Scary movie classics worth watching multiple times

By Howie Nave

Oh, how we love Halloween up here in Lake Tahoe – elevating it to holiday status. And just like Christmas, what would any traditional holiday be without those classic movies encapsulating the spirit of that holiday?

And not just classic mind you, but movies that are cheesy fun, which can only be acceptable during Halloween.

My love for all things scary dates back when I was just a kid staying up late on a Saturday night watching "Creature Features" on KTVU Channel 2 (before it became a Fox affiliate) growing up in the Bay Area. It was my first introduction seeing the likes of Lon Chaney Jr., Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Vincent Price in those classic black and white flicks. There are so many good ones (and a few great ones, too) and your taste obviously may differ from mine, but here are a few of my personal favs not just from back then, but some recent horror flicks that still generate a scream when I least expect it.

Many of these I have on DVD and when the world gets weird I'll close the curtains, pop in a disc and crank it up to cover my screams just in case anybody might be nearby.

Halloween, R (1978)

What better way to kick off any Halloween Horror Fest than the namesake that would spawn more than 20 sequels? "Halloween" is director-writer John Carpentaer's horror masterpiece and introduced us to the new Queen of Scream, Jamie Lee Curtis long before she was regulated via Activia. "Halloween" set the sci-fi horror standard in which other movies would soon copy.

Starring the late, great Donald Pleasence as Dr. Sam Loomis, “Halloween” had it all didn’t it? A psychotic murderer The Shape (later to be known as Michael Myers in subsequent sequels) who loved to slash his victims, a terrifying music that sticks to your soul and by far one of the most frightening experiences I have ever had in a theater. There were some equally scary sequels. but nothing that captured that first scream as the original.



The Cabin in the Woods, R (2012)

As a fan of horror movies and one who has pretty much “seen it all” when it comes to predicting the storyline (I can usually tell you what’s going to happen within the first 15 minutes of the feature) it’s refreshing when a movie comes long like “The Cabin in the Woods” that isn’t as formulaic as one would expect. Let’s just that you’re not going see this one coming. Oh sure, the movie starts out with the requisite college students, each with its own stereotypical character centered on a cabin where horrific things are happening. But wait, these undead wanting to kill the living (by the way why do they always crave college-aged students?) don’t just show up randomly. They appear to be controlled by scientists. Say what? Yes. Beneath the cabin is a basement, and beneath that basement are where Richard Jenkins and Bradley Whitford hash out their dastardly schemes, but what’s in it for them? I ain’t tellin’, but there is a surprise ending that reminded me

a little of “The Hunger Games” meets John Carpenter’s “The Thing”. Survival of the fittest, but when those controlling the outcome are themselves upstaged. That’s when things get really interesting. “The Cabin in the Woods” was produced and co-written by Joss Whedon (creator of “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and “Angel”) and directed by Drew Goddard (writer of “Cloverfield”).

Alien, R (1979)

To this day when you witness that alien bursting out of John Hurt’s stomach, you know that director Ridley Scott’s terrifying flick has you captivated. “Alien” and its sequel “Aliens” (1986) are still two of the better sci-fi horror flicks out there even though their version of high-tech by today’s standards looks antiquated. The aliens are still some of the creepiest and scariest I have seen in a movie, which by the way were based on the work of H.R. Giger (for which he received an Academy Award under Best Visual Effects category).

The Exorcist, R (1973)

It would forever typecast its little known actress Linda Blair. After this flick it was tough for Blair to get any real serious roles forever typecast as that possessed girl who spit up pea soup. Of course it was supposed to be barf but soon everyone found out it was pea soup and then people would always imitate her making a mess. One of the scariest and psychologically tinged movies ever, “The Exorcist” caused a sensation when it first premiered, including religious protestors that of course only made me want to see it more. And yes, there were countless sequels and prequels, but none of them holds up to the mother of all satanic movies.

Hellraiser, R (1987)

Clive Barker knows a thing or two when it comes to messing with people’s minds and this to me is one of his best in that department and one of the most original, too. Originally

titled, “Sadomasochists from Beyond the Grave,” Barker (who wrote, directed and produced) must have been on some sort of medication (or stopped taking it) when he came up with this classic horror gem. The character of Pinhead, the lead Cenobite, is truly one of the more original icons in horror. You’ll never play with a Rubik’s Cube again if you haven’t seen this classic. Go ahead, I dare ya!

The Grudge, R (2004)

Based on Takashi Shimizu’s Japanese movie, “Ju-On: The Grudge”, the American version is just as good. Why? Because someone out there in Hollywood was smart enough to let Takashi Shimizu do a remake from his own movie. How about that? The original creator gets to do his own work and wow-the results are impressive. Starring Sarah Michelle Gellar as an American nurse living and working in Tokyo, she discovers (and is exposed) to a mysterious curse that causes a person to experience an uncontrollable rage before taking their life. The part that still creeps me out is that of images of zombied looking kids in this waterlogged black and white image with freaky noises that stay with you long after the movie has ended. You’ll never want to enter an uninhabited house again unless accompanied by an army of eyewitnesses.

Shaun of the Dead, R (2004)

Got a have a funny horror flick and nothing says, funny better than a Simon Pegg movie, especially when it involves zombies. The British horror comedy, “Shaun of the Dead” makes scary sexy. By treating the genre as a joke Pegg gets plenty of mileage with his dry wit making this satire one of the best comedy/horror one of the funniest I’ve ever seen outside of “An American Werewolf in London”. When zombies start descending on London the media declare it “Z-Day” in the U.K. Pegg, who wrote the screenplay with director Edgar Wright, plays the title character, a hapless 29-year-old clerk who, with his best friend Ed (Nick Frost) plot a plan to make a

safe exit along with Shaun's on-again, off-again sweetheart, Liz (Kate Ashfield). The movie also stars Bill Nighy. Trust me, this is one of the funniest movies I've ever seen with regard to brain-eating zombies.

The Thing, R (1982)

Hands down one of the best remakes ever. How good? Well, there was a prequel that came out earlier this year that takes you up to the 1982 remake – that's how good. I first saw this as a double feature in the theater (yes kids, they used to let you see two movies sometimes for the price of one) not knowing what to expect, but was literally blown out of my seat when I did see it. It was that good. Starring a bearded Kurt Russell as the head of an American Antarctic expedition, "The Thing" still boasts some of the best special effects ever and has an all-star stellar cast that includes Wilford Brimley, T.K. Carter, David Clennon, Keith David, Richard A. Dysart and Charles Hallahan. Directed by the master himself, John Carpenter, you'll be grabbing anything when you see what happens when an alien being replicates itself into anything starting with huskies and moving on up from there. Every movie mentioned so far has had a sequel or two and yet this one is the one that I wanted to see a sequel but alas, Carpenter felt otherwise.

Paranormal Activity, R (2007)

The original was good, but and I could see having a sequel was inevitable – but three sequels? Someone went to the horror well a little too often and that's why global warming is not a myth. The original was good because of its low-budget quality that made it appear so real with its single-camera, rapid-movement-shot in the first-person style. With each subsequent sequel the budget got bigger as the quality depreciated. "Paranormal Activity" works in much the same way another very low-budget flick, "The Blair Witch Project." The tension is just as shaky as those hand-held cameras are. You know the

story is good when you don’t require any big names to carry your picture. Of course that makes it easier for the filmmakers to control their young actors lest they want to be killed off and not be in another sequel.

Poltergeist, PG-13 (1982)

Would you believe that back then executive producer (and writer) Steven Spielberg had to lobby to give this movie a PG rating? The film was originally given an R rating so he (along with the filmmakers) protested successfully and got a PG rating (the PG-13 rating did not exist at the time). This was the movie that gave us the immortal line, “They’re baaaaaack” that was uttered by Heather O’Rourke, the cute little blonde who played Carol Anne, daughter of Craig T. Nelson and JoBeth Williams in the movie. The movie is a stark reminder of what happens when developers in their zeal to construct urban sprawl forget to move bodies from a cemetery they are building on. The movie took on a life of its own with real life actors dying in each production. The eldest daughter in the movie (played by Dominique Dunne) was killed in real life by her boyfriend upon completion of the first film. Actor Julian Beck died of stomach cancer after shooting the second film and actress Heather O’Rourke died of a mystery case of intestinal stenosis shortly before completion of the third film. Also, many cast members’ careers have suffered after appearing in the films. The ghosts at first appear friendly by moving objects around the house to the amusement of everyone, but then they turn nasty and start to terrorize the family before they “kidnap” Carol Anne. Still a great scare factor to this day, “Poltergeist” has a great story and great effects that rival only that of “The Thing”.

Psycho, PG (1960)

The one movie that would forever make showers a scary experience (if you’re a woman) and would brand those of the male species who were too close to their mom a horror just

waiting to unfold. Think of it as a momma's boy becoming momma. Leave it to Alfred Hitchcock to deliver one of the truly frightening masterpieces of all time. Phoenix office worker Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) is fed up with the way life has treated her. She has to meet her lover Sam (John Gavin) at lunch breaks and they cannot get married because Sam has to give most of his money away in alimony payments. One Friday afternoon Marion is entrusted to bank $40,000 by her employer. Seeing the opportunity to take the money and run, Marion leaves town and heads toward Sam's California store. Tired after the long drive and caught in a storm, she gets off the main highway and pulls into The Bates Motel. The motel is managed by a quiet young man called Norman (Anthony Perkins) who seems to be dominated by his mother. An interesting piece of trivia: After the film's release, Hitchcock received an angry letter from the father of a girl who refused to have a bath after seeing "Les Diaboliques" (also on this list), and now refused to shower after seeing "Psycho." Hitchcock sent a note back to the father simply saying, "Send her to the dry cleaners."

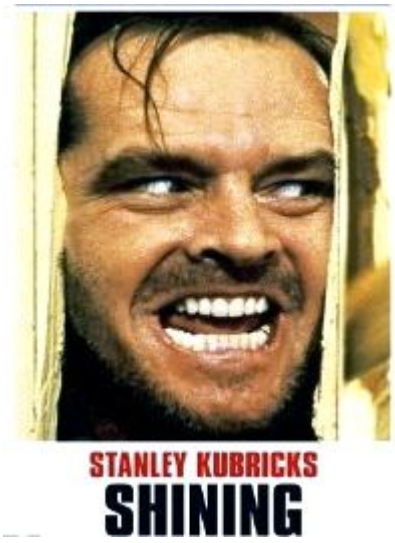
A Nightmare on Elm Street, R (1984)

Outside of John Carpenter, Clive Barker and George Romero, I kind of know I'm going to pretty much enjoy my scare factor when I see horror master Wes Craven's name attached to it. And with "A Nightmare on Elm Street" I wasn't disappointed. One could argue that many a subsequent horror flick borrowed their chops (no pun intended) from Craven's original "Elm Street". High school kids are being killed off in a small town and nobody knows why. Enter Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) playing detective who traces the cause to Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund), a disfigured bum in a slouch hat who sporting knives for fingernails long before Wolverine made it sexy. Still holds up as classic slasher that I think horror fans continue to hold in high esteem in part because it comes across as low-budget and with an intelligent (and original)

script featuring some pretty impressive newcomers such as Johnny Depp, Ronee Blakley and Amanda Wyss with Craven himself directing.

28 Days Later, R (2003)

Who would have guessed that the same guy who directed that incredible montage at this year's 2012 Summer Olympics in London would also be the same chap who brought us one of the more original movies centered on a deadly virus. There's just something about movies revolving around a deadly virus that creep me out the most. Is it airborne? Can I get it from shaking somebody's hand? Will it kill me slowly and is there a host to help find us a cure? Whichever it might be director Danny Boyle plays on that scenario (and more) combining the terror of its after effects and the tried and true zombie story. The movie also takes a look at what might happen if we experiment on things that go unchecked. It's that unknown element that can be the scariest psychologically. Londoner Jim (Cillian Murphy) wakes up in a hospital room all alone. No one else is in the entire hospital. He puts his clothes on, walks out into the empty streets. He does meet other survivors, but how long will they survive? Not just that, but it's the manner in which they die that will make you writhe.



The Shining, R (1980)

The pairing of director Stanley Kubrick with Jack Nicholson's cold and frightening character (also named Jack) defined this

movie and the career of both. “The Shining” introduces the viewer to Jack Torrance (Nicholson), a man who plans to spend the winter in solitude with his wife, Wendy (Shelley Duvall), and son, Danny (Danny Lloyd), as jack becomes the caretaker of the Overlook Hotel just as workers are shutting it down for the winter. Chef Dick Hallorann (the classic Scatman Crothers) is one of the crew but the movie centers almost entirely around Jack and his slow, deterioration into madness writing the novel that is page after page of the same line. For me it’s a psychological mind thriller at its best and a movie that would label Shelley Duvall as the Queen of Scream and one that every young actress would have to emulate in order to be considered as the leading lady for any horror flick.

Night Of The Living Dead, R (1968)

If this movie were made today, it would be considered tame compared to the current crop of gore flicks out there. “Night of the Living Dead” is a true classic (and always will be) that definitely deserves its place in the Smithsonian Institute of Horror. The movie is still quite effective shot in glorious black and white. I had the rare privilege of seeing this film in a theater at a midnight screening. The audience found themselves screaming and jumping as I did in certain parts of the film. It’s raining weird rays from outer space that causes the dead to awaken from their graves to feed on human flesh for sustenance. After seeing this movie originally on television, I never slept near my sister again when camping with the family.

Diabolique, R (1955)

This movie (original French title “Les Diaboliques”) centers around a nasty headmaster having an affair on his wife who, as it turns out treats his mistress just as badly as he treats his wife. In a twisted three-way the two women conspire to do

in he headmaster Robert Bloch, author of “Psycho,” called this his favorite horror movie.

The Fly, R (1958)

You know a movie is good when a generation of fans who creeped out on the original decide that when they become filmmakers in the next generation to try and top the original. They don’t. Tough to make a better one when you have Vincent Price in the original. When a scientist experiments with matter transference and a fly accidentally becomes part of that matter well, let’s just say if you’ve never seen this classic you’ll never look at flies the same way again.

Seven, R (1995)

For one thing I liked seeing Brad Pitt in a role where even he looked scared. David Fincher’s “Seven” stars Pitt as a rookie detective with veteran detective Lt. William Somerset (played by Morgan Freeman) tracking a serial killer who gruesomely kills for world’s ignorance of the seven deadly sins. It gets really good when they get into the killer’s mind and start thinking as he does.

Jaws, PG (1975)

This was the movie that literally put a young Steven Spielberg on the cinematic map. If you think the PG rating is too tame, you’re correct. But back then they hadn’t come up with the PG-13 rating, which is what this should be if seen today. This is one of the best psychological horror-adventure flicks I’ve seen in a while. The idea of a lone, killer shark bent on eating people in a vacation resort community just begs buffet specials. That coupled with the signature shark music of John Williams makes this an all time fav of mine and even to this day I ask myself, “Is it safe to go into the water?”

Zombieland, R (2009)

In much the same way that “Shaun of the Dead” poked fun in London “Zombieland” is a post-apocalyptic America where the undead have already pretty much taken over the entire country. The trick now is how one survives and stay (literally) one step ahead of them. With a cast that includes “The Social Network” lead, Jesse Eisenberg, sexy Emma Stone and zombie hunter Woody Harrelson, “Zombieland” is a laugh out riot using anything handy, even a banjo to rid the world of the walking dead. There’s a cool cameo too of Bill Murray, playing himself, which was unexpected and just added even more laughs to an already soon-to-be-classic. Director Ruben Fleischer mixes just the right amount of gore, glee, fright and slapstick to create what is now a must-see every Halloween.

Honorable Mentions:

There are so many other flicks that make Halloween worth celebrating include the original “Saw” (2004), “Basket Case” (1982), “The Omen” (1976), “House of Wax” (not the Paris Hilton version but the original 1953 rendition with Vincent Price), “The Haunting” (1963), “The Blair Witch Project” (1999), “The Birds” (1963)“Scanners” For campy horror fun you must see “An American Werewolf in London” (1981) and “Scream” (1996), “Dracula” (1931).

Howie Nave is host/emcee/manager of The Improv at Harveys. You can hear him Monday-Friday 6 to 10am on KRLT FM-93.9.

League putting on Halloween party

The League to Save Lake Tahoe is teaming up with local progressive rockers Groovebox to stage a Halloween Party all about keeping it blue.

Prizes will be awarded for best overall costume and most creative blue costume.

Other attractions include raffles and a special Halloween photo booth.

A portion of proceeds will help support the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

Show starts at 8pm Oct. 31, $10 cover, must be at least 18 to attend.

The event is at the American Legion in South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Big Bird is a Republican

By James Poniewozik, Time

I wasn't surprised that during the Oct. 3 presidential debate in Denver, Mitt Romney pledged to defund the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). For Republicans, PBS threats are as reliable as Ken Burns reruns during pledge drives. But I was surprised by how he said it: "I like PBS. I love Big Bird … [But] I'm not going to keep on spending money on things to

borrow money from China to pay for."

That's right: Romney called Big Bird out, pulled his big yellow weave. Ordinarily it's PBS's defenders who bring up Big Bird – and Elmo, Arthur and Curious George–to emotionalize the debate, to make it about protecting your kids' favorite cuddly animals. PBS cutters usually want to talk about anything but Big Bird: liberal bias, waste, coastal elites taking your money to foist their values on you. Sesame Street, they argue, will be fine, because it makes more off licensing than the Count can calculate.

By citing Big Bird – as he has before on the stump – Romney put the argument on his opponents' favored terms. A Fired Big Bird Twitter account sprang up, and the Muppet himself responded to Romney on "Saturday Night Live". At a rally, Barack Obama quipped that Romney would "get rid of regulations on Wall Street, but he's going to crack down on Sesame Street."

Maybe Romney was trying to give austerity an empathetic face. ("You can kill things and still like them," GOPer Rick Santorum helpfully explained.) But focusing the debate on the fate of one flightless avian muddies the real issue. No, Romney's cuts wouldn't kill Big Bird. But they would deeply hurt a program, public TV, that in fact exemplifies his party's values and serves his voters.

To understand why, you first have to look at how public broadcasting works–which is pretty much the opposite of how most people assume. A CNN poll in 2011 asked Americans what percentage of the federal budget the CPB gets; the median guess was 5 percent ($173 billion) a year. In the 2013 budget, it actually gets $445 million – that's million, brought to you by the letter m – in a federal budget of nearly $4 trillion. And where does that money go? Not, mostly, to PBS headquarters. Commercial TV is top-down: NBC collects the money and programs the series. In public TV, local stations

make (and buy) the shows, set their own schedules and, by law, receive most of the public money.

So “defunding PBS” wouldn’t defund PBS. It’s stations in poorer rural areas that would be devastated, maybe killed. Coastal elites like the Romneys and Obamas will still have Downton Abbey; Cookie Monster will not want for chocolate chips. But good luck finding a channel on which to watch him—and literacy programs and other services—in the low-population heartland regions that reliably turn GOP red every four years. As with interstate highways, it’s one more way the same states that vote for small government get back more in federal spending than they contribute in taxes.

There’s the irony in all this: lots of Republicans rely on Big Bird. And Big Bird is in many ways a Republican. That is, in its finances and ideals, public broadcasting is about as little-c conservative a government program as you can find.

For starters, it’s frugal. We get a national TV and radio network for the kind of money Oprah has under her couch cushions. Progressives might prefer a lavish all-public program like the BBC – the single-payer plan of TV – but PBS uses its seed money to leverage corporate and charitable dollars. If PBS were a space program or a school system, conservatives would love that. It’s also decentralized: major decisions are made locally, just as Romney would have with health care.

And for all the culture warriors against it, public TV is proudly, dorkily family-values-friendly, an Edwardian hemline in a sea of booty shorts. If liberals love PBS’s pluralism, cultural conservatives love that their kids can watch free TV without being bombed with ads and inappropriate content.

Frankly, cutting PBS funds might be better for me personally. Here in rich, evil, liberal New York City, I’d still have public TV, now free from political pressure to be safe and

bland. And I could keep the buck and change in taxes that I spend to offer PBS to the heartland. Screw you, South Dakota. You're on your own!

But public TV is for all the public, which is why it's amazing we're fighting over one federal program that manages to be cheap and bipartisanly popular. You may think that this election is about how to best serve "the 100 percent" or that it's about using money wisely in tough times. Either way, PBS is the definition of educational TV.

Apple Hill growers not complaining about economy

By Kathryn Reed

CAMINO – People want their apples and they are willing to drive for them.

Parking lots were full Friday in Apple Hill and apple treats of all kinds were being consumed.

Granted, many of the license plates were from Nevada on Oct. 26 because a slew of workers had the day off in celebration of Nevada Day.

"Our Nevada customers are very loyal. They appreciate fresh produce," Christa Campbell with Rainbow Orchards said.



Apple Hill orchards offer numerous varietals at their farms. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Still, those in the apple business say the economy has not hurt them except in terms of growth being slower.

“I keep expecting the economy to affect us, but business keeps getting better,” Denver Dale Martin of Denver Dan’s told *Lake Tahoe News*. “People want fresh produce and you can’t get any fresher than picking it off the tree.”

Campbell said, “In the last couple years we’ve noticed a lot of people from Tahoe.”

In part, she attributes this to Rainbow Orchards participating in the Sample the Sierra food and wine event, which is now on Labor Day weekend in South Lake Tahoe. One year she sent blueberries to a chef and another year blackberries. She thinks it was 60 pounds of her Triple Crown blackberries that were turned into a dessert.

“People know we’re here because of Sample the Sierra,” Campbell said.

She added that gas prices have not slowed the stream of cars into the area.

It’s Mother Nature who makes or breaks a season.

The storm that brought snow to Tahoe this week dropped rain on the West Slope. This time of year all the wet stuff does is

wash away the dust. It also slows the harvest because tractors tend to sink in the mud.

Campbell said the goal is to have the harvest wound up by the first hard freeze; otherwise the fruit won't be any good.

Apple varieties ripen at different times. Pink Ladies were just being brought into the selling area Friday afternoon. Campbell said this has become a favorite of consumers because they are a little sweet and a little tart, anything can be done with them, and they can last until June if refrigerated.

Cold weather is good for apples – it helps with the color, according to Scott Larsen, who is one of several family members working at Larsen Apples.

People are all over his property – some in the warehouse trying to figure out which of the nearly 20 types of apples to buy, others are enjoying lunch.

For the previous two years, Larsen only capitalized on about 10 to 20 percent of the crop because of the weather. A cold snap in the spring struck his Pippins and Pink Ladies. Still, this year's harvest is substantially better than the last two falls, with 60 to 70 percent of the apples making it to market.

One thing he said that is hard to keep up with is when the consumer catches wind of a varietal and it becomes the trendy thing to have. It's not like trees can be planted and immediately they produce the latest fad.

Martin of Denver Dan's says the same thing. The 80-year-old has been in the apple business for 50 years. While he likes to grow traditional apples (Macintosh, Jonathan, Goldens) on his farm where the customer does the picking, he said this year it's Honey Crisp people are looking for, while last year it was Pink Ladies.

It’s Golden Delicious that does the best at Larsen and Grandpa’s Cellar because they are good for eating, good for cooking and have a bit of a shelf life.

The aroma wafting from Grandpa’s Cellar is overwhelming – in a good way. All things apple are being baked – and all from scratch.

Pat Scheuner opens the freezers – pies, struddles, turnovers, dumplings – are stacked high. These delicacies, more so than bushels of apples, are what keep the cash registers ringing. People come with coolers to haul the goods away to be baked at a later date.

“Our business is up this year,” Scheuner shared with *Lake Tahoe News*.

She said one thing that is rare is this growing region adheres to strict quality assurances. Folks from the Apple Hill Agriculture Commission test for sugar and juiciness of the apples. No apples are picked until they are ripe.

“You won’t get an apple that doesn’t have flavor and juice,” Scheuner said. “We have standards. That is pretty unique.”

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Notes:

• Each orchard has different hours of operation. Many are open through Thanksgiving weekend, and then weekends only until the end of the year.

• Apple Hill Growers Association website has more information.

• Not all orchards have the same types of apples, some sell food already made, some sell food to take with you.

• Some orchards let you to pick the apples, while most have picked them.

• Many places have other items for sale – like pears, pumpkins and apple cider.

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South Tahoe council candidate financial forms released

The second set of campaign financial documents for the South Lake Tahoe City Council race have been released.

Click on a candidate’s last name to call up the form:

Austin Sass

JoAnn Conner

Hal Cole

Bruce Grego.

Fire at Genoa eatery destroys kitchen

A fire at the Genoa Station Grill and Bar on Oct. 26 caused about $75,000 in damage.

The fire broke out in the kitchen area and was contained to the kitchen and attic area. The cause of the fire is still under investigation, but arson has been ruled out, according to Douglas County sheriff's deputies. No injuries were reported.

The fire was reported just before 9am Friday.

Genoa Station, next to the town hall, is one of the newest businesses in this Nevada town.

Approximately 18 firefighters responded to battle the fire, while Douglas County Sheriff's and Nevada Highway Patrol assisted with traffic control.The road that runs through Genoa was closed for approximately two hours.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

More chipmunks on South Shore found to have plague

Two more chipmunks on the South Shore have tested positive for plague. This brings the total number to three this fall.

One of the chipmunks was found in the Tallac Historic Site area and one was near the U.S. Forest Service Taylor Creek Visitor Center.

The chipmunks were tested as part of a surveillance effort initiated by health officials after learning earlier this month that another chipmunk had tested positive for plague at the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center in the Taylor Creek area.

A total of 41 rodents (38 chipmunks and three squirrels) were tested as part of the most recent surveillance effort. Interim El Dorado County Health Officer Robert Hartmann, in a press release said, the surveillance test results are not unexpected, but do warrant precautions and notification to the public.

Warning signs will continue to be posted in the affected areas and surrounding campgrounds throughout the coming months.

“Risk of transmission is significantly reduced during the winter months because rodents and their fleas are less active when the weather is cold,” Hartmann said.

Plague is an infectious bacterial disease that is spread by squirrels, chipmunks and other wild rodents and their fleas. People can become infected through close contact with infected animals or infected fleas. Plague can be prevented by avoiding contact with these wild rodents and their fleas, and by keeping pets away from wild rodents and their burrows.

To report a sick or dead rodent, contact El Dorado County Vector Control at (530) 573.3197.

El Dorado County joins fight against fire fee

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to join the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association class-action lawsuit seeking to overturn the state fire fee.

“Hundreds of residents have contacted the county to voice their frustration about the fire tax,” Supervisor John Knight said in a press release. “The Board of Supervisors can’t sit idly by while the state is running a legalized extortion scheme on rural residents.”

El Dorado County residents living in the “state responsibility area” began receiving fire fee bills in late September. The fee is $150 per habitable structure within the state responsibility area. A $35 discount applies if the structure is also within the boundaries of a local fire protection district, like Lake Valley.

The county government received bills for five pieces of property including sites purchased for road right of way, the Perks Court homeless facility, residential property adjacent to the Headington Road corporation yard, and the Union Mine disposal site. The county filed a petition for redetermination, and submitted a letters to state officials indicating the county’s payment of the fee was provided under protest.

The county’s letter argues that the fire fee is actually a tax which requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature. The bill imposing the fire fee garnered only a simple majority of votes.

“For this reason,” the letter states, “the county of El Dorado pays the Fire Prevention Fee under protest and reserves all rights to pursue a refund of said amount through judicial

action or otherwise."

It is expected that the HJTA complaint against the fee will be amended in the coming weeks to add additional plaintiffs, including El Dorado County.

Reid's machine powers Obama in Nevada

By Adam Nagourney, New York Times

LAS VEGAS – Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. sat onstage before a crowd of culinary workers here the other morning, listening intently to a man who is not on the ballot but might hold the key to a victory for President Obama in economically ravaged Nevada.



"Mr. Vice President, let me give you some real numbers here," Sen. Harry Reid, the Democratic majority leader, said to union members who had screamed "Harry!" when he poked his head around a curtain. "These people and others have filled 26 field offices around Nevada and have made 3.2 million phone calls. Obama-Biden has 255 team leaders. Mr. Vice President, these folks have registered 70,000 new voters. Three hundred and twenty-five thousand door knocks."

Reid has spent the last 10 years building a political machine that helped Obama win Nevada in 2008 and carried Reid to a re-

election victory two years ago that stunned many pollsters. It is widely praised – even by Republicans – as one of the most effective voter-organizing and money-raising political organizations.

But the Reid machine is facing its biggest test yet.

Reid's organization is a large reason that Obama is favored by many analysts to win narrowly in Nevada, despite what may be the worst economic climate in the nation and a sizable population of voters who, like Mitt Romney, are Mormons. Reid, who has long been strongly supportive of Obama in Washington – he maneuvered the president's health care bill through legislative hoops to an unlikely victory in the Senate – has made it clear that he views a victory for Obama in his state as a personal mission. This reflects not only his admiration for the president but also his visceral dislike for Mr. Romney, expressed in constant needling and attacks for almost six months.

Even more ambitiously (and perhaps more problematically), Reid is determined, friends say, to lift Representative Shelley Berkley, a Democrat, to victory over Sen. Dean Heller, a Republican, as he seeks to make sure that he does not return to Washington next year as the Senate minority leader.

Romney is campaigning here for two days this week – both he and Obama were in the state on Wednesday – backed up by a surge of new advertising, reflecting the importance that both he and the president have placed on this state's six electoral votes.

In a contrast that has been noted by the Romney camp, the Nevada Republican Party has collapsed in a storm of factionalism and infighting between Tea Party conservatives and party regulars. A contingent of supporters of Representative Ron Paul of Texas, an unsuccessful Republican presidential candidate, ousted the party leadership in a

showdown in the spring.

Romney's campaign responded by building a parallel political organization, Team Nevada, to match the combined forces of the Reid organization and Obama for America, which built on what Reid had in place. Aides to Romney said they had made considerable progress. Hundreds of Romney volunteers, many bused in from Southern California and Utah, gathered recently outside the campaign's headquarters at a Las Vegas shopping center before heading out in white vans to knock on doors in Clark County.

Still, the aides did not dispute the advantage that Reid had created for the president.

"Turnout is going to be important," said Ryan Erwin, Romney's senior adviser here. "And, candidly, the Reid machine and the Democrats have been better and more disciplined than we have been for the better part of a decade."

For all the ways that presidential elections are portrayed as national affairs — and for all the technology that has transformed the relationship between candidates and voters — the basic get-out-the-vote mechanics that have empowered political organizations for 100 years remain critical in elections. (Or, at least, close elections. A good organization can, at best, add two or three percentage points to a candidate's vote share, analysts said.)

The Reid army may be using modern tools — volunteers can be spotted walking through neighborhoods with iPads linked to headquarters, feeding and updating information on potential voters — but the intent is the same as ever: finding people who like your candidate and making sure they vote.

"Reid, working with various leaders of the Democratic Party, put together a very effective voting machine that's gotten better every election," said Eric Herzik, a professor of political science at URN. "Reid is the conduit to money for

candidates, he is a conduit to organized labor, and he has great relations with multiple groups around the state."

Several early indicators have attested to the effectiveness of the Democratic machine, which draws on the state party, powerful unions like the culinary group Reid spoke to last week, and the staff members and resources the Obama campaign dispatched to this state.

Voter registration in Nevada closed earlier this month, leaving the Democrats with an edge of 90,000 voters over the Republicans, up from an advantage of 60,000 voters two years ago, the secretary of state's office reported. (Reid understated the figure in his speech last week.) Democrats have substantially outpaced Republicans in early voting, another way to measure political organization.

The obstacles for Obama here are considerable. The state's unemployment rate was 11.8 percent in September, a drop from 12.1 percent the month before but still the highest in the nation, and the state has been racked by mortgage foreclosures.

"I don't think that anyone believes that Obama supporters are going to be as motivated this year as they were in 2008," said Mason Harrison, the communications director for Romney's campaign here.

In Reid, Republicans face an opponent who is fiercely combative and wily, with a command of the ebbs and flows of his state. He is loyal to those he likes (Barack Obama) and unrelenting against those he does not (Mitt Romney).

He has been one of Romney's top tormentors, at one point claiming that he had failed to pay any federal income taxes for the past 10 years, an assertion that was debunked when Romney released information on two years of income taxes.

"The man who is leading the Republican ticket for president of

the United States is giving used-car salesmen a bad name," Reid said at the rally here.

Reid's campaign to rebuild the Democratic Party was motivated by self-preservation after he almost lost re-election to John Ensign in 1998 and Republicans went on in 2002 to sweep every contested statewide office.

He displayed his ability to turn out voters in 2010 when he defeated his Republican opponent, Sharron Angle, by five percentage points, after many analysts – and polls – predicted that he was headed for defeat.

Herzik said he had followed Reid workers to observe their efforts in neighborhoods. "They are like dogs on meat," he said.

Erwin, the Romney adviser, said that for all the work he and other Republicans had done to catch up, he did not dispute that characterization.

"We do know how to run Republican organizations here – for the first time since 2002, the Republican Party is strong," he said. "But I don't harbor any misconceptions that we've caught up to something that Democrats have built up over a decade."

Tahoe firefighters in SoCal ready for action

By Melissa Pinion-Whitt, San Bernardino County Sun

Dozens of out-of-state firefighters have come to the Inland Empire to help protect the San Bernardino National Forest from potential wildfires during expected high winds and dry

weather.

Five Lake Tahoe-based engine crews and two hot shot crews from the U.S. Forest Service – totaling about 70 extra firefighters – traveled to the area on Thursday in preparation for the season's first round of Santa Ana winds. Extra aircraft have also been requested.

"We're now at the very peak of our fire season and at this time of the year, we operate at a high state of readiness," said U.S. Forest Service spokesman John Miller. "When a citizen dials 911 for the possibility of fire, our response is going to be very aggressive."

The National Weather Service issued a Red Flag Warning for the San Bernardino Mountains and other parts of the Inland Empire on Thursday. The warning is in effect until Saturday afternoon.

"We're looking at wind gusts of 55 mph, and locally wind gusts could get as high as 65 mph," said Phil Gonsalves, a Weather Service meteorologist.

Because vegetation has been drying out all summer long and there was less-than-average rain and snowfall last winter, firefighters say the potential for brush fires is high.