Thieves steal cash from Incline movie theater

Burglars stole an undisclosed amount of cash from the Incline Village Cinema last week.

At approximately 5:30pm Jan. 1 a manager at the movie theater notice one of the glass entry doors was smashed in. The theater was secure the previous evening at about 11:30pm when the manager closed for the night.

Washoe County sheriff's deputies are asking anyone has information to call (775) 328.3336 or Secret Witness at (775) 322.4900.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Controlled burn scheduled in Incline area

North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District's fuels crew will continue the hazardous fuels reduction project in the Galena and Davis Creek Park areas starting Jan. 8 and continuing through the week of Jan. 14, weather permitting.

This project is a cooperative effort between North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, Washoe County Parks Department and Nevada Division of Forestry. The debris or slash piles were created as a result of a hazardous fuels reduction and defensible space project over the last year to help minimize the risk of wildland fires in the area.

The project’s safety plan calls for cancellation of the controlled burning based on weather conditions each day, such as significant wind activity or precipitation.

The burning piles are expected to produce smoke that may be visible throughout the area. Smoke resulting from the pile burns will affect the surrounding areas for approximately 24-36 hours. People who are smoke sensitive are advised to please stay inside and close their windows and doors as much as possible until the smoke dissipates.

For further information, call (775) 831.0351, ext. zero.

Cooking classes just for youths

A four-week after school workshop is designed to prepare kids ages 10-12 to take an interactive role with the family meal-planning process.

Youngsters will learn the six nutrient principles of preparing and eating quality nourishing meals. They will be taught how to shop for healthy food, read and follow recipes, and use basic kitchen tools and equipment.

This workshop is designed to build a foundation for kids to establish healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

The workshops are Friday Jan. 11-Feb. 1, 4-6pm at Lake Tahoe Community College. Cost is $99.

Sign up online.

Crystal Bay Club owner buys auto racing's SCORE International

By Autoweek

Culminating a deal that has been in the works for the last year, Sal Fish, longtime president of desert racing sanctioning body SCORE International, has sold the organization to racer and businessman Roger Norman. The sale marks the culmination of a lifetime of work for the seller.

Fish got his start in desert racing when he was still in the publishing business. After a disastrous though entertaining attempt at the Baja 1000 as a driver in the early 1970s, he was hooked. He learned the race sanctioning trade under SCORE founder Mickey Thompson and took over the organization shortly afterward. Fish, who is 73, has run it for most of SCORE's 39 years.

"Next to my wife Barbara, SCORE has been the love of my life, my passion and I have left my blood, sweat and tears in the desert of Baja California, Mexico, and in the USA in Arizona, California and Nevada," said Fish in a SCORE release. "I believe fervently that this is the time to pass the torch to the next generation and Roger Norman is a great racer with a big vision, superb business acumen and I know I leave my 'baby' in good hands. I know I'll wake up tomorrow wondering what did I do, but I have had a phenomenal run and I wouldn't change a thing. I have been able to grow this sport to the

level it has reached and now Roger and his team will take it to the next level. I have no regrets and I leave knowing I have left a good legacy for the sport to continue to move forward in for the next 40 years."

New owner Norman comes from a racing family. His father Don entered cars in IMSA races, according to Norman's website. His stepfather is the late Unlimited hydroplane racer Bill Muncey. Roger Norman's first race was in a Class 1 buggy in the 1996 Best in the Desert Vegas-to-Reno. Within two years he was part of the legendary Rod Hall's off-road team. From there he ran in the Baja Challenge class before forming Norman Motorsports in 2008 to race in the showcase Trophy Truck class. As an organizer and sanctioning body head he resurrected the old High Desert Racing Association (HDRA) last year.

Norman owns, among other properties, the Crystal Bay Club Casino at Lake Tahoe.

"For me it's a dream come true," said Norman regarding his acquisition of SCORE. "Sal Fish is the godfather of this sport and it is an honor to move forward with the incredible legacy he has left our sport with SCORE International. We have been talking about this for over a year, but I knew I had to learn all sides of the sport before I could be in a position to make a solid offer to Sal.

"I have tremendous respect for the future of the sport and the leadership role of SCORE International," Norman said.

Norman has big plans for the sport, announcing three separate championships for 2013: HDRA, SCORE, and a new world championship. The world championship will be comprised of three HDRA races in America and three SCORE races in Baja. The World Championship is the culmination of six of the seven races of the HDRA and SCORE race series with the Tecate SCORE Baja 1000 (Nov. 14-17, 2013) in Ensenada, Mexico as the deciding factor with double points. The first race is the HDRA

South Point Vegas 250, Jan. 12 in Jean, Nev.

Norman also has big plans for televising the sport.

“Races will be nationally televised in the U.S. and we will provide greater details of our plans over the next two weeks,” Norman said. “The vision of a world championship will be monumental for our sport. We will look forward to honoring the legacy of SCORE and the colossal contribution to our sport by Sal Fish at the SCORE Awards Night on Jan. 12.”

The awards night will be Jan. 12 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and Spa in Newport Beach honoring the Champions of 2012 and ushering in a new and exciting era for SCORE International.

Calif. lawmaker pushes for $10,000 bachelor’s degree

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

With the cost of going to college already more than $30,000 a year at many California campuses, is it possible to earn a bachelor’s degree for just $10,000 – total?

Assemblyman Dan Logue, R-Marysville, hopes so.

Borrowing an idea being promoted by Republican governors in Texas and Florida, the GOP assemblyman has introduced a bill that would create a pilot program in California for what he’s billing as a $10,000 bachelor’s degree.

The degree would be available to students majoring in science, technology, engineering or math disciplines.

Assembly Bill 51 calls for closer coordination between high schools, community colleges and California State University campuses and targets three regions for the pilot program: Chico, Long Beach and Turlock.

Participating students would earn some college credit in high school through Advanced Placement classes and greater access to community college courses.

The bill calls for participating community college students to go to school full time.

Tuition at CSU right now is $5,472 a year. Books and campus fees cost another roughly $2,000 annually. A statement from Logue said his proposed $10,000 degree would include textbooks. It does not cover living expenses such as room and board.

“I hope my bill will be the beginning of a revolution to the very pressing issue of the costs of college that students face these days,” Logue said in a statement. “We cannot expect today’s students to have a higher standard of living than their parents if they continue to leave college saddled with so much debt.”

Even on a topic as politically sympathetic as making college more affordable, it remains to be seen if the Republican’s bill can make any headway in California’s Democratic-controlled Legislature.

Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez has his own plan for lowering the cost of college – what he calls a “middle-class scholarship” program – and Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown has said he wants universities to increase affordability by doing more with online education.

CSU officials have not taken a position on the bill.

Logue’s bill builds on efforts already under way in California

to better streamline K-12 schools, community colleges and universities, said Judy Heiman, a higher education analyst with the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office.

"The bill also appears to draw on existing regional education partnerships, an approach we think makes a lot of sense," Heiman wrote in an email. "In addition, the incentives in the bill for full time attendance would support current efforts to improve graduation rates."

Perfect cup of joe can be complex

By Matt Richtel, New York Times

Tristan Walach has a tattoo of the famous Las Vegas welcome sign on his neck. He goes by the name Ant. He teaches people how to make coffee, professionally.

I have come to learn from him.

"People like you are the best to train," he says, sizing me up. "You don't have bad habits or preconceived notions. You're a blank slate."

We're at Sightglass, a cafe near downtown San Francisco with a huge coffee roaster near the front door. But Ant and I are tucked away upstairs, cordoned behind a chain and a sign: "Training in Session."

Such training centers are increasingly common, and not just at cafes: there are certification classes for baristas and even

Camp Pull A-Shot, a four-day, three-night event. And there are also a growing number of regional and national “throwdowns” to find the most technically proficient, graceful makers of the best-tasting coffee drinks.

Am I skeptical? Well, making coffee, even espresso, roughly entails pouring or pushing water through coffee. Sometimes by flicking a switch or pushing a button. Sure, Ant, you can up my coffee game, and then I’ll spend three days at Camp Let’s Make Oatmeal.

And, hey, I’m not precisely a blank slate. Without any training, I brew a very solid morning latte. And it’s superior to Starbucks, I brag to my wife, using only a $100 espresso maker and beans from a local cafe.

“How hard can coffee be? It’s an attitude we’re constantly encountering,” noted Ellie Matuszak, director of professional development for the Specialty Coffee Association of America, a trade group with thousands of company members and 1,200 people in its growing Barista Guild.

Ant, 34, whose title is director of education, says coffee requires a deft touch. “It’s the most complicated beverage we consume,” he said.

The training center at Sightglass includes a counter with several grinders, an industrial-strength espresso machine, a scale, coffee tampers and other paraphernalia. On a nearby island of reclaimed blond wood are 10 handleless cups, organized in five pairs, each half full of light-brown beans.

But first, we are going to watch Ant’s PowerPoint presentation about where the best beans come from and how they are picked. There is also a slide titled “The Origin Myth.” It’s folklore, a big-bang theory of the discovery of coffee by a goat herder in Ethiopia.

Then it’s time to commence cupping.

This entails smelling the contents of the white cups — beans from Kenya, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, El Salvador and Guatemala. I cannot detect much difference.

Ant then introduces me to the La Marzocco Linea, an espresso maker that runs $8,000 to $10,000. (The really expensive machines, the La Marzocco Strada and the Slayer, are downstairs for the actual baristas.) To its left is a $1,500 Mazzer Major grinder. On top is a button. My job is to push that button, dispensing precisely 19.5 grams of coffee into the filter.

I'm supposed to give the coffee a little sift to even it out, then pack it down with the tamper. Ant shows me how to create about 35 pounds of pressure, a give-or-take amount achieved by bending my knees for leverage and pushing on the tamper until the coffee pushes back.

This step is crucial, Ant says, because otherwise water flows unevenly through the coffee, creating unwanted channels. I press another button, to run the water through the coffee. We press a timer to make sure I leave the water flowing for 25 seconds. Brown and tan espresso flows into the demitasse, which Ant calls the "vessel."

Ant sips. "It's not terribly offensive."

I sip. It is, actually, terribly offensive. Sour and bitter. Ant makes a cup using the same steps. It has a hint of sweetness, just shy of floral, no aftertaste. I make another. Just as bad as my first. Maybe I need milk.

Ant explains how to steam the milk. In brief: position the steam wand just below the milk's surface until the milk swirls in a circular motion and puffs up as it absorbs the steam, then drop the wand lower until the milk reaches 135 degrees, as verified by a thermometer. There's a sweet spot between milk and temperature, the point at which the sugars cook and the milk becomes sweeter, but before the sugars burn.

I try a few times. I make water-thin milk, poured over bitter shots. Finally, I get the milk consistency right, like wet paint. I try a little latte art. It looks like mating amoebas.

Ant offers wisdom: “The difference between a good barista and a great one is the great barista has the courage to toss a shot.” We toss my amoebas in the sink.

I have a second chance coming. I tell Ant that I’m getting more training with Chris Baca at Verve, a cafe and roaster in Santa Cruz. His eyes light up. “He’s great! I trained with him,” he says.

But first, I try to put some of my training to work at home the next morning. I throw out the first three shots. Something is wrong. I was making excellent espresso just the day before. I have actually gotten worse.

Baca, 32, planned to be a high school history teacher. But he dropped out of college and took a job at a cafe in Modesto. He developed a love affair with coffee, moved to San Francisco to work for a trendy cafe called Ritual, then started competing in 2006. In 2010, he finished second out of 50 competitors in the United States Barista Championship. In the freestyle competition, he made a crème anglaise espresso drink, cherry infused with a citrus garnish.

“I know, this all seems like ‘Best in Show,’” says Ryan O’Donovan, an owner of Verve, referring to the faux documentary about dog shows. “It seems ridiculous. We’re trying to make it less ridiculous.”

Verve, where Mr. Baca is director of education, devotes 1,500 square feet to training. It’s part of what the cafe considers the “third wave” of the coffee movement – the first being campfire and drip coffee, the second the Starbucks revolution and the next understanding and evoking the complexity of coffee. Training, O’Donovan says, “is the nucleus of what we do.”

I show Baca what I've learned. He calls my first shot dry. He is being kind.

Baca asked me to bring my usual brand of coffee and makes a shot with it. It is not good. Lesson No. 1: coffee matters. Just because the bag says "fair trade" or "locally roasted" does not mean the highest-grade beans have been selected and put through meticulous roasting. We toss my $13-a-pound coffee in the trash. Then Baca provides a math lesson.

The essence of good espresso, of good coffee in general, revolves around three numbers: the amount of quality dry coffee used, the amount of time water flows through it and the amount of coffee that comes out the other end. When the ratio is right, the process extracts the best flavor. If it is wrong, the good flavor never surfaces or is watered down. A mistake in seconds or grams, I am coming to learn, is the difference between something wonderful and awful.

Baca explains that you have to experiment to find just the right balance of these three elements for each coffee machine and coffee grind, and then replicate them. He has tested the machinery at Sightglass and determined that we want to use 17 grams of high-end coffee and run water for 25 seconds to yield about 30 grams of coffee.

Again, this seems simple, given that the grinder is preset to deliver the grams I want, and I can verify using the scale. All I have to do is press buttons. My first shot tastes foul. But Baca calls my second "bright and snappy."

He shows me how to paint with steamed milk: hold the decanter six inches from the cup, pour a medium-sized stream at a constant rate and when the cup is half filled, lower the decanter close to the cup. When the cup is nearly full, wriggle your hand quickly to create a shape that will make the foam blossom out. Finish with a flourish by drawing a bit of milk through the middle of the design. After a few tries, I'm

able to make something that looks like a pine tree, though I was aiming for a heart.

Great, I am improving. But this is impractical. I buy my coffee preground. I don't own a scale.

"A $10 scale is the best investment you can make for your coffee game," Baca says. And because coffee density and brewing time are so significant, he says, a grinder is not far behind. Some experts say grinding your beans fresh is the most important priority.

Reality check: I'm trying to make it through chaotic mornings at home with a clamoring family. Mr. O'Donovan is amused. Why, he asks, would I make espresso in the morning, let alone latte?

"I make drip coffee," O'Donovan explains. Baca does, too. That's because making a good espresso requires preparation and cleanup. Even when it all goes right, it takes time. Like making a good meal.

"Coffee isn't just coffee," O'Donovan says.

It's "just like anything else," Baca chimes in.

I instantly take his meaning: Coffee — what I assumed was just a simple, necessary thing to start my day — is something more than that. It may not require certification but it does require more attention than I realized.

With my cram session at an end, O'Donovan leaves me with a laugh and a warning: "You're heading down the rabbit hole."

In the ensuing days, I start using the timer on the microwave to make sure I'm pulling my espresso shots for 25 seconds. I troll the Internet for counsel on what might be a next-step espresso maker. But even with my old gear and a bit of leftover coffee from Sightglass, my shots have gotten discernibly better, and occasionally good.

I place an order for coffee from Verve. When two different roasts arrive and I make a show of my excitement, my wife rolls her eyes. She challenges whether I can even tell the difference between the new coffee and two other blends I used to swear by. So we do a blind smell test.

I nail it. My wife seems surprised; who is this new discerning creature? Just getting started, I tell her. Wait until you see what we can do with milk.

Ski report: Snow falling

Some fresh powder and continued snow showers today.

Hope all have enjoyed the past holiday weeks at Lake Tahoe.

Here is the Jan. 6 ski report

— Curtis Fong

Man shoots himself in middle of street in S. Tahoe

Updated Jan. 6 6:55am:

One person is dead in South Lake Tahoe from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Shots rang out behind the Jack-in-the-Box north of Highway 50 at about 9:30pm Saturday after a fight between unknown persons erupted at an apartment complex near the streets of Rubicon, Brockway and Sussex.

South Lake Tahoe police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News* that one man used a handgun to kill himself in the middle of the street and that the other was not wounded.

The incident is described as a "neighborhood dispute" between two men. The surviving individual told officers he went to his neighbor's to a talk about a damaged vehicle. The man ran after his neighbor pointed a revolver at him. At least one shot was fired.

The suspect fled the scene on foot; returning not much later to the middle of Rubicon Trail as officers were setting up a perimeter and searching for him. Officers said the man shot himself in the head.

The identity of the deceased has not been released pending notification of family.

View Larger Map

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Respect for Mother Nature helps ensure safe snow experience

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

Snow – so beautiful, so tempting, so dangerous.

Drawn by its sparkling presence, thousands of outdoor enthusiasts will trek to the Sierra Nevada this season to experience snow's magic.

But with more than 16 feet of snow at many resorts so far, this season already has had tragic reminders that the mountains must be respected at all times.

An experienced snowboarder at Donner Ski Ranch and a ski patrol member at Alpine Meadows were killed in separate Christmas Eve avalanches. Earlier in December, a stranded motorist died in deep snow near Burnside Lake while trying to reach help.

"Mother Nature always calls the shots," said Lel Tone, a longtime ski patrol member at Squaw Valley. "We do our very, very best and work hard to keep people safe, but there can be really hazardous conditions."

The death of Bill Foster, a 53-year-old ski patrol veteran, hit home for many working in the industry. He was caught up in an intentional avalanche – triggered by explosives as a safety measure – that started higher and wider than expected.

According to reports, Foster had proper safety equipment. Rescuers found him just one minute after the avalanche and

pulled him free in under eight minutes, but he did not survive massive injuries from the crushing snow.

“It’s so incredibly sad to lose a fellow ski patrol member,” Tone said. “It’s such a painful thing.”

Recently, Tone led a women’s avalanche clinic at Squaw Valley to help prepare fellow skiers for such dangers. Such safety education has become as important a part of snow sports as gloves and sunscreen. Several ski areas will host events this month as part of National Safety Week. Squaw Valley and other resorts also host free avalanche workshops. So do guide and gear companies. Some schools – such as Sierra College in Rocklin – offer snow-related safety courses, too.

“Safety – it’s something you can’t just say once,” said Troy Hawks, spokesman for the National Ski Areas Association. “You need to repeat the message in every form and fashion.”

Constant safety reminders nudge snow lovers to think before they swoosh.

“The No. 1 rule of our code of responsibility is ‘Always stay in control,'” Hawks said. “That means stay focused. That’s why there are safety reminders everywhere.”

Marking its 50th anniversary this winter, the NSAA has focused on basic safety initiatives such as helmets. Efforts have paid off. Two-thirds of all skiers wear helmets, Hawks said. Among children age 9 and under, 91 percent wear helmets while skiing or boarding.

Awareness of changing conditions can also play a role in staying safe. Roads can quickly become icy. Cars can become stuck or buried in snow.

“You’ve got to be really respectful of the weather at all times,” said Mary Bennington, executive director of the Tahoe Rim Trail Association. “It can change in a hurry.”

On Jan. 12, the Tahoe Rim Trail Association will host National Winter Trails Day at Tahoe Meadows with several safety clinics. Demonstrations include survival equipment and techniques such as avalanche beacons and building of a snow shelter. Geared for the whole family, the event also will have guided snowshoe hikes.

“We want people to be safe,” Bennington said. “People come up – not for skiing, but just to play in the snow. We see so many people come up here for a snow day totally unprepared.”

If your vehicle does become stranded, Bennington suggests that you stay put.

“Rescuers will spot your car before they see you,” said Bennington, who carries emergency supplies in her car including warm clothes, food, water and a blanket.

Timing is everything; that includes snow safety. Sunny, windy days after heavy snowstorms can unleash an avalanche.

“When you have those conditions, layers develop in the snow and it can set up for avalanches,” Bennington said. “It’s like little ball bearings between the layers. It can come down in a hurry.”

Avalanches killed 34 people in the United States last winter. About 90 percent of victims triggered the avalanche. Three out of four avalanche victims suffocate. The other 25 percent are crushed to death by snow.

“Fresh snow can look light and airy, but when it compacts, it’s very heavy,” Bennington said. “After an avalanche, it solidifies.”

Every second counts in snow survival. According to a recent study, the survival rate for individuals completely buried in an avalanche is about 40 percent after 15 minutes. Those survival odds drop to 25 percent after 30 minutes.

Those same survival figures can be applied to snow-immersion accidents such as slipping into a “tree well,” an area of loose snow around the trunk of a tree that’s otherwise enveloped in deep snow. Branches keep snow from accumulating close to the trunk, but create a treacherous hole.

Depending on the surrounding snowpack, tree wells can be 20 feet deep. Their victims often fall into these icy traps head first. According to another study, 90 percent of skiers or snowboarders who fall into tree wells can’t free themselves.

“Tree wells can be particularly treacherous for snowboarders,” Hawks said. “They can’t release their equipment and they’re upside down.”

Since 1990, 15 people have died in California from tree well accidents at ski areas, more than any other state. Most of these accidents happen in late morning as skiers and boarders – looking for fresh snow – edge closer to the trees. And experts warn not to count on a cellphone to call for help if you’re in trouble; coverage is spotty at best in most mountain areas. And that phone may be in a pocket you can’t reach.

Instead, make sure to always stay in visual contact with a partner – never lose sight.

“It’s the old buddy system,” Bennington said. “Always have a partner.”

Tahoe mountain guide to talk

about international adventures

Alpenglow Sports’ third installment of the annual Winter Film Series on Jan. 17 features local mountain guide Adrian Ballinger talking about skiing 8,000-meter peaks in the Himalaya.

Find out what happens when you combine a Russian who lives in Chamonix with a Brit who lives in Squaw Valley attempt to ski the fifth and eighth tallest mountains in the world.

The Alpenglow Winter Film Series is free and is designed to motivate, inspire, and educate.

The event is at Squaw Valley’s Olympic Village Lodge at 7pm.