Tough Mudder – where adults pay to play in the mud

By Jessie Marchesseau

TRUCKEE – I was more excited than nervous driving up to Northstar on Friday morning to preview this year's Tough Mudder course and try my hand at some of the obstacles.

Tough Mudder calls their events, not a race, but a challenge, and uses the tagline: Probably the Toughest Event on the Planet.



Nolan Kombol, head of course design for Tough Mudder, scales the Funky Monkey without dropping into the water. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

I had taken their online Are You Tough Enough Quiz the night before and only scored a 75. "Maybe Mudder" it said. Had I chosen the wrong mustache on Question 4? Whatever the reason, I was apparently only questionably prepared.

The 11.3 mile course includes a nearly 2,000 foot elevation gain, 22 manmade obstacles, frigid water, barbed wire and mud, lots of mud.

Participants start their Tough Mudder adventure with the Kiss of Mud: crawling through a mud pit on their bellies underneath barbed wire strung just 8 inches off the ground. They then work their way through a series of other obstacles with names like Arctic Enema, Funky Monkey, Spider's Web, Electric Eel, Everest and finally, the Electroshock Therapy.

These obstacles take them through icy water, across greasy, muddy monkey bars, over rope nets, into electrified waters, up, down, in and out. And did I mention there's mud?

For participants starting to feel weary during the event, motivational signs are placed throughout the course with encouraging messages such as "Don't panic, but if you do, keep running" and "Remember you signed a death waiver."

If all of this sounds like your cup of tea, then you are not alone. Today's event sold-out with 15,000 people signed up to participate, and though Sunday still has some openings, organizers are expecting to be close to the 5,000-person limit.

With numbers like that, Nadia Guerriero, general manager of the Village at Northstar, said it would be the biggest single-day event the mountain has ever seen.

With Northern California events held at Squaw Valley last year, and Bear Valley in 2010, Tough Mudder appears to be growing by leaps and bounds. The company started with three events in 2010 and approximately 20,000 participants. This year, they have 35 events scheduled around the globe with nearly half a million people signed up.

This is the first time the event has been at Northstar. Nearly a year of preparation has gone into this weekend, with three weeks of on-mountain construction. This was apparent when stepping off the gondola to find numerous banners, tents, a stage, semi-truck trailers with built-in beer taps, a corral of sani-huts and a 15-foot high quarter pipe named Everest.

Though Everest is actually near the end of the course, it was our first challenge of the day. The object: run up it. I was wearing my hiking shoes, so I was totally prepared for this one. As it turns out, running up a quarter pipe is about as impossible as you would expect it to be. However, sliding back down on your rear is a pretty fun way to fail. I did it several times, not minding the dirt smearing up my back.

We had the advantage of attempting to climb Everest on a dry surface with dry shoes, enabling me and my media cohorts to get within inches of reaching the top. However, by the time participants hit this one, they will likely be wet and muddy, to say the least. The key for this one: teamwork, which is something Tough Mudder encourages. Once they reach the top, people help lift others that last little bit. Some will make human pyramids, climbing over each other to the top.

After giving up on summiting Everest for the day, we piled into Rangers which are essentially four-wheelers that seat five people, and headed uphill for a visit to the Funky Monkey. As we rounded the corner, a 2-foot-by-6-foot structure resembling the framing stage of a garage appeared. The orange sign above indicated it was, indeed, the Funky Monkey.

This obstacle gets its name from the monkey bars that span between what would be the roof rafters. I remember being an expert at the monkey bars in elementary school, but am pretty sure I have not laid a hand on one in a couple decades. Like everything in the Tough Mudder, these monkey bars have a twist, quite literally: some of the bars spin. Top it off with a 5-foot-deep pool of chilly water below and now you've got a challenge.

Nolan Kombol, head of course design for Tough Mudder, hopped right up and showed us how it's done. Then he did it again for a photo op. Still no takers from the group. I stepped to the edge and peered down. The water was green and murky, definitely not Lake Tahoe.

“How deep is it?” I asked.

Five feet. Almost as tall as me. Do I really want to get that wet? Maybe if it were 3 feet.

I reminded myself, “I’m here to have fun,” and grabbed hold of the metal bar overhead. I swung my other arm to the next bar and I was committed. The first half of the bars are on an incline as they travel up the roof line. I swung from one to the next, some of them turning slightly as I grabbed on. The group was shouting words of encouragement from the sideline and I kicked my legs as instructed.

Up the roof, then back down. My hands were getting a little tired, but I really did not feel like swimming. As I reached the other side, it took an extra swing to get my feet once again over solid ground, and I was done. Happy to be dry, my heart was beating a little fast, and I felt a definite sense of accomplishment. This could be addicting.

Next up for the challenge was Lindsay “with an A” Romack, the morning show host on 101.5 Truckee Tahoe Radio. She put forth a valiant effort, but did not come out nearly as dry as I did. The gasp she let out as she hit the water indicated that it was surely not a heated pool.

There were no other takers for the Funky Monkey, leaving Romack and me feeling just a touch braver than the boys as we headed back to the gondola.

So what is it about these strange, messy events that is so appealing to thousands of people?

“I think it’s really a way for people to challenge themselves without worrying about winning,” said Kombol. “It’s a way to get out and kind of act like a kid again.”

And plenty of people are willing to pay for the chance to act like a kid again, forking out registration fees of $90-$200

per person, a portion of which Tough Mudder donates to the Wounded Warrior Project.

It may sound like a lot, but after having the chance to play a little on the course, I have a feeling I may find myself joining the masses next year. After all, the quiz did say "maybe Mudder"… next time I will choose a cooler mustache.

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Note: More information about the Sept. 22-23 event at Northstar is online.

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Valley fire consumes 1,500 acres; Round Hill fire out quickly

Updated Sept. 21 10:45pm:

The Carter Springs Fire in Douglas County had burned more than 1,500 acres as of late Friday night. It is estimated to be 5 percent contained.

Highway 395 is expected to remain closed from Riverview on the north and at Kingsbury Grade on the south through the night.

Fire officials said the threat to the 30 residences has decreased, but if the fire were to jump the highway it would

be a different story.

Power lines are down in the area, which is impacting some customers in the area.

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Two fires are burning in Douglas County Friday afternoon. One is burning near Elks Point Road and Highway 50 and is all but contained as of 5:30pm.

Fire crews for Tahoe Douglas Fire and the U.S. Forest Service jumped on the 3-acre blaze quickly. The fire started at 3:30pm. No structures were threatened. It's believed to be human caused and is under investigation.

The other Douglas County fire is located near Highway 395 between Pine Valley Road and Ray May Way. As of 5:30 pm, this blaze is burning "pretty aggressively" according to the Tahoe Douglas Fire spokesman Eric Guevin. This 12:20pm blaze is also believed to be human caused and may be due to a discarded cigarette, Guevin added. This fire is also under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Free rabies shots for El Dorado County dogs and cats

El Dorado County Animal Services is teaming up with area veterinarians and animal welfare agencies to offer free rabies vaccinations for cats and dogs on World Rabies Day – Sept. 29.

The free rabies vaccinations will be offered from 9am to 5pm

that Saturday at the El Dorado County Government Center located at 330 Fair Lane in Placerville. Dogs must be on leash; cats must be in pet carriers.

This is only for El Dorado County residents.

In addition to free rabies vaccine, Animal Services will also offer dog licenses for a fee. Unlicensed dogs may receive the rabies vaccine at no cost at the free rabies clinic, but their owners must purchase a dog license within 30 days.

There is currently no requirement to license cats in El Dorado County.

Nevada welfare agencies sent checks to dead people

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Since 2007, Nevada state agencies have continued to pay welfare and food stamp benefits to a small number of recipients who had died, according to a legislative audit released Wednesday.

The report found the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services sent benefits to 27 of the 50 dead recipients analyzed by legislative auditors. The loss to the state was $6,000.

More than $500 million was distributed to food stamp and welfare recipients during fiscal 2011.

Assemblywoman Maggie Carlton, D-Las Vegas, said she doesn't condone the benefits being sent after the person's death. But she called it a small problem.

Since 2007, the number of Nevadans receiving food stamps grew 172 percent to 153,934 recipients. And those in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program increased 64 percent to 11,982 families.

Legislative Auditor Paul Townsend agreed it was not a "huge problem" but the division should keep a closer watch on sending electronic benefit transfer cards to dead recipients.

Steve Fisher, acting administrator of the welfare division, called it a "small problem" considering the amount of benefits paid. But he said steps have been taken to better check when a client dies.

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3 art exhibits at LTCC to launch this month

The Lake Tahoe Community College Haldan Art Gallery opens this month with a memorial exhibition by longtime artist and educator David Schnabel. Schnabel has a special connection to LTCC through his grandson, Scott Valentine, a full-time geology instructor at the college.

Schnabel taught art at Pasadena City College for more than 20 years. This exhibition highlights his large-scale drawings done late in his career.

The Duke Theatre Foyer Gallery will showcase former LTCC student Charlotte Castillo's large scale figure drawings.

Castillo went on to complete her bachelor of fine arts degree at Sonoma State University.

Her work shows an expressive use of line and color, and these paintings specifically investigate the color red – formally and conceptually.

The best of the best are back in the Student Art Gallery. Last year's award winners from the annual student art exhibit bring back their winning pieces and up to three new works of art.

All openings are Sept. 27 from 6-8pm. There will be an artists' talk in the Haldan Art Gallery starting at 5pm.

Women more likely to die at hands of a man in Nev. than any other state

By Samantha Boatman, KOLO-TV

A study released by the Violence Policy Center ranks Nevada as No. 1 for the third year in a row for the number of women killed by men.

Nevada has topped the list five out of the last six years.

The study says the rate of women killed by men is 2.62 per 100,000. This rate is more than double the national average.

According to the study, 35 women were killed by men back in 2010.

These murders don’t seem to be all random acts of violence against women. Actually, 91 percent of the female victims knew their killer, and more than half of the killers were ex-boyfriends, boyfriends, ex-husbands or husbands.

The executive director of the Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence, Sue Meuschke, says, “Reducing domestic violence homicide is the responsibility of all Nevada’s communities. As this report points out, women in Nevada are at a higher risk of being victims of homicide perpetrated by people they know and love. Much more must be done in our state to change this outcome.”

The study is released around the same time every year. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

‘Living With Fire’ singled out as an excellent project

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension’s “Living With Fire” program was named an Exemplary Project by the Association of Public Land-grant Universities.

“Living With Fire” is an interagency effort initiated, coordinated and implemented by Cooperative Extension. It teaches Nevadans how to live more safely in high fire hazard environments. The program stresses that the key to reducing the wildfire threat to homes and communities is implementing pre-fire activities such as replacing wood roofs, screening vents and managing vegetation.

To promote widespread adoption of pre-fire activities in Nevada’s high fire-hazard communities, a partnership was

formed between UNCE and Nevada's local, state and federal firefighting and emergency organizations. Partners meet routinely to plan events and provide input into projects.

Former Cooperative Extension Dean and Director Karen Hinton noted that the "Living With Fire" program, launched in 1997, has helped thousands of homeowners and communities prepare for Nevada's extreme wildfire dangers.

SnowGlobe releases names of acts coming to S. Tahoe

Deadmau5, Wiz Khalifa, Chromeo Live, Beats Antique, Big Gigantic, Laidback Luke, MiMOSA, Madeon, Gramatik and Polica are leading the lineup for SnowGlobe 2012.

Three-day passes ($155) and VIP passes ($450) for the Dec. 29-31 show are on sale.

Also coming to the field by Lake Tahoe Community College are Flosstradamus, Poolside, Baauer, Boombox, Break Science, Clockwork and Minnesota.

More information is online.

Incline experiencing rash of residential burglaries

Incline Village residents have been reporting people entering their homes while they are at home.

Washoe County sheriff's deputies have put out an alert to residents about a series of residential burglaries that started Sept. 1. They are usually during the early morning hours.

The suspects are entering through unlocked doors and window.

Anyone with information or who sees suspicious activity is asked to call (775) 785.9276.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Hwy. 395 in south Douglas County closed because of fire

Updated 1:55 pm:

The fire has grown to approximately 30 acres and is threatening structures in the the area.

A unified command has been established with East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts and Bureau of Land Management.

One helicopter is on scene providing water drops. Others have been ordered.

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East Fork Fire and Paramedic District is working a nearly 5-acre wildland fire in the hillside east of the Spring Valley area just south of Leviathan Mine Road.

The fire is close to Highway 395, and reportedly moving toward homes in the area.

Highway 395 is temporarily closed at Ray May Way in the north, and Pine Valley Road in the south, to allow East Fork Fire units to access the area.