Ski report: Calm before the storm



Weather will be moving in on Wednesday and is expected to stay in the Lake Tahoe Basin through the weekend.

Here is the Nov. 27 ski report.

– Curtis Fong

Opinion: Obamacare is going to cost patients

By Peter Weiss

Obama won, Obamacare is the law, and, as my wife says, I will just have to learn to dance to a new song.

Now, don't get me wrong, Obamacare is awful. Forget all the "free stuff" it provides. Children covered on their parents' plan until 26 years of age? A scam, making young adults – excuse me, children – pay for complete, comprehensive health insurance when all they need and should pay for is major catastrophe insurance. Then there is the "annual " or "preventative" exam, which according to Obamacare is "free."

You gotta love this stuff. I wish I had the chutzpah of the people who wrote Obamacare. What they did not tell you, and I

am, is that it covers absolutely nothing more than the bare minimum.

I have now posted a notice in my office and each exam room stating exactly what Obamacare will cover for those yearly visits. Remember Obama promised this as a free exam – no co-pay, no deductible, no charge. That's fine and dandy if you are healthy and have no complaints. However, we are obligated by law to code specifically for the reason of the visit. An annual exam is one specific code; you can not mix this with another code, say, for rectal bleeding. This annual visit covers the exam and "discussion about the status of previously diagnosed stable conditions." That's the exact wording under that code – insurance will not cover any new ailment under that code.

If you are here for that annual exam, you will not be covered if you want to discuss any new ailment or unstable condition. I cannot bait and switch to another code – that's illegal. We, the physicians, are audited all the time and can lose our license for insurance fraud.

You, the patient, will then have to make a decision.

Do you want your "free" yearly exam, or do you want to pay for a visit which is coded for a particular, new problem? You can have my "free" exam if you only discuss what Obamacare wants me to discuss.

This happened to me personally, as a patient, when I went for my physical. It is the law. If you are complaining of a new problem, then you have to reschedule, since Obamacare is very clear as to what is covered and what is not. Obamacare – intentionally – makes it as difficult to be seen and taken care of as possible.

Patients can be very tricky. I have had patients make an "annual" exam, only to want to discuss and be treated for another ailment. I can't do it.

Peter Weiss is director and founder of the Rodeo Drive Women's Health Center. He is also assistant clinical professor of OB/GYN at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. He was health care adviser to John McCain's presidential campaign.

Dental van returning to South Lake Tahoe

The El Dorado Children's Dental Van will be in South Lake Tahoe at the Al Tahoe Center from Dec. 3-21.

The Dental Van's primary focus is to serve children up to age 5 with Medi-Cal and pregnant women with Medi-Cal.

Children ages 1-5 should see a dentist for an oral health check up at least every year, and ideally every six months.

Call Julie Day at (916) 836.7174 with questions or to schedule an appointment for a child on the dental van.

Science institute for high school students accepting applications

High school students interested in science have until Jan. 4 to apply for the Youth Science Institute program.

This afterschool program is offered on Wednesdays from 4-6pm at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences in Incline Village beginning Jan. 30 and running through May 22.

UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center and Space Science for Schools will be hosting the seventh annual Youth Science Institute. This 16-week program is for high school students in grades 9 through 11 who have an interest in exploring different scientific disciplines. Students will conduct science experiments and activities including stream monitoring, fish dissection, earth science geology hikes, astrobiology, biochemistry, green building demonstrations, lake science on the UC Davis Research Vessel John Le Conte and more.

Students will also receive opportunities for paid internships, fulfill community service hours, and receive letters of recommendation.

Eligible students must have a minimum GPA of 3.0, and have a commitment to the program. All applicants will go through an interview process and accepted students will need to pay tuition of $250.

Send applications or any questions to Kylee Wilkins at knwilkins@ucdavis.edu or (775) 881.7560, ext. 7474.

Additional details and the application are available online.

Hwy. 50 slope expected to be secured next week

By Kathryn Reed

The nearly two-year grind of construction on Highway 50 just below Spooner Summit on the Tahoe side is about to come to an end.

“That project has a grading season exception based on the concern a serious hazard could occur if the project were not allowed to be completed,” Kristi Boosman, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That hazard is the hillside winding up in the middle of the highway.

Usually dirt is not supposed to be moved in the Lake Tahoe Basin after Oct. 15 per TRPA rules. Those rules are in place so added sediment won’t flow into the lake during the wet season.



Slope stabilization along Highway 50 in Douglas County should be completed next week. Photos/Susan Wood

However, with this in part being an erosion control project and it not possible to stop work without leaving the hillside to the south in jeopardy, work has continued well past the first substantial snow. And while heavy rain at lake level and snow at the higher elevations are in the forecast starting Wednesday, work is not expected to be wrapped up until the end of next week.

During the storm earlier this month that had snow at the summit being counted by feet instead of inches, the commute between Tahoe and Carson City was even more gnarly than usual. This is because one lane of the highway headed east is closed with all the construction work. It was bumper to bumper with low visibility and oncoming traffic inches away.

“It’s definitely not an ideal situation. We can’t just remove the barrier and leave the slope exposed. It’s just one of those things. We have to get it done,” Scott MacGruder with the Nevada Department of Transportation told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The work took longer than expected because as the slope was being stabilized the crews realized the hillside was much weaker than anticipated, MacGruder said. This meant more reinforcement was needed, which took more time. He said geologists have been on-site to give input.



Heavy equipment and piles of dirt have been the norm for months along Spooner Summit.

“Sometimes you get sloughing that is unforeseen,” MacGruder said. “You can’t make up time.”

On Nov. 28 an inspector from TRPA is scheduled to assess the work.

Granite Construction is doing the work. The $3.6 million project started in 2011. In all, it included about five miles on Highway 50 from Cave Rock to nearly the junction of Highway 28.

Mammoth settles suit with developer; bankruptcy a done deal

By Steven Church, Bloomberg

Mammoth Lakes won dismissal of its bankruptcy case after settling the $43 million development lawsuit that forced the city to seek court protection from its creditors.

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Thomas Holman in Sacramento this month signed an order ending the case about four months after the town became the second of three in California to file bankruptcy this year.

Community leaders put the town into bankruptcy in July after being ordered by a state court to pay $43 million to its biggest creditor, Mammoth Lakes Land Acquisition. The town

announced a settlement with the company the following month, and in September it asked Holman to dismiss the case.

The settlement allows Mammoth Lakes “to resolve numerous significant creditor issues and will provide for the town’s prompt exit from bankruptcy,” the city said in court papers filed in September.

Details of the accord weren’t filed in the bankruptcy case. Ending it voluntarily allows the city to avoid paying lawyers and financial advisers to develop and win court approval of a plan to adjust its debts.

Mammoth Lakes, a ski resort community of 8,200, has an annual budget of $19 million. It entered bankruptcy saying it couldn’t afford to pay the developer.

The company sued the town in 2006 and accused it of breaching a development agreement allowing the company to build homes, retail space, hangars and other structural improvements near the Mammoth Yosemite Airport. Terrence Ballas, who holds the development rights at issue in the lawsuit, is part of the settlement, the city said.

Prescribed fires set for South and West Shores

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will continue prescribed fire operations in the Cold Creek area near South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 27.

Crews expect to burn 2 acres, conditions permitting.

Operations in the Cold Creek area are scheduled to last one day.

In addition, prescribed fire operations will begin Nov. 28 in the Ward Canyon area south of Ward Creek on the West Shore. Crews expect to burn as many acres as possible before the predicted rainstorm moves into the Lake Tahoe Basin. Operations in Ward Canyon are expected to last one day, weather permitting.

Residents and visitors can expect to see smoke from these prescribed fire project areas. The Forest Service strives to minimize the impacts of smoke on local communities. Smoke-sensitive residents should consider staying indoors and keeping doors, windows and outside vents closed.

To directly receive prescribed fire updates, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

DiMatteo pleads not guilty; counsel change possible

Gino DiMatteo pleaded not guilty to all charges Nov. 26 during his arraignment in federal court in Sacramento.

The South Lake Tahoe resident was indicted on three drug charges on Nov. 21.

The bail review scheduled for Monday was postponed because DiMatteo may be having a change in lawyers. In the meantime, DiMatteo remains behind bars.

Attorney Rob Woelfel has declared a possible conflict of interest. Woelfel was not available for comment so it is unknown what the conflict may be.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

UC Davis scientist to talk about state of Lake Tahoe

Lake Tahoe: State of the Lake Presentation with Geoff Schladow of the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center is Dec. 13.

The report will include a summary of how natural variability, long term change and human activity have affected the lake's clarity, physics, chemistry and biology over the previous year. The data shown will reveal a unique record of trends and patterns – the result of natural forces and human actions that operate at time scales ranging from days to decades.

A no-host bar opens at 5:30pm. The presentation begins 6pm.

Cost is $5.

For more information, contact Heather Segale at (775) 881.7562 or hmsegale@ucdavis.edu.

Snowmobile group to meet

The Tahoe Sierra Snowmobile Club is having its first meeting of the season on Dec. 6 at Tep’s restaurant in South Lake Tahoe.

U.S. Forest Service reps for the Lake Tahoe Basin as well as Hope Valley have been invited to give an update on the Forest Service Plan as well as what areas are open to riding this season.

The meeting begins at 6pm.