McDonald’s makes move to sell coffee for home brewing

By Huffington Post

Do you like the taste of McDonald’s coffee, but dislike how convenient it is to buy coffee already-brewed? You may be in luck. BurgerBusiness reports that the fast food chain could soon start selling its coffee beans in packages for home brewing.

The evidence for BurgerBusiness’s theory comes in the form of a trademark application McDonald’s filed on Sept. 18. The blog sought, but did not obtain, confirmation for the product launch from McDonald’s PR.

Still, the trademark application alone is a sign of how seriously McDonald’s takes coffee these days. Since the mid-aughts, the company has made a concerted push to challenge the dominance of Starbucks and Dunkin’ Donuts in the brewed coffee market. The company’s efforts boosted McDonald’s market share from 2 percent in 2004 to 6 percent in 2010.

The market for packaged beans is already competitive. Coffee-focused Starbucks and Green Mountain Coffee are two of the five biggest players, according to a August 2012 report by IBISWorld. But multinational food giants Smuckers, Kraft and Nestle are also in the fray, through their Folgers, Maxwell House and Nescafe brands respectively. That means it will be hard for any new entrant, even the world’s biggest fast-food chain, to break in.

But the at-home coffee market is worth $10 billion annually in the U.S. alone, with a profit margin near 30 percent. And it’s growing at an estimated 5 percent a year. That’s such a big pie that even a tiny sliver could be tremendously lucrative for McDonald’s.

Meditation session at Tahoe Wellness Center

Tahoe Wellness Center is getting an overhaul and will have new floors, dim lighting, new furniture and a more relaxing atmosphere for meditation.

This month’s meditation is Oct. 29, 6-7pm, Tahoe Wellness Center in the Bijou Center, next to Hot Gossip, in South Lake Tahoe.

Donations accepted.

There will be chairs, but bring a pillow or mat to sit on.

For questions, contact Rosemary Manning at tahoehealthtouch@gmail.com.

Opinion: ‘It’s time for reason to replace rage’

By Claire Fortier

Progressive or provincial? That is the crux of the issue facing our South shore community during this election and well into the next decade.

Do we want a viable, prosperous community that our children and grandchildren are proud to call home? Or do we want the Tahoe of yesterday – only older and shabbier, with fewer families and more boarded up businesses?


Claire Fortier

The question is not new. Yet every time we take baby steps forward in this town, howls of outrage drown out the most reasoned and moderate of voices. Those howls aren't coming from people who envision a better Tahoe. The howls are indicative of how we have allowed NIMBYism to usurp community benefit.

Democracy is a messy business, but it is not a mud wrestling contest nor a death match. Yet, we as a community, have become accustomed to rage over reason.

The one area where we all agree, or at least seem to agree, is on preserving this slice of heaven we call the Jewel of the Sierra. Ensuring the pristine beauty and purity of Lake Tahoe for generations to come is a value deeply ingrained in the hearts of those fortunate enough to live here.

The problem is the setting for the famed Jewel: The increasingly second-rate 1960s town called South Lake Tahoe.

For almost a decade, we have soul-searched, conducted endless community meetings and spent millions in planning money to answer the critical question of envisioning our future.

We have the answer. It's called the city's General Plan. That plan was hailed at the state level for its elements of sustainability and environmental innovation.

The General Plan, as well as the TRPA's new effort to allow local jurisdictions more control over their destiny, should give South Lake Tahoe hope. It may soon be possible to take what we have and rebuild it better. That should be exciting news.

But you certainly wouldn't think so if you listen to the outrage over the loop road or the ceaseless thrashing over the hole or even the fatalism that the TRPA should be eliminate all together. (Hint to those willing to trash the TRPA: It won't do the city a bit of good because we are still in California and subject to even more stringent regulations without the bi-state agency.)

On a more local level, the city's recent push to clean up and fix up our town to make it more attractive to tourists, which is our economic life blood, should engender enthusiasm. Instead we find ourselves mired down in the vitriol of the very vocal few. That vocal minority realize they can thwart most any project or process just by raising their voices louder and more harshly than anyone else in town.

This small-ball way of doing business will ensure that nothing changes, only continues to deteriorate. But the reality is the Tahoe of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that the vocal few seem so passionate about preserving is never coming back, even if nothing changes. With no change, our town will simply deteriorate further.

We will continue to decline unless we elevate the community's expectations and reinvigorate the community conversation.

As we sit on the verge of renewal or degeneration, it is time for those in this community who have a view beyond their special interests to get into the conversation. It's time to push city council candidates to answer real questions on what they want for their community in the future. Are they content with what is or do they see what could be?

It’s time for reason to replace rage. It’s time to re-establish our core commitment to South Lake Tahoe’s future and not squander our limited window of opportunity for a small-minded few.

Finding consensus takes time, energy and emotional investment. Is our community, through our community leaders, really ready to find consensus or stay mired in yesteryear?

Claire Fortier is mayor of South Lake Tahoe.

Brothers plead guilty to poaching pregnant deer in Douglas County

By AP

Two Nevada brothers have pleaded guilty to poaching a pregnant deer near their home in Douglas County.

Nevada Department of Wildlife Game Warden Rob Buonamici says the mule deer was pregnant with twins when Gonzalo Cossio and Jesus Cossio-Pitones illegally shot the animal near Holbrook Junction in March.

He says they harvested, gutted and cleaned the animal before a citizen saw them disposing of the carcass and alerted authorities.

Cossio has been sentenced to 90 days in jail. His brother, Cossio-Pitones, had to forfeit the weapon used to kill the deer. He’s also prohibited from possessing a firearm, or purchasing any hunting license or tag.

California gas prices increase substantially

By Ronald D. White and Dalina Castellanos, Los Angeles Times

Skyrocketing gasoline prices caused some local service stations to shut off their pumps Thursday while others shocked customers with overnight price increases of 30 cents or more.

California’s fuel industry isn’t running out of gasoline — supplies are only 2.5 percent lower than this time last year — but recent refinery and pipeline mishaps sent wholesale prices to all-time highs this week. As a result, some station owners weren’t buying fuel for fear they couldn’t sell it. Those who did buy simply kicked prices higher and bet customers would understand.

“If this keeps up, I’ll be looking at $5-a-gallon gas by next Thursday,” said Ali Mazarei, who owns an Arco station in Riverside County. On Thursday, Mazarei was charging $4.52 for a gallon of regular gasoline, up from $4.27 on Wednesday and $4.21 on Tuesday.

“I really don’t have any choice here, and I won’t be making money at $4.52 a gallon,” he said.

Some fuel stops had already crossed the $5 threshold.

On Thursday afternoon, the Low-P station in Calabasas was selling regular gasoline for $5.69 a gallon in cash, or $5.79 for credit card purchases. In addition to the high prices, the pumps displayed hand-lettered signs reading: “We are sorry, it is not our fault.”

The station, whose name is short for “low price,” is usually full of drivers attracted by the high-profile location at Calabasas Road and Parkway Calabasas, right off the 101 Freeway. But customers thinned out as prices soared.

Low-P has to pay more “because we’re an independent gas station” that lacks the buying power of its big-brand counterparts, said owner John Rabi, who paid $40,000 for a 9,000-gallon load that day, up from $32,000 a few days before.

Some drivers didn’t pick up on the price right away.

“Holy shoot! I didn’t notice that earlier,” Aaron Belcher, 38, said as he ripped his Visa card from the reader. “This is ridiculous.”

Tiffany Lemme, who spent $50.29 on less than nine gallons, said she was shocked on a recent trip to Miami when she paid $5.30 a gallon.

“I thought that was crazy, but this is insane,” the 31-year-old Woodland Hills resident said.

Many stations closed their pumps as soon as they ran out of the fuel they’d bought more cheaply. Some owners worried that if they paid the current wholesale price, they would be stuck selling that gas at a loss when prices fell.

Several Costco gas stations, including those in Marina del Rey, Tustin and Inglewood, closed Thursday. A manager in Inglewood said the only nearby Costco outlets that hadn’t run out of gas were in Hawthorne and Torrance.

A sign at one Costco apologized: “We do not know when we will be resupplied.”

On Thursday, the wholesale price of California gasoline hit a record-setting $4.39 a gallon, said Tom Kloza, chief oil analyst for the Oil Price Information Service in New Jersey. The wholesale price surpassed even the retail price: California filling stations were charging $4.315 on average Thursday, according to AAA's daily survey. That was up more than 8 cents from Wednesday.

Analysts attributed the increase to mishaps that have befallen some of the state's 14 refineries, which operate with little margin for error because few facilities outside California make the state's cleaner-burning gasoline.

"Most recently there has been a problem with an oil pipeline that supplies gasoline for Tesoro, Valero and Shell stations," said Patrick DeHaan, senior petroleum analyst for GasBuddy.com, a price-tracking website. A power outage Monday forced the temporary shutdown of Exxon Mobil's Torrance refinery, DeHaan said. The August fire at Chevron Corp.'s Richmond refinery was also cited.

Kloza added that there was an element of panic in the run-up in wholesale prices, with buyers fearing more refinery problems.

"There is a sense out there that this might not just be the typical run of bad timing and bad luck in terms of refinery outages," Kloza said. "People are beginning to wonder whether something else might be involved. Has the heat been a factor? Is the electrical grid holding up? Are these refineries just a little too old?"

How long will the high prices last? That depends on whether more problems occur, fuel price expert Bob van der Valk said.

A form of relief might come if the state's refineries are allowed to switch to the cheaper winter blend of gasoline in the next few days rather than having to wait until the end of October, he said.

“The California Energy Commission received a request for that from the California Independent Oil Marketeters Assn.,” Van der Valk said. “However, Southern California is currently enduring a heat wave, and air quality will be given primary consideration before any final decision is made.”

The summer blend is designed to reduce evaporation of pollutants during warm weather.

S. Tahoe arson suspect turns himself in

A South Lake Tahoe resident was arrested late Thursday on aggravated arson and burglary charges.

Police officers say Eric Almdale, who lives in a trailer at 885 James Ave., admitted to starting the blaze on Oct. 4 at 11:18pm. Officers in a press release said, “(Almdale was) distraught over family matters and matters concerning the owner of the trailer.”

Geraldine McClure lives in the same unit. According to police, heavy smoke in the residence woke her up. Initially she did not know if her roommate, Almdale, was still inside. Police searched the trailer after the fire was out and no one else was there.

Not much later Almdale allegedly called 911 to turn himself in.

Almdale was being held on $1.05 million bail.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• South Lake Tahoe planning commissioners granted historic sign status to Tahoe Valley Pharmacy and Burger Lounge. The latter closed on Sept. 30 — but it's the mug that has significance, not the name.

• On Oct. 10 at 6pm there will be a South Lake Tahoe neighborhood meeting for people living in the Tahoe Keys, Tahoe Island, Tahoe Valley and Gardner Mountain areas. The meeting is in the Tahoe Keys Association Conference Room, 356 Ala Wai Blvd.

• Strategic Marketing Group's Tahoe Tourism, Technology + Marketing Workshop is Nov. 1 in South Lake Tahoe. For more info or to register, call (530) 541.2462, ext. 102.

• In 2011, Barton Memorial Hospital's Skilled Nursing Facility staff and medical personnel made a goal for 2012 to earn a five-star rating from Medicare. That goal was met in September.

• On Oct. 12 from 9am-4pm there is a blood drive at the Incline Village Recreation Center gym. To schedule an appointment, call (775) 832.5058.

Embassy Suites in South Tahoe on the auction block

By Kathryn Reed

Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe may not exist after Oct. 24.

That is the date a trustee sale is scheduled in Placerville.

Lake Tahoe News first reported in July about how the property near the state line is in financial trouble. It is directly across from the would-be convention center.

Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe has a troubled past and present. Photo/LTN file

Max Saito with Ken Corp., the Japanese company that owns the parcel, did not return multiple phone calls.

Dominic Acolino, general manager of Embassy Suites, did not return multiple phone calls either. Embassy is a subsidiary of Hilton Hotels.

The building, fixtures even the plants are for sale. It is possible that if someone buys the property, that it could continue to operate as is. It is also possible the note could be paid and the auction never takes place. It’s also possible the doors will close.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said the hotel is still paying its transient occupancy tax. This hotel generates the largest percentage of hotel tax on an annual basis of all South Shore properties.

El Dorado County Auditor Joe Harn said Embassy is up-to-date on paying its property taxes.

Business lunches matter even if they don’t involve martinis

By Ron Sylvester, Las Vegas Sun

The rules for entertaining business clients have changed since the days of the three-martini lunch.

Who has time to sit around and drink when there’s so much work to be done?

Nevertheless, while leisurely “business” lunches may be a thing of the past, maintaining good customer and client relationships is more important than ever. In a fickle economy especially, loyalty can make the difference between growing a business or going out of business.

Many deals are still made over lunch, at a cocktail party or during a round of golf.

“People still want to do business with people they like and who make them feel special," said Robin Jay, the Las Vegas author of "The Art of the Business Lunch – Building Relationships Between 12 and 2."

Jay turned 20 years of experience in outside sales into a career speaking to business owners about fostering personal relationships with customers. One of the keys, she said, is face-to-face contact. Invite a client out for a meal. Take him or her to a show. Move beyond an email or a text.

"Breaking bread breaks down barriers," Jay said. "If you meet someone in an office, they never let their guard down like they will over a table. I've never lost a client who has been over to my house for dinner."

People, for instance, drive out of their way to patronize companies that make them feel comfortable and valued, even if it means passing closer businesses that offer similar services, Jay said. Simply put, good service trumps convenience.

So for companies entertaining clients, Jay recommends: "You ask them what's going on in their world and their business. How can you better help them?"

Jay recommends schmoozing established customers and prospective clients.

"I worked for a company that would not allow our sales team to take prospects out to lunch," Jay recalled. "Unless they were clients who were already spending money with us, my bosses could not see the value in investing in the relationship. I completely disagree. Their reasoning was penny wise and pound foolish."

Author Tom Peters suggests in his book, "The Pursuit of Wow! Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times," that businesspeople avoid wasting their lunch hours eating alone or in an office. Instead, he suggests they use that time to build relationships. Peters calculated that with 49 work weeks per year, the average business person has 225 networking opportunities during lunchtime alone.

“When you know for a fact that taking your clients out and treating them right will elevate your relationships with them, how can you justify eating alone?” Jay asked.

Where you take clients also matters. In Las Vegas, a city known for great restaurants, it’s important to find one that understands business lunches. Wait staff should be cognizant of time and give efficient service with few interruptions.

“That’s not easy when you’re juggling tourists, conventioneers and parties, in addition to businesspeople,” said Tom Kaplan, senior managing partner of the Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group. “That’s why we try to train our servers, staff, the manager at front door, even the busser, to gauge the guests, recognize the business client and provide appropriate service.”

Client outings don’t have to be confined to restaurants, either.

Jay has taken clients shopping, to movies and to conventions. For one client who liked to gamble, she hosted lunches specifically at casinos so he could pop $20 into a slot machine after eating.

Exclusive venues or events also impress.

“Any time you can take a person to a place where you have a membership and they can’t go without you, it’s a great opportunity,” Jay said. “It could be a country club — or Costco.”

Golf remains a popular business activity, as well.

“It’s a fun, easy way of getting to know somebody, and it takes all the pressure away from a lunch,” said Brian

Esposito, a former golf pro who's now vice president of business development at Soil Tech, a Las Vegas construction business. "Usually you build a great camaraderie on the golf course."

Before setting up a tee time, Esposito researches companies to find out who the key decision makers are. That's who he aims to golf with.

"If the golf course is nice enough, usually the president will find a way to play," Esposito said. "If they are adamant that they do not want to go or that they don't play golf, then it's time to think of something else."

Esposito even gives beginners lessons. He'll take new players to a driving range or putting green to introduce them to the sport.

"In golf, you're with the same people for four or five hours," he said. "And there's always a chance you'll hit a career shot, or they will. You make memories that way."

Administrators at UNLV agree, so much so that they created a course titled, "Golf for Business and Life." It teaches people how to build relationships specifically while golfing.

The class has drawn business majors, law students and people from just about every other industry, said professor Christopher Cain, a former golf pro and head of the PGA Professional Golf Management program at UNLV's College of Hotel Administration.

"Golf has a reputation of being a game with a stuffy kind of country club atmosphere," Cain said. "The key is making the experience fun. Once you have the relationship, it seems like the business follows."

Successful networking doesn't depend on closing a deal right away, either. In fact, most meetings won't end with someone signing on the dotted line. More often, new connections lead to sales down the road.

Esposito recommends not letting clients leave the golf course without scheduling a follow-up appointment. Jay typically offers to drop by a client's office with follow-up information.

"Sometimes," Jay said, "it was just a matter of getting back to them with a simple phone call."

Opinion: California's school funding hard to figure out

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

If you want your head to spin, try to figure out how much money we spend each year to educate California's 6 million K-12 school students.

Official agencies and outside groups publish numbers, but they rarely agree. They either take their snapshots at different times or include different types of spending and/or different sources of financing.

Gov. Jerry Brown's budget pegs the number at $63.4 billion during the 2012-13 fiscal year, but assumes that voters approve his sales and income tax increase measure, Proposition 30, on the Nov. 6 ballot.

If it fails, that budget number would presumably drop by $5.5 billion, unless he and the Legislature change their minds after the election.

With that caveat, Brown’s number appears to be fairly accurate because it includes income and outgo that other reporting agencies often ignore, such as federal funds (about $7 billion), state payments for teachers’ pensions ($1.2 billion) and the repayment of school-construction bonds ($3.3 billion). It’s also roughly in line with the Census Bureau’s annual report on school spending.

Why are accurate school-financing data important?

It’s because Brown focuses on school finance in his campaign for Proposition 30, and because wealthy civil rights attorney Molly Munger is pushing a rival tax measure, Proposition 38, whose proceeds would almost all go to schools.

Brown’s number, which assumes Proposition 30 passes, is about $10,500 per student, somewhere in the lower third among the states.

Were it to fail – its chances are about 50-50 – a contingency plan already in the law would cut schools by $5.5 billion, but only about half would be real-time operating funds ($400 per pupil), accomplished by counting bond service as state aid. The remainder would be further delay in repayment of money already owed to schools.

Conversely – and this is very tricky – were Proposition 30 to pass, it would interact with the allocation formula under Proposition 98, the state school-finance law. Schools would see very little, if any, increase in operational financing, at least during the plan’s early years, according to the Legislature’s budget analyst and the California School Boards Association.

Munger has repeatedly hit that point because her Proposition 38 would, if enacted, raise income taxes and devote nearly all its revenue to classroom spending – by as much as $2,000 per pupil per year when fully implemented.

However, were Proposition 30 to lose and Proposition 38 win – a very unlikely event, polls indicate – school spending cuts for 2012-13 would take effect, unless they are modified, while Proposition 38's new money wouldn't kick in until the following fiscal year.

Confusing?

Absolutely, but when you look at how school money is allocated within the state, it's even more so.