NFL’s vote on Raiders also a victory for sports books

By Todd Dewey, Las Vegas Review-Journal

In the equivalent of a two-minute drill, the NFL changed its view of Las Vegas and legal sports betting.

Less than two years ago, Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo was forced to cancel a fantasy football convention here because of the NFL’s policy against players being associated with gambling. But on Monday, the league’s owners overwhelmingly approved the Raiders’ relocation from Oakland to America’s gambling capital by a 31-1 vote.

A confluence of factors has led to the growing mainstream acceptance of legal sports betting, from expanding national media coverage to NBA commissioner Adam Silver emerging as a vocal proponent.

But the biggest factor in overcoming the stigma of sports betting and bringing an iconic NFL franchise to Las Vegas was money. As Raiders owner Mark Davis said in April 2016, the team and city made the NFL an offer it couldn’t refuse in the $750 million in taxes that was approved by the Nevada Legislature for construction of a $1.9 billion domed stadium near the Strip.

Read the whole story

LTCC on quest to enroll more local students

The LTUSD and LTCC boards at their annual meeting on March 28. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College wants to see more local students enrolling in the two-year institution.

From Lake Tahoe Unified School District's class of 2012 66.4 percent went to LTCC the following fall; class of 2013 – 66.5 percent; 2014 – 60.7 percent; and 2015 – 56.4 percent. It was noted that with the district having about 260 students graduating each year, it only takes a few students to skew the percentages.

This information was dispensed March 28 at the joint meeting of the two institutions' boards. An agenda item was post-secondary enrollment trends.

The stats provided involve those who graduated from South Tahoe High School, Mt. Tallac High School and the Tahoe Learning Center.

What doesn't show up in the numbers provided by LTCC is the students going to trade schools, using the knowledge they gained through the various career technical education paths STHS has.

LTCC picks up more local graduates after they have been out of high school for a year or two. Administrators would like to find ways to attract them from the get-go. One way is through promise grants.

The staff report says, “Typical of many promise programs, fees and tuition are covered for students who enroll in the partner college in the fall following graduation from high school.”

The college applied for a promise grant from the state, but was denied. LTCC President Jeff DeFranco said he’s looking at partnering with other entities – agencies and businesses – in the area to possibly create a promise program.

Another incentive for local kids to go to LTCC is having earned college credits while at South Tahoe High. LTUSD and LTCC have a duel credit program that continues to expand. Staff believe 25 percent of high school students taking college classes is a realistic goal. There is also the potential that one day they will earn a high school diploma, and the next they could receive their associate of arts degree; this is happening in other parts of the state.

The current sophomores could have about 30 LTCC credits when they leave STHS through the duel credit program that was launched last school year.

Part of the relationship between LTUSD and LTCC includes sharing facilities. This cuts down on having duplicate buildings and everything needed for programs.

DeFranco said LTCC is paying attention to what students are majoring in when they leave Tahoe. This data could be critical when the university center comes into being. This will be where four-year institutions come to campus to offer bachelor’s degrees without students having to leave South Lake

Tahoe.

The primary reason LTUSD students (67.2 percent) from the classes of 2012-15 went to LTCC was to obtain a degree, certificate or transfer. The top declared majors were business, liberal arts, medical office assistant, criminal justice and natural science.

Jeremy Brown, director of institutional effectiveness for LTCC, went over the certificates LTUSD students earned at other institutions. They include corrections officer, general education, emergency medical technician, firefighter 1, leadership, massage therapy and medical assisting.

"The areas where we don't have certificates may be potential areas for growth," Brown told the boards.

The following are the number of LTUSD students who have gone on to higher education within one year of graduation and to what type of institution:

- **Class of 2012**

Private or for profit – 7

Out of state public four year – 16

Out of state public two year – 3

California public four year – 37

Other California community college – 21

LTCC – 123

(Total – 207)

- **Class of 2013**

Private or for profit – 6

Out of state public four year – 18

Out of state public two year – 1

California public four year – 44

Other California community college – 26

LTCC –95

(Total 190)

- **Class of 2014**

Private or for profit – 14

Out of state public four year – 16

Out of state public two year – 2

California public four year – 54

Other California community college – 24

LTCC – 84

(Total 194)

- **Class of 2015**

Private or for profit – 12

Out of state public four year – 14

Out of state public two year – 4

California public four year – 29

Other California community college – 25

LTCC – 87

(Total 171).

Trump signs bill killing Obama rule on public lands

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON — President Trump signed a bill Monday that kills a federal rule dictating planning on public lands in Western states — including 47.5 million acres in Nevada.

Conservationists and Democrats argued that the Obama administration regulation, known as the Planning 2.0 rule, protected Bureau of Land Management lands from commercial interests.

All GOP senators from Western states, including Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., were co-sponsors of a resolution calling for the repeal of the regulation. It was sponsored by Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, the chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

The Obama administration regulation changed a process at the Bureau of Land Management that had been in place for 34 years.

Read the whole story

U.S. has a $4 trillion

infrastructure time bomb

By James Cook, BBC News

On the banks of California's Feather River, way below the tallest dam in the United States, is a ballet of steel and stone.

The dancers are huge earth-moving machines, their costumes bright yellow. The movement at the Oroville dam is constant and mesmerizing.

The average age of the 90,000 dams in the United States is 56 years. By 2025, seven out of 10 of them will be more than half a century old.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) warns that "many dams are not expected to safely withstand current predictions regarding large floods and earthquakes".

Overall, says the society, $4.6 trillion will be needed by 2025 to bring U.S. infrastructure to an acceptable standard. Less than half that amount has so far been allocated for the work.

Read the whole story

EDC wineries open doors to four-legged visitors

AJ could get used to regular trips to wine country. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CAMINO – Wine is always better shared with friends – even if the friend has four legs.

AJ was an instant hit at the handful of El Dorado County wineries she visited. She got treats, was petted and there were water bowls already set out for her.

At Findleton Estate Winery people were showing off pictures of their dogs on their phones. One guy had photos of his pups in his wallet.

Owners Tom and Pam Findleton have always allowed dogs. They even had a sweet 16th party for their dog last year.

Tom Findleton talks dogs and wine at his Camino winery. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Pam Findleton creates all the labels for the winery. A painting is already done with Tom Findleton and their dog Grizzly. It’s likely to show up on future Bordeaux blend label.

Across the way in the Camino Wine Tasting Plaza is the Chic Photo Boutique. They do screen printing of people’s dogs and then Findleton will use it as a personal label for customers on one of their bottles of wine.

The Findletons are such dog lovers that they do an annual fundraising event for the SPCA and El Dorado County Animal Control.

“The more, the better” is Boeger Winery’s philosophy when it comes to dogs.

AJ makes herself at home at Boeger Winery. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"Dogs make everyone else happy," Yvonne Kendler, who works at Boeger, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

She said pet owners are good about taking their dog outside if the animal starts to bark or becomes disruptive in some other way.

With ample acreage, there are many places for wine to be enjoyed outside at Boeger if the four-legged companion would rather be outdoors.

Boeger sells the dog treats they hand out to the animals. AJ quickly gobbled up the goodie from Pawsperity Bakery. The Applegate-based business has treats in a variety of flavors; all made with natural ingredients. She won't have a problem finishing the bag before the expiration date comes.

Over at Wofford Acres Vineyards it's a one dog at a time policy inside the tasting room. Once dog No. 2 arrives, it's time for all of them to go to the patio area.

This is a small tasting room, so more than two would be quite a distraction.

AJ becomes the center of attention at Wofford. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“My goal is to get people focused on wine. As soon as you bring a child or dog in, the focus changes,” Ann Wofford told *Lake Tahoe News*. She is one of the three owners of the winery.

AJ proved her theory correct. Other tasters started paying attention to her, petting her and then sharing their dog stories. Wine suddenly became secondary.

Even so, AJ got people who might not otherwise have talked to one another to do so. And we all still found time to keep sipping.

Not all wineries allow dogs inside the tasting room. Some allow them only in the picnic area. Check a winery’s website or give them a call to find out before you trek all that way with your four legged family member.

Poker tables keep decreasing in Nevada

By Regina Garcia Cano, Associated Press

When the Monte Carlo casino closes its eight-table poker room in about a month as part of a $450 million overhaul, the Las Vegas Strip will be down nearly a quarter of the tables it had a decade ago.

Casinos constantly adjust their floors to meet customer demand. Some casinos have made their poker rooms smaller. Others have eliminated them entirely.

"Casinos added more tables in response to popularity, and once it became less popular, they took away the tables," said David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the UNLV. The peak of the poker room was 2007.

Read the whole story

Indian casinos rethinking how to attract customers

By Richard Chang, Sacramento Bee

The region's Indian casino scene could soon get more crowded.

With two casino projects on the horizon in an already bustling market, tribal operators old and new will have to offer entertainment and other amenities to retain the loyalty of customers in what experts say is a gaming market that will soon reach a breaking point.

"There are a finite number of gamblers," said Rich Hoffman, CEO of the Jackson Rancheria Casino Resort in Amador County. "The more times you split that pie up, the fewer customers you have."

California has 59 casinos and ranks behind only Nevada – with 270 casinos – in terms of gaming revenues.

When and if the new casinos open, they are expected to take much of their business from regional competitors.

Read the whole story

Tahoe shelter for millennials as diverse as lifestyle

Publisher's note: ***This is one in a series of stories about affordable housing in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee region. All articles may be accessed via the home page under Special Projects, 2017 Affordable Housing.***

By Susan Wood

When it comes to millennials and home ownership, the 30s could arguably be the new 20s.

The 16- to 34-year olds (per U.S. Census Bureau), aka millennials, have hit the pause button on certain aspects of the all-American dream.

With some exceptions, many demographic studies in the United States have pointed to a delay in home ownership among a generation known for its computer wizardry, independence and mobility. The findings coincide with their apparent hesitation about raising children and even getting married in their coming of age period.

In 2015, the younger set numbering 83.1 million, according to the Census Bureau in 2015, appear more diverse than any other generation in minority status, goals and view of the world. (California tops the list with 61.5 percent among minorities.)

Whatever ethnicity or locale, millennials have brought home ownership to a record 30-year low at 34.1 percent compared to the overall U.S. population coming in at 62.9 percent.

Despite the generation splitting that number in half, Business Insider among other observers keeping a close eye on the demographic group, reports that 65.3 percent of these youth associates buying a home with the American dream. That's the plan for a majority when the time is right.

Timing is everything

The waiting by millennials says as much about their view of social norms in the world and rejections of climbing the corporate ladder as their income status and cautious optimism about the nation's finances.

Millennials are less likely to get married as they're coming of age than previous generations. According to the Pew Research Center, only 42 percent of millennials were married and living with their spouse last year. In 1963, that number exceeded 80 percent.

Moreover, the majority of millennials – 56 percent – was childless. By contrast, more than half of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers reared children at that similar stage of life.

Alongside mounting student loan debt, sources like SmartAsset have cited labor market opportunities as a key factor in jumping into life-altering moves. Millennials were hit hard by the recession of 2009, which ran parallel with a weak jobs recovery in subsequent years. Then, there's simply a lack of desire early in life to sign on to a spouse or children, much less being roped in to such a large investment like a home.

Brianna Biller is making ends meet by subletting her rental to tourists via Airbnb. Photo/Susan Wood

Home is relative

"Because a lot of us entered the workforce during the recession, I don't know anything but living paycheck to paycheck. We're overworked and underpaid," Brianna Biller told *Lake Tahoe News* while in her rental off Pioneer Trail.

Biller works in sales for Sierra-at-Tahoe at a job she loves in paradise. The 29-year-old knows the ropes. She grew up in Tahoe and left to attend a performing arts school to become an actor.

She’s resided in a few different living arrangements here, including sharing space with her best friend in a place she affectionately referred to as the “ghetto in the meadow.” The term plays right into the longstanding nickname for Tahoe housing – “poverty with a view.”

Tahoe is known to test the will of even the steeliest of residents. For years, ski resort employees would bunk up, sometimes 10 people to a house to make ends meet.

With such a low inventory of rentals, those not buying a home are forced to stand in long lines to compete for places. Biller recalled going to an open house and seeing prospective renters standing there “with folders” to sell themselves. To top it off, scams exist. She later found her place because she knew the right person.

“I can’t do (permanent) roommates anymore. One of them turned the heater on and left the window open,” she said in disgust. “It’s just stuff like that.”

But good rentals aren’t cheap.

A light bulb was turned on

Biller discovered the clear advantage of her generation’s advancements in the digital age.

She rents out her upstairs loft on Airbnb, the increasingly popular online home sharing website. She has renters but on a temporary basis, most often on the weekends because who doesn’t want to visit Tahoe?

Biller has found a lifestyle so pleasing: “It makes me want to open a hostel.”

She established a little seating area similar in looks to the front lobby of a bed and breakfast. She assembled a binder full of hikes, bike rides and other activities visitors may partake in while they share a roof with her for a few days.

“I love waking up here and hearing people laughing in the morning,” she said.

Plus, money is not the concern it was.

“Now I can afford good wine,” Biller said.

This is the lifestyle Biller wants, even though living through the recession has been challenging. Nonetheless, millennials have learned to do what they need to do to pay the bills, given their diverse views of the working world.

“My generation is getting creative in getting corporate America dethroned. Our generation is all about the experience and not collecting stuff,” she said. “This is our generation’s response to wasted resources.”

Smart, single and savvy, this Tahoe woman doesn’t necessarily buy into a certain protocol of falling into line.

“Not everyone has to have kids. I have no desire to chase that ideal and move up to a bigger house,” she said.

Instead, her golden retriever Cody fills in the gap nicely. They love romping in the woods steps from her humble abode.

Dondra Biller and Ryan Elson are new homeowners on the South Shore. Photo/Susan Wood

Stages and outcomes vary

Biller’s sister, Dondra, 30, returned to Tahoe a few months ago after a stint in Colorado, but she took on a different living arrangement.

She bought a home here with her 35-year-old husband, Ryan Elson, and got a job in her environmental science discipline selling water quality products for General Electric.

“I look at working for corporate America as a means to an end,” said Dondra Biller, who travels a region and calls Tahoe her work-home base. “Colorado was nice, but I really wanted to live in Tahoe.”

The Earth science/oceanography major met Elson in Santa Cruz. She graduated from college in 2009.

Like her sister, Dondra’s attitude about being responsible with money but skeptical about what it can do were somewhat formed by the financial crash and consequential ailing jobs market.

“One thing that has shaped the millennials is we literally came out of the age of recession. For me, I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop,” she said.

“We wanted to buy a house so we could do what we want with it,” said Elson, who works for Bentley Nevada in engineering.

The two rely on each other greatly in a world filled with insecurity, doubt and mistrust. While they’re being creative with their home, creating life in their household might be on hold.

“A lot of my friends have the pressure to be perfect like having a child,” Biller said.

Instead, they’re focusing on their careers and want to contribute to their community.

“Millennials want everyone to have what they need. We’re willing to pay for the greater good,” she said. Call it a new sense of socialism.

“In Tahoe, things crashed, but came back. Still, we don’t buy into that you must have kids and the bigger house. Millennials are not stuck on that at all. We can make our lives what we want them to be,” said Biller, noting how the couple wants to develop an energy-efficient home.

And like Brianna, Dondra stated they’re well aware of a lack of short-term housing and good-paying jobs “but we were hell-bent on being in the community here.”

Think globally, act locally

The Biller sisters aren’t the only ones who grew up at Lake Tahoe and returned upon leaving the nest.

Many say Tahoe has a draw.

Millennial Devin Middlebrook reinforced this notion. At age 27, he has a job in the basin at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Having graduated in business and sustainability at Chico State in 2007, Middlebrook is now using his studies to protect the lake he grew up loving. This is so appropriate, given his friends and family are here.

Still, Middlebrook wanted to be independent. He shares a home with his girlfriend, something he admits he's "lucky" to be able to do.

"Tahoe was always home. I always had a plan to come back," he told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Having endured the recession while in school, he crossed his fingers he would find a job here. He returned in 2012, going to work for the Tahoe Resource Conservation District before landing the job at TRPA.

"Tahoe can be very tough on young people. I had my parents' house to come home to. Some are not as fortunate," he said.

Middlebrook recalled how a friend had to move away because she couldn't find a place that would take a dog.

"It's a humble house (we have), but it gives us what we need," he said. "You don't make a ton of money here, but that's the trade off of experiencing life in Tahoe."

And there lies the common denominator expressed by numerous millennials. It's all about the experience – not the prestige.

Jamie, Annika and David Orr are living the Lake Tahoe dream. Photo/Provided

Seize the day

One could say David Orr understands this better than most.

Bucking the millennial tradition of delaying marrying and having kids, Orr, 33, prides himself on establishing a life for he and his wife, Jamie, 35, and their daughter Annika, 5, within a one-mile radius.

Again, living is about seizing the most out of it – opposed to wasting time, for example sitting on a freeway in the San Francisco Bay Area to get to a corporate office.

Orr had that life and shows no plans of returning. In fact, he’s taking all those idea-building brain cells and creating a sense of community for not only his family, but for others.

He opened Tahoe Mountain Lab on Harrison Avenue with his wife as a way to provide a commercial space for the mobile worker. He recently expanded the operation to the restaurant at the top of the Heavenly Mountain Resort tram.

He’s seen his fair share of what’s being referred to as “digital nomads” in his generation. Those workers provide a service online and can live and work anywhere to accommodate most any whim.

“The old ideals are in question. It’s the experience that’s important — not collecting possessions,” Orr told *LTN* that he’s come to realize about his age group. His claim echoes the Biller sisters’ assessments.

Of course, everybody’s different. However, he has noticed a disproportionate number of millennials choosing to move around without having an anchor on their heels.

“Most millennials these days don’t want to be tied to a mortgage,” he said. “If they are buying homes, they don’t want a ton of space.”

There’s a movement going forward that bills those modular spaces used commercially and personally as the wave of the future.

“At the Mountain Lab, there’s a place where we’re trying to solve problems in our lives besides being in these four walls,” he said, motioning to the building he’s running. “It’s designed to spur the South Shore economy.”

The Mountain Lab houses many business professionals just needing ample, minimal office space. There are attorneys, financial consultants and real estate agents. The building remains full.

Orr would like to see the commercial idea in other buildings expand into living spaces. Developing this further would take a lot of effort, especially given regulations and the structural layout of Tahoe.

But this is a new day, with a new groundswell to accomplish progress.

“There are experience-driven places, and that’s what makes Tahoe special. That’s why the millennials are moving here,” he said. Orr almost sounds like a prophet when he talks about his vision for the South Shore.

It’s all part of a cycle

South Lake Tahoe Association of Realtors spokeswoman Theresa Souers has seen many trends as a longtime Realtor in this market area.

She’s noticed a slight uptick about the latest adult generation buying homes, but not necessarily a huge increase.

“I am noticing my kids’ friends coming back,” she said.

Of those who do, some will get their parents to co-sign like the Gen Xers did – while the Baby Boomers are downsizing in their moves.

“Those that can’t afford the high rents, buy,” Souers said. “Today, millennials are yesterday’s Gen Xers.”

Some like the Orrs made their mark in the lucrative Bay Area and can afford it by utilizing their highly demanded computer programming skills and creative sense.

Beyond housing, Souers has also seen a rise in the number of small businesses popping up with a young influence at the helm. These businesses are providing products and services that are unique. Even with the companies that have been around town for a while, there’s a sense of more profitability to be had.

It’s only a matter of time when more millennials buy into that dream of owning a home, if anything because their “experience” may become more grounded in home and hearth.

Zillow and Realtor.com are predicting 2017 will be the year it all turns around as millennials make the plunge. Estimates indicate that home prices will increase by 3.9 percent, according to a Reuters report. Realtor.com believes much of the sales will be driven by that age group.

Of the top 10 metropolitan areas in the United States, Sacramento ranks No. 4 with a projected sales growth of 4.9 percent. Perhaps, there could be spillover to Tahoe.

The state of home ownership needs a jolt

Making the big move into home ownership is long in coming for millennials – especially in California. Just ask Troy Matthews.

The 32-year-old South Lake Tahoe man admits that if he and his wife had not qualified for a USDA loan through El Dorado County with no down payment required, they'd be renting.

"For a lot of millennials, that's an issue. We just don't have the money," he said, comparing Tahoe to major cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco. "If we lived there, I guarantee you we would not own a home."

Matthews works for Tahoe Youth & Family Services and is the civic engagement chairman of the Tahoe Regional Young Professionals, a social group at 250 members strong and growing.

He's witnessed other young professionals struggling with the same challenges.

Matthews understands the interest in waiting for the bigger milestones in life. He just got married a few years ago and has no children.

"Many millennials don't want to be tied to mortgages. Renting offers mobility, and we came out of the recession," he said. "It's really hard to save money."

Putting away the down payment with home prices what they are may seem like a daunting task for someone entering the housing market. But their sheer numbers in the population carry clout.

That’s why the California Association of Realtors is studying the demographic.

“A lot of them are living at home for various reasons – with a lot hit by the recession,” CAR spokeswoman Lotus Lou told *LTN.*

In its 2016 Millennial Survey, CAR discovered that 44 percent of millennials live with their family. The household annual income rounds out at $49,000 a year. With that money, CAR found out millennials in the Golden State plan to buy in the next five years. Half rent now because “they cannot afford to buy,” according to the survey.

Notably, “an affordable home price would be the No. 1 motivator” to get millennial renters to turn the key. In the meantime, 10 percent of California millennial respondents have used home sharing services such as Airbnb.

“The Lake Tahoe real estate market is very desirable for cost and also lifestyle. You can’t buy a house in the (San Francisco) Bay Area for under $300,000, let alone a home that’s at the base of a ski resort, close to world class mountain biking trails and in a top-notch school district,” Jenna Palacio explained.

Palacio, who is also active with TRYP like Matthews and Middlebrook, has noticed a shift in millennials moving into the Tahoe area for the active lifestyle – and in doing so, have reshaped the culture to a sharing and collaborative society.

Nevada sports betting fund shines, then stumbles

By Todd Prince, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Chris Connelly, founder of one of the first sports betting mutual fund in the U.S., was killing it during 2016.

His Contrarian Investments LLC was up 31 percent on Dec. 18 compared with a 10 percent return for the Dow Jones over the same period. His bets on the National Football League and the National Basketball Association rocked.

Then he had his Atlanta Falcons Super Bowl moment.

With less than two weeks to the new year, Connelly lost 10 of his next 13 bets, wiping away all the gains and more. He finished the year down 23 percent compared with a 13 percent gain for the Dow Jones.

Read the whole story

A veteran snowmaker on the future of skiing

By Megan Michelson, Powder

Robin Smith, 70, got his start as a ski instructor at an upstate New York ski hill called Swain Ski Center in the 1970s. He went on to own and run that resort for over 20 years and installed the area’s original snowmaking system.

When Intrawest bought Mountain Creek, an urban ski area in New Jersey, in the late 1990s, they called up Smith to run the place and help solve their snowmaking woes.

Smith, now in business development for the Italian snowmaking company TechnoAlpin, has since become one of the ski industry’s most veteran snowmaking consultants and pioneers. He currently lives in Englewood, Colo.

“Robin knows how to look at your snowmaking system and quantify it,” says Dennis Harper, snowmaking manager at Idaho’s Sun Valley ski resort. “He’ll tell you how much snow you need to make and how much it’s going to cost to make your resort run.”

Read the whole story