2 El Dorado County men face manslaughter charges in teen’s death

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Two El Dorado County men were arrested Monday and are facing felony manslaughter charges in connection with the drug-related death of a Pollock Pines teen.

Jesse Howard Roberts, 21, and Elijah Lee Richter, 20, both of Camino, were arrested and booked into El Dorado County jail on felony charges of involuntary manslaughter, the El Dorado Sheriff’s Office announced.

According to a news release from the sheriff’s office, Alejandro Nunez Avila, 15, is believed to have voluntarily ingested a hallucinogenic drug sometime late Saturday or early Sunday.

Authorities responded to a Pollock Pines residence where they unsuccessfully tried to revive Avila, according to the release. Avila was transported to Marshall Hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Authorities say they learned during their subsequent investigation that Avila had invested a new drug developed in Germany called 2-CB, 2-Cl or 2-5Bomb. It is clear in color and can be in liquid or powder form.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Here are Caltrans' El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork plans for this week.

• Lake Tahoe Forest Supervisor Nancy Gibson on Sept. 5 signed off on Heavenly Mountain Resort's desire to expand summer offerings.

• Northstar has begun accepting applications and started hiring for the more than 1,200 seasonal positions that will be available at the resort for the winter season.

• Live Violence Free's Sunset Gala is Oct. 21 from 5-8pm at Edgewood Tahoe.

• There will be a Pirate Party at the South Lake Tahoe branch library (1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.) on Oct. 20 at 2pm. Dress in you best pirate duds, and come aboard for stories, games, crafts and more.

Man charged in fatal Incline accident arrested at Giants game

By Bay City News Service

SAN FRANCISCO – A man was arrested for allegedly attacking

another man in a bathroom at AT&T Park during a San Francisco Giants baseball game on Sunday evening, police said Monday.

Christopher Torii Smith, 26, was arrested in connection with the attack, which was reported at 6:42pm Sunday at the ballpark where the Giants were playing a game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, San Francisco police Officer Albie Esparza said.

Smith, a resident of Grass Valley, is also awaiting trial in May 2013 on two charges of DUI causing serious injury or death, according to the Washoe County District Attorney's Office.

He was allegedly under the influence of marijuana on Dec. 30 when he fatally struck two people who were walking in a crosswalk in Incline Village, Nevada Highway Patrol officials said.

Forums in Truckee designed to help educate voters

Two forums are being put on this month for residents in Truckee to find out about issues that will be on the Nov. 6 ballot.



The Sept. 20 6-8pm event is a chance to learn about Measure J, the Truckee Donner Recreation and Park measure, and who the candidates for Truckee Donner Public Utility District are.

The Sept. 27 6-8pm gathering is to hear from candidates for Truckee Town Council and Truckee Tahoe Airport District.

Both meetings are at Truckee Town Hall, 10183 Airport Road, second floor.

For more information, call the Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce at (530) 587.8808.

Opinion: S. Tahoe council could be filled with rookies

To the community,

It’s a grand mess the city of South Lake Tahoe is in. Actually, it’s more like a nightmare. The following could happen or will happen.

The mayor will leave the city without finishing her term. If charged with a crime and convicted, Angela Swanson will vacate her seat on the council. There will be an election in November and the two incumbents might be defeated. If the incumbents lose and the mayor and Swanson leave the council, then Tom

Davis will be the lone man standing. Poor Tommy. By January, that’s when the mayor has said she will leave the city, Mayor Davis will be sitting with two new faces on the council and one empty seat for sure, maybe two if Ms. Swanson has to resign.


Bill Crawford

At that time the City Council will have to appoint to fill vacancies or call a special election. That’s not likely because it’s costly. So it is possible the city will be governed by a three-member council, at least for a while. Looks like a crazy sitcom-reality show scripted by a devilish trickster. So the audience should be prepared to hang onto their seats and not tune out, but tune in and enjoy the fun and laughs. No tears please.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

PS: If an elected official is offered a bribe and does not report the offer, then the official can be charged with a crime. And as the playwright has said, “Fair play is a spectator sport.” And by the way, on Sept. 9, 1850, California was admitted to the Union as a free state. When I was a child it was state holiday. Times change.

Raley’s ratchets up marketing to compete in crowded grocery field

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Even as it has been shutting some stores and trying to get concessions from unionized employees, West Sacramento-based Raley’s is trying to reassert its brand in a brutally competitive Northern California supermarket environment.

The privately held company’s multiple marketing efforts range from online shopping options to expanded private brands to working closely with local growers … and even bringing back an instantly recognizable voice from the past.

“We’re always looking for ways to improve the Raley’s brand, both in our food and service area,” said Kevin Konkel, senior vice president of sales and marketing. “Yes, we are doing different things.”

Analysts are skeptical that marketing efforts will be enough to solidify Raley’s position against the onslaught of competition from nonunion discount grocers such as Wal-Mart. Raley’s sales fell 8 percent between 2008 and 2010.

But local shoppers are likely to notice some of the efforts.

One of the most visible is the return of 83-year-old Frank McMinn, the longtime radio voice of Raley’s. McMinn’s silky-smooth delivery could seemingly prompt the most jaded radio listener to take instant notice of a weekly special on sweet corn.

The folksy McMinn – who joined Raley’s as an ad man in the 1950s and was a marketing vice president before retiring in 1993 – was out the door as pitchman in late 2008, when Raley’s

opted to try other marketing options.

However, when Michael Teel, grandson of Raley's founder Tom Raley, came back on board as CEO in early 2010, things were re-evaluated.

Read the whole story

LTCC on path to become 4-year destination college

By Kathryn Reed

A bachelor's degree with Lake Tahoe Community College's seal. That could be a reality for students graduating in 2016 if college President Kindred Murillo gets her way.

She would also like to turn the two-year institution into a destination college – as in people would move to South Lake Tahoe to go to college here.



LTCC President Kindred Murillo has big plans for the South Lake Tahoe college. Photo/LTN file

A few select programs would be expanded or introduced for students to complete all four years of study at LTCC. She foresees turning the fire science program into four years, possibly environmental sciences, as well as sports medicine.

With LTCC having the highest transfer rate to the UC and CSU systems of the eight small community colleges, this proves local students are seeking a four-year degree.

The idea is for the four-year programs to complement other things the area has to offer – which translates into being able to work in the region upon graduation, as well as not competing with the UC and CSU systems.

Plenty of potential roadblocks could thwart Murillo's plans of LTCC starting as a four-year college in fall 2014, but she is not shy about confronting the challenges head-on.

"It requires building community support, support through the community college system and the Legislature," Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It's possible the state will launch a pilot program that LTCC could be part of. If that doesn't come to fruition, Murillo is prepared to work with officials in Sacramento to have LTCC be a test case for a community college to expand its offerings.

Murillo said with higher education in California going through major changes, now is the time to try new things – like having a community college offer a four-year degree.

The board of education at its retreat earlier this summer voiced support for staff to pursue this goal.

Even if LTCC does not evolve into a four-year institution, Murillo and the board are committed to attracting students from out of the area. This will require building student housing on campus. She said parents don't want their offspring to be living in apartments or hotel rooms right out of high school.

"Becoming a 24/7 campus is the linchpin to being a destination college," Murillo said while sitting in her office, with plenty of developable land outside her window.

Besides recruiting students from California and Nevada, Murillo wants a true push to lure international students here. She expects to work on this more in the 2013-14 school year. Why she believes it will be more successful than what the college tried a few years ago is that she would employ people who do this for a living.

"We need to globalize this college," she said. "It could be a great economic development tool for this community."

But to entice some of those students who might not be thinking of Lake Tahoe as a college destination, Murillo also knows the campus needs upgrading.

"We don't want to let the college deteriorate. Instructors and students deserve modern facilities," Murillo said. Plus, using technology that is found in the workplace is critical to being able to land a job.

While the college once had classrooms in a motel, it moved to its current location off Al Tahoe Boulevard in 1988. It has grown since then, with the newest building – the library – opening six years ago this month.

But the science classrooms and labs are 24-years-old. Technology has changed, how classes are taught has evolved. At a minimum, a remodel is needed; though a whole new science complex could be possible.

The college has submitted an initial capital outlay plan to the state chancellor’s office. This meant looking at how every inch of space is used – even closets. The goal is to obtain an efficiency remodel grant.

Any grant will require the college to come up with matching funds, but that dollar figure is unknown. It would depend on what the state allocates and what all the college wants to do.

Besides the science upgrades, most of the technology on campus needs to be brought into the 21st century. New servers are part of those upgrades. The art department is also in drastic need of being revamped. A less visible improvement that is needed is fixing the roof.

The finishing touches of the initial facilities master plan are being workout out. The first reading of it is expected to be before the board Sept. 25. It’s expected to be a fluid document that talks about the college’s needs for the next 15 to 20 years.

To pay for the upgrades or have a match for state dollars the college is talking about going to voters in 2014 at the earliest to ask them to approve a general obligation bond. The amount would depend on the needs of the college.

Owner of dogs that bit woman

on West Shore being sought

El Dorado County Animal Services is searching for the owner of two German Shepherd dogs that bit a 68-year-old woman Aug. 31 at approximately 4:45pm while she was walking in Rubicon Bay.

The incident occurred on Highland Drive in Rubicon Bay when the dogs, off leash and running alongside their owner's truck, approached the woman and bit her on her leg. The owner of the dogs stopped and provided contact information to the woman, but that information has since proven to be incorrect.

The dogs are described as pure bred German Shepherds, black and tan in color.

While the woman's injuries were not life threatening, Animal Services officers are actively looking for the dogs' owner to verify that the dogs are current on their rabies vaccinations. Without this verification, the woman may need to have post-exposure rabies treatments.

Anyone with information is asked to call (530) 573.7925.

Surpluses confused state parks workers for years

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Over and again, budget officials at the California Department of Parks and Recreation struggled to understand why every fiscal year ended with millions of dollars in surplus cash on hand.

At least since 2009, budget reviews conducted by the department each January showed a multimillion-dollar surplus, according to hundreds of pages of witness testimony reviewed by The Bee. Budget officials turned over regularly at state parks headquarters amid what one called a “hostile work environment,” and each seemed powerless to figure out why the mystery money kept piling up.

The department’s beleaguered deputy director of administration, Manuel Thomas Lopez, appeared angry and confused about the surpluses, according to staffers’ testimony. One year, he ordered a budget manager demoted, saying he simply didn’t believe her estimate of a $25 million surplus – even though she later was proved correct.

“When I saw the numbers, I said holy crap,” David Saxby, assistant deputy director under Lopez, said in an April 25 interview with a deputy attorney general. He was referring to a budget estimate in the 2009-10 fiscal year. “There was another big balance, not as big as the year before, but another big balance.”

The puzzle of the recurring surpluses goes to the heart of a scandal in which state parks was found in July to have hidden $54 million in two park operating funds. For reasons that remain under investigation, the parks department kept the money secret for years by reporting false balances to the state Department of Finance.

So far, there are no indications the money was misused or embezzled. It was simply kept hidden, state officials said, even as the department carried out a plan last year to close 70 parks to achieve $22 million in state budget cuts.

Parks director Ruth Coleman resigned as the scandal unfolded. Numerous other parks officials were either fired or demoted. Separate investigations are under way by the state auditor and attorney general’s office.

These events followed an earlier scandal, first reported by The Bee, in which Lopez was found to have carried out an illegal vacation buyout program for parks headquarters employees in 2011 that resulted in payouts of more than $271,000.

In response to numerous Public Records Act requests, the state last month released more than 1,000 pages of investigative interviews on the covert vacation buyout program. These deal mostly with the mechanics of the program, which allowed employees to sell unused vacation time back to the state. But in their interviews, many parks officials tried to explain why the department had money to spend on the buyouts in the first place.

“There was a lot of concern that we were going to leave a lot of general fund money on the table, which was not going to be a good thing because they were threatening to close parks,” said Cheryl Taylor, the department’s former budget officer, in an April 12 interview with a deputy attorney general. “They couldn’t understand why we had so much surplus money sitting around.”

Taylor was describing a meeting in February 2010 with Saxby and Lopez. Similar confusion occurred in 2009 and 2011, according to Saxby, who oversaw the budget staff.

“There was still a big number (in 2011) that we were going to leave on the table,” Saxby said when interviewed April 25. “I demanded that they get to the bottom of the allocation file, go through it and truth it and figure out what went wrong because there’s something wrong in there.”

When Lopez conceived the vacation buyout in June 2011, he justified it as necessary to spend down the unexplained surplus, according to a transcript of his April 3 interview with a deputy attorney general. He also spent $1 million on new communications equipment for the department’s law

enforcement dispatch centers, according to testimony, and new personal computers for the entire department that may have cost another $1 million.

Lopez was asked if he thought about consulting his supervisor or Coleman about where the surplus money could best be used to help parks. He said he did not.

“I was looking at it from just the Admin Division budget,” he said. “Obviously, I was wrong.”

Lopez was demoted in October when Coleman and other department executives learned about the vacation buyouts. He resigned in May, just days before the state planned to fire him, according to the documents. Lopez, a Granite Bay resident, has not responded to recent requests for comment.

Read the whole story

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2 STHS students to represent U.S. in international forestry competition

South Tahoe High School seniors Emily Barnett and Tyler Myers are going to Russia to present their field research project “The Effects of Fire and Forest Thinning on the Biodiversity of Understory Plants in the Lake Tahoe Basin” at the 9th annual International Junior Foresters’ Competition.

Their project was selected by the U.S. Forest Service International Programs office in Washington, D.C., to represent the United States.

The competition is in Moscow Sept. 12-14.

This annual event brings together youth from nations around the world to promote and reward young scientists for their interest and efforts in the environmental field and encourage international dialogue concerning forestry issues.

This year, 60 students from 32 countries will be competing. An international panel of 15 forestry experts will judge the students' projects. This is the first time the United States will attend the competition.

Barnett and Myers' project grew out of their participation in the Generation Green Program, a student club advised by teacher Maria Luquin and the Forest Service' Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's Conservation Education Specialist, Joy Barney. Through this program, they learned of a summer internship opportunity with the LTBMU, and in 2011 worked as members of the Youth Conservation Corps. The internship motivated them to assume the leadership of the Generation Green Club during the 2011-12 school year.