Assistance available to pay energy bills in El Dorado County

El Dorado County's 2012 Home Energy Assistance Program will begin accepting applications Sept. 10.

Federally funded HEAP helps income-eligible families pay their energy bills. HEAP can help pay for electricity, natural gas, wood, propane, or heating oil costs of eligible households. Benefits may be paid once a year. The amount of the benefit depends on household income and size, and the amount of the energy bill compared to income. Even if utilities are included in rent, HEAP may be able to help.

Due to limited funding, applications for 2012 HEAP will only be accepted from households with the highest energy burden that have at least one of the following living in the home: child(ren) under age 5, disabled individual(s), or individual(s) over the age of 60.

Applications can be picked up 937 Spring St., Placerville and 3368 Lake Tahoe Blvd., Suite 202, South Lake Tahoe.

For more information, call (530) 573.3490.

London Games – a barrier breaker for female athletes

By Bill Saporito, Time

A week after the cinematic opening ceremony on July 27, London's Olympics were flagging. Of course there were events and medals in the ensuing days, but the showdown between American swimmers Michael Phelps and Ryan Lochte was a bit of a fizzle, and Team Great Britain had been a relative no-show. Sparse crowds at some events in the opening days and breakdowns and delays on the London Underground had the British tabloids in a snarling, told-you-so mood about the nation's penchant for punching below its weight. Games boss Sebastian Coe wasn't too happy either. When one reporter offered to show him a digital image of empty seats, Lord Seb sassed back that he would be happy to "look at your holiday snaps later."

Then, over one stellar weekend, the women of the Olympics changed everything, righting the ship for the Games and sending Team GB toward its best Olympics in 104 years. The signature performance of these Games would come from Jessica Ennis, Britain's luminous heptathlete and the official face of the Games. On the morning of the hurdles, the heptathlon's first event, she put a charge into Olympic Stadium with a first-place finish. One night later, that charge became a full-fledged thunderbolt as "our Jess," as the tabloids then lovingly called her, blazed down the straightaway to claim the 800-m event—and the gold—before a delirious crowd. "She's an astonishing combination of a great athlete and lovely person," said David Luard, 31, a small-business owner from London, in the stadium after Ennis took gold. "You know, these Olympics are all about passing a torch to a new generation. She's a fantastic example for kids."

She was the brightest star on Britain's day of glory, when nearly 72,000 spectators swarmed the Olympic Park, filling 92 percent of the available places, with the royal cheerleading couple of Prince William and Kate Middleton first among them.

Ennis' gold wasn't the only spectacular moment for female athletes over that weekend. On the water, in the double

sculls, Team GB's Katherine Grainger and Anna Watkins steamed home before 30,000 spectators. Nearby in the velodrome, the Games' noisiest and sweatiest venue, Team GB's women vanquished the U.S. in the pursuit race, shattering their own world record. The following Monday, the U.S. women's soccer team clashed with their Canadian cousins in an epic semifinal, winning 4-3 in the dying seconds of overtime. The match left observers in England, the home of soccer, wondering why they even bothered to watch the men play, since they've produced so very little in this tournament. "We never think we're out of it," says Megan Rapinoe, the platinum-topped American wing half who scored two goals, the second an absolute screamer. "We're kind of like, 'OK, that just means we need to score another one.' Huge heart, huge fight on this team." The U.S. men's team failed to even qualify. The U.S. women went on to play Japan in the gold-medal match, in a repeat of the World Cup final last year.

The color scheme of the London Olympics includes bubble-gum pink, but there's nothing pink or fluffy about these women's performances. London has provided a joyous parade of amazons. The first gold went to a female shooter from China, the first gold for Team GB went to rowing duo Helen Glover and Heather Stanning, and some of the most compelling stories were spun by women: for every Michael Phelps, Usain Bolt and Andy Murray, there was Missy Franklin, Jess Ennis and Serena Williams. For nearly half of the 57 nations that earned a medal in the first week, women outnumbered men on the podium.

It only took a century

There were victories for women even before the Games commenced. London distinguished itself as the first Olympics in which all countries sent teams of both genders. (OK, Nauru sent men only, but then again, it sent only two; in 2008 it sent a lone female.) The longest holdouts—Qatar, Brunei and Saudi Arabia—counted seven female athletes among them, competing in sports from swimming to table tennis to judo. At

the opening ceremony, International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge noted with satisfaction that “for the first time in Olympic history, all the participating teams will have female athletes. This is a major boost for gender equality.”

That only took a century or so. Consider that in 1996, 26 nations declined to send women. Forty years after Title IX changed sports for girls in the U.S. by banning discrimination in federally assisted education programs, the rest of the world, it seems, is still catching up. Now, with the introduction of women’s boxing—hey, knock yourself out, girls—competitors of both sexes can pit themselves against the best in the world in nearly every sport. Synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics alone remain women-only. (Perhaps it’s time that the IOC consider extending those sports to men, in the name of equality.) When women were invited to the Olympics in 1900, they could compete in just three sports: lawn tennis, croquet and golf. The list now includes 34 sports in which both men and women compete. As if to underscore that point, in winning the women’s 400-m individual medley in world-record time, Chinese swimmer Ye Shiwen swam her last 50-m freestyle leg faster than Lochte did in his freestyle leg (a feat so stunning that some accused Ye of doping).

Women have become a competitive advantage if running up the medal count is the goal—and in many countries, it is. China, which claimed the most gold medals of any nation at its home Olympics in 2008, has made women’s sports a keystone of its so-called gold-medal strategy. Figuring that women’s sports are still underfunded in many countries, the Chinese have disproportionately boosted their female athletes. The efforts have paid off. In Beijing, more than half of China’s gold medals came from women. This time around, by Aug. 8, Chinese women had won 42 medals, 55 percent of the nation’s total.

India’s all-time individual-gold-medal count nearly doubled, to two, thanks to its first female boxer, Mary Kom, or to use

her formal name, Chungneijang Hmangte. The five-time world champion, who is from an ethnic minority, won a bronze in London in the inaugural sport of women's boxing. She is a 29-year-old mother of two from the tiny, insurgency-ridden northeastern Indian state of Manipur. She is what is known as a Tribal, similar to being Inuit or native Hawaiian. Kom gets a salary from the Manipuri government as a police officer but spends much of her time running, with her husband, the M.C. Mary Kom Boxing Academy, through which she is determined to give nearly 40 disadvantaged Manipuri youth a fighting chance.

Kom's medal will easily raise India's sporting stature. India ranks dead last in medals as weighted by population. The country of more than 1 billion people has captured only one Olympic gold in an individual sport, from Abhinav Bindra, a man who won the 10-m air-rifle event in 2008.

By contrast, the U.S. fielded its first female-majority team—women outnumbered men 268 to 261—and turned that advantage into more medals on the women's side. (Women also made up the majority on the Russian and Chinese squads.) In swimming, Teri McKeever is the first female head coach for the U.S. women's team, and her touch made a huge impact, according to the athletes. "It's so much fun to talk to each other rather than be talked at," says Rebecca Soni, who won three medals in London, of the atmosphere of openness that McKeever encourages. Says two-time Olympian Dana Vollmer: "These team members were way more open with each other than past ones. All of us want to win, and we know what an honor it is to represent the U.S., but sometimes before a race, that's not exactly what we need to hear. What we need to hear is that we are ready and we've done the work. And that's what Teri told us."

McKeever says it's about understanding that while male and female athletes want the same thing—to win—they use different methods to achieve victory. "As a coach, you want to allow the athlete to be empowered to be their best," she says. "And men

and women typically go about that journey in different ways." For the female swimmers, making the Olympic rookies and the veterans comfortable enough to share their fears and experiences built bonds that conquered performance anxiety and led to a 14-medal tally.

Which may be why in team play, the American women have been more than equal to their male counterparts. Some of that is expected. In soccer, the U.S. women will have played in four consecutive finals. In basketball, a gold medal seems as likely for the women as it does for the NBA-superstar-studded men. In water polo, the women will again outdo the men in reaching the medal round. In rowing, the U.S. women's eight, the ranking world champions, claimed gold in that showpiece event, while the men failed to show. And on the faux royal beach at the Horse Guards Parade near Buckingham Palace, the U.S. was guaranteed gold and silver in bikini sports. Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh beat fellow citizens April Ross and Jennifer Kessy in the beach-volleyball championship match.

'I really inspire them'

It wasn't just that more women competed—they made history as well. In gymnastics, American Gabrielle Douglas achieved a pioneering twofer, becoming the first African American to win the coveted all-around title and the first U.S. gymnast to flip and tumble her way to gold in both that event and the team competition. Told about her achievement, the excited 16-year-old said, "You learn something new every day!"

Another American woman who appeared in the Olympics set a mark of a different sort. Sarah Attar, 19, a dual American and Saudi citizen who attends college in California, finished last in her 800-m heat while representing the Middle Eastern nation. Although she wore long sleeves, leggings and a head covering in London, she has competed for Pepperdine University in the typical track outfit of a tank top and shorts, without anything obscuring her hair. She was given a warm round of

applause as she plodded across the finish line.

Attar is one of two women representing Saudi Arabia at the Games. The other, 16-year-old judoka Wojdan Shaherkani, provoked some controversy when the International Judo Federation initially ruled that she could not compete while wearing a headscarf. No deal, said the Saudi officials whose approval of female athletes at the Games was contingent on headscarves. After last-minute negotiations, the IJF relented a couple of days before Shaherkani's first bout. She competed with a black head covering that resembled a swimmer's cap. Shaherkani lost her preliminary-round match in the +78 kg category in 80 seconds, not surprising given that she is only a judo blue belt competing among black belts. Still, she figures she won just by competing. "I am very excited, and it was the opportunity of a lifetime," she said after her loss. "Hopefully this will be the start of bigger participation for other sports. Hopefully this is the beginning of a new era."

As if to trumpet its newfound egalitarianism, Brunei designated its first—and only—female participant, 400-m runner Maziah Mahusin, as its flag bearer. "Women in Brunei say that I really inspire them," she says. "They say they aspire to be like me some day." Both Brunei and Qatar have unveiled—if that is the appropriate word—programs to encourage girls to participate in sports. Not quite Title IX, but a step forward in two very conservative countries.

It's tempting to contrast the slow growth in sporting opportunities in the Middle East and elsewhere with those in Britain, where women have had voting rights since 1918. And where funding, some via the national lottery, has not only produced champions in traditional strengths like rowing and cycling but also given women the chance to participate in other sports like water polo. It's unrealistic to expect Brunei women to be competing in bathing suits anytime soon.

The more pertinent comparison may be with the next Olympic

host, Brazil. Like Brunei and Qatar, Brazil is an oil-producing country that is growing rapidly. Unlike in the Muslim countries, the female body in Brazil is a subject of open admiration. But it's often an idealized, sexualized image of the female body that hasn't necessarily translated into creating better athletes. Brazil has twice the population of Britain, is home to some of the greatest soccer players ever seen and has claimed less than a fifth of the medals. Only two Brazilian women won medals through the first 12 days of the Games, both in judo, a Brazilian strength. Mayra Aguiar, 21, won bronze in the +78 kg class, while Sarah Menezes, 22, won gold in the –48 kg class.

One lesson from London is that if sports mean anything, putting women on a pedestal, whether religious or hedonistic, won't put them on the podium. Because of those tendencies in wider society, they need more help, not less, than men to even consider a career in sports and to get the training they need to realize their potential. These Games will have helped, filling stadiums and screens with fantastic female role models. The imagery of strong female bodies of all shapes and sizes provides a brief but powerful corrective to the representations of femininity that usually predominate. London exposed a fallacy: that women's sports are less gripping, less serious and less entertaining than men's. The women have made glorious the Summer Olympics. As Shakespeare might have put it: To play is the thing.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Clean Tahoe was named volunteer of the year by Caltrans' Adopt-a-Highway Program.

• Alta, Aspen-Snowmass, Jackson Hole, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows are partnering to offer one pass for the 2012-13 season.

• A celebration of life for Chris Nelson is Sept. 30, 2pm at the Tahoe Donner Lodge in Truckee.

• Here are the Caltrans' roadwork schedules for the week – Sierra, El Dorado-Tahoe.

• The fields committee of the South Shore recreation JPA meets Aug. 20 at 4pm at Lake Tahoe Airport. Here is the agenda.

Fuzzy thin skin makes peaches super seasonal

By Jessica Stoller-Conrad, NPR

If lately you've noticed the farmers' market flooded with signs that say "donut," "cling," "whiteflesh" and "freestone," you won't be surprised to learn that August is National Peach Month. Though the juicy fruits pack the produce aisles now, in

a few short months a good peach might be hard to find.



Many fruits, though harvested in other parts of the world, are available in the United States all year long. So why are peaches so seasonal, and in the winter, either difficult to find or hard as a rock?

To clear up our “fuzzy” understanding, The Salt turned to Will McClatchey, vice president and director of research at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas. McClatchey says that peaches are easy to find in the late summer and early fall because they tend to ripen all at once. Though the plant’s “limited-time only” strategy is annoying to consumers, biologically, it makes them very efficient reproducers.

“If you’re a fruit tree, the best way to get your fruit dispersed is to have a whole bunch of fruit [at once] so then the animals come and go crazy eating fruit, which helps secure the next generation of trees,” says McClatchey. Although nowadays we’re the animals going crazy over peaches, the trees originated in Central Asia, their fruits initially feeding large mammals like bears, camels, and elephants, he says.

Read the whole story

Amodei: Green energy not worth higher electric bills

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., said this week that

any “green energy” policy that leads to higher electric bills for Nevadans who are looking for work in tough economic times is the wrong energy policy for the state.

“Nobody is anti-green,” he said. “We struggle to compete with the cost of a kilowatt hour when we talk about economic development. And economic development has something to do with jobs.”

If federal money is going to be spent on research and development to make wind, solar and geothermal energy more competitive that’s one issue, Amodei said.

“But if those, when they get done, go to sell into the grid and that increases rates, especially right now when things are they way they are in Nevada, and competition for sustainable living wage jobs is what it is in the Inter-mountain West, I think that’s the wrong energy policy,” he said.

Nevada’s 2nd Congressional District representative made his comments to Sam Shad in an interview on the “Nevada NewsMakers” television program in response to recent comments from Sen. Harry Reid saying that NV Energy’s Reid Gardner coal plant in Clark County should be shut down. Reid has also urged NV Energy to support a $5 billion solar project that a Chinese company ENN Mojave Energy, wants to build near Laughlin.

An NV Energy official told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* last week that the utility has no plans to purchase more renewable energy at this time because it has exceeded the state’s requirement that 15 percent of its portfolio originate from green energy sources.

Amodei also questioned the effectiveness of federal financial support for green energy projects.

“If you go to the Department of Energy and you look in the last few years, they provided $1.5 billion, Sam, $1.5 billion in loan guarantees, to those projects in Nevada,” he said.

“And while it’s great news for all the construction folks, I get that, in terms of the long-term jobs, it has created 137 long-term jobs throughout the state. That’s $22 million a job, Sam, in loan guarantees.”

Amodei appeared to get his math wrong, however, with a closer estimate being $11 million a job based on 137 jobs and loan guarantees of $1.5 billion.

The Nevada Policy Research Institute last week released its own analysis of the renewable energy sector in Nevada and found that over $1.3 billion in federal funds funneled into geothermal, solar and wind projects since 2009 has yielded and is projected to yield 288 permanent, full-time jobs, or $4.6 million per job.

Amodei said Gov. Brian Sandoval could create more jobs in Nevada if given a $1.5 billion bank to do so.

Reid was also successful several years ago in getting NV Energy to terminate the construction of a coal-fired plant near Ely in eastern Nevada. NV Energy announced in 2009 it was stopping work on the $5 billion project. Two coal plants had been planned for the area by the utility.

Amodei said the project was able to meet all environmental and air quality requirements.

“These folks have complied with all of the objective regulations and permitting requirements, and you’ve got somebody (Reid) coming in, going, ‘forget about the rules, I’m going to impose my will,’ ” Amodei said.

2-person fire station in South Tahoe may temporarily close

By Kathryn Reed

Fire station No. 2 has been the subject of conversations for years because it's so old (circa 1940s when it was part of the Lake Valley Fire Department) and inadequate.

A proposal being floated is to test closing the station for five days. At any given time only two people staff the building that is located on Highway 50 across from South Tahoe Middle School. An engineer and captain are there.

Under the plan South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Brian Uhler is contemplating the captain would go to Station 3 (by the Y) and the engineer to Station 1 (at Ski Run Boulevard-Pioneer Trail). Stations 1 and 3 have four people now.



South Lake Tahoe fire Station 2 may be closed on a trial basis. Photo/LTN file

By having two captains in one station, one would be in charge of the rig, the other the whole city.

When the three division chief positions were eliminated late last year it created a scenario where the incident commander is also in charge of an engine. This does not create an effective, safe way to handle emergency calls.

Uhler relayed how last week Engine 3 went to a rescue off Highway 89. The crew hiked in about 1.5 miles and lost radio contact. The shift commander was supposed to be in overall command of the city and he was out of reach.

Uhler is in consultations with staff to see if moving out of Station 2 would be worth the experiment. Debriefing afterward would determine if this would be something worth doing on a long-term basis.

“Response time will suffer in the sense of getting an engine on the scene,” Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News* if staffing is eliminated at Station 2.

As it is, one engine with two guys can’t do much other than put out a trash can fire, lay lines and wait for others to arrive, so Uhler doesn’t see the change hindering the ability to put out a fire. Ambulance service does not change if staffing at Station 2 changes.

In 2009, former Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti talked about getting rid of that station and building a facility at Lake Tahoe Community College. That concept is back on the table as the college looks for ways to expand its programs.

With new leadership at the college, the city and elsewhere, the reality of creating a training facility is more likely.

In 2009, then LTCC President Paul Killpatrick told this reporter he was concerned about having a training facility on campus because it is surrounded by forest.

Having a station at the college off Al Tahoe Boulevard would put firefighters in the same area they are now.

Problems with the current Station 2 include vehicle storage issues, no accessibility for the disabled, a dangerous situation for emergency vehicles to merge into traffic on Highway 50, conditions are lousy and modernization is out of the question.

Uhler expects to decide next week if he is going to do the trial closure at Station 2.

‘A Note of Scandal’ – a romance worth reading

By Kathryn Reed

Escaping to a place that does not resemble your life is a good reason to read books – especially fiction. I had to be reminded of this fact this summer because normally non-fiction is what I choose.



“A Note of Scandal” is not something I would normally choose to read. But because my friend and former colleague Nicky Penttila wrote it, I downloaded it. (The book is available only as an ebook.)

I didn’t know it was set in post-war London until I started

reading. This presented a certain irony because it was in London that I was reading it.

This romance novel, according to the publisher, is at Level 2 on the heat index. While, admittedly, I think a little more steam would have added more to the book, I was captivated by how Penttila spun her tale through a time when such scandal would have been provocative.

Knowing Penttila's newspaper background made it personally fun to read how a publisher plays such a prominent role.

"A Note of Scandal" will not be for everyone. But the writing is superb, the storytelling captivating, the scene-setting excellent, and the story fun and lively.

Working smoke detectors save lives



A smoke detector with a missing or dead battery is of no help to anyone. It's a good idea to test your smoke detector periodically and a bad idea to take the battery out and use it for something else.

Read the instruction manual for your smoke detector and know how it operates and how to test it.

Remember, a smoke detector with a missing or dead battery is of no help to you or your family. Test your detector today.

– Sally Ross-Filgo, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department

Silver Lake provides ample fun for boaters of all kinds

By Kathryn Reed

PIONEER – It was hard to know where to look while paddling along Silver Lake. The natural scenery was as captivating as the people on their water toys.

At 7,200 feet, this lake in the Eldorado National Forest sits below Carson Peak. Scattered about are smooth granite "beaches" filled with sunbathers. Pockets of sand are interspersed with the rocks.

A few submerged rock islands make it appear as though people and their dogs are walking on water.



Sue Wood glides along Silver Lake. Photos/Kathryn Reed

At times the lake is so smooth, the glassy water looks like one could walk across it. And in some ways one could say the

water skiers were doing just that.

A sport I had not witnessed before was a “surfer” being pulled by a ski boat. Sometimes the person held a rope like a skier would, and other times let go to balance like a surfer and ride the wake. The person is just feet from the stern.

Encouragement from observers in the boat had the surfer trying to do a 360 like a wakeboarder would do.

Sitting idle, a couple fishermen had hauled in some trout. Rainbow, browns and Mackinaw call Silver Lake home.

Kayakers dot the water.

Even though motorboats are allowed on this small lake near the Carson Spur, they don’t dominate this body of water. This means being a canoeist or kayaker is a safe endeavor.

Inlets provide pockets of smooth water to explore. Get out early to stake out a spot on shore in one of these sheltered areas.

The only problem was the looming dark clouds moving in from the south. A slight breeze picked up and the water was no longer tranquil. Even Rusty, who was on his first canoe adventure, could tell the ride was becoming a bit more than an E-ticket experience. It was easier to lie down than for him to balance on four legs.

Instead of staying close to shore, as we customarily do, we decided to go across the lake to be close to the ramp before the thunder started booming on this first Saturday of August.

We had the canoe on top of the truck as the rain started to come down and the lightning filled the sky.

This body of water has had plenty of controversy surrounding it. In 2010, the U.S. Forest Service and Eldorado Irrigation District settled on agreements involving land swaps and water

rights affecting the campgrounds and lake. Silver Lake was created from flows of the Silver Fork American River.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west. Turn left on Highway 89. Go over Luther Pass. At the T intersection (Pickett's Junction), go right on Highway 88. You will pass Caples Lake, Kirkwood and the popular Carson Pass hiking-parking area. Turn left on Kays Road to reach the boat launch.

Other things:

• Boat launch is $10.

• Hiking trails skirt the lake.

• Camping is walking distance from the lake.

• Kit Carson Lodge offers real beds.

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Fish and Game continues to investigate Homewood bear shooting

By Ravali Reddy, Sacramento Bee

The California Department of Fish and Game continues to seek information about the shooting of a bear that was found dead on a beach in Homewood late last month.

BEAR.jpegThe investigation has revealed that Sunny, a black bear, was shot at close range. The type of wound the bear suffered is believed to have caused a significant loss of blood, which was found at the site where she was killed.

The investigating warden was not able to locate blood or evidence of a discharged firearm at any of the properties surrounding the area where the bear was found. Fish and Game is following leads, including tips from the Tahoe community, and will submit a final report to the Placer County District Attorney once the investigation is finished.

The Humane Society of the United States and The Humane Society Wildlife Land Trust have added a reward of up to $2,500 to a previously posted reward of $3,000 for information leading to the arrest of individuals responsible for the killing.

Anyone with information about this case is encouraged to contact CalTIP at 888.334-2258. Callers may remain anonymous.