Opinion: Saving America's small farms one apple at a time

By Chris Mittelstaedt

For more than 100 years, farmers in Graton and Sebastopol have been raising and harvesting the fickle and short-lived Gravenstein apple. In the 1940s, when this Sonoma County region shipped dried Gravenstein apples and applesauce to American troops, there were more than 10,000 acres in production. Today there are 900 acres, with only 15 farmers keeping this rare apple's production alive.



Saving the Gravenstein goes beyond the foodie arguments for preservation, the noble goals of sustainability or the sentimentality for things of yore. Saving the Gravenstein and other small farms and their unique products makes our cultural and economic immune system strong with self-sufficiency, draws on a legacy of Grange hall independence that strengthens communities, and pushes back against the trend that values sameness.

Small agriculture defines a sense of place in a way that goes beyond food and straight to the meaning of democracy and capitalism. In our modern world, where from Beijing to Boston to Belfast you can order a burger and count on its exact reproduction, we often confuse the opportunity for material equality with freedom. The comfort that comes with sameness lulls us into complacency.

We forget how to do things for ourselves.

We assume that there is an invisible system running programs and that they (whomever they are) will make sure that things are done well and safely on our behalf.

We begin to value what is familiar rather than what is innovative or different.

There is some confusion and concern following the passage of the Food Safety Modernization Act, the sweeping reform of our food safety laws signed into law in April, as the FDA has yet to come out with rules to implement it. Small farmers we work with say, regardless of the final rules, the large buyers, insurers and other entities will hold sway over farming operations, and will raise the bar of compliance beyond what is reasonable for a small farm.

There are concern that animals, including birds, bats, deer, foxes, and even dogs, will be deemed hazardous. While I understand the food safety concerns, the concept of sterilizing the biodiversity of a farm only leads down one path: to no more outdoor farms.

There is discussion about accommodating small growers, but the trend is not good, and the mood is akin to an agricultural Patriot Act, where an over inflated concern about food safety puts at risk American agricultural life as we know it.

While food safety is important, the sameness that drives compliance threatens consumers, may not make food safer and muzzles the important and independent voice of small farms.

Yvon Chouinard, the founder of the company Patagonia said, “We are not citizens any more; we’re consumers.” But if what we can consume is hindered before it gets to us, then the vote we cast is no vote at all.

So when you shop, think about what you are voting for. Saving

the Gravenstein or the Blenheim apricot or the Fey Alberta peach or a small farm growing acres of greens is about creating environments and markets for that produce.

Laws and regulations shouldn’t hand a competitive advantage to large farms. Small farms are more than just places that grow food – they are vital to our democracy.

Chris Mittelstaedt is the founder and CEO of The FruitGuys. He is working with the Russian River chapter of Slow Food to raise funds for the Gravenstein farmers.

DiMatteo pleads not guilty to drug, bribing elected official charges; wife released

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE – Gino DiMatteo pleaded not guilty Sept. 4 to the drug and bribery charges levied against him, while the charges against his wife, Irene, were dropped.

He was formally charged with bribery, possession of marijuana for sale, possession of a controlled substance and possession of ammunition. The latter charge has to do with his third-degree felony possession of a handgun conviction from August 1999 in New Jersey that prohibits him from owning or possessing a firearm.

The first count says DiMatteo “did unlawfully give and offer a bribe to a member of the South Lake Tahoe City Council, with intent to corruptly influence said member in his/her action on a matter and subject pending before and which was afterward to be considered by said body of which he/she was a member.”



Gino DiMatteo -- who also goes by Sergio Franco Ottomanelli -- was booked into El Dorado County Jail in Placerville on Aug. 31. Photo/Provided

The alleged bribery of Councilwoman Angela Swanson, according to the complaint that was released Tuesday, took place on or between June 5-13.

June 5 is the date DiMatteo was before the council to seek approval to move his medical marijuana collective, City of Angels II, from Third Street to Lake Tahoe Boulevard. The resolution before the council was to deny that request, but the council wanted to do the opposite. It was thought at the time the 4-1 vote (Councilman Bruce Grego voted no) was to allow DiMatteo to move, while in fact what was approved was to have staff craft a resolution to allow him to move.

That resolution came before the board July 3 and was then voted down 3-2, with Swanson and Mayor Claire Fortier in the minority. The preceding night the local drug task force came out with a report alleging DiMatteo was connected to illegal drug activities, though at that time no charges had been brought against him. This led the majority of the council to deny his move, which in effect put him out of the medical marijuana business.

Swanson has consistently been in support of medical marijuana collectives, so her votes on these two occasions are not inconsistent with prior votes.

Although Swanson is the councilmember named in the bribery, she has not been charged with any crime. No one from the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, the lead agency on the case, is disclosing if they intend to press charges against Swanson or if she may be a victim in all of this.

Swanson has told *Lake Tahoe News* she has done nothing wrong and is cooperating fully with the DA's office.

However, to complicate matters, James Clinchard, the deputy district attorney prosecuting the DiMatteo case, wrote a letter dated Aug. 12, 2012, to DiMatteo that essentially granted him immunity in the bribery case.

That letter in part says, "The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, pursuant to Penal Code 1324, agrees that any future statements or testimony given pursuant to this agreement, and any evidence discovered based solely upon those statements and/or testimony, related solely to the bribery of Angela Swanson in or about June and July 2012, shall not be admissible in any subsequent prosecution of said Gino DiMatteo."

Nineteen days after that letter was signed DiMatteo was arrested on bribery charges. It is not known why a deal was cut with DiMatteo and then apparently rescinded. Nor is it

known if Swanson was unknowingly being used to get to DiMatteo and that is why she has not been charged.

Lake Tahoe News read the entire letter to Swanson on Sept. 4. She said this was the first time she knew about the letter and had no immediate comment.

Clinchard was in court in Placerville on Sept. 4 representing the state. After the hearing he had no comment for *Lake Tahoe News*.

Dressed in the standard issue orange jumpsuit and hands cuffed with a chain around his waist, DiMatteo let public defender David Cramer do the talking. Cramer asked El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Robert Baysinger to overrule Judge Suzanne Kingsbury's order from last week that would keep DiMatteo in jail based on suspicion the money he would use to bail himself out would have been obtained illegally.

Clinchard told the judge he wanted a bail study because he does not believe DiMatteo qualifies for a public defender based on the amount of income he has claimed from his pot club.

Cramer voiced his objections to that decision.

A bail hearing is set for Sept. 7 at 1pm.

Ted Long, a South Lake Tahoe attorney and former councilman, said he represented Irene DiMatteo and was able to get the charges against her dropped. He said he plans to file a claim of false arrest and false imprisonment.

Long believes Gino DiMatteo is being set up. He also does not believe Swanson took a bribe.

"I think there is a lot of pettiness going on," Long said.

Long was at Push Fitness, the athletic club DiMatteo bought after giving up the medical marijuana business, when DiMatteo

was arrested Aug. 31. Long said he has been a business consultant to DiMatteo and helped facilitate the purchase of the health club.

“I was physically restrained from talking to my client. They threatened me with arrest,” Long told *Lake Tahoe News*. Long said how friends in the DA’s office are treating him makes him “suspicious” about the charges against DiMatteo.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority bike committee will meet Sept. 5, 9-11am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

• The annual Peaks and Paws fundraiser at Squaw raised $10,000 Truckee-Tahoe Humane Society.

• Enrollment at Lake Tahoe Unified School District after the first week is 3,813. The last school year ended with 3,740 students.

• On Sept. 7 at 5:30pm 968 Hotel in South Lake Tahoe will reveal its newest addition – 968 Coffee & Pub.

• This in from *Northern Nevada Business Weekly*, “Tri-State Water Operations of Zephyr Cove won a contract through the U.S. Marine Corps worth $33,600 to provide waste and potable water treatment oversight and management at the Marine Corp Mountain Warfare Training Center at Bridgeport, Calif. The

contract began Sept. 1 and runs through Aug. 31, 2013.”

El Dorado County woman dies from injuries sustained in Jeep accident

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

An El Dorado Hills woman. injured more than a month ago in an off-road crash on the Rubicon Trail, has died, according to the Sacramento County Coroner’s office.

Rachel Anne Gray, 21, died at 12:08am Sunday.

She had last been reported in critical condition after her vehicle rolled off the Rubicon Trail on July 28, causing a 2-acre forest fire and stranding as many as 300 other Jeeps participating in the Jeepers Jamboree.

The 1961 Jeep Willy she was driving careened off an embankment near Cadillac Hill, said Officer Dan Stark, a spokesman for the California Highway Patrol.

The vehicle overturned several times, ejecting Gray and a 34-year-old male passenger from Pilot Hill before catching fire, Stark said.

Both Gray and the passenger were taken to the UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento.

While some of the Jeeps turned back, most – lacking enough fuel for the return trip –waited out the fire before

completing the final three to four hours of the trip toward Lake Tahoe.

Raley’s union to vote this week on contract

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

In a make-or-break bid for labor peace, union leaders at Save Mart Supermarkets have ordered another vote on a contract agreement that members have already rejected.

Warning that the Modesto grocery chain is in difficult financial shape, leaders of Local 5 of the United Food and Commercial Workers in San Jose are urging their members to accept a “distasteful” contract that includes concessions. The vote will take place Thursday and Friday, and the ballots will be counted Saturday.

Central Valley employees, represented by Local 8 in Roseville, won’t participate because they’ve already voted in favor of the contract. But they’ll have a keen interest in the Bay Area outcome: The contract doesn’t take effect for anyone until a majority of Save Mart workers across Northern California approve it.

Bay Area union leaders are pulling out all the stops to secure ratification. They’re invoking union rules that would let Local 5’s executive board approve the contract even if a majority of workers vote against it.

Read the whole story

Recovered stolen goods linked to string of burglaries

South Lake Tahoe resident Deonte Brown is behind bars on charges of possession of stolen property, possession of narcotics and resisting arrest.

Officers said they found a 2002 Lexus convertible parked in his apartment complex on Manzanita Avenue in South Lake Tahoe. The vehicle had been stolen during a residential burglary in Zephyr Cove two weeks ago.

A search of Brown's apartment on Sept. 3 turned up high-end watches, jewelry, computers, flat-screen TVs and collector coins, police said. Brown is on felony probation related to drug convictions and therefore can have his residence searched without a warrant. Police believe the goods are related to a string of recent residential burglaries in Nevada and California.

Investigator also found the key to the stolen Lexus inside the apartment, along with a large amount of heroin.

Brown was apprehended behind Harveys casino in Stateline after a short foot chase.

If anyone has information related to this event, call Detective Nick Carlquist of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at (530) 542.6100.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Overweight children create problems for school system

By Kavitha Cardoza, NPR

One in three children in the United States is overweight or obese. Significant numbers of those young people are grappling with health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

Those conditions can be difficult for children to manage in any setting, but they can pose particular challenges for children during the school day.

Dr. Yolandra Hancock used to be an elementary school teacher, and it shows. She's patient, encouraging and has an endearing way of ending her sentences with "my love" and "my sweet."

Her patients include a 13-year-old who weighs 400 pounds; a child whose teeth are so rotted she can't bite into carrots; and many preteens who are diabetic. Today, Hancock is examining Derek Lyles, 13. He's 4 feet 11 inches and weighs 256 pounds.

"When we look at his body mass index, which is how well his weight and height balance out, his BMI today is 46.7," Hancock says. "For an adult male, we like to see a BMI of 30 or less."

Hancock is also troubled by dark patches of skin around Derek's neck.

"When little ones, especially around the back of the neck, have that sort of thick, almost velvety appearance to their neck, it means that their bodies are becoming less sensitive to insulin," she says.

Back-to-school checkups for patients like Derek mean lots of follow-up work for Hancock. Their belly fat pushes down on their bladders, so she'll have to write notes to principals, asking that her patients be allowed to go to the bathroom frequently. She must also draft requests to excuse children whose sleep apnea makes them appear drowsy in class, or whose joints hurt as they walk between classes.

These accommodations also mean more work for schools, says Camille Wheeler, a nurse at Bell Multicultural High School in Washington, D.C.

"It's a lot. It really is," Wheeler says. "It takes a lot for the student, for the nurse, the parent and the school. Especially the school. Because the majority of the time the students are here, you know?"

Wheeler says it's not unusual for a child to arrive at school at 8am and depart at 6pm, depending on a family's aftercare arrangements.

"That's a large chunk of their time," she says.

On a recent afternoon, Wheeler is thumbing through stacks of paper, racing to process students' health information.

"I have a whole stack here of many, many health certificates, dental forms, health records," she says. "It's about well over 200 forms in here, and I'm getting them daily."

Many of the forms are related to obesity. Children with diabetes need midmorning snacks. Some are on special diets and some need medication. All this means time away from the classroom.

"It may not be in the forefront, like a broken bone for example, but it's there and it affects the students every day," says Shirley Schantz, nursing education director for the National Association of School Nurses.

Schantz says that nurses from across the country are increasingly calling her organization, asking for guidance on how to deal with childhood obesity in schools – even preschools.

“They see students that can’t walk upstairs,” she says. “They see students that are absent because they’re overweight or obese, [who] don’t want to go to physical education.”

The physical aspects of living with obesity can be difficult enough for a child. But there’s an emotional toll, as well. Bullying is a common problem for obese kids. Derek says other students often called him fat in middle school.

All these challenges can also affect learning. Dr. Hancock says there is evidence that children who are obese score less well on standardized tests and basic classroom tests.

“Some researchers believe that there may be something physiologically that’s affecting the child’s ability to learn,” Bell says. “Others believe, because of self-esteem issues and bullying, it makes them less eager to attend school and participate in school activities.”

Derek wants to lose weight so he can “walk fast like other kids.” And he really wants to start playing football again this year.

“During training camp, I couldn’t do most of the, like, exercise that other people was doing,” Derek says. “I just couldn’t do it.”

For many obese children, even maintaining their weight when they’re not in school is challenging. This summer, Derek could eat whenever he wanted, and the fridge was always stocked with food. At school, he says, he ate cereal or a muffin for breakfast. But over the summer, he often ate sausage and eggs. The pounds piled on.

Hancock hopes eating meals at school will help Derek get his weight under control. She embraces Derek as she says goodbye.

“All right, handsome, give me some hugs,” Hancock says, embracing Derek. “I have faith you’ll be able to make changes, because you’ve done this before.”

As Hancock reminds her young patient, it’s a brand new school year – an opportunity to start fresh.

Time is now to challenge property tax assessment

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

Tens of thousands of homeowners in the Sacramento area are headed into another year of an expensive tax cycle – one of paying those hefty property tax bills that help fuel government operations.

For those who believe their property assessments are too high, this is also the time of year owners can try to do something about it. The windows for challenging your property tax assessment are about to close in Placer, Yolo, El Dorado and Sacramento counties.

Following is a step-by-step guide on how to get started. All it takes is a little homework, some paperwork, patience and basic analysis.

Your first question: Is your home’s assessed value in line with sales of comparable properties in your neighborhood? Or is it too high?

To find out, look at sales of homes with similar amenities, square footage, bedrooms and lot sizes in your neighborhood. County assessors tie their valuations to Jan. 1, 2012, so focus mainly on sales from Oct. 1, 2011, through March 31, 2012.

Read the whole story

Home health care a growing need and business in California

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

The fastest-growing profession in California doesn't require a college degree and provides constant validation that you are making a difference in someone's life.

But the same job pays little more than minimum wage and demands intense exposure to the sick and dying.

Home health aides visit the elderly and disabled to assist them with simple medical tasks like getting shots and dressing wounds while also helping them get around.

As baby boomers age, the number of home health aides will increase by 32,000, or 52 percent, across California by 2020, according to new projections by the state Employment Development Department. That's a faster rate of growth than any other profession with more than 10,000 California workers.

A related profession, personal care aides, will grow by 43 percent, adding 138,200 jobs.

“It’s a huge need, and it’s a growing need,” said Ken Erman, CEO of Rx Staffing and Home Care in Sacramento. “People need some assistance, but they don’t need so much help for them to go to a nursing home.”

The rise in home health aides will correspond with a historic increase in the number of very old Californians – and it will probably not be a short-term trend.

Within 30 years, the number of Californians over 85 – the age group most likely to use a home health aide – will more than triple to almost 2 million, growing eight times faster than the state’s population as a whole, according to projections from the California Department of Finance.

Besides home health aides, that growth will contribute to increased demand for myriad health professionals – from occupational therapy assistants to pharmacy aides.

The EDD predicts the number of California jobs in the health care support sector will increase by 25 percent by 2020, compared with 16 percent growth in jobs overall.

Read the whole story

HopeFest raises money for cancer patients

It’s time to “HOPE” again. HopeFest 2012 is Sept. 7 at the Carson Tahoe Cancer Center.

This annual benefit concert is one of the biggest game changers for people in the area because 100 percent of the money raised directly supports local cancer patients in need.

For many, in addition to the stress of the disease, they also have to deal with an accompanying financial crisis. As a result, people need help with basic things like gas to get to treatment, a place to stay for extended care, a helping hand with insurance co-pays.

Thanks to the generosity of musical groups Mo5aic and The Cutters, food and drink sponsors Firkin & Fox and High Sierra Brewing Company, and Dick Campagni – which is offering $10,000 in cash or a new car for the HopeFest raffle – the event has something for everyone.

Last year more than $37,000 was raised. Because of the dramatically increased local need, the goal this year is $100,000.

For more information, call (775) 445.5161.

The event is at 1535 Medical Parkway, Carson City.