California vintners court fast-growing Asia market

By Chris Macias, Sacramento Bee

LODI – With bottles ready for tasting, a group of Lodi wine producers waited anxiously last week for a delegation of monied business people they hoped to impress. The vintners burst into applause when the group finally arrived, over an hour late.

These honored guests weren't Hollywood moguls or Silicon Valley venture capitalists. They were potential customers and investors from the city of Shenyang in northern China, coming to check out Lodi as a potential source of affordable wine to supply China's rapidly growing market.

The rising middle class in China and other Asian-Pacific countries is fueling one of the wine world's fastest growing markets. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, China is expected to add 235 million consumers by 2020 and will account for 20 percent of the global luxury market by 2015.

U.S wineries exported $62 million of wine to China in 2011, a 42 percent increase from 2010, according to the Wine Institute, an advocacy group for California's $61.5 billion wine industry. Exports to Hong Kong jumped by 39 percent in the same period, to $163 million.

Those numbers – while small compared to the total market – have grabbed the attention of wineries looking for alternatives to the cutthroat competition of U.S. wine sales. California wine comprises 90 percent of U.S. exports.

"If you structure the deal correctly, it's both safer and more profitable to sell to China than it is to sell domestically," said Frank Gayaldo, director of international development for

the Lodi District Chamber of Commerce, and organizer of last week’s tasting.

“Imports are eating up roughly 20 percent of our domestic (wine) market, and it’s difficult for small wineries to get good distribution contracts.”

Read the whole story

Fundraiser benefits Animal Coalition of Tahoe

The Animal Coalition of Tahoe’s summer fundraiser to keep the spay-neuter program going is June 27 from 6-8:30pm at the Flight Deck restaurant at Lake Tahoe Airport.

A portion of the proceeds will benefit ACT’s spay-neuter program and the El Dorado County Animal Shelter. There will also be a raffle.

The Animal Coalition of Tahoe is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization that raises funds to help local residents spay and neuter their dogs and cats in an effort to reduce the population of unwanted pets – plus they donate 10 percent of all funds raised to the animal shelter in Meyers. Call (530) 400.4766 or email info@tahoeanimals.org for more information.

Also, mark your calendars for the 8th annual Mutt Strut on Oct. 14.

Lawmaker: Delay in tourism contract exceeds legislative authority

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – State lawmakers have put a new tourism contract to promote Nevada on hold despite the concerns of one lawmaker that the move exceeds legislative authority.

Concerns have been raised by Sen. Steven Horsford, D-Las Vegas, about the intent to award the two-year, $3.2 million contract to an out-of-state firm.

Burson-Marsteller, one of the largest public relations firms in the country, was selected by a state agency to handle the promotion of Nevada for the next two years.

“We haven’t had a bad tourism plan in the past, so I have some real reservations,” Horsford said during last week’s interim Finance Committee meeting. “And to bring in a national firm, that I think is based out of New York, to come in here in our state and promote rural communities, that they don’t even know where they are, let alone what they do; I have some real questions and reservations about that.”

Horsford is running for the 4th Congressional seat, which includes a large swath of rural Nevada in addition to parts of Clark County.

Ultimately lawmakers decided to hold off on approving budgetary changes sought by Claudia Vecchio, director of the Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, that would allow the contract to go forward, citing several questions they wanted answered first.

That decision was opposed by Sen. Ben Kieckhefer, R-Reno, who

said lawmakers are exceeding their constitutional authority by intervening in an executive branch function.

“The fact of the matter is that some people didn’t like the contract so now they’re not going to appropriate the funding,” he said. “That’s going backward and that’s not our job.”

The Legislature appropriates revenue and authorizes expenditures, but it is up to the Executive Branch to implement those decisions, Kieckhefer said. The decision was an attempt to do a de facto denial of the contract and it overstepped legislative authority, he said.

“I totally understand the concern that we’re spending a significant amount of money on a big contract with an out-of-state vendor,” Kieckhefer said. “But the simple fact of the matter is that no Nevada company was in the top five in this (request for proposals).

“I wish we would spend money in Nevada and we do as much as we can,” he said. “But this bid process followed every law that we have in statute, followed every policy set by the Legislature in terms of bidder preference and things like that, and the simple fact of the matter is that this was the best company to do the job. And their job is to drive more traffic to Nevada to enhance our economy, to enhance our biggest industry, which is still hospitality and tourism and gaming.”

Delaying a contract that will help the state’s economy grow is ludicrous, Kieckhefer said.

Vecchio defended the contract and selection process at the meeting. Nineteen companies submitted proposals, but none of the four finalists was from Nevada, a fact which generated comment from at least one Nevada public relations firm.

Burson-Marsteller, which is actually based in Los Angeles, was the unanimous selection of an evaluation committee made up of

Nevada tourism professionals, Vecchio said. The company will be working with Red Rock Strategies out of Las Vegas, she said.

The contract has been drawn up and signed by both parties, but it remains contingent upon approval of state officials.

Vecchio said the firm will provide national and international contacts that will benefit the state.

“The value that you get back, and the value that comes back to a destination by working with the best in the business, is tenfold, twentyfold over what it is with somebody who just has that local perspective,” she said.

Burson-Marsteller has proposed an idea for a smart phone application that will provide a way for visitors to craft itineraries and access to services in both cellular telephone service and non-service areas, Vecchio said. Much of rural Nevada does not have cellular phone service, but the information will be downloaded to the phone and so will be available to visitors, she said.

“That’s a game changer for this state,” Vecchio said. “So it is the understanding of our visitor needs that is so important to our success.”

Vecchio, appointed in October 2011 by Gov. Brian Sandoval to the tourism job,has previously worked for Burson-Marsteller in Dallas as well as for the Edelman public relations firm in Chicago.

Horsford said he is certain that there are firms in Nevada with the regional and national experience that could perform the work although he said he did not know the identities of all 19 applicants.

“The Legislature set a policy that 5 percent preference should be given to Nevada-based businesses,” he said. “So this is a

policy that the Legislature and the governor believe was important, particularly at this time when so many business, and advertising and PR is no exception, need the work."

Classes train contractors to work with lead paint

South Lake Tahoe and Lake Tahoe Community College Connect Community Education are sponsoring the Renovator, Repair, Painter and Supervisor Trainings for local contractors.

The Lead Safe Worker eight-hour training for Renovators, Repair and Painters is being offered at LTCC on June 30, July 20, Aug. 4, and Sept. 14. The cost to attend the training is $50 and up to two workers from each local company are welcome to participate.

Common renovation activities like sanding, cutting, and demolition can create hazardous lead dust and chips by disturbing lead-based paint, which can be harmful to adults and children. To protect against this risk, on April 22, 2008, EPA issued the Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule. It requires that firms performing renovation, repair, and painting projects that disturb lead-based paint in pre-1978 homes, child care facilities and schools be certified by EPA and that they use certified renovators who are trained by EPA-approved training providers to follow lead-safe work practices.

Ten local California general contractors are being offered the opportunity to attend a five-day course to become certified lead safe worker supervisors. An EPA approved exam will be held onsite at LTCC on the sixth day.

Registration is limited to one supervisor from each firm. This training is being offered Oct. 22-27. The cost to attend is $100.

The reduced cost of the workshop fees are being paid for by South Lake Tahoe grant funding. The Lead Safe Tahoe program has been able to control potential lead-based paint hazards and renovate nearly 60 homes so far through this federally funded grant program.

Registration is available online.

Contact Janine Green with any questions at (530) 542.6196.

Opinion: Education funding in California not equitable

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the June 18, 2012, Los Angeles Times.***

Wouldn't it make sense for education funding in California to be transparent and equitable, with money spent according to students' varying needs? Gov. Jerry Brown is proposing to inject some overdue clarity and logic into the process by allocating to schools a flat amount per pupil, plus a large additional sum for low-income students or those who aren't

fluent in English.

The governor's plan is far from perfect – it's especially lacking in accountability – and the Legislature appears unwilling to support it this year for reasons both political and philosophical. But the reasoning behind it is sound, and legislators should work with the governor to move the state in this direction in coming years.

California's system for allocating public school dollars – if it can be called a system, which implies that there's an organizing principle behind it – has needed an overhaul for decades. Only a handful of people in the state claim to understand how it works. Some school districts receive more money for each student than others, even when living costs and student characteristics are roughly the same. The Inglewood Unified School District receives about $1,200 less per student annually than Los Angeles Unified, for example, although the two have almost identical demographics and educational challenges. Some affluent districts get far more than the statewide average; others receive less.

Read the whole story

Nevada's higher education gets failing grade

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada is one of four states to receive an F grade for student access and success in its higher education system from the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in a report

released this month.

The third edition of its Leaders & Laggards series, “A State-by-State Report Card on Public Postsecondary Education” examines public colleges and universities in all 50 states, including four-year and two-year institutions, and is designed to provide an in-depth evaluation of data and a careful analysis of postsecondary performance and policy across states.

“With tuition growing, debt loads increasing, students questioning the marketplace value of their degrees, and large amounts of taxpayer dollars invested, the business community and the public are starting to ask questions of policymakers and higher education leaders,” said Margaret Spellings, president of ICW and a former U.S. Education secretary. “This report begins to look at how states are doing in preparing students for jobs after college and the value state taxpayers are getting in meeting the demands of local economies and employers.”

The chamber is urging policymakers, the business community, and educators to craft a reform agenda that promotes transparency to the public, demands better data on performance and improved measurement of student outcomes.

For the first time, the report grades postsecondary institutions in the following six areas:

Student access and success

Efficiency and cost-effectiveness

Meeting labor market demand

Transparency and accountability

Policy environment

Innovation.

The Nevada System of Higher Education received an F grade for "student access and success" at both its four-year and two-year institutions.

Of the failing grades for student access and success in Nevada, the report said: "The four-year institutions rank in the bottom 10 states in terms of completion rate and the percentage of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants. The two-year institutions, despite having a retention rate in the top 10 states, ranked near the bottom on completion rates, credentials produced per 100 full-time equivalent undergraduates, and the percentage of Pell recipients."

Nevada higher education officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Nevada's three four-year institutions mustered a C grade for efficiency and cost effectiveness, and D grades in the categories of meeting labor market demand and transparency and accountability.

Its four two-year colleges received a C grade for meeting labor market demand, and D grades for efficiency and cost effectiveness and transparency and accountability.

Nevada's higher education system as a whole received a C grade for its policy environment, a D grade for innovation: openness to providers, and an F grade for innovation: online learning.

"I think the results help illuminate that some state systems are doing a far better job of graduating students with the dollars they're spending, and that too few states are providing students, families, and taxpayers with the information they need to make good choices or hold higher education institutions accountable," said Rick Hess, director of Education Policy Studies for the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), which conducted research for the report. "With tuition rising at three times the rate of inflation, we want to work with the business community to ensure that

students who invest in their education learn the knowledge and skills necessary to enter an increasingly competitive global workforce.”

Not protecting skin could result in melanoma

By Fu-Tong Liu

We think of our skin as protecting us but often ignore the importance of protecting our skin. With summer here, this is risky.

Melanoma, a deadly type of skin cancer, is on the rise. Among the 3.5 million skin cancers that will be diagnosed in the U.S. this year, about 76,000 will be melanomas, according to the American Cancer Society.

Skin cancer is common, accounting for more than half of all other cancers combined. Most non-melanoma skin cancers are basal cell, the slowest growing type, or squamous cell carcinoma. Melanomas develop from the pigment-making cells of the skin. In California, new melanoma cases are expected to top 7,050 in 2012, with 4,180 cases occurring in men and 2,870 in women, and 925 deaths.

Skin cancer is more common in sunny regions, like Lake Tahoe, where the sun shines more than 75 percent of the time, 300-plus days per year on average.

In 2012, 270 new cases of melanoma are expected in Sacramento County; 150 in Placer County and 75 in El Dorado County. **These are risk factors associated with melanoma skin cancer:**

• Unprotected exposure to natural (sun) and artificial sources of Ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Individuals using sunlamps and tanning booths before age 30 are at increased risk.

• Having three or more severe, blistering sunburns puts individuals at a greater risk.

• Personal and family (two or more relatives) histories of melanoma.

• Genetic characteristics such as pale or freckled skin, red or blond hair or blue or gray eyes.

• Multiple or unusual moles.

Experts believe one reason for the skin cancer increase is better vigilance; people are spending more time checking their skin for unusual growths. Early detection is improving with whole-body checks and individuals watching regularly for changes on their skin, including new moles. **You can detect beginning signs of melanoma by looking at moles using the "ABCDEs":**

• Asymmetry where one half of the mole looks different than the other half.

• Border that is irregular, ragged, notched or blurred.

• Color that is uneven.

• Diameter that increases, usually wider than 6 millimeters or about one-quarter inch.

• Evolving appearance of the mole over the past few weeks or months.

Melanoma is curable if detected early. **You can prevent the disease by doing simple things:**

• Limit your time in the sun, particularly between 10am and 4pm when the rays are the strongest. If you're outside during

that time, stay in the shade.

• Generously apply sunscreen with a 30 SPF (sun protection factor) or higher up to 30 minutes before going outside. Apply regularly every two hours and immediately after swimming.

• Protect your head, face, neck and ears with a wide-brimmed hat.

• Wear long sleeves and pants made from tightly woven fabrics

• Wear UV radiation protection sunglasses.

• For individuals 20 years and older, get a skin examination checkup with your physician during a periodic health examination.

• Conduct monthly ABCDE self -examinations.

Whether it’s sunny or gloomy outside, cancer experts urge you to protect your skin and as the American Cancer Society’s campaign slogan suggests “Slip, Slop, Slap and Wrap” as a reminder to slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen, slap on a hat and wrap on sunglasses.

Fu-Tong Liu is a medical doctor and a distinguished professor and chair of dermatology at UC Davis Health System and a member of the National Cancer Institute-designated UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Paying attention to kids near

water key to keeping them safe

By Warren Withers

For kids, summertime sure does ramp up the fun. And when it’s hot, it’s water they want. Consider these reminders when kids are looking to make a splash.

Watch them like a hawk. Pay close attention whenever kids are in or near water – and always keep little ones within arm’s reach. Texting, phoning, reading or doing yard work could be risky distractions.



Warren Withers

Take precautions with pools. Remember, it takes only minutes for kids to wander away into danger.

Issue life jackets. These are especially important for the lake, but consider having young or inexperienced swimmers use them in swimming pools too. Water wings – inflatable arm flotation devices – are great for beginners, but children must be carefully supervised, as the devices are not a life jacket and will not prevent a child from going under the water.

Always know where they’re going. Remind kids to ask before going near water, and never entrust their care to another child.

Don’t forget the sunscreen. Always put kid-friendly sunscreen

on your child before going outside, starting at 6 months of age. Be sure to re-apply every two hours and after getting out of the water. Hats, clothing and plenty of shade will help with sun protection in the Lake Tahoe area.

Most of all, have fun with your kids, and enjoy the summer.

Warren Withers is director of Emergency Services at Barton Memorial Hospital.

Lake Valley fire wants to talk to contractors, homeowners about roof grant

Lake Valley Fire Protection District is planning a series of meetings for the public and roofing contractors to talk about the wood roof replacement grant.

The July meetings are for homeowners, while the August meeting is for contractors.

July 10, 6-8pm, Lake Valley Station 7, 2211 Keetak St., Meyers;

July 11, 4-6pm, Meeks Bay main station, 8041 Highway 89, Tahoma;

Aug. 2, 9am-noon, Lake Valley Station 7, 2211 Keetak St., Meyers.

For more information, call (530) 577.2447.

Opinion: UC system caters to the rich and foreign

By Thomas D. Elias, San Jose Mercury News

The more that foreign and out-of-state students register at the University of California and higher tuition and fees are pushed, the more legitimate it becomes for taxpayers who built and still largely fund the 10-campus system to wonder who it will belong to in the future.

It’s a question that got new force early this month when UCLA officials voted to take their graduate school of business private, making it depend solely on a variety of grants, plus student tuition and fees.

No one knows if the UC system will remain as it has been for more than 70 years – the single biggest incubator for upward mobility of young Americans – or if it will become a playground for the rich of California and other places.

But all indications at this moment are that UC campuses are gradually going to cater more and more to the wealthy.

It’s all because of money: The state doesn’t have as much as it needs to fund many basic services that have come to be expected, from parks to elementary and high school education to caring for the disabled elderly who have paid taxes all their lives and expected a bit of a safety net in their twilight years.

One result has been a steady reduction over the last decade in state support of UC, California State University and community college campuses. That has translated into major increases in

tuition and fees that have hit all those campuses. UC tuition is about triple what it was 10 years ago, after increases of as much as 20 percent in some years. Taking away inflation, in 1980 the value of a typical California home would buy more than 200 years of a UC education. In 2011, it bought only approximately 30 years. So tuition, amazingly, has risen even faster than housing costs.

Another result of the funding cuts has been a decrease in the number of students transferring to UC schools from community colleges – always a good measure of future upward mobility – and a parallel increase in admission applications from other states and countries. Applications from out-of-staters don't usually arrive spontaneously; they tend to result from outreach efforts.

Read the whole story