Tahoe man caught in CalPERS scandal knows his wine

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Alfred Villalobos might be in hot water over his dealings at CalPERS, but the man knows his wine.

The Lake Tahoe businessman, implicated in the pension fund's bribery scandal, is selling his French wine collection to an Orange County wine merchant for $160,000.

The collection consists of 300 bottles of Bordeaux, at an average price of $533. The sale to Hi-Time Wine Cellars of Costa Mesa was approved by a U.S. bankruptcy judge in Reno earlier this week.

Josh Hoover, operations manager and French wine buyer at Hi-Time, said the Villalobos collection consists of "great wines, not blow-you-away type of wines. … It's a very nice collection."

Read the whole story

El Dorado County wineries score big at state fair

By Pooch Pucilowski

The California State Fair Wine Competition has been judging California wines since 1854.

The 2011 competition should go down as a proud moment for all

the wineries in the Sierra Foothills Appellation – more important, for the wineries in El Dorado wine country.

An interesting observation that should bring a sense of pride to every Sierra Foothill winery is Napa had 23 red wines (Golds and Double Golds) being tasted for Best of Region. Sonoma had 19 reds, South Central Coast had 12 reds, and California appellation had 25 reds. Sierra Foothills had 51 Gold and Double Gold red wines. A most incredible happenstance.

Peter Gamble, winemaker and consultant from Ontario, Canada, stated, "In over 25 years of my judging wines from around the world, the greatest single flight of wines I've ever had was at this year's California State Fair; over 30 of 50 wines presented in the regional finals were at the 'spectacular' level. Amazing!"

Among those receiving top honors was Windwalker Vineyard with a Double Gold for their 2008 Primitivo "Shady Lady" 98. Windwalker was also awarded Best of Show – Red; Best of California; Best of Region Red Sierra Foothills Appellation and Best of Class Sierra Foothills Appellation. Ranked third Best Winery in California, they also took home three Gold, five Silver and two Bronze medals.

Auriga Wine Cellars took home three Gold for their 2008 Merlot, 2009 Sangiovese and 2009 Barbera. Boeger Winery received one Gold for their 2008 Migliore; Crystal Basin Cellars received Gold for their 2008 Gren, Syr. Mourv; 2 Golds for Gold Hill Vineyard for their 2009 Chardonnay – Best of Class and 2007 Petite Syrah; Lewis Grace Patriot Gold for their 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon and Perry Creek received a Gold for their 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon.

El Dorado Winery Association members receiving Silver and Bronze Medals:

Silver Medals

* Auriga Wine Cellars – 2008 Shiraz; 2007 Zinfandel

* Boeger Winery – 2009 Sauvignon Blanc, 2008 Barbera, 2008 Zinfandel

* Busby Cellars – 2008 Zinfandel

* Charles B. Mitchell Vineyard – 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2008 CabSauv, CFranc, Mer

* Crystal Basin Cellars – 2008 CFranc, Mer, CabSav, PVer, 2008 Cabernet Franc, 2008 Syrah

* David Girard Vineyards – 2009 Grenache, 2009 Roussanne, 2009 Sur, Gren, Counoise,

* Gold Hill Vineyard – 2007 Cabernet Franc,2007 Barbera, 2009 Viognier, 2007 CabSav, CFranc, Mer

* Holly's Hill – 2009 Mourvedre, 2009 Roussanne, Viog, Grenach, 2009 Grenach Noir

* Latcham Vineyards – 2008 Barbera

* Lava Cap Winery – 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2008 Petite Sirah, 2008 Zinfandel

* Lewis Grace Patriot – 2006 Syrah, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2009 Viognier, 2006 Tempranillo

* Madrona Vineyards – 2008 Cabernet Franc, 2010 Riesling, 2009 Viog, Mars, Roussanne, 2008 Ruby Port

* Mount Aukum Winery – 2007 Sang, CabSav, CFranc

* Oakstone – 2009 Barbera, 2010 Sauvignon Blanc, 2008 Meritage, NV Red Wine, 2008 Sangiovese, 2008 Zinfandel, 2010 Verdelho

* Perry Creek Winery – 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2009 Chardonnay, 2008 Zinfandel

* Sierra Oaks Estates – 2008 Petite Sirah

* Sierra Vista Vineyard – 2008 Syrah, 2010 Viognier

* Windwalker Vineyard – 2008 Zinfandel, NV Blended Red Wine, 2007 Zinfandel.

Bronze Medals

* Boeger Winery – 2006 Meritage, NV Red Wine, 2007 Sangiovese, 2007 Zinfandel

* Busby Cellars – NV CabSav, CFranc, Mer, Ma

Charles B. Mitchell Vineyard – 2007 Merlot, 2008 Merlot

* Crystal Basin Cellars – 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon

* Gold Hill Vineyard – 2007 Merlot

Holly's Hill Vineyards – 2009 Mourv, Syr, Gren, Counois

* Jodar – 2006 CFranc, Mer, Cabsav, 2007 Zinfandel

* Latcham Vineyards – 2008 Zinfandel

* Lava Cap – 2008 Zinfandel, 2008 Bronze

* Madrona Vineyards – 2008 Zinfandel, 2007 Merlot, 2009 Zinfandel,

* Oakstone – 2008 Merlot, 2010 Pinot Grigio, 2010 Pinot Grigio, 2008 Primitivo

* Perry Creek Winery – 2009 Barbera, 2008 Syrah, 2008 Petite Sirah, 2008 Zinfandel

* Sierra Oaks – NV Zin, Barb, NV Red Wine

* Sierra Vista Vineyard & Winery – 2010 Sauvignon Blanc, 2009 Syr, Gren, Mourv, Cins

* Windwalker Vineyard – 2007 Petite Sirah, 2006 CabSav Mer,

CFranc, Ma, 2009 Sauvignon Blanc.

Pooch Pucilowski is chief judge and consultant to the California State Fair Commercial Wine Competition.

Winemaker dinners at Black Bear Inn

Black Bear Inn in South Lake Tahoe is offering two winemaker dinners in July.

Dobra Zemlja Vineyards will be highlighted July 13 and Jeff Runquist Wines will be featured July 27. Both wineries are in Amador County.

Each dinner will consist of six courses prepared by the inn's chef, Alex Elsaesser. A wine will be chosen by the winemaker to complement each course.

The cost $65 per person. Reservations are necessary. For more information, go online.

Warmer temperatures threaten N. California vineyards

By Ashlie Rodriguez, Los Angeles Times

In the next 30 years, high-value vineyards in Northern California could shrink by 50 percent because of global

warming, according to a new Stanford University study released Thursday.

Applying scenarios from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, scientists used a climate system computer model and found that Napa and Santa Barbara counties could experience very hot days during the growing season, with temperatures reaching 95 Fahrenheit or higher. The number of hot days will be greater, they say, with about 10 more sweltering days than usual.

As a result, the amount of grape-growing land is projected to decline over the next three decades, the authors wrote.

“There will likely be significant localized temperature changes over the next three decades,” said Noah Diffenbaugh, coauthor of the study and a center fellow at the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford. “One of our motivations for the study was to identify the potential impact of those changes, and also to identify the opportunities for growers to take action and adapt.”

High-value growers in California may need to take into account warmer weather and integrate climate information into their cultivation and practices, Diffenbaugh said. Two counties that he found would have cooler temperatures, Yamhill County in Oregon and Walla Walla County in Washington, can prepare for more optimal growing seasons.

“It’s risky for a grower to make decisions that consider climate change, because those decisions could be expensive and the climate may not change exactly as we expect,” Diffenbaugh said. “But there’s also risk in decisions that ignore global warming, because we’re finding that there are likely to be significant localized changes in the near term.”

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: Grilled cheese not just for kids

By Kathryn Reed

Grilled cheese might be a staple on children’s menus, but big kids like it, too. In fact, it’s even becoming trendy at some restaurants – though, that would be outside the Lake Tahoe Basin.



I love grilled cheese each summer in my backyard. (We don’t fire up the bbq in winter.)

It probably all started as a kid when Mom would make what she called “cooked cheese”. This was one slice of bread with cheese on it cooked under the broiler. The cheese would bubble and even get a little charred. That was super yummy.

The grilled cheese of my adult liking involves more of a sandwich – cheese between two slices of bread.

But it doesn’t have to be bland like the kids’ menu variety. Try different cheeses between those slices. Try different breads.

And then be creative by adding more than cheese. A staple for us is tomato with the cheese. I also like avocado – the three together.

Something we tried last month was Fuji apple slices with the cheese. When I first read about that combo (where I don’t

remember) I thought it didn’t sound good. But then I thought how I often serve apples with cheese and crackers, so why not try this combo on the grill. And then there are people who put cheese on their apple pie – something I will never understand.

The apples added a crunch and sweetness to the grilled cheese that was fun and tasty. Sue said she doesn’t need this combo again, but I liked it.

These sandwiches don’t take long to cook on the barbecue; so don’t walk away from the grill. They are done when the cheese is melted.

Make sure the whole piece of bread is covered with each ingredient so every bite has everything on the sandwich.

Sue puts a little bit of olive oil on both sides of the bread before grilling. She puts the sandwiches on the main level of the gas grill for a few minutes, then onto the upper level so they don’t burn.

California food handlers must have appropriate paperwork

A food handler card will be required for all non-exempt food handlers starting July 1. A food handler is an individual involved in the preparation, storage or service of food in a food facility.

There are some exemptions: temporary food facilities, certified farmers’ markets, commissaries, grocery and convenience stores, licensed health care facilities, schools, and a few others.

It is the responsibility of each employee to get the card. It is not the responsibility of the restaurant owner to obtain the card for employees. The restaurant owners are required to track and ensure all their employees have the card. The cards are valid for three years and will be required throughout the state within 30 days of hiring.

All food handlers will be required to obtain a food handler card after taking a food safety training course and passing an exam. This can be completed online. The cost of the online course is not more than $15. The exams can be done in English or Spanish.

More information regarding the California Food Handler Law is available online. The link is on the right side of the page under “hot topics.”

Homegrown herbs add flavor to dishes

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

When it comes to herbs, we’ve gone from parsley and chives to a new world of flavors.



“People are asking for shiso and ginger root,” said Meg Gray, buyer for Green Acres nursery in Sacramento. “Stevia is at the top of everyone’s list.”

Herbs spice up our meals and our gardens. And as interest in

global cuisines grow, so does our appetite for ethnically diverse herbs.

With increased interest in cooking at home, gardeners also are growing more of their own herbs, saving money while adding fresh flavor.

“You can get a whole plant for what it costs for a few sprigs of basil in the supermarket,” Gray said. “And you’ll have fresh herbs all summer – or longer.”

And this spring, herbs also have spiked sales for nurserymen as novice and experienced gardeners dive into herbs as an easy entry to edible landscaping.

“It goes hand in hand with interest in vegetable gardening and growing your own food,” said Janet Simkins of Sierra Nursery in Roseville. “Independent nurseries, such as ours, sell herbs side by side with vegetables. Even if you don’t have room for a vegetable garden, you can put a few herbs in a pot and get some satisfaction, too.”

It’s not just about food.

Read the whole story

Study: Potatoes are not your friend

By Daniela Hernandez, Los Angeles Times

Public Enemy No. 1 in America’s battle of the bulge isn’t cupcakes, soda or double bacon cheeseburgers. It’s the simple potato, according to Harvard University researchers.

Daily consumption of an extra serving of spuds – French fries, crispy chips, mashed with butter and garlic, or simply boiled or baked – was found to cause more weight gain than downing an additional 12-ounce can of a sugary drink or taking an extra helping of red or processed meats.



Altogether, after tracking the good and bad diet and lifestyle choices of more than 120,000 health professionals from around the country for at least 12 years, the research team calculated that participants gained an average of 0.8 of a pound a year, close to the U.S. average, according to a report published in Thursday's edition of the New England Journal of Medicine.

It may not sound like much, but as the years go by "it becomes like compounded interest," adding up to 16 pounds over 20 years, said Dr. Jeffrey Schwimmer, director of the weight and wellness program at Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego, who wasn't involved in the study.

Potatoes have a long pedigree in the human diet. They were once hailed as history's most important vegetable, and the Incas – whose ancestors are credited with domesticating spuds in South America – worshiped a potato god.

They are still certified as a "heart healthy" food by the American Heart Assn. And the United Nations declared 2008 the International Year of the Potato, praising the tuber for being a good source of vitamin C, several B vitamins, and minerals including iron, potassium, phosphorus and magnesium.

But when the team from Harvard Medical School and the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston examined the potato's role in the modern diet, they found that people who ate an extra serving of French fries every day gained an average of 3.4 pounds over a four-year period. On top of that, those who munched on an extra serving of potato chips daily gained an

average of 1.7 pounds every four years. Overall, an extra serving of potatoes prepared in any non-chip form was found to contribute an average of 1.3 pounds to total weight over four years.

The typical American consumes 117 pounds of potatoes each year, including 41 pounds in the form of previously frozen French fries, according to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. “Fresh” spuds account for only 28 percent of the total, the USDA said.

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: Perfect dip to share with friends

By Kathryn Reed

With Fourth of July just a week away, it’s time to figure out what to bring to the barbecue or have at your backyard gathering.



The recipe below is one I made for a group at Memorial Day when I was asked to bring an appetizer. It was well received because the flavor is so robust – and not one you get in grocery store dip concoctions.

I like hummus, but I’m not a huge fan. This recipe is bound to win over the non-hummus likers. It’s not quite as thick as hummus and definitely is more flavorful. But it does have a certain hummus like quality.

I made it two days before it was served – this allowed the flavors to meld even more.

The picture in the November 2007 issue of *Cooking Light* magazine shows the spread on a bagel chip with fresh rosemary garnish. Yes, it's pretty.

I didn't do pretty. I did practical. I served the dip in a bowl with hard crackers (though bagel chips would be perfect) and Wheat Thin Stix. I had never seen the Stix until shopping that particular day. I took a chance they'd be good and appropriate – they were.

Roasted Garlic, Sun-Dried Tomato, and White Bean Dip

Prepare a day ahead; bring to room temperature before serving. Serve on bagel chips garnished with rosemary sprigs.

1 whole garlic head

1 C water

1 (3.5 ounce) package sun-dried tomatoes, packed without oil

2 T extra virgin olive oil

½ tsp chopped fresh rosemary

¼ tsp kosher salt

¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

1 (15.8 ounce) can Great Northern beans, rinsed and drained

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Remove white papery skin from garlic head (do not peel or separate the cloves). Wrap head in foil. Bake at 375 degrees for 45 minutes; cool for 10 minutes. Separate cloves; squeeze to extract garlic pulp. Discard skins.

Bring 1 cup water to a boil in a saucepan. Add tomatoes; cover

and remove from heat. Let stand 10 minutes. Drain tomatoes in a colander over a bowl, reserving ¼ cup liquid.

Place garlic pulp, tomatoes, ¼ cup reserved liquid, oil, and remaining ingredients in a food processor; process until smooth.

Makes 2 cups.

Forgotten Feast at Cedar House in Truckee

Cedar House's summer calendar kicks off with a celebration of wild plants and mushrooms, game and seafood. Indulge in The Forgotten Feast with Hank Shaw author of "Hunt, Gather, Cook: Finding the Forgotten Feast" on July 16. Shaw spends his days thinking and writing about ways to cook and enjoy anything that walks, flies, swims or crawls.

The Forgotten Feast begins with cocktails and a book signing by Shaw at 5:30pm and is followed by a five-course tasting menu inspired by Shaw's book.

Cost is $75 plus tax and service includes cocktails and wine.

For more information about this event in Truckee, call (530) 582.5655.