men they hired to do the job were charged by the cubs, they shot them too.

Threatening phone calls poured in. Strangers drove by Tonda's place hurling insults.

“I hired two security guys for a time because I was afraid they were going to burn the place down,” said Tonda, 69.

They broke in instead.

“The vandalism was worse than what the bears did,” Tonda said. “They broke all the windows, the lighting fixtures. They threw bottles of wine against the walls.”

And they put Tonda’s wooden bear in the open front doorway. It was a message of sorts: The bears had taken revenge.

Bryant’s cluttered cabin in the woods is a menagerie of wounded and orphaned wildlife. Birds and chipmunks. Squirrels and raccoons. A porcupine, the victim of a car accident, relaxes on a shelf.

“I grew up around wildlife,” Bryant, 61, said of her childhood in Minnesota. “I feel like I can look into their faces and communicate with them. They have as much right to life as we do.”

Game officials applaud her work educating the public on how to secure their homes and what to do if they encounter a bear. (“Make noise. Pound your feet. Scream like you frickin’ mean it,” she says.)

With a long blond mane and forceful nature, Bryant is no bear whisperer. She responds to bear calls with a paintball gun and a shotgun loaded with rubber buckshot. Bears are quick learners; a few body blows, she says, can do wonders to put the fear of humans back into them.

She also has no compunction about getting into someone’s grill if she feels a bear is in danger. Her ability to work up a lather no doubt played a role in landing “Blonde vs. Bear,” a three-part reality show that aired on Animal Planet in 2011.

“For a lot of people, anything a bear does to cause them an inconvenience is a reason that bear should die,” said Bryant,

whose work has made her a polarizing figure, both beloved and hated. “They have no regard for nature or wildlife and they want it all to be gone. And whenever we speak up on the bears’ behalf, we become the enemies.”

But Bryant says she has no tolerance for vigilantism, even though the Bear League also published the name, address and phone number of Sunny’s suspected shooter on its Facebook page. “All I want is for him to be brought to justice,” she says. “I don’t want his house to burn down.”

Reports taken by Bear League volunteers read like a police blotter – lots of breaking and entering, vandalism, prowling and loitering.

Some callers are head-scratchingly clueless, such as the woman who reported she was “mad, angry about buying a house in Tahoe. No one told her about the bears. Had a break in. Not happy.”

Others are clearly fed up, such as the man who reported that he tried to secure his home but it “didn’t work” – a bear leveled a garage door and cleaned out a refrigerator.

“Has gun for next time he comes back,” the report reads.

Standing in the way of détente is disagreement over what constitutes a problem bear.

“I don’t care if you leave your doors and windows open. If you have a 500-pound bear who’s comfortable with walking into somebody’s home – that’s not good,” said Carl Lackey, a Nevada Department of Wildlife biologist. “That bear has no fear of humans. That bear needs to be killed.”

Lackey, like Bryant, has become a lightning rod in the debate over bears. He has gotten “a death threat or two” over the years, he says.

But he and Bryant have much in common. Both have a deep

respect for bears. Both say humans are the root problem. But both also concede that coexistence would require a level of voluntary mass behavior that would rival a migrating flock of birds.

“People up here don’t want to put up with property damage. But at the same time, they don’t want to prepare either,” Lackey said.

Unlike grizzly bears, black bears rarely attack humans. Since 1900, only 14 people have been killed by a black bear in the continental United States, according to a study published last year in the Journal of Wildlife Management. None was in California or Nevada.

“We’ve never had a death,” Lackey said. “But it’s coming. I just hope it doesn’t happen on my watch.”

Bryant takes a similarly bleak view. Not of nature, but of human nature.

“I think a human is going to hurt a human before a bear does.”

Power back on in Tahoe for all NV Energy customers

Updated Jan. 11 3:50pm

Power has been restored to all NV Energy customers on the South Shore.

Crews have identified the mechanical problem at the Round Hill substation and are working to fix it.

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Updated Jan. 11 2:30pm

Two-hundred NV Energy customers remain without power Friday afternoon. All are in the Lower Kingsbury Grade area of Stateline.

Customers are gradually being brought on line as crews switch their service to an operational substation.

The Round Hill substation problem has not be resolved, according to an NV Energy spokesman.

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Updated Jan. 11 11:45am

Power remains out for about 500 NV Energy customers on Lower Kingsbury Grade. The company does not have an estimated time when the lights will come back on.

The problem with the Round Hill substation has not been fixed as of this time. Power is being rerouted to service customers on the South Shore.

Karl Walquist with NV Energy told *Lake Tahoe News* it appears one of the lines has come off an insulator. Crews are out looking for the problem.

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South Shore customers of NV Energy have been without power since about 5:30 Friday morning when the circuits at the Round Hill substation went out.

There is no estimated time when the nearly 5,000 customers will have electricity again.

“They have not spotted any clear cause for the outage at the substation,” Karl Walquist, spokesman for NV Energy, told *Lake*

Tahoe News at 8:55am.

Customers in Stateline, up Kingsbury Grade and to Cave Rock are affected. The casinos, though, are serviced by a different substation.

Traffic lights are also out. This means the intersections should be treated like a four-way stop.

The outage briefly affected about 2,000 customers of Liberty Energy in South Lake Tahoe. Their power was out for about 10 minutes.

Walquist said NV crews have been at the substation for hours trying to figure out why the circuits are out. He said repairmen are looking at possibly rerouting the affected customers to a different substation until the Round Hill problem is fixed.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Man who robbed 2 Lake Tahoe banks going to prison

Known as the "fedora bandit" because of the hat he wore, David Griffith Osborne, 74, pleaded guilty Jan. 11 to three counts of armed robbery.

The former Carson City resident pleaded guilty to robbing the Gridley Bank of the West, Rancho Cordova's American River Bank, and Paradise's Chase Bank – all in 2010.

Osborne is scheduled to be sentenced March 29 by U.S. District Judge Garland E. Burrell Jr. He faces up to 25 years in

prison, followed by five years of supervised release, for each of the three armed bank robberies.

Osborne also admitted to four other bank robberies and will be required to pay restitution for all seven robberies. The other robberies are:

• Bank of the West, 2160 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe, Feb. 18, 2010;

• Bank of the West, 200 Bear Street, Kings Beach, March 9, 2010;

• Bank of the West, 736 Taylorville Road, Grass Valley, Dec. 22, 2009, and March 31, 2010.

For all seven robberies Osborne wore a hat, sunglasses, a fake mustache and goatee, and demanded money while brandishing a firearm.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report