Food and wine festival is more than eating and drinking

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – It's not often the secret ingredient is wiggling around on the counter. But that is what two chefs had to overcome during the annual Blazing Pans competition.

2011 champion Chef Sean Conry of Longboards Bar & Grill at Plumas Pines took on Chef Elsa Corrigan of Mamasake Sushi from the Village at Squaw Valley.

Crawfish from Lake Tahoe was the secret ingredient the two chefs had to incorporate into a handful of dishes at the 27th annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food & Wine Festival earlier this month.



Lake Tahoe Lobster Company provided the secret ingredient -- crawfish -- for the Blazing Pans competition at Northstar on Sept. 8. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The fun thing about the entire multi-day event that is mostly at the Village at Northstar is that it's more than eating and

drinking. Non-food vendors are interspersed with those with food. Cooking related demonstrations are going on at various locations. Some things are free, while others have a fee associated with them.

Based on the Iron Chef competition on the Food Network, the Blazing Pans contest tests the chefs' ability to create dishes using the secret ingredient in a certain amount of time. More time was incorporated to accommodate the need to peel the crawfish. Each chef had the assistance of one sous chef.

Crawfish is not something either chef has in his or her kitchen, so each was at an equal disadvantage.

"I changed my original plan 10 times," Corrigan said. "For training for something like this you have to be fluid because time is of the essence."

Salads, bisques, spring rolls, chicken stuffed with crawfish – those were just some of the dishes the chefs created.

In the end, it was Corrigan who was crowned the winner of this year's Blazing Pans competition.

Other winners from the 27th Annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food & Wine Festival:

Judges' Awards – Culinary Competition & Grand Tasting

Best Food & Wine Pairings:

Gold: Granlibakken Lodge – Mushroom stuffed with Red Lentil Hash, Chevre, Duck and Red Currant

Morgan 2010 Pinot Noir

Silver: Jake's On the Lake – Seared Scallop

Wente 2010 Chardonnay

Bronze: North Tahoe Catering – Chile-Smoked Beef Tender,

Roasted Peach Truffle Sauce/Beet/Yukon Chip

Renwood 2010 Old Vine Zinfandel

Best Pairing Food and Beverages (Other Than Wine):

Gold: Hard Rock Café, Lake Tahoe – Bayou Shrimp Burger with BBQ Coleslaw

Charbay Artisan Distillery – Blood Orange Vodka Negroni

Best White Wine:

Gold: Wither Hills 2010 Sauvignon Blanc (Marlborough New Zealand)

Silver: Wente 2010 Chardonnay (Monterey)

Bronze: ZD Winery 2010 Chardonnay (Napa Valley)

Best Red Wine:

Gold: Frank Family 2010 Pinot Noir (Napa Valley)

Silver: Morgan 2010 Pinot Noir (Santa Lucia 12 Clones)

Bronze: Renwood 2010 Old Vine Zinfandel (Amador)

Best Food:

Gold: Jake’s On the Lake – Seared Scallop 2

Silver: Six Peaks Grille – Roasted Beet Salad, Arugula, Goat Cheese,

Shallots, Whole Grain Mustard Vinaigrette.

Bronze: Hawk’s Restaurant – House-Smoked Duroc Pork Belly, Sweet Corn Pudding, Mariposa Plums

2012 People’s Choice Awards

Best Food & Wine Pairings:

The Chocolate Bar – Turkey En Crepinette with Sweet Potato Gaufrette

Francis Coppola 2009 Petite Sirah (Napa Valley)

Best Food:

The Chocolate Bar – Turkey En Crepinette with Sweet Potato Gaufrette

Best Red Wine:

Stanger Vineyards 2006 Syrah Library Reserve (Westside Paso Robles)

Best White Wine:

ZD Winery 2010 Chardonnay (Napa Valley)

Best Pairing Food and Beverages (Other Than Wine):

Hard Rock Café, Lake Tahoe – Bayou Shrimp Burger with BBQ Coleslaw

Charbay Artisan Distillery – Blood Orange Vodka Negroni

Best Table Presentation:

Northstar California Resort.

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Lecture about open water food

web dynamics in Lake Tahoe

Dave Beauchamp will share what is known about Lake trout, Kokanee salmon and Mysid shrimp interactions in the open water (pelagic zone) of Lake Tahoe based on past research and will also describe the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services efforts to fill in information gaps related to the Kokanee salmon, Mysid shrimp, and other Lake Tahoe zooplankton.

His presentation will be Oct. 3 at 3:30pm at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village.

He will describe how seasonal changes in environmental conditions, food supply, predation and competition influence a potential niche for Lahontan cutthroat trout.

Beauchamp is a professor of Aquatic & Fishery Sciences at the University of Washington. His research program focuses on predator-prey interactions, bioenergetics modeling, behavioral ecology, distribution, growth, population dynamics, and food web dynamics in large western lakes, estuarine, and marine systems. Some current investigations include: Early marine feeding, growth and survival of salmon and forage fish in Puget Sound; Columbia River Basin Food Web Review; Food web implications of re-introducing native salmon or trout above dams; and development and application of visual foraging models for predatory fish.

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

Truckee-Tahoe humane society looking for calendar dogs

Your dog could be the next cover girl (or boy) of the Humane Society of Truckee-Tahoe 2013 calendar.

Entries are due Oct. 15. Photos must have been taken in and around the Truckee-Tahoe area.

If you have adopted or rescued a dog and would like to show off their happy smiling face, enter your best photos of them enjoying their new lifestyle in the Truckee-Tahoe area in HSTT’s 2013 Calendar Photo Contest.

The theme of the calendar is Rescued dogs of Truckee-Tahoe.

You may submit up to five of your favorite dog photos for the entry fee of $10. You must also submit an official entry form attached with your email submission to dale@hstt.org. Your entry must include a short story (150 words maximum) about your rescued pet(s) for us to include in the calendar if your photo is chosen.

Where is your favorite place for fall colors?

Ritz-Carlton drives Placer County economic needle up

By Susan Wood

TRUCKEE – After logging almost three years on the slopes of Northstar, the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe has shown how easy it is to mix business with pleasure.

That's because some may say the only AAA five-diamond hotel in the Tahoe region has been good for guests, village retailers and even Placer County by contributing to local government coffers.

Per Placer County records, transient occupancy tax collected from the Ritz guests and about 500 other condo and single-family units in and around Northstar and Martis Valley (situated east of the mountain) almost tripled to $1.1 million from the quarter ending in December 2009 to the next that wrapped up March 31.



Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe is helping Placer County's economy when it comes to hotel and sales taxes. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Of course, the winter season is always strongest. But more telling, tax revenue collected in that same quarter in 2011 at the height of the ski season went up yet again by almost $150,000. Granted, the ski resort had much help from Mother Nature, who provided a banner winter. Still, this is all despite a pesky recession that officially started two years before the resort opened in December 2009.

Sales tax figures almost doubled to $98,989 in the first quarter since the Ritz-Carlton came onto the Sierra Nevada scene. (This statistic also includes the primary retail sales hub of the Northstar Village.)

“(The hotel) has definitely had an impact on our business,” said Kelsey Tedrini, manager of Helly Hansen.

Tedrini said her Northstar Village store fields calls from the Ritz-Carlton concierge staff helping guests get “last minute things” like a pair of socks. In one instance, a staffer retrieved the item for the guest.

“It’s a snowball effect. At least it gets people in the store,” she said. “Of course, last year was a little slower, but I think it’s been best for business. It’s the Ritz Carlton. It’s totally professional.”

A hospitality business must use all its resources and advantages to get its share of the tourism dollar, which has seen more and more competition around the world (even with brands like the Ritz-Carlton recently expanding to opening its first hotel in Austria).

Income levels of the wealthy have gone up, making travel attainable. But a recession can make all markets more frugal.

With North Lake Tahoe occupancy rate percentages averaging in the mid-40s in 2012, according to Mountain Travel Research, some hoteliers have found it necessary to lower daily rates despite a decade of growth year after year. The average

between 2011 and 2012 for the period ending in July went down 1.5 percent to $209 in North Lake Tahoe. By comparison, Ritz-Carlton rooms start at $239 per night for advance purchases on an October weekend and climb to $4,500 for the Sugar Pine Suite.

Hotels that offer more amenities and host or participate in more regional events that appeal to markets ranging from the recreational warrior to the supreme foodie will come out on top in the long haul.

“Certainly, over the last few years, all segments (of our business) have been impacted (with the recession), but we continue to be optimistic that we’ve turned the corner and travel has turned the corner,” Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe Market Director Steven Holt told *Lake Tahoe News* on a recent meeting in the Ritz Destination Club lounge during the Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival.

Holt, who oversees the public relations for all Northern California properties of the global company, added Lake Tahoe’s efforts remain in making the resort more four-season by “connecting the lake” to the mountain between the hotel concierge staff and managers of activity and recreation outlets.

For example, guests lounging in any of the Ritz-Carlton’s plentiful seating areas in and out of the hotel are likely to catch hikers taking a jaunt across the mountain (some with their dogs because the hotel is pet friendly), or are alongside gnarly mountain bikers screaming straight down the slopes. Swimmers may take laps in one of the hotel’s three pools on the massive, split-level patio. Gym rats can enjoy a view of all this on one of the numerous exercise machines.

Windows are big on Tahoe’s Ritz-Carlton property – with 170 hotel rooms, 23 private residences and 25 Destination Club lodging facilities. The warm sun provides enough heat to

three-quarters of the building, making it energy efficient enough to qualify as a first-level LEED-certified benefit. The $300 million resort hotel earned the prestigious distinction from the U.S. Green Business Council a year after it opened by recycling more than 16,000 tons of construction waste, installing treatment basins to capture stormwater runoff, putting in bicycle racks and lockers for employees and using the massive onsite boulders in its retaining wall that climbs up the mountain next to the new road. That effort – along with about two dozen others such as the mere building of a special gondola – showed the difficulty and resulting success of the project that took three years to build.

“It took a year and a half just to build the road,” Holt recalled.

But no one said living and staying in Tahoe is easy. The destination has its own distinct charm and character, as Holt pointed out in comparing the style to the Ritz hotel at Bachelor Gulch at Beaver Creek ski resort in Avon, Colo.

“We want to see the experience (of the hotel) be specific to the place. Here, California has its own style,” Holt said, as a few Club guests sauntered in and out of the special, fifth-floor room in their shorts and T-shirts for the breakfast buffet. Cookies were neatly stacked in drawers to munch on later in the day.

Guests of the Ritz-Carlton should not go hungry with the hotel’s eatery options and planned events. There’s even a rooftop garden created by Guest Relations Manager Mitch Penning, who plants a plethora of various vegetables including six types of lettuce and edible flowers that may be found all over the property, right down to floating in a cocktail glass.

“Culinary is extremely strong now,” Holt said, when asked what role food-oriented events play in spurring occupancy.

Nine specialty events in September were scheduled. They range

in taste from Pints and Pies at the Manzanita fine-dining restaurant where James Beard Award-winning chef Traci Des Jardins provides her magic touch. “Beer and a Burger” is offered at the casual MountainBlue café. Master cooking classes are slated there on the weekends. “The Art of the Cocktail” educates the amateur libation maker in the Living Room. This dining offering is just like that – where falling asleep in one of cushy chairs or chaise lounges at the pool would be understandable in a land that brings new meaning to relaxing and rejuvenating.

(Note: From the Living Room menu, ordering the roasted vegetable wrap at the pool hits the spot.)

If you’re into s’mores for dessert, there’s a fire pit calling your name on the expansive patio area.

“This is awesome,” said one woman as she discovered the lower-level hot tub and fire pit. The small hidden cove is inviting enough after soaking in the tub to lounge in a robe and sandals in front of the fire while listening to the slopeside night sounds.

If that type of lounging isn’t enough for utter relaxation, a 17,000-square-foot spa serves up a full page of treatments and services – including an herbal milk bath and massage running $185 for 50 minutes. Every little whim of the guest is considered.

A testament to finishing touches at the luxury resort, even the artwork in the rooms and in the common areas adds to the experience of the place. For instance, a trio of paintings featuring pup tents in one of the hallways makes one feel at home in the Sierra Nevada.

Albeit modern, the rooms offer a mountain motif décor, with a full set of bathroom and hall closet supplies to answer the occasional whims of the guests. (Note: One thing missing – an electrical outlet at the desk.)

Around the property, water dispensers keep guests hydrated during warm days – especially for the multitude of guests who come up from the flatlands of Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area and need to acclimate.

Then, there's the staff – who make courteous customer service such a mantra that one forgets being in the Lake Tahoe region. It must be due to how the hotel chain starts its days. Holt claims that the 45,000-plus people who work for the chain share in a half-hour session designed to point out "service stories" highlighting where staff members went out of their way to help a guest.

"The high quality and elevated level of service the Ritz-Carlton is known for delivering to its guests makes it a good match for Northstar," said Jessica VanPernis, spokeswoman for Northstar. She mentioned that since Vail bought the ski resort two years ago the hotelier makes a good fit for the ski resort giant.

Northstar has long evolved into a destination village with various lodging options most notably through East West Partners condo projects. They include: the Northstar Lodge – a Hyatt timeshare; Tahoe Mountain Resorts and One Village Place – both ownership properties that may go into a rental pool.

The hotel provides an elegant, non-ownership place for guests to take part in the Tahoe, California lifestyle.

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Details:

Directions: From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 east. Take Highway 28 at the top of Spooner Summit. Turn right onto Highway 267 in Kings Beach. Turn left onto Highlands View Road. (This is the street before the main entrance for Northstar.) Wind around until you see the hotel on your left.

Phone: (530) 562.3000

Website

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‘Peace One Day’ to be shown at Unity at the Lake

Unity at the Lake invites all interested movie-goers to a special showing of “Peace One Day” on Sept. 28 at 7pm.

This documentary poses the question, “Can one individual really make a difference?” For filmmaker Jeremy Gilley the answer is a resounding yes. After five years, he persuaded the United Nations – and the world – to officially sanction a global ceasefire day.

Donation will be gratefully accepted. For more info, call (530) 544.2266.

Unity is at 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Vail Resorts income drops, season pass sales rise

By Beth Potter, Boulder County Business Report

BROOMFIELD, Colo. – Vail Resorts Inc. reported income of $16.5 million for its fiscal year, and ski pass sales are up for the coming ski season, according to an earnings statement released Sept. 25.

Broomfield-based Vail Resorts said income fell from $34.5 million for the previous fiscal year.

Revenue revenue was $1.02 billion for fiscal 2012 compared with $1.17 million for fiscal 2011, a 12.2 percent decrease.

The company's subsidiaries operate Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone ski areas in Colorado and Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood ski areas in the Lake Tahoe area.

Unseasonably warm weather during the 2011-12 ski season kept skiers away from the mountains. Skier visits were down to 6.1 million from 7 million at the resorts in 2010-11, according to Vail Resorts.

"I am very proud of our results, given that the 2011-2012 ski season was the most challenging winter in the history of the United States ski industry," Rob Katz, Vail Resorts' chief executive, said in a press statement.

"The strength of our growing season pass business and the comprehensive and differentiated experience we provide at our resorts stabilized our revenues in the face of very challenging weather, Katz said.

About 178,000 season ski passes have been sold for the upcoming 2012-13 season, an increase of 17 percent from the same time last year, Katz said in the press statement. Season

pass calculations were adjusted as if the Kirkwood ski area were owned in both periods, according to the press statement.

Company subsidiary RockResorts operates hotel properties around the world. Vail Resorts Development Co. is the company's real estate arm.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Heavenly Mountain Resort expects to fire up its snowmaking guns Nov. 1.

• Expect the highways around Lake Tahoe to be impacted by the Lake Tahoe Marathon Sept. 28-30. This website provides details.

• Truckee is making changes to its transit system starting Oct. 12.

• Sierra Avalanche Center has hired Jenny Hatch as program director.

• Deer hunting season (rifle) began Sept. 22 for the west side of the Tahoe National Forest and it starts Oct. 6 for the east side. Use caution and wear bright colors.

Clean Tahoe recognized by state for its efforts

Caltrans Adopt-A-Highway Program honored the Clean Tahoe Program with the 2011 Adopt –A-Highway Program Volunteer of the Year award for the group's outstanding efforts in keeping a portion of Highway 50 from the Y to state line in South Lake Tahoe clean.

"It is a thankless job to pick up litter on the side of our state highway," Caltrans District 3 Director Jody Jones said in a statement. "Volunteers like those from the Clean Tahoe Program are helping to keep their community clean."

The award was presented at the Clean Tahoe Program board meeting Sept. 20.

Clean Tahoe volunteers have been picking up litter along Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe since they adopted the roadside in May 2003.

The Adopt-A-Highway program, which began in 1989, has been one of the most truly successful government-public partnerships of all time. More than 120,000 Californians volunteer annually to clean and enhanced over 15,000 shoulder-miles of roadside.

Truckee resident in jail on

pot cultivation charges

A Truckee resident was arrested for allegedly growing marijuana at his residence in his in the Glenshire subdivision on Saxon Way.

On the morning of Sept. 20, officers searched the house. They said they found, “The entire interior of the three-bedroom house had been converted into a marijuana growing operation.”

About 40 marijuana plants were in various stages of development and about half that many were ready for harvest, officers said.

Arrested at the scene on charges of illegal cultivation of marijuana was Michael Morrow, 25, of Truckee. Morrow was also on felony probation out of Placer County for a previous conviction of illegal marijuana cultivation, and he was also charged with violation of probation.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report