Fundraiser helps potential Paralympians train in Tahoe

Divided Sky in Meyers is hosting a fundraiser for Tahoe Adaptive Competition Center on Jan. 12.

The money raised will help subsidize the three-day rider camp at the end of the month at Sierra-at-Tahoe. The snowboarders are from the U.S. and other countries who have hopes of making it to the 2014 Paralympics Games in Sochi, Russia.

The event starts at 7pm.

A disc jockey will provide music and merchandise will be for sale. There is not cost to be part of the fun, but donations are accepted and raffle tickets will be sold.

Southwest Gas wants to increase rates

Southwest Gas bills are likely to go for people in El Dorado County.

The utility says the average residential customer’s monthly bill for 73 therms would increase $7.21 to $73.41.

The Las Vegas-based company filed the increase request with the California Public Utility Commission on Dec. 20. The goal is to increase its 2014 authorized operating margin for natural gas service in El Dorado County by $2,716,647 or 13.6

percent.

Southwest also wants post-test year increases for 2015 through 2018, which would become effective Jan. 1 of each year.

According to the company, it wants to "recover the reasonable costs the company will incur to own and operate the facilities used to maintain and provide safe and reliable natural gas service to its California customers."

Written comments on the proposed increase may be sent to: San Francisco Office (Headquarters), 505 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, CA 94102. For more info, email public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov or call 866.836.7825.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

College students with food allergies make legal gains

By Eliza Barclay, NPR

Many a college student lives off of microwavable meals – but some do it not by choice but because they're worried school food might make them sick.

They may have celiac disease, a digestive ailment caused by gluten, or life-threatening allergies to foods like peanuts – both are on the rise. But even as more people become aware of the issues, schools and institutions may lag behind.

Now some food allergy advocates are celebrating what they see

as a shifting legal trend: schools and other institutions required to treat food allergies as a disability. They've found an ally in the Department of Justice.

DOJ's Civil Rights Division announced last month that the Americans with Disabilities Act applies to students at Lesley University in Cambridge, Ma., who claimed that the school's food services and meal plans were inadequate for their needs. It was the first food allergy-related settlement under ADA in higher education, says a DOJ spokeswoman.

In the agreement with DOJ, Lesley is required provide gluten- and allergen-free food options in its dining halls, offer special meal plans for students with allergies, and pay $50,000 in damages to the students who filed the claim in 2009, among other measures.

"The Lesley settlement is terrific," Marilyn Geller, chief operating officer of the Celiac Disease Foundation, said. "It puts all universities on notice that they're going to have to make these accommodations for students with celiac, gluten sensitivity and other food allergies."

Food allergies affect about 2 percent of adults and 4 to 8 percent of kids in the U.S., and the number of young people diagnosed with a food allergy has risen in the last decade, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

By applying the ADA to food allergies, the DOJ has essentially turned food into an access issue – akin to providing ramps for students in wheelchairs.

"By not accommodating food allergies, you're barring students from participating in the university," says Maria Acebal, a lawyer and spokeswoman for Food Allergy Research & Education, an advocacy group. "If you can't get safe food, how can you study there?"

It's gotten easier to make the case that food allergy is a

disability since Congress broadened the scope of the ADA in 2008 with an amendment. The amendment has led to widespread reforms to accommodate people, especially children, with food allergies.

But Geller says there's still a ways to go, especially for people with celiac disease and gluten sensitivity who have to worry about cross-contamination of their food.

"The problem is that a microscopic amount of gluten for people who are very sensitive can take them down for several days," says Geller. "So we want schools to take it to the next level and make sure that the gluten-free food is prepared and served in dedicated areas so there's no cross contamination."

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• El Dorado Winery Association's Passport weekends are April 13-14 and April 20-21. For tickets, go online. They are $70 per weekend or $40 Sunday only.

• Backcountry gates between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows are open on a pilot program basis in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service.

• January is California Restaurant Month. Well, Tahoe-Truckee eateries, where are the deals like other cities are offering?

• The Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan project applicant has submitted a revised specific plan and phase 1 project description, which are available for review online.

• Smokehouse 360 at Sierra-at-Tahoe is mentioned in the February issue of *Ski* magazine as “arguably the best barbecue in Tahoe.” The same issue says the KT Base Bar at Squaw Valley is one of the best “beach” aka sunny deck spots at a resort.

Winter weather advisory for Lake Tahoe

The howling wind that has been whistling through the Lake Tahoe Basin for most of the day is a precursor to a storm that is on its way.

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a winter weather advisory for Tahoe from 6pm Wednesday through 9am Thursday.

The heaviest snow is expected in the morning. The lake could see 3-6 inches, while higher elevations could get 9 inches.

Snow is possible into Friday, with a break on Saturday before the white stuff starts falling again on Sunday.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report



Chains were needed when traveling over Sierra passes last weekend and are likely to be needed Thursday morning. Photo/LTN

USFS leading interpretive ski tours at Heavenly

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is putting on the Ski with a Ranger at Heavenly Mountain Resort Jan. 18-April 12.

Participants will learn about the mission and role of the Forest Service in ski area management, improve their understanding of natural resource issues, and learn about environmental stewardship.

Tours are offered Mondays and Fridays at 10am 1pm. The tour lasts approximately one hour and is open to Heavenly Mountain Resort guests who are intermediate level and above skiers and snowboarders. The tour begins near the bottom of the stairs at

the top of the Heavenly Gondola. No reservations are required.

For more information, contact Megan Dee at (530) 543.2618 or mldee@fs.fed.us.

Ex-LTBMU Forest Service chief Bob Harris killed

By Kathryn Reed

Bob Harris, former forest supervisor of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, has died. He was 72.

“He was quite an environmentalist, but also a professionally knowledgeable land manager. He was able to balance environmental ethics with land and conservation knowledge,” Bill Morgan said of his friend of 47 years.

Harris led the local U.S. Forest Service office from 1988-97. He arrived at a time when the Forest Service Plan was being finalized and left as the Environmental Improvement Program was being launched.

Harris was a key figure in having then President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore visit the basin in what was the inaugural Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit in 1997.



Bob Harris

“One of the legacies of that monumental visit was some funding for the first time by federal sources to invest in the future of Lake Tahoe’s health,” Don Lane, long-time Forest Service employee, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The EIP was the legacy of that visit. Bob was very much engaged in facilitating that.”

Harris followed Morgan a bit career-wise. Both were engineers to start with. When Morgan left the Tahoe National Forest, Harris took his engineering job.

Morgan was a supervisor of the LTBMU before Harris. During part of Harris’ tenure Morgan was executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

“I think the most outstanding characteristic about him was he was a high-energy guy. He never turned down a request when someone needed something,” Morgan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

They both also had a profound interest in the Tahoe-Baikal Institute; having traveled together to Russia. It was Harris who recruited Morgan to be on the board of directors.

“He would take young people from the Baikal Institute on long hikes in the mountains and tell them about forest management and the history of Lake Tahoe,” Morgan said.

Harris grew up in Oakland. He graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in civil engineering.

In the last 1960s he helped design the Taylor Creek Visitors Center, including the stream profile center. He also worked on trails in Desolation and Meiss wilderness areas.

As Harris progressed up the ranks and took over the Lake Tahoe office, his love of the outdoors did not diminish.

“He liked to go in the backcountry a lot. You usually don’t get people who are that physically engaged,” Lane said. He

remembers that time fondly – being out with the big boss, sitting around a campfire, sleeping on the hard granite, going over mountains and hiking through meadows.

Lane said it was Harris' collaborative management style that allowed him to accomplish various tasks with people of differing opinions.

Although Harris retired in 1997, he still visited the local Forest Service office, always with a smile.

"He pushed Forest Service retirees – (saying) don't just quit, stay involved," Lane said. "He really pioneered a lot of education and community education programs."

Harris died from a gunshot wound Jan. 6 at his Pollock Pines home. His 70-year-old wife, Colleen, is accused of murder.

Harris is survived by two sons and a daughter. Funeral services are pending.

Judge rules against USFS regarding off-road vehicles

By KCRA-TV

A federal judge has ruled that the U.S. Forest Service failed in its management of forest trails used by off-road vehicles in the Stanislaus National Forest.

U.S. District Court Judge Kimberly Mueller ruled on Friday that the Forest Service didn't minimize damage to the

environment caused by the vehicles.

In issuing the ruling, the judge did not order the closing of any specific off-road vehicle trails.

The Stanislaus National Forest is located between Lake Tahoe and Yosemite National Park. The forest has a web of roads, trails and other areas designated as open to off-road vehicles.

Conservation groups took legal action in August 2010 to try to stop the Forest Service's approval of an additional 137 miles of off-road vehicle routes.

The judge ordered a hearing on Feb. 15 to consider remedies for the management plan.

DiMatteo enters guilty plea to federal pot charges

Updated: Jan. 9 10:55am

Gino DiMatteo, 43, of South Lake Tahoe pleaded guilty today to possession with the intent to distribute marijuana.

A bail review hearing is scheduled for this afternoon at 2. Sentencing is set for April 17 before U.S. District Judge Kimberly J. Mueller. While the maximum penalty is 30 years in federal prison, a plea agreement calls for five years.

"As part of his plea agreement, DiMatteo specifically admitted that he possessed the marijuana seized from his residence on Aug. 31, 2012, with intent to distribute it to others," the U.S. Attorney's Office said Jan. 9 in a press release.

DiMatteo was arrested in August on state charges that were eventually dropped when federal charges were levied against him. While he had owned the medical marijuana dispensary City of Angels II in South Lake Tahoe, it's the marijuana found at his residence that led to the arrest.

Detectives said they found a hidden door that led to several rooms under the structure. Court documents reveal that the rooms were used to grow marijuana. Five pounds of processed marijuana and 15 pounds of marijuana residue used for cooking edibles were confiscated. Finished marijuana products like ice cream, granola bars and pizzas were found in a freezer in DiMatteo's detached garage, according to authorities.

The press release further states, "Within a desk inside the kitchen area, as well as inside a desk in the living room area of DiMatteo's residence, detectives found pay/owe sheets. In particular, DiMatteo had notes setting the price of the marijuana sold at a South Lake Tahoe marijuana dispensary known as City of Angels II. On a separate set of documents, DiMatteo listed the various amounts paid. DiMatteo lists himself receiving $7,000 biweekly."

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By Kathryn Reed

Gino DiMatteo is going to prison.

"He is going to plead guilty tomorrow morning," his attorney Don Heller told *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday.

The former owner of City of Angels II medical marijuana dispensary in South Lake Tahoe will be in court Jan. 9 in Sacramento where he is expected to admit to marijuana trafficking.

The South Lake Tahoe resident had been indicted in November on three federal charges – conspiracy to manufacture and possess

with intent to distribute marijuana; possession with intent to distribute marijuana; and manufacture marijuana. Had the case gone to trial and DiMatteo were convicted on all three charges, he could have faced 60 years to life in prison and fines of more than $30 million.



Gino
DiMatteo

Instead, in a plea agreement with the U.S. Attorney's Office, DiMatteo will be in federal prison for five years.

The judge on Wednesday will set a sentencing date. At sentencing is when the other charges would be dropped.

Heller would not talk more about his client or the case. This means it is not known what happens to DiMatteo's business – Push Fitness in South Lake Tahoe – or his house.

The U.S. Attorney's Office earlier told *Lake Tahoe News* if DiMatteo were convicted of at least one of the offenses, he would have to give up all his property deemed to have been associated with or bought by money from drug transactions.

DiMatteo was arrested in August by El Dorado County investigators. Those charges were all dropped simultaneously as the federal charges were leveled against him. However, not everyone caught in law enforcement's web has been exonerated.

In August, DiMatteo was accused of bribing a public official. El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson fingered South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman Angela Swanson as that official. However, no charges have been filed against her. *LTN* again

tried to reach Pierson; again with no call back.

A Nov. 2 press release from Pierson's office says, "… the investigation into certain South Lake Tahoe City officials as to their dealings with DiMatteo is ongoing."

Swanson told *Lake Tahoe News* neither she nor her attorney has had contact with Pierson since August. She added that Pierson doesn't return her attorney's calls either.

Autopsy inconclusive in determining Byrne's cause of death

By Kathryn Reed

The definitive cause and time of death for Alyssa Byrne could not be determined based on results from the Jan. 8 autopsy.

Byrne's body was found in a snowbank Jan. 4 off Pioneer Trail in El Dorado County near South Lake Tahoe. She had not been seen since New Year's Eve where she had been attending the SnowGlobe Music Festival about a half-mile way on the ball field adjacent to the Lake Tahoe Community College campus.



Alyssa
Byrne

“The date of death is unable to be determined because the body was frozen,” El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Pet Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*. For the same reason the cause cannot be determined.

Blood samples have been sent to a laboratory that should tell authorities what Byrne died from.

Speculation is the 19-year-old Petaluma resident succumbed to hypothermia. Her jacket was found away from her body and footprints near the scene show signs of someone who was disoriented. These are classic indications of someone affected by hypothermia.

Van Arnum said the blood sample and toxicology reports should be available in about a month.

“Why she ended up there we still don’t exactly know why,” Van Arnum said.

His department is working with South Lake Tahoe police and Douglas County sheriff’s officials to try to figure out the details leading up to her disappearance and subsequent death. The concert was in the city limits and her hotel at the Horizon is in Stateline, which is in Douglas County.

A friend of Byrne’s remains adamant he saw her after midnight on New Year’s at Horizon.

“Right now we have no reason to disbelieve him,” Van Arnum said. “Even if he saw her, she could have come back over here.”

Douglas officials are still reviewing video from the casino. The last time they have her on video is at 11:45am New Year’s Eve. Her room key was used shortly after that.

Deputies are following up on leads that continue to come in. Call (530). 573.5300 if you have information.

“The problem was at that time of night literally thousands of people were walking away from SnowGlobe. It’s hard to determine if anyone saw her because there were so many people that night,” Van Arnum said. “We may never find out how she got there or why she walking that way.”