‘Super fires’ in California’s future, says USFS scientist

By Edward Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

Intense and deeply destructive “super fires,” like Colorado’s current Waldo Canyon fire, which has claimed two lives and burned 350 homes, are almost assured in Northern California’s future, according to a U.S. Forest Service scientist.

“Typically we’re seeing an earlier fire season and that fire season is lasting longer,” said Malcolm North, plant ecologist with the Pacific Southwest Research Station of the U.S. Forest Service. North works out of the station’s Davis office.

The culprits, said North, are weather fluctuations and climate change. He said the warmer temperatures and drier winters seen recently in the region are creating ideal conditions for intense and hard-to-control fires like the Colorado fire.

“What we’re seeing now is that snow reserves are less in the Sierras and runoff is happening earlier in the year,” he said.

That creates drier conditions in areas where fires burn hottest – the forests. The most difficult to deal with are “crown fires,” whose flames travel from one tree to another, usually at high speed. It is common for crown fires to move at 30 mph, North said.

Read the whole story

Delicious drinks for summer parties

By Laura Longero, Reno Gazette-Journal

Fireworks aren't the only thing that should be wowing guests at your Fourth of July party. Try some new fun cocktails this year in red, white and blue. Swap out tropical fruit juices, strong spirits and lively garnishes for the standard beer and wine to treat your guests to something special.



The authors of "Slurp" offer drinks for morning, daytime and evening, as well as party tips and instructions for making syrups, garnishes, shots and sugared and salted rims. Unsure of which glass to use for which cocktail? There are hints for that, too: A highball glass is "tall and skinny to keep the drink cold," and a rocks glass is "short and heavy with straight sides."

And don't neglect the nonboozers. Following are 10 drink recipes — six cocktails and four "mocktails" — for your summer barbecue.

Read the whole story

American beers help celebrate the 4th of July

By Greg Kitsock, Washington Post

Craft brewing is a melting pot; the best beers borrow from German, English and Belgian traditions while managing to be American originals. These five brews, listed in order from lighter to more assertive, would be a welcome addition to any Fourth of July picnic.

Samuel Adams Porch Rocker. An American take on a German "radler" (a blend of lager and lemonade), this summer release combines the tartness of pureed lemon with the crisp maltiness of a Bavarian-type helles beer. Alcohol: 4.5 percent by volume.

Flying Dog Underdog Atlantic Lager. Brewed with a little wheat and rye, this bready lager with a light citrusy-grassy hop character comes in easy-to-tote cans as well as bottles. Pair with summer salads or seafood. Alcohol: 4.7 percent.

Read the whole story

Shoe gadget could open secret texting world

By Drake Bennett, Bloomberg

Technology and etiquette don't move in lockstep. Just because it's possible to whip out your smart phone and connect from anywhere doesn't mean you should.

Text during a meeting and you risk offending your boss, e-mail during family dinner and you risk displeasing your spouse, peruse your MP3 collection during church and you risk disappointing your pastor (and any supernatural arbiter whose ear he may have).

A device being developed by engineers in Germany, however, promises to liberate smart-phone addicts from the strictures of social opprobrium, making it easier to work their devices sneakily under the noses of those who might judge them for it. The gadget is called ShoeSense. It’s a motion sensor that, indeed, mounts on a shoe.

Facing upward, it allows a user to control his phone through hand gestures performed at midriff level, even when the phone is still stored away in his pocket. Pinch index finger and thumb together and move your hand slightly forward to answer the phone or hang up, touch one hand to the other forearm to send a prewritten text, hold out a number of fingers to communicate whom on your speed-dial list to send it to. A person using ShoeSense looks a bit like a theremin player.

If the ShoeSense user is sitting at a desk, however, or a conference table, he looks as if he’s not doing anything at all and instead paying you his undivided attention — even as, sub rosa, he’s semaphoring his phone to send out a text about happy hour.

“It is quite discreet,” says Gilles Bailly, a computer scientist at Technische Universität Berlin and Deutsche Telekom who is one of ShoeSense’s creators. “Say you are in a meeting, you want to indicate that you are going to be late. You’ve already defined the gesture for this, and you perform the gesture under the table. The system on your shoe can recognize it, and nobody at the meeting knows that you performed the gesture.”

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: Kahlua milkshakes – a summer favorite

By Kathryn Reed

Until we saw billboards for Kahlua, we just thought it was a coffee liqueur. The ads taught us the beverage from Mexico is a rum and coffee liqueur.



According to the beverage’s website, it is the top selling rum and coffee liqueur in the world. Of course, I can’t even name another one.

It hails from Veracruz, Mexico; having first been made in 1936.

Sometime in college I had my first Kahlua milkshake. For whatever reason it didn’t feel like underage drinking. It was like a coffee flavored shake. It wasn’t going to get me tipsy any more than the cheesecake brownies I make with Kahlua.

The shake is a perfect summer dessert or reward for doing yard work or just because Sue says it’s time to have one.

I would suggest not making milkshakes for a big group. It’s just too time consuming and everyone won’t be enjoying them at the same time.

Use less liquid for a thicker shake. Some people like their shakes to be eaten with a spoon, others want to suck it down with a straw. So, keep that in mind. It’s best to go easy on the liquids to get to the consistency you like. Of course, you can always add more ice cream to make it thicker.

I think Kahlua is one of those beverages best mixed with something else. Kahlua and cream is one of the most popular combos. No wonder ice cream works so well.

Kahlua Milkshake (serves 4)

1½ quarts vanilla ice cream

½ C Kahlua

¼-½ C milk

1/8 C chocolate syrup

Place all ingredients in blender. Blend. Pour into glasses. Bottoms up.

Airports, hotels reconfigurating wi-fi speed, rates for travelers

By Susan Stellin, New York Times

As airlines try to persuade passengers to pay for Internet access at cruising altitudes, more airports and hotels are offering it free on the ground.

Half of the busiest airports in the United States now have free Wi-Fi, including Denver, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Phoenix and Houston. Dallas/Fort Worth plans to join that list in September, teaming with AT&T in a service that will give travelers 40 minutes of free Wi-Fi in exchange for viewing a

30-second advertisement.

That type of sponsored access is one way airports are balancing consumer pressure for free access to Facebook, Twitter and e-mail accounts with the cost of providing a bigger pipe for growing data needs. As devices demanding Wi-Fi proliferate, airports and hotels are also turning to tiered pricing models: offering limited Internet access free and a faster premium service to customers willing to pay.

Denver International Airport, which has offered free advertiser-supported Wi-Fi since 2007, is switching to a tiered pricing model this week. Working with Boingo Wireless, the airport is upgrading its network to give travelers free basic Internet service or more bandwidth for a $7.95 day pass (for a laptop) or $4.95 an hour (for a smartphone).

A business traveler sending a large file to a client is the type of customer who may opt for the premium speed.

“If you don’t see it going fast enough, you’d have that option of upgrading to the paid service,” said John Ackerman, the airport’s chief commercial officer. “Is your time or your money more important to you? That’s a personal choice we’re going to allow you to make.”

While the free service will still require viewing a 15- to 30-second commercial every half-hour, Ackerman said passengers should see improvements in the speed of the complimentary service, which has been a source of complaints.

The Boingo contract guarantees the Denver airport a minimum share of the Wi-Fi revenue — more than $500,000 over three years for the airport — with the potential for higher earnings as advertising opportunities evolve.

Read the whole story

What would you like Lake Tahoe Airport to be?

Most U.S. flags being flown today were made in China

On this day in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was approved by the Continental Congress; setting the 13 colonies on the road to freedom as a sovereign nation. As always, this most American of holidays will be marked by parades, fireworks and backyard barbecues across the country.

Today there are an estimated 313.9 million people living in the United States compared to the 2.5 million in 1776.

Most U.S. flag are imported from China.

The value of fireworks imported from China in 2011 was $232.3 million, representing the bulk of all U.S. fireworks imported ($223.4 million). U.S. exports of fireworks, by comparison, came to just $15.8 million in 2011, with Australia purchasing more than any other country ($4.5 million), according to Foreign Trade Statistics.

Thirty-one places have “liberty” in their names. The most populous one as of April 1, 2010, was Liberty, Mo. (29,149). Iowa, with four, has more of these places than any other state: Libertyville, New Liberty, North Liberty and West

Liberty.

Eleven places have “independence” in their names. The most populous one is Independence, Mo., with a population of 116,830.

While the British were the adversaries in 1776, the United Kingdom is the sixth-leading trading partner for the United States today.

Opinion: Independence Day should be a time for U.S. to unite

What would the founding fathers of the Unites States think today of the country they helped form in 1776?

What will people 236 years from now say about 2012?

If only there were crystal balls or time machines to answer those questions.



Fireworks will again light up the sky in Lake Tahoe on July 4. Photo/Howie Nave

While we are on the eve of celebrating the birth of this country, perhaps now is a good time to ponder what these United States of America are all about.

Each of the states has a tremendous uniqueness and in its own right could be a country unto itself. Diversity is everywhere – in terrain, climate, political beliefs, economies, and more.

But there is something in all of our originality that binds us as a nation, as a people.

Lake Tahoe News believes it is the richness of our individual differences – as people and states – that strengthens us as a country. While we often pick apart the differences, it is the similarities that bind us.

We are strong. We are individuals. We are thinkers. We are community-minded. We believe in life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Yes, we differ in defining happiness or how to pursue it and even what liberty means.

But take a step back – where else could you go and be able to

state your opinion so freely, be so free to disagree with the government, so free to burn the flag that protects your right to burn it?

While no country is perfect, no form of government is perfect, and certainly the people running the country are not perfect, what we have is pretty close to perfection.

If we were all to embrace the good that binds us, wouldn't that make for less hate, and less pain and suffering?

We are a country that prides itself in singing about bombs bursting in air. What if we channeled that energy into something positive?

Take some time as we celebrate the birth of the United States to look at your neighbors, your colleagues, the visitors in town, everyone and realize we are one people – no matter what we look like or who we vote for. We are the United State of America.

S. Tahoe council blocks pot club move after signaling it would approve

By Anne Knowles

The South Lake Tahoe City Council voted to deny a request from one of the city's medical marijuana dispensaries to relocate its business after last month intimating it would approve the move.

At its June 5 meeting, the council declined to act on City Attorney Patrick Enright's advice to deny City of Angels 2 its request and instead voted 4-1 on a motion directing staff to prepare a resolution to approve the move, according to Nancy Kerry, interim city manager.

But a day before the July 3 meeting, the council received a letter written by the South Lake/El Dorado Narcotic Enforcement Team (SLEDNET) painting a vivid picture of the criminal activity surrounding the marijuana collectives.

"Every day SLEDNET agents are intermingled with the marijuana industry that has become so enormous here, traffickers from outside California have made this city a prime distribution point for the east coast," reads the letter dated July 2. "No longer are we seeing the large scale indoor grows. We see a simpler form of trafficking of marijuana through the U.S. Post offices, UPS and Fed Ex. It is such a significant problem that the U.S. Postal Inspector's Office recently assigned a full time inspector for marijuana trafficking in our area post offices. Now the primary workload for our task force is the sales and distribution of marijuana from traffickers who simply go to the collective, purchase lbs (sic) of marijuana and ship it off in mail."

The letter went on to describe eight cases involving large sums of marijuana in which all of the convicted felons claimed to have been working with one of South Lake Tahoe's three collectives.

"I can provide further examples at your or the city council's request," read the letter addressed to South Lake Tahoe Police-Fire Chief Brian Uhler. "This year alone we have seized $142,708 in marijuana proceeds and worked interstate investigations in New Hampshire and New York."

SLEDNET Task Force Commander Jeff Catchings told *Lake Tahoe*

News there are numerous ongoing investigations into people tied to the collectives but no open investigations of the collectives themselves.

“This is a huge problem and we can’t turn a blind eye to it,” said Catchings. “No other business in South Lake Tahoe has so much criminal activity connected to it.”

“This is a game changer,” said Councilman Tom Davis several times during discussion of the resolution at the meeting. “This documentation from law enforcement is huge.”

“This is out of control,” agreed Councilman Bruce Grego, who cast the sole vote to deny the dispensary’s move at the first meeting. “I think we need to end it today.”

City attorney Patrick Enright cautioned the council that the item under consideration was narrow, focused on whether to allow City of Angels 2 to relocate, but adding that the California court rulings were inconsistent regarding whether cities had the power to ban the dispensaries outright.

And Councilwoman Angela Swanson raised concerns that the city could be opening itself up to some liability if they backtracked on the matter.

“I believe to not support this puts the city in a precarious legal position,” said Swanson. “We don’t have proof (the marijuana) is going through the collectives. There could be other things going on.”

Uhler, who delivered the SLEDNET letter to the council, said law enforcement was working on a way to track the collectives’ transactions.

City of Angels 2 owner Gino DiMatteo spoke during the public comment period, assuring the council that his dispensary abides by the law.

“If my collective had anything to hide we would never have

offered surveillance to the chief of police," said DiMatteo. "They have access to our security video any time."

DiMatteo was told by his current landlord that he had until mid-July to change his business or vacate his current Third Street location after the landlord, Darcy DeTarr, received a letter from the U.S. Attorney General's Office threatening to seize the property if pot continued to be sold there.

In the end, the council voted down the resolution to allow the dispensary to relocate.

Correction: South Lake Tahoe City Council did not vote on a resolution presented at its July 3 meeting and instead directed staff to draft a new resolution that it voted on at its June 5 meeting. The council did not re-vote on an improperly-worded resolution, as originally reported. The story has been changed to reflect that.