Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Fields Committee of the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority will meet Dec. 17 from 4–6pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

• The work of Tahoe City architecture and engineering firm Gary Davis Group was recently featured as the cover story in *Residential Design + Build* magazine.

• Passage of Proposition 30 also means money for California's opening meeting law. Local agencies were still following the Brown Act.

• Squaw Valley is kicking off winter with the Get Outside Festival on Dec. 22.

• Lawyers James Hales and Nathan Tod Young of Minden and Marc Picker of Reno are the finalists to succeed Douglas County District Court Judge David Gamble, who is retiring Jan. 6. Gov. Brian Sandoval will make the appointment.

Gas prices falling before holiday driving begins

By Steven E.F. Brown, San Francisco Business Times

AAA Northern California, Nevada & Utah said California gas

prices have been falling and will likely continue to fall, a holiday boon for Golden State drivers.

The Emeryville-based auto club said Tuesday that California's average price for a gallon of gas is $3.62, down 23 cents from the time of its last report on Nov. 13.

Despite the drop, California still has the fourth highest gas price in the United States – Hawaii has the highest at $4, with a gallon in Wailuku costing $4.06. The Golden State's average price is 29 cents higher than the U.S. average of $3.33.

Bay Area prices are above the California average, at $3.71 per gallon, but that's still down 27 cents from a month ago.

San Franciscans pay $3.83 per gallon, down 22 cents from a month ago, while those across the bay in Oakland are paying $3.68, down 27 cents from a month ago. Skiiers up in South Lake Tahoe will find gas costs $3.60 per gallon.

Cynthia Harris of AAA said low demand and high supply are driving the decrease. Though demand will go up slightly during the holidays, overall demand is expected to stay low into next year, which should keep prices low.

Modesto has the cheapest gas in the state, at $3.40 per gallon. Eureka has the highest, at $3.88.

Missouri has the lowest price of any state, at $3.03 per gallon.

Lane advising group wanting to develop retail space at South Lake Tahoe convention center site

By Kathryn Reed

Six years after the first mound of dirt was moved on the then-$410 million hotel-convention center project, more may be turned over.

Bill Owens, who owns 20 of the 29 parcels on the 11-plus-acre site by Stateline, is ready to build part of the project.

The goal is in summer 2013 work will begin on developing 30,000-square-feet of retail space – exactly what was originally planned. Depending on how fast work progresses, shops could be open by the holidays a year from now.

Owens owns about two-thirds of the project site on the east end of South Lake Tahoe. City National owns the other nine parcels that constitute about one-third of the site. The latter has not come forward with any ideas for that section.



A pedestrian on Dec. 13 walks from the fenced off non-existent convention center toward McP's Pub.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

In October, the city hired a structural engineer to determine if the concrete and rebar are stable. The report said there would be no problem building on top of what was laid years ago.

The City Council at its Dec. 11 meeting briefly discussed the resurrection of the project.

City Manager Nancy Kerry at the meeting said a performance bond and parcel consolidation map would be in place before construction crews return to the idle site.

Not having those helped contribute to the mess that has ensued. While Councilman Hal Cole now wants that bond, he at one time told this reporter there is no such thing as a performance bond.

Nonetheless, the council agreed to put Cole and Mayor Tom Davis on the ad hoc committee that will be working with the developer. Cole with then-Councilman John Upton were the only two electeds to have read the market report that did not favor a convention center, but told their peers to go ahead with it.

Randy Lane, the original builder who ran the now bankrupt Lake Tahoe Development Company, is an adviser to Owens and is the person to whom the city has been talking about moving forward. Owens is the leader of Owens Financial, one of the lending agencies that ended up with property when the largest development project in South Lake Tahoe's history folded.

Lane told *Lake Tahoe News* he expects to submit the necessary paperwork to South Lake Tahoe officials the first week of January.

Kerry said it could be a $10 million infusion of cash into the local economy if construction resumes.

“It could be a catalyst for economic recovery in the area,” Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We are excited that something is going to get going and getting rid of the blight that is pulling down economic recovery.”

Sidewalks would be put in and other streetscape aspects as were originally planned. This will help with safety issues because right now there is minimal room to walk along the fenced-off site on Highway 50.

What businesses may go in there remains to be seen.

“I’m not concerned about the leasing part of it,” Lane said.

Originally McP’s Pub, which is still open at the western edge of the site, was going to move into the new center. It was going to be three times the size it is now, with a stage, more pool tables and expanded food menu.

Pete Joseph, who owns McP’s, is out of the town and unavailable for comment.

Lane said he had not spoken with Joseph to see if he would want to keep with the original plan.

This new first phase (the originally project had two phases) would stop short of the current McP’s bar-restaurant.

Making sure the public and businesses are secure is another concern of the city’s. The proposed development would go about one-third of the way from Highway 50 to Cedar Avenue. Right now it’s covered in concrete and rebar and has a cyclone fence around it.

Parking for the retail center would need to be worked out, too. In the first set of plans underground parking was to be provided for some aspects of the project. But the council and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency officials in the permits that were issued allowed for the project to go forward without adequate parking. The developer was supposed to secure parking

at Harveys, but that was never done. So, whether enough spaces would be incorporated into the project as it’s put together in a piecemeal process remains to be seen.

Baccarat not just for high-rollers

By Christopher Palmeri, Bloomberg Businessweek

Mention the game of baccarat and images of international spies, playboys or tuxedo-clad royalty come to mind. But don’t tell that to Dallas Teerlink, director of table games at the Running Aces Harness Park in Columbus, Minn.

After he introduced the card game to his Midwest customers two years ago, it turned into a surprise hit at the casino 30 miles northeast of Minneapolis, in part due to side bets that can pay as much as 40 to 1. A computer monitor at the table lets everyone know if the right cards come up. Explains Teerlink: “When that light goes off, the floor goes nuts.”

Best known as the second-favorite evening pastime of James Bond, baccarat has become the world’s highest-grossing casino game, thanks to wealthy Asians who sometimes bet tens of thousands of dollars a hand. Now, with China’s slowing economy pinching the purse strings of mainland gamblers, casino operators are seeking growth by taking baccarat from private salons onto the main gambling floors catering to the masses.

“High rollers get all the attention, but there is an enormous

amount of play that is outside that category," says Robin Powell, a consultant who helped develop a more accessible version of the game called EZ Baccarat, which is played at Running Aces.

Casino winnings in the former Portuguese colony of Macau grew tenfold in the past decade to $33.5 billion last year, 90 percent from baccarat, in which players bet on which of two hands will add up closest to nine. At tables in Macau, China's wealthy stand two or three deep, sometimes squeezing, folding and blowing on the cards for good luck. "It's all new money," Stephen Wynn, the founder of Wynn Resorts, said in a May conference call. "What you're seeing is an explosion of pent-up demand for the good life."

In Nevada, where baccarat revenue has tripled since 2002, the game was bigger than blackjack, craps and poker combined at $1.4 billion for the 12 months ended in September. "I always knew baccarat would be big in Macau," says Las Vegas Sands Chief Executive Officer Sheldon Adelson, whose $20.4 billion fortune is due largely to the game. "Those players coming to Las Vegas are the frosting on the cake."

The cake itself may be getting a bit stale. The high-roller business in Macau has fallen for three consecutive quarters. Wynn Resorts saw casino revenue in China decline 4 percent, to $857.2 million, in the third quarter, led by a drop among VIP customers. Table game winnings from its mass market clientele rose 8.3 percent, to $211 million. Those lower rollers are the new target for gaming houses. "What has been a VIP-fueled growth engine is now transitioning into mass growth," Robert Goldstein, Las Vegas Sands' president of global gaming operations, said in October.

On the Las Vegas Strip, baccarat is still mostly an upscale pursuit. At the Mansion at MGM Grand, guests stay in 29 villas, each with its own pool. The Tuscan-themed courtyard adjoins a restaurant featuring bean curd cakes and dried squid

snacks. Nearby, gamblers with $1 million credit lines can play baccarat in six semiprivate salons.

It’s a different story across town. Station Casinos, which caters to Vegas locals, has increased the number of tables it devotes to lower-stakes versions of the game, including mini-baccarat, where players don’t get to touch the cards and minimum bets start at $10. International Game Technology, the largest maker of slot machines, is even pitching Golden Baccarat, an electronic version for customers who may be intimidated playing at tables with others. Boasts the company’s marketing material: “Neither high-stakes wagering nor special agent status is required to play.”

Skiers have chance to spend day with Rahlves at Sugar Bowl

Sugar Bowl Resort is giving away an all-inclusive adventure with Daron Rahlves, one of the most versatile and accomplished U.S. skiers.

Contestants can win a full day of fun with Rahlves just by “liking” Sugar Bowl’s Facebook page. Once on the page, click the “Enter To Win” sweepstakes tab near the top of the page.

“Any intermediate to advanced skier or snowboarder who dreams

of having their best day in Tahoe should enter," Rahlves said in a press release. "We'll ski my favorite runs, exploring the mountain's best spots."

The winner will start the day off with Rahlves over breakfast at the lodge, then head out onto the hill for some morning laps, followed by lunch.

In the afternoon, head out of bounds for fresh tracks with a backcountry guides, then finish it all off at the Sierra Vista Bar for some drinks.

The mountain adventure will be Jan. 13, subject to winner's availability.

Letter: Thank you from Operation Christmas Child

To the community,

We wanted to write to thank all of the residents of the Lake Tahoe area who generously gave of their time and resources to help impact thousands of hurting children this Christmas through Operation Christmas Child. Together we were able to pack 47,500 shoe boxes – filled with toys, school supplies and basic necessities– 8,600 of these being packed at one large packing party. Our region's shoe box gifts, joined by millions of others, are now on their way to needy children in 100 countries. During the 2012 collection season, Operation Christmas Child reached a milestone – more than 100 million children have been impacted by the power of a simple gift

since 1993.

We would also like to thank the volunteers at our local collection sites. Although all 14 of our drop-off locations are closed, there is still plenty of time to get involved through the project's "Build a Box" online tool where you can virtually pack a shoe box gift. Gifts are also received year-round at Samaritan's Purse by mailing them to 801 Bamboo Road, Boone, N.C. 28607.

Thank you again to everyone who participated in this project. A simple gift, packed with love, can communicate hope and transform the lives of children worldwide.

Sincerely,

Jodi L. Church, Operation Christmas Child greater Sacramento region

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Mammoth's Teller finishes 7th in ski cross

By USSA

TELLURIDE – Ski Cross USA's John Teller of Mammoth skied his way into the semifinals in the Audi FIS Ski Cross World Cup at Telluride, but just missed the finals finishing seventh to lead the U.S.

Slovenian Filip Flisar won a close men's final with Swiss Fanny Smith taking the women's title.

It was the first U.S. World Cup stop for the skicross tour in three years.

In the semis, Teller got boxed out with a crash ahead of him – avoiding disaster but falling back and finishing third, missing the finals.

“I had a terrible start on my first run. I don’t know if I was awake yet,” Teller said. “In the semi I was trying to avoid traffic and had a big crash in front of me.”

Douglas County libraries looking for Lego enthusiasts

Douglas County library is having a Winter Lego Building Challenge.

Use Legos to create a winter themed work of art. Bring the creation to the Minden or Zephyr Cove library between Dec. 15 and noon Jan. 3.

Lego prizes will be awarded to the first and second place winner in each age category. Children and adults may participate; one entry per person. Children 2-3 must use Duplo bricks.

Winners will be announced Jan. 15.

The challenge is sponsored by the Friends of Douglas County Library.

Complete rules and entry form are available at the Minden and Zephyr Cove libraries.

Renewed call for probe of federal Wildlife Services

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

Two U.S. congressmen are once again calling for a probe of a little-known federal agency called Wildlife Services, citing photos of animal abuse posted on the Internet by an agency employee.

“We are gravely concerned that (the) photographs … do not represent an isolated occurrence, but may reflect a deep-rooted problem within the Wildlife Services program,” wrote Reps. John Campbell, an Irvine Republican, and Peter DeFazio, an Oregon Democrat, in a Nov. 30 letter requesting a U.S. Office of Inspector General investigation.

The photos show two dogs attacking a coyote in a leg-hold trap and Wyoming-based agency trapper Jamie Olson posing with the tattered carcass of a coyote. They also show other trapped animals, dead and alive.

The photos, which began to circulate on the Web in late October, have sparked an agency review which “is still under way, underscoring that USDA takes this matter seriously,” said Wildlife Services spokeswoman Carol Bannerman.

She added: “Wildlife Services has taken this opportunity to reaffirm to employees their obligations to uphold professional standards as well as their responsibilities to the American public.”

Animal advocates are wary.

“What they address in the letter is absolutely accurate,” said

Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense, an Oregon nonprofit group. “This is not an isolated incident by any stretch of the imagination.”

The photos have stirred outrage online, where more than 43,000 people have signed a petition calling for Olson’s termination at www.change.org.

“They hope it will all just go away if they ignore it long enough,” said Camilla Fox, executive director of Project Coyote, a Bay Area group that drafted the petition with the Animal Welfare Institute. “But we are not going away and we will do all that we can to ensure that this kind of brutality against wildlife is fully exposed.”

For eight decades, Wildlife Services has specialized in trapping, shooting and poisoning predators for farmers and ranchers. More recently it has expanded into killing and controlling geese, pigeons and other species in urban areas.

“It would be good to review the whole program,” said Carter Niemeyer, a retired Wildlife Services district supervisor who contends the agency’s predator control practices are excessive and expensive.

“We live in a new society today. Forty, 50, 60 years ago, there were more livestock on the range,” Niemeyer said. “It would be a good time to examine the extent to which aggressive predator control is needed any longer.”

Federal trappers use dogs to attract coyotes or locate dens. But Niemeyer said some also train their dogs by letting them attack coyotes in traps, a practice he considers unnecessary and cruel.

The letter from Campbell and DeFazio comes almost six months after they requested a congressional oversight hearing in the wake of a Bee series earlier this year that found the agency targets wildlife in ways that are indiscriminate, at odds with

science and inhumane. No hearing was held.

Several nonprofit groups have called for action, too, including the Humane Society of the United States, which in May urged U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack to conduct a “top-to-bottom review.” Vilsack declined.

“This is the latest in a mounting portfolio of evidence that there are a lot of problems at Wildlife Services,” said Campbell, referring to the trapper’s photos.

“Several other requests we have had seem to have fallen on deaf ears,” he said. “We’re hoping these new revelations will cause someone to take notice.”

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1 person hurt in traffic collision near Cave Rock

Updated: Dec. 13 10:05am

An injury accident on the east side of the Cave Rock tunnel sent one person to the hospital and made the commute into Carson City even slower.

Patricia Schille, 48, from Carson City crossed over the center line in her Subaru, striking a maroon truck driven by 58-year-old Richard Kline of South Lake Tahoe, according to the Nevada Highway Patrol.

Schille was taken by ambulance to Barton Memorial Hospital with non-life threatening injuries.



One person was hurt Dec. 13 in a two-car crash near Cave Rock. Photo/Susan Wood

The accident occurred about 7:30am Dec. 13 on Highway 50. The vehicles involved were in the westbound lane at least an hour after the crash.

The road is icy and slippery. People were traveling about 30 mph down Spooner Summit into Carson after inching past the accident scene in the one lane that is open.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report