Salt debate spills into restaurant sector

By Douglas Guengua, New York Times

It was a slightly curious gesture: last week, Boston Market, the national chain of rotisserie chicken restaurants, removed the salt shakers from its tables, replacing them with small placards – tucked next to the pepper shakers – promoting the company's interest in reducing sodium.

As a marketing strategy, it was clever, earning the 476-restaurant franchise business more publicity than its popular macaroni and cheese ever could. As a health measure, however, it was unlikely to do more than to make customers shrug and to fire up the longstanding debate over whether people who do not have high blood pressure truly need to limit their salt intake.

"We are removing the temptation to put salt on food right away without even tasting it," said George Michel, chief executive of Boston Market, in a telephone interview. "As part of our social responsibility and promise to deliver wholesome food, we wanted to take a bold step like this."

Sodium reduction has lately become a culinary cause célèbre. Subway, Olive Garden, Red Lobster, Burger King and Taco Bell, as well as food manufacturers like Campbell Soup and PepsiCo, have all publicly vowed to produce lower-sodium products. (To a degree: last year, Campbell decided to add sodium back into some of its soups after sales began to slide.)

Critics say the precautions are getting ahead of the science. Unlike tobacco, alcohol and other long-corroborated health risks, sodium remains a topic of sometimes angry debate among researchers. There is no evidence that average people – those without hypertension – need less sodium, critics say, and too

little of the essential nutrient could be as dangerous as too much.

“The science does not support an effort to reduce sodium in people who eat around three and a half grams of sodium a day, and that’s most Americans,” said Michael H. Alderman, editor of the American Journal of Hypertension. “Yet here we are doing silly things that are P.R. Salt shakers only account for about 10 percent of your salt intake. I don’t think it’s ethically justified.”

On the other side are public health advocates – most notably the United States Department of Agriculture, with a strong assist from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg’s administration in New York.

“There is conclusive evidence that high-salt diets lead to hypertension,” said Michael F. Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and a leading antisalt flag bearer, “and there is conclusive evidence that hypertension increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes.”

Read the whole story

Lab kills trees to learn how to save them

By David Gilkey, NPR

The droughts that have parched big regions of the country are killing forests.

In the arid Southwest, the body count is especially high. Besides trying to keep wildfires from burning up these

desiccated forests, there’s not much anyone can do. In fact, scientists are only now figuring out how drought affects trees.

Park Williams studies trees at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, but not the way most scientists do. “We’re interested in trees that die,” he says – specifically, death by heat and drought.

Sure, lack of water kills trees, but which ones die first, how long does it take, how long can they go without water? “That’s a part we don’t understand very well as ecologists,” says Craig Allen, an ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey. “We don’t know what it takes to kill trees.”

Allen and Williams have tracked droughts through the centuries. They know there’ve been bigger droughts than the one we’re in now, but not many. And Williams says this one is different. “In past droughts, temperatures always rebounded and precipitation rebounded and went to a wet time,” he explains. “What we have now is a gradual trend toward warmer temperatures.”

Climate change is making the region ever hotter. And when you have consistently hotter weather, the atmosphere gets thirsty – it sucks water out of the ground and out of plants. You get more droughts, and deeper droughts. There’s less water for everything.

Computer models of climate change predict that this region will warm by several degrees before the century is out, and Allen says the “new normal” will look like the worst of the past. “So it suggests basically that the main tree populations on our mountains will die,” Allen says. “They will not be able to survive there. It doesn’t mean there won’t be any trees anywhere on these landscapes, but it means the current dominant trees will die.”

Which ones survive, and how many, is the subject of research

at the Los Alamos lab.

Read the whole story

Identities of South Tahoe plane crash victims released

The El Dorado County coroner has confirmed the identities of the five people who died Saturday night when their plane crashed after taking off from Lake Tahoe Airport.

The deceased are:

Harold Cardwell, 60

Kin Cardwell, 41

Francisco De La Mora, 43

Lorena De La Mora, 39

Esmeralda De La Mora, 6.

All are from Fresno.

The National Transportation Safety Board is continuing to investigate the Aug. 25 accident to determine the cause.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placerville winery accident brings sad end to couple's future

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

It would have been a spectacular setting for their wedding, amid the rolling hills of a vineyard where he was learning the art of winemaking.

Joshua David Ruff and Rachel Manasse had it all planned, from the sparkly toasting glasses to the purple flower petals that would decorate the aisle.

But as they were putting the final touches on the ceremony, their world came crashing down around them.

On Wednesday, less than three weeks before they were to be married, Ruff was killed in an equipment accident while working at David Girard vineyards in Placerville.

Now Manasse is left to contemplate a future without the man she called her best friend and the love of her young life.

"I am hearing words like reception and guest books, which I've been associating with my wedding plans," said Manasse, who graduated this spring from Long Beach State, where she met Ruff. "But things have turned around 180 degrees."

Family and friends will gather this afternoon in El Dorado Hills, where Ruff grew up and was a star athlete who earned a college track scholarship, for his memorial service.

He would have been 23 years old next month. The wedding would have been Sept. 8.

Read the whole story

Learn about migration patterns in Tahoe

Will Richardson of the Tahoe Institute for Natural Sciences will talk about the fall migration in Tahoe and the effects of change climate patterns on migration and the birds and wildlife found in the basin on Sept. 18.

The event is at the South Lake Tahoe branch library, 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.

The free event starts at 6:30pm.

For more information, call (530) 573.3185.

Gas prices not expected to impact Labor Day travel

AAA Travel projects 33 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more from home during the Labor Day holiday weekend, a 2.9 percent increase from the 32.1 million people who traveled last year.



The total number of 2012 Labor Day holiday travelers is expected to reach a new post-recession high, according to the AAA/IHS Global Insight 2012 Labor Day Holiday Travel Forecast.

Apparently travelers are not suffering from sticker shock at gas stations.

Approximately 28.2 million people (85 percent of holiday travelers) will make their Labor Day holiday journey by automobile, considered the most convenient mode of travel for many Americans. This is a 3.1 percent increase over the 27.3 million people who took to the nation's roadways in 2011.

According to AAA Fuel Gauge Report, gasoline futures have spiked by 19 percent in the last two months. This has translated into a 7.2 percent increase at the pump. And don't expect things to getter soon because pump prices take several weeks to catch up to futures.

A survey of intended travelers found that 66 percent said their current financial situation would not negatively impact their Labor Day holiday weekend travel plans. Of the remaining 34 percent of travelers who said their current finances would impact their travel plans, 21 percent will economize in other areas, 9 percent are planning to take a shorter trip, and the remaining 4 percent will travel by an alternate mode of transportation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Ehrman Mansion tells the story of Tahoe of yesteryear

By Kathryn Reed

TAHOMA – As the first president of Wells Fargo Bank, Isaias Hellman was well versed in how to make money. He also understood real estate.

In 1897, the German-born financier bought 1,000 acres of waterfront property on the West Shore of Lake Tahoe that included two miles of beach. Then he bought another 1,000 acres on what is now the west side of Highway 89.

This was where he and his family, along with multitudes of friends, would pass away the summers. While Hellman had to spend most of his time taking care of business in San Francisco, others enjoyed the estate he had created.



The Ehrman Mansion is a trip back in time before Lake Tahoe was truly settled. Photos/Kathryn Reed

In summer 1903, Pine Lodge was ready for guests. It took only two years for the beachfront house – which is more like a mansion – to be constructed. It cost $22,000 to build.

While much of the material came from the surrounding area, all

the supplies and workers reached the property via boat. Granite came from Meeks Bay and the lumber from Hobart Mills, north of Truckee.

Walter Danforth Bliss designed the house.

A spiral staircase, with windows looking west to the back yard and away from Lake Tahoe, goes to the second floor. This is where the family and their friends slept – in the eight bedrooms. It was unusual at that time for bedrooms to have their own bathrooms, but seven of these did.

On the third floor, which is not open to tourists except during rare occasions, were the four bedrooms for staff.

As children started to come to the estate, a separate building was built for them so they were not with the adults in the main house.

Even though roads were not yet built, the home had indoor plumbing with hot and cold water, as well as electricity. A steam generator provided the modern conveniences.

It also took 200 cords of wood – which was the primary heat source.

With a caretaker on-site year-round, he would dam General Creek so ice could be cut into blocks and stored in a shed all summer. They were for refrigeration.

It was Hellman's daughter – Florence Hellman Ehrman – who spent the most time in Tahoe. She inherited the property from her father. Thus the reason is it most-often called the Ehrman Mansion.

By 1927, the mansion was on the power grid. A year later the state had paved roads on this side of the lake. In 1930, telephone service arrived in Tahoma. In 1945, a propane stove replaced the wood cooking apparatus.

Today it is a state park and museum of sorts. California State Parks in 1965 paid $7.2 million for the mansion and 2,000 acres. It sat vacant for 20 years. At first officials thought about tearing down Pine Lodge, as the house was called by the original owners, and turning the area into a campground. Instead, what became a campground is the acreage on the other side of the state highway.

The public was welcome in the 1980s. It is well worth taking a tour of this slice of Tahoe history, with its dining room that has woven redwood walls and ceilings one-twentieth of an inch thick. This room looks like it would have in the 1930s.

A mirror is low on the wall – all for the women to check to make sure their petticoats were not showing, let alone their ankles.

A rather modern kitchen produced about 150 meals a day; each guest was served three meals a day.

And if a trip back in time is not to your liking, the grounds are pleasant to stroll and the beach worth catching some rays on. The icehouse is open without a fee, as is the boathouse where the classic wooden Cherokee is stored.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, go north on Highway 89. Go for about 19 miles. Sign for the state park will be on the right. (The entrance is 10 miles from Tahoe City.)

Things to know:

• Daily tours end Sept. 30 before resuming Memorial Day weekend.

• Call for times: (530) 525.7232.

• Cost: $10 to park, $8 for adult tours, $5 for ages 6-17, free if younger.

• Sierra State Parks Foundation and California State Parks is putting on “behind the scenes” at Ehrman Mansion on Aug. 31 from 5-8pm. Tickets are $50/person, with proceeds designated for maintenance and repairs of the mansion.

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Sandoval retains speaking spot at GOP convention

By Las Vegas Sun

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval has held on to his prime-time speaking slot at the Republican National Convention this week after Tropical Storm Isaac forced the cancellation of the convention’s opening night.

Sandoval will speak at 6pm Tuesday and is expected to keep to the original theme of the opening night: “We can do better.”

He will discuss his personal story growing up in a working class family and then accuse President Obama of putting the American dream at risk.

Sandoval was originally set to speak Monday evening, but convention business was canceled until Tuesday because of the oncoming storm.

On a conference call Sunday, party officials said they plan to stick to a Tuesday-through-Thursday schedule while keeping an eye on Isaac, which is expected to develop into a hurricane by the time it reaches land Tuesday.

Improv veterans to teach class on South Shore

Ask an improv actor what is improvisation's most challenging skill, and chances are pretty good they'll say making up a song. That's what improv actors and students will be practicing Sept. 1 in a workshop taught by song improvisation masters Laura and Rick Hall.

The workshop will focus on using musical or song improv as a natural extension of a scene and building vocal confidence with various musical styles.

The workshop is designed for improv actors, students and improv theater teachers.

Classes are from 10am-noon and 1:30-3:30pm at Unity at the Lake, 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe. Cost is $55.

For information, contact Gerry Orton at (530) 318.2180.

Adventure Trail Run at Kirkwood on Labor Day weekend

The 32nd annual Kirkwood 5K/10K Adventure Trail Run is Sept. 1 with a one mile and a half mile fun run for kids at 9am. The 5K and 10K will start after the fun run.

The races are presented by the Tahoe Mountain Milers Running

Club and the Kirkwood Volunteer Fire Department.

Race registration forms are available at: CV Sports in Carson City; Kahle Community Park in Stateline; South Lake Tahoe Recreation Center in South Lake Tahoe; and Eclipse Running in Reno; or by calling (775) 588.2864; or online.

Race day registration will be at the Kirkwood Main Lodge beginning at 8am for $40.

Proceeds from the race benefits the Kirkwood Volunteer Fire Department.