Red Hawk Casino murder suspect arrested

A suspect in the Red Hawk Casino killing has been arrested.

Juarez Estephen, 33, was taken into custody Dec. 3 at 10pm at a residence on Cothrin Ranch Road on the West Slope.

He is accused of killing 19-year-old Gene McArn on Nov. 21.

Deputies said they surrounded the residence and Estephen surrendered peacefully. However, while they were leaving the residence a dog attacked an El Dorado County sheriff's K-9. The aggressive dog was fatally shot.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Salt Lake City commits to seeking 2026 Winter Olympics

By Howard Berkes, NPR

Ten years after jumpstarting Mitt Romney's political career with a widely-praised Winter Olympics, officials in Utah say they're ready to do it all over again.

But there's no word on whether the unemployed Romney is interested in reprising his role as Salt Lake City Olympics chief. He would be 78, after all, when the 2026 games roll around. That's the earliest opportunity for a Winter Olympics in the United States.

“Salt Lake City and the great state of Utah are ready, willing and able to host a future Olympic Games” if the U.S. Olympic Committee pursues another winter Olympic bid, according to Gary Herbert, Utah’s Republican governor, in an announcement Monday at the Olympic Cauldron Park on the University of Utah campus.

Herbert and Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker made the decision after reviewing a report from an exploratory commission.

The commission referred to a survey finding 74 percent support for another Utah Olympics among those polled. The report also said that 40 percent of the nation’s winter Olympic athletes train at the 2002 Olympic facilities in Utah, which include an indoor speed skating oval, ski jumping ramps, a freestyle skiing training ramp and pool and a bobsled, luge and skeleton track.

The bidding process for the 2002 Olympics was tainted by a bribery scandal that involved more than $1 million in illicit gifts for members of the International Olympic Committee. The scandal prompted congressional hearings, criminal charges and a painful reform process for the IOC and the USOC.

Lingering embarrassment from the scandal may hinder Salt Lake City’s new bid. But a bigger barrier is the USOC and a pending decision on the best time to nominate a U.S. city to be the next Olympic host.

“We obviously are appreciative that the Olympic movement is strong enough to have cities interested in potentially bidding,” says Patrick Sandusky, the USOC’s spokesman. “However the USOC is focused on determining when it would be the right time to potentially bid for an Olympic Games.”

The USOC has decided that the next Olympics to possibly have an American bid is the 2024 summer games. The USOC is considering a bidding strategy and if it decides to nominate a

U.S. city for the summer Olympics, it’s not likely an American city will also bid for the winter games that follow two years later.

There are also at least three other possible U.S. bidders for the 2026 winter games: Reno-Lake Tahoe; Bozeman, Mont.; and Denver.

An American nominee would go up against other cities around the world and the IOC would make a final decision.

A USOC working group on Olympic bidding is set to report to the USOC board at a meeting scheduled for Dec. 19. But Sandusky says that the group is only providing an update and not a recommendation for a future bid.

New York failed in its bid for the 2012 Olympics and Chicago lost out in the bidding for the 2016 games. Both bids were hampered, in part, by a persistent revenue-sharing dispute between the IOC and the USOC.

That dispute was resolved in May. One of the key negotiators for the USOC was Fraser Bullock, Romney’s second-in-command during the 2002 Olympics, an adviser for Salt Lake City’s new Olympic exploratory committee and a respected figure among IOC members.

Nevada ruling on gay marriage may impact California’s Prop. 8

By Scott Shafer, KQED-TV

Four days before the U.S. Supreme Court met to ostensibly discuss California's Proposition 8, a Nevada District Court issued a ruling upholding that state's ban on same-sex marriage. The ruling by Judge Robert C. Jones, a George W. Bush appointee, holds that Nevada's law does not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th amendment.

That decision is at odds with Judge Vaughn Walker's 2010 decision that struck down Proposition 8 as a violation of both the Equal Protection and Due Process clauses. Walker also found that marriage is a fundamental right protected by the U.S. Constitution.

Lambda Legal, which represented the 16 plaintiffs in Nevada, will appeal Jones' decision to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Earlier this year, the 9th Circuit upheld Walker's decision but narrowed it considerably, declining to rule on his broader findings that marriage is a fundamental right. Unless the U.S. Supreme Court acts first, a new panel of 9th Circuit judges would consider the appeal to that Nevada ruling.

One well-placed legal observer told KQED that makes the Proposition 8 case something of a moving target for the Supreme Court.

Could it increase the likelihood that the Supreme Court will send the Proposition 8 case back to the 9th Circuit and ask them to address the fundamental questions addressed by Walker, but skirted by 9th Circuit Judge Stephen Reinhardt in his Prop. 8 decision?

The answer may come Friday when the Supreme Court is expected to issue its decision on whether it will review the Proposition 8 case.

Vail Resorts posts 1st quarter loss, slow start to ski season

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

Vail Resorts on Tuesday announced a $60.6 million loss for the August-October quarter, compared to $55.7 million in the same period last year. The resort company's total net revenue for the quarter was $116.4 million, almost identical to the revenue from the same quarter of last year.

Vail Resorts always posts a loss in its first fiscal quarter, when its ski areas are not open and summer business fades in the fall. But the company has worked to offset that loss with season pass sales, and earlier this year acquired Kirkwood ski area to bolster sales of its now-seven resort, two-state Epic Pass.

Season pass sales through Dec. 2 were up 5 percent in units and 8 percent in revenue, compared to the same period last year and adjusted as if Kirkwood was already in the company's quiver of ski areas. Pass sales for its Tahoe resorts and international pass sales are fueling the increase, even though the spike is less than expected after strong sales in the spring, said Vail Resorts chief Rob Katz. Pass sales now account for 45 percent of the company's lift ticket revenue, which reached $342.5 million in fiscal 2012.



Vail Resorts' Colorado ski areas are in need of snow. Photo/LTN file

Vail's earnings from resort operations – including its mountain and lodging businesses – was $54.5 million for the quarter, compared to $50.2 million in fiscal 2012. The company cited increased summer business at its resorts for the increased earnings, with increased group business at Keystone helping to stem first-quarter losses.

All seven of Vail Resorts' ski areas are open, with its three Lake Tahoe resorts – Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood – enjoying healthy snowpacks. The company's Colorado hills, however, are still waiting for winter. Katz said winter reservations are slightly down compared to last year but Keystone is pacing ahead of last year thanks to the resort's new Kids Ski Free program. Historically, less than half of Vail Resorts reservations are booked by early December.

"It is important to remember that it is still very early in the season with plenty of time for things to improve before the holidays," Katz said.

Still, Katz said the previous earnings announcement in September, when he offered guidance of 27 percent to 32 percent growth in resort earnings, would be revisited after the holidays and warned analysts to expect a smaller window

for resort earnings growth.

“When we issued guidance back in September, it was predicated on normal weather,” said Katz, saying he was being “upfront and transparent” with the fact that Colorado’s warm start to winter has impacted bookings. “We are seeing trends that could affect that range.”

Some analysts on Tuesday’s earning calls queried Vail’s interest in the Tuesday announcement that Denver-based KSL Capital had acquired a 24 percent share of Whistler-Blackcomb ski area, the most visited ski area in North America.

Katz said Vail Resorts avoids deals that provide the company only a minority position. Katz said the company is continuing its “aggressive approach” in looking for opportunities that help drive its season pass sale business, like last February’s $18.2 million deal for Kirkwood.

KSL, which owns Squaw Valley, could develop a Whistler-Squaw pass deal that would compete with Vail Resorts’ dominant Epic Pass. This season Aspen, Squaw, Alta and Jackson Hole ski areas joined forces with a $349 Mountain Collective pass designed to compete with Vail’s eight-hill, $649 Epic Pass.

Katz said those kind of multi-mountain pass deals helps sway skiers into realizing that the new model for skiing involves a season pass. He said that if KSL comes out with a season pass deal, that would be positive.

“That ultimately speaks to the fact that our strategy is the right strategy for creating long-term growth and stability in the industry,” Katz said. “That helps continue to increase overall season pass penetration and I’m quite comfortable that our collection of resorts and what we offer will always be competitive.”

Buyers show interest in Lake Tahoe luxury housing market

By Dan Spano

Go back in time two years, when the housing market was experiencing low sales, high volume of inventory and high interest in buying foreclosures and short sales. Skip forward to today when the housing market is seeing high sales, low volume of inventory and high interest in buying luxury homes.

News out of Reno shows that rich Californians upset about the passage of Proposition 30 (a tax on those making $250,000 or more) are looking to move to the Silver State. Agents are getting numerous calls from disgruntled taxpayers who would like the prospect of no state income tax.

Even before the passage of the proposition we had already been seeing an increase in interest of Lake Tahoe's homes priced more than $500,000 in California and Nevada. In October, closed home sales of homes priced above $650,000 rose 20 percent, and homes priced between $435,00 and $649,999 saw an increase in sales by 33 percent.

Inventory of homes in these two higher price ranges has decreased just as the lower priced homes have. There are 33.9 percent fewer homes for sale priced $650,000 and above and 38.9 percent fewer in the $435,00 to $649,999 range.

There are currently 49 homes for sale in South Lake Tahoe in this price range, with nine in escrow. There are currently 97 Nevada Lake Tahoe homes for sale in this range. Out of the 40 homes in escrow on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe, nine are homes priced $650,000 or above.

The five most expensive homes for sale on the South Shore in California:

833 Stateline Ave. $4,950,000

271 Beach Drive $4,699,000

2428 Tolteca Way $4,350,000

789 Fallen Leaf Lake Road $3,900,000

319 Beach Drive $2,895,000.

The five most expensive homes for sale on the South Shore in Nevada:

525 Highway 50 $75,000,000

1494 Highway 50 $29,500,000

18 Golf Links Road $12,995,000

1028 Skyland $12,000,000

416 Bitler $11,995,000.

Dan Spano is a real estate agent with Paradise Real Estate.

Ski report: Morning skiing bound to be the best

Get out on the mountain early today. More weather is coming today. And that means winds will be increasing.

Here is the Dec. 4 ski report.

– Curtis Fong

Parent company of Squaw-Alpine buys part of Whistler

By Kathryn Reed

KSL Capital Partners, the owners of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, now owns nearly one-quarter of Whistler Blackcomb in British Columbia.

The deal is expected to be completed today.

Denver-based KSL will acquire Intrawest's 9,092,500 common shares of Whistler Blackcomb Holdings, which amount to about 24 percent of the corporation's issued and outstanding common shares, for $12.75 per common share for almost $116 million.



Whistler is now partly owned by the same people who own Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. Photo/LTN file

Intrawest has long been a financially troubled enterprise. In fact, just before the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics folks at Intrawest threatened to not be able to stage some of the events at Whistler. That threat never materialized.

Intrawest built the village at Squaw. That development was sold to former Squaw owner Nancy Cushing in January 2010. It was then sold to KSL when it took over the Squaw Valley ski report the following November.

With the transaction comes a shakeup of the management team and board of directors.

Bill Jensen has resigned as a director and CEO of Whistler Blackcomb Holdings. Directors Wes Edens and Jonathan Ashley will be off the board when the transaction is done. Current president and COO Dave Brownlie will continue as president, but will also be the CEO and a director. Eric Resnick and Peter McDermott, both of KSL, will be directors.

In a statement to shareholders, KSL said it plans to hold the purchased shares for investment purposes. However, they added that KSL and its affiliates expect to evaluate on an ongoing basis the financial condition and prospects of Whistler Blackcomb Holdings and its interest in the corporation, and may from time to time acquire additional common shares of Whistler Blackcomb Holdings or may dispose of all or a part of their shares.

Whistler is the largest ski resort in North America.

Dinner-show combo benefits South Tahoe performing arts group

South Tahoe High School Performing Arts Booster Association's 2nd annual special fundraising Stars Night Out is Dec. 14 at 5pm.

The fundraiser dinner is $30 per person at the high school. Catering is by the STHS Culinary Arts and entertainment by the STHS music department.

"White Christmas" stage production is at 7pm. That ticket is another $10.

After dinner and at intermission, there will be a silent auction in the Tahoe Arts and Design Academy building with student-designed and themed gift baskets.

For more info or to buy a ticket, contact Madonna Doyle at (530) 545.9734 or madonnadoyle@att.net.

Competitors become partners to lure skiers, snowboarders

to both ends of Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

No ski resort is going to please all of the people, but it is possible one pass can please most of the people.

That is the hope of officials at Sierra-at-Tahoe, Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. (Alpine and Squaw have the same owners.) All three resorts are unique – in terms of terrain, amenities, and vibe. It's not about becoming a homogenous, non-descript corporate (though all are corporate entities and not indie resorts) mountain.

"What it's about is the different experiences. The differences and variety each can offer customers," Andy Wirth, who runs Squaw and Alpine, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Squaw is legendary. After all, it hosted the 1960 Winter Olympics. Terrain is steep. Cliffs are rugged. The mountain is sprawling. Alpine is definitely more laid back. It's known more for its bowls than traditional ski runs. Sierra is all about the mountain – no village necessary – exceptional terrain parks and being a place all ages can feel comfortable.



When it's windy at Squaw, those pass holders will find plenty of sheltered area at Sierra. Photo/Provided

Squaw and Sierra are home to a slew of past and current Olympians and X Gamers – think Tamara McKinney, Jonny Moseley, Julia Mancuso, Travis Cabral, Hannah Teter, and Jaime Anderson. So their mountains aren't just for the recreational skier – though that is mostly who is schussing down their slopes.

"We are partnered with two of the best resorts in the United States," John Rice, general manager of Sierra, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I have had days at Squaw Valley in terms of quality that don't compare to anything else in the U.S. It's got it all."

Rice has intimate knowledge of Squaw, having worked there early in his career. He started as an intern and left as director of all outdoor operations, which included managing a staff of 350.

What he believes Sierra will offer Squaw and Alpine pass holders is terrain parks like they aren't used to.

"I think we will see a huge sampling from their youth to see what we are about," Rice said.

The three-in-one pass is a one-year deal – at least to start with. Head honchos and money crunchers will assess how the partnership is working throughout the winter and figure out what to do for the 2013-14 year.

(Both resorts have limited deals with other ski resorts that are separate from this offer.)

While resort officials can't completely attribute the bump in season pass sales to the Nov. 12 announcement of this promotion, they know people are excited about it.

Wirth said, "Since the announcement we have seen an overwhelming response from the marketplace. We've clearly seen a lot of new customers through our season pass sales."

He said people have upgraded their passes so they can ski at Sierra.

“On opening day we had 12 Squaw people,” Rice said. This was Thanksgiving Day and Squaw was open.

For most pass holders at Squaw-Alpine, it means being able to ski at Sierra throughout the season. For most Sierra pass holders, it means access to Squaw-Alpine until Dec. 21 and after April 15.

With Squaw and Alpine during normal snow years having closing dates in May, this will mean another month of skiing (for free) for Sierra pass holders.

Having a north-south option was appealing to Rice because he had it before when Booth Creek also owned Northstar. He saw the benefit to a deal like that even if skiers are apt to predominately be at one end of the lake.

Wirth likes that Sierra attracts a sizeable crowd from the Sacramento area. Now he hopes they’ll take Interstate 80 a few times instead of Highway 50.

Once a rider is at a resort there’s more money to be spent beyond having bought the pass. There’s food, gear, rentals, lessons, preferred parking and more. That’s one way the resorts will cash in on the deal.

It’s also about the perceived value of the pass. Even if people don’t take advantage of skiing the multiple resorts, the possibility always exists.

Gardnerville couple doesn’t show up after leaving Sac area

By C. Johnson, News-10

Ground and aerial searches have not turned up any signs of a missing couple who left Citrus Heights last Thursday for Gardnerville.

Roderick Paul Clifton, 44, of Citrus Heights/Gardnerville and Paula Lane, 46, of Gardnerville were reported missing by relatives when they didn’t answer their cellphones and didn’t return to Nevada by that night, according to Citrus Heights police Detective Sgt. Lee Harrington.

Considering the stormy weather and the couple’s usual route from Highway 50 to Highway 89 to Highway 88, police classified the missing couple as at-risk and notified California and Nevada law enforcement.

Over the weekend, Herrington said searchers with the El Dorado, Alpine County and Douglas County sheriff’s departments, the California Highway Patrol and relatives and friends of the couple retraced the route. Monday, the CHP flew a helicopter over El Dorado and Alpine counties. Searchers also used a snowmobile to look along roads closed by snow.

Herrington said no sign of the pair was found and their credit card and cellphone records do not show activity.

They drive a dark blue, 1989 Jeep Cherokee, California license plate number 4VPB789.

Anyone with information about Clifton and Paul is urged to contact Citrus Heights police dispatchers at (916) 727.5500.