

Here comes the summer travel crunch

By Chris McGinnis, San Francisco Chronicle

Memorial Day marks the start of the busy peak travel season, and it looks like this summer will be one of the busiest ever at airports, on the road and at hotels.

The Transportation Security Administration, which processed more than 239 million airline passengers and crew from Memorial Day to Labor Day last year, said it expects to see that number rise to 243 million this summer. To keep the lines moving, TSA has added more than 600 officers to its checkpoint staff since January and said it will add 1,000 more by the peak summer crunch, when it will be processing 2.6 million travelers per day.

To save money on airfare during peak season, you must be flexible. Fridays and Saturdays in July and August now outrank Thanksgiving as the busiest air travel days of the year.

Read the whole story

What to know about Calif.'s water bonds

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Californians this year will vote on not one but two water bond measures totaling \$13 billion. Given that the state still hasn't spent all of the \$7.5 billion from the Proposition 1

water bond passed in 2014, it raises a crucial question: Does California really need another \$13 billion in water bonds?

As of December 2017, the state had allocated only about \$1 billion from Proposition 1. About half of the total money available from the bond is dedicated to new water storage under a complicated new process that funds only the “public benefits” of such projects. The first dribble of money from that pot is expected to be awarded later this year.

With all that money still coming, why two more water bonds?

Read the whole story

EDC working to keep mentally ill out of jail



El Dorado County Chief Probation Officer Brian Richart talks mental health. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

People who live inside their heads don't thrive inside jail cells.

It can be said they also don't do well getting there – or even within the system that incarcerates them, for that matter.

That's what about 30 stakeholders discovered during a mental health meeting at Lake Tahoe Community College last week to launch Stepping Up. The U.S. initiative is supported by the National Association of Counties, El Dorado included.

The county passed a resolution a few years ago to make it a priority to come up with a plan to deal with this global crisis on a local scale. But nothing much happened. It was an oversight that the county's Chief Probation Officer Brian Richart apologized for.

Richart views the Stepping Up initiative as a way of doing business in keeping the mentally ill out of jail while maintaining the public safety in the community.

"It's about shifting our way of thinking," Richart, the facilitator, told the audience made up of mental health professionals, affiliates and family members.

For years, if someone who's mentally ill made a scene in public, law enforcement was called out to restrain the situation and apprehend the person. Now there's a protocol to talk the person down and instead show empathy. The goal is to get that person to a safe place other than jail where even the most level-headed citizen may have extreme anxiety.

It seemed like an insurmountable task for law enforcement, but now there's special training because the risk of doing nothing as the problem increases is just too high.

The Public Policy Institute reported inmates statewide in California prisons numbered 112,300 in 2016. Estimates claim 15 percent of those incarcerated are mentally ill. Nationwide,

it's estimated people with mental illness constitute 2 million inmates.

Most close to the issue agree the matter will only get worse without doing something as the number of homeless correlates with the mentally ill, and the division between the "haves" and "have nots" grows wider.

"Jails are not designed for the mentally ill," said Jeanne Nelson, president of the National Alliance on Mental Illness in El Dorado County.

Nelson has been frustrated by how long it's taken to get a plan in place, admitting the county is in a state of "catch up."

"We need to put a stake in the ground. If work was performed like this in the private sector, they'd be fired," the former Oracle corporate executive told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We need to catapult this thing forward."

But like a good steward of a cause, she added being hopeful and gratified that the initiative is finally moving. She provided recognition to seeing Patricia Charles-Heathers, the director of the county's Health & Human Services Agency, in attendance.

"It's harder in rural communities because of access (to care)," Charles-Heathers told *LTN* after the May 16 meeting. She expects the problem will worsen with the stifling economy for the poor and disenfranchised.

"But we're on track," she said.

El Dorado County sheriff's Sgt. Michael Yarbrough nodded in agreement. Yarbrough dedicates much of his time to the cause, continuing to spearhead the county sheriff's response through the CIT program. He trains about 10 officers a year on the program that details a special crisis management protocol for

deputies going out on calls involving the mentally ill.

May is Mental Health Awareness month.

After hearing countless stories from family members, Nelson got NAMI to take the lead on sending a grant opportunity to the county for its consideration. Richart announced the county is applying for \$400,000 with a \$100,000 match from El Dorado to carry the county through the planning process. More should be known in six months. Implementation of guidelines presents another chapter yet to be tackled – one that is sure to take more time and money.

But most would agree failure is not an option with lives at stake.

Just ask Tish Elliott, whose 24-year-old son Ross Collins suffers from a severe mental illness that's a cross between schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Collins has made his way in and out of the system. About a year ago, he was roughed up and told to shut up when taken into custody by three Mono County sheriff's deputies who jumped on his back, Elliott alleged. He was suicidal at the time.

"It's the reason I moved here. My son was scared," she said. "They treated him horribly and was told to act like a man."

Like clockwork, the hospitalizations were once annual visits. Now they happen about every three months. There's a cycle, a vicious one.

Elliott worries her son has reached the point of no return in respect to ever being able to live a normal life. He told her he paces and screams, so he doesn't hear the voices in his head.

"My heart aches for every NAMI parent," she said wearily. "I'm constantly looking for hope, and I'm hopeful as long as he's stabilized."

She took solace in hearing others' stories and thinks telling hers is therapy. She attended the El Dorado County meeting to achieve both.

The Stepping Up report released in January 2017 outlines six questions county leaders can ask to determine the extent its local government may have on using a system that stems the tide on mental illness – especially with respect to clogging the jails.

The questions:

- Is our leadership committed?
 - Do we conduct timely screening and assessments?
 - Do we have baseline data?
 - Have we conducted a comprehensive process analysis and inventory of services?
 - Have we prioritized policy, practice and funding improvements?
 - Do we track progress?
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Small Nev. businesses struggle to find qualified workers

By Bailey Schulz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Small-business owners in Nevada have hit a wall finding employees with the right skill sets. A 2018 survey by Nevada

State Bank and Applied Analysis found more than two-thirds of businesses find it somewhat or very difficult to recruit qualified candidates. The state's education system and a lack of economic diversification may be at fault, experts say.

Jeff Grace, chief executive officer of information technology service company NetEffect, said it's been increasingly difficult to hire qualified candidates in recent years amid a robust economy. His company currently has 23 employees and three job openings.

Nevada had the nation's highest job growth rate in 2017, according to the U.S. Labor Department. While this is a sign of a burgeoning economy, it can lead to a disproportionate labor market – one with more job openings than qualified candidates.

Read the whole story

Wildfire risks are high again this year

By Ragan Adams, The Conversation

Memorial Day marks the traditional opening of the summer travel season. This year the American Automobile Association projects that more than 41.5 million Americans will hit the road over Memorial Day weekend, nearly 5 percent more than last year and the most in a dozen years.

For many years, AAA has urged drivers to prepare for trips through steps such as testing their car batteries, checking for engine coolant leaks, and making sure their tires are in

good shape. The group also recommends packing a mobile phone and car charger, a flashlight with extra batteries, a first-aid kit, a basic toolkit, and drinking water and snacks for all passengers.

But travelers should also think about conditions beyond their cars. As coordinator of Colorado State University's Veterinary Extension programs, I help people in rural and urban communities manage all kinds of threats that can affect them and their animals, from disease to disasters. When people travel in unfamiliar places, far from their social safety nets, they should know what challenging conditions exist and prepare appropriately. In particular, anyone visiting the western United States this summer should understand risks associated with wildfires, since once again the risk of fires is high in many areas.

Understanding fire conditions

The 2017 wildfire season was one of the most challenging years on record. More than 71,000 wildfires burnt over 10 million acres. Federal agencies spent nearly \$3 billion on fire suppression, and 14 firefighters were killed in action.

This year the U.S. Forest Service expects another above-average fire season. Many parts of the Southwest that depend on winter precipitation for moisture are dry. Coupled with above-average growth of grasses last year, conditions are ripe to turn a harmless spark into flames. Wildland fire potential is forecast to be above normal through August across portions of the Southwest, Great Basin, Southern California and the Pacific Northwest.

Wildland fires are fickle beasts that behave erratically, depending on wind speed and direction and the landscape over which they travel. If you are close to a fire, it can be difficult to tell which way the fire is moving. Firefighters, police and other first responders have access to information

that defines the scope of a fire and the potential pattern of its movement. They use this information to define evacuation areas to keep people safe. It is essential to respect these boundaries.

Travelers in unfamiliar territory should research hazards they may face (including events such as blizzards, floods and tornadoes, as well as wildfires), and prepare accordingly. Here are some basic recommendations:

- Know where you are. GIS systems are convenient, but Siri may not always be available. Carry paper maps that you know how to read.
- Share your exact travel plans with friends or family. Inform them when you change course. Someone else should know where you think you are.
- Develop situational awareness. Pay attention to your environment: Seeing or smelling smoke is significant. Avoid rising rivers and flooded roads.
- Have a communication backup plan if cell service is not available. Sign up for reverse 911, subscribe to an emergency communications service such as Everbridge, or listen to AM channels advertised on road signs in rural communities.
- Check weather reports and respect red flag advisories.
- Respect warnings from local emergency managers and cooperate with first responders.

The human factor in wildfires

People trigger most wildfires in the United States. According to a 2017 study, 84 percent of wildfires federal and state agencies were called to fight between 1992 and 2012 were ignited by humans. Wildfires can also be ignited by lightning or sparks from railroads and power lines.

People start fires by discarding cigarettes carelessly, leaving campfires unattended or inadequately extinguished, and

losing control of crop fires and prescribed burns. The 2017 study calculated that human actions have tripled the length of the national wildfire season, extending it into spring, fall and winter.

The U.S. Forest Service has been educating Americans about their role in preventing wildfires since 1942, when Disney lent it images of Bambi the fawn and his forest friends for an educational poster. The campaign was very popular and confirmed that an animal was an effective fire prevention symbol. Because Bambi was only on loan, the agency had to find a new animal symbol. A majestic, powerful and appealing bear fit the bill.

The Smokey Bear Wildfire Prevention campaign, the longest-running public service advertising campaign in U.S. history, started in August 1944. The initial poster depicted a bear pouring a bucket of water on a campfire. In 2001, Smokey's catchphrase was updated to "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires."

Smokey's message to prevent unwanted and unplanned outdoor fires is as relevant and urgent today as it was in 1944. By learning about campfire safety, safe management of backyard debris burns, and protecting houses and property from wildfire, Americans can make themselves safer, both on the road and at home.

Ragan Adams is the coordinator for the Veterinary Extension Specialist Group at Colorado State University.

Ballpark blends history with

modern conveniences



Braves fans learn at an early age to “chop on.” Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

ATLANTA – Baseball may be a simple game – hit, catch, throw – but the history, the competition, the nuances of the game, the pageantry are what make it magical.

Unlike football and basketball where the dimensions of the field and court never change, the same is not true for baseball parks. Sure, the distance from the pitcher’s mound to home plate and between all the bases are a constant, but outfield configurations are all different. This makes each park unique.



Ronald Acuna Jr. is one of the Braves hot young players.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

SunTrust Park, now in its second season, is the newest ballpark in Major League Baseball. The Braves are an exciting team to watch this season with a slew of young players; some aren't even old enough to drink.

Left fielder Ronald Acuna Jr., 20, is one of those players. He's also one of the major draws to the ballpark. For his home debut on May 4 it was a sell-out and an attendance record of 41,807 for this park that opened in 2017.



Giants third baseman Pablo Sandoval signs autographs. Photo/Kathryn Reed

As a Giants fan – thus the reason to be there for three games earlier this month – I thought the crowd size might have had something to do with who the visiting team was. The Giants cooled off the sizzling Braves, sweeping them in three games.

While the game is the main draw, this ballpark has so much to offer that even a casual fan of the sport is bound to find plenty to enjoy. I think of AT&T Park in San Francisco as still being new even though it opened in 2000. After being in Atlanta, I can tell my home park is a bit dated.



More than 50 Braves players and managers have been inducted into the Hall of Fame. Photo/Kathryn Reed

I was especially impressed by the tribute to the Braves' history, with a nod to baseball lore in general, that is showcased on the lower level. It is appropriately named Monument Garden.

It tells the story of the Braves journey from Boston starting in 1871, which makes this the oldest franchise in Major League Baseball, to Milwaukee and then to Atlanta in 1966. Names like Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron are tied to the Braves.

Greg Maddux's 1995 Cy Young award is there for all to see.



Even traditional ballpark food is better in the Delta Club.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The hardware the Braves have collected through the years is impressive.

It so happened that some of that history was on the field during batting practice on May 4. Legendary outfielder Andruw Jones was seen talking to John Schuerholz, who was general manager of the Braves from 1990-2007 and then the Braves president from 2007-16. He entered the Hall of Fame in 2017.

Another piece of history the Braves are holding onto is the tomahawk chop. The phrase now being touted by the marketing folks is "chop on." It's supposed to be less offensive. It really is something to see nearly 40,000 people either wave foam tomahawks or raise their arm in a chopping motion.



The area outside SunTrust Park is full of eateries, shops and condos. Photo/Kathryn Reed

As with most of the modern parks, an area has been dedicated to the younger set. A zipline and other kids' activities are behind the outfield.

I had the privilege of being at the park with a season ticket holder who has seats in row 11 behind home plate. Wow! It had been a while since I'd seen a game from that perspective. These were the most luxurious seats I've ever sat in for a sporting event – they had cushioning – not just hard plastic.



Giants catcher Buster Posey is ready for batting practice.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

These are part of the Delta Club section. Much like at AT&T, there is a special eating area for these ticket holders where the masses are not allowed. A big difference though is all the food and drink are included with the ticket price at SunTrust.

And it's not just traditional ballpark food that is available. The chefs acknowledge each visiting team with specialties from their home city. For San Francisco, it was grilled oysters on the half shell and ahi tacos.

The food was outstanding – grilled vegetables, portabella sliders, a corn concoction that was worth having more than one day, pizza with soft dough, nachos with a slightly spicy white cheese, salads that tasted like the veggies were just picked.



SunTrust Park is beautiful day and night. Photo/Kathryn Reed

And with Sharla's tickets come the opportunity for four "memories" she can participate in. She cashed one in while I was there – the opportunity to be on the field for batting practice. What a treat.

Sure it was fun to see some of my favorite players – Buster Posey, Brandon Crawford – up close, but it was more impressive watching the players interact with the fans. (It's also possible to pay for this experience.) These players on both teams were warming up for a job they were about to do, but some still took the time to sign autographs – no matter who the fan was rooting for. This was classy – just like the park.

Judge: USFWS illegally denied

bi-state sage grouse listing

By Scott Sonner, AP

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acted illegally in 2015 when it denied Endangered Species Act protection for a distinct population of bi-state sage grouse in California and Nevada, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

U.S. District Chief Magistrate Judge Joseph Spero in San Francisco said in an 85-page opinion that the agency ignored its own best scientific evidence when it reversed course three years ago on its 2013 proposal to declare the bird threatened.

Read the whole story

North Tahoe firefighting in the 1950s

By Pat Dillon, Moonshine Ink

A gleaming red fire engine roars by, a paramedic ambulance close behind. Arriving at the scene, the firefighters attack the fire, assess the wrecked car, or stabilize the sick or injured person. On the North Shore, we're fortunate to have the expertise and equipment to handle almost any emergency, but has it always been this way?

The North Tahoe community has only had a year-round population since the 1920s. At that time, there were just a few hardy families that stuck it out through the often brutal winters. After World War II, however, people built more homes, established businesses, and the towns of Kings Beach and Tahoe

City expanded.

During summer, the U.S. Forest Service provided fire protection, with engines equipped with small water tanks for fighting brush fires. While adequate for the infrequent forest fire problem, these units and the rangers that staffed them were not equipped to deal with structure fires. In winter, the residents were left to handle blazes themselves. Even into the 1950s, bucket brigades were still used by neighbors to fight fires.

Read the whole story

Kingsbury Grade a defining climb for Amgen racers



Katie Hall uses Kingsbury Grade to her advantage on May 18.
Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Ashton Lyle

Thousands of residents came out to watch as the Amgen Tour of California cycling race return to South Lake Tahoe on Friday.



The main group descends Carson Pass with 30 miles to go.

Photo/Ashton Lyle

The women started the day with Stage 2, a 67-mile loop running into the Carson Valley, with a start and finish at Heavenly Mountain Resort's Cal Lodge. The day also included an ascent up Kingsbury Grade, an 8-mile climb that averages over 6 percent grade.



The women scream down Kingsbury Grade under the threat of stormy weather. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

The men finished later in the day, tackling Stage 6, which ran over 120 miles from Folsom to Heavenly.

The Tour of California has visited the Lake Tahoe area six times over the 13-year history of the race, most recently visiting South Lake Tahoe in 2017. The high altitude and mountainous terrain have a profound impact on the final results, and have led to some of the most exciting stages in the history of the event, including Tom Skujins's win from the breakaway in 2016.



Egan Bernal (Sky) salutes the crowd as he wins Stage 6 in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Ashton Lyle

In the women's race, American Kendall Ryan (Tibco) held the race lead after a surprise win in Elk Grove on Thursday, but faced a stiff challenge from world-class climbers such as Megan Guarnier (USA) and Katie Hall (UHC).



Riders are often going much faster than the posted speed limit. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

Liza Rachetto (Hagens-Berman) was the first to attack, but Coryn Rivera (Sunweb) and Lily Williams (Hagens-Berman) formed the day's early breakaway. After the first major climb, Williams dropped Rivera on the decent and forged on solo. She held a maximum advantage of 2 minutes, but rejoined the peloton just after the intermediate sprint, with over 15 miles still to race.



A group of men make their way through the South Shore. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

Astana drove the pace into Kingsbury Grade, the day's hardest climb, which tops out with just 6 miles to the finish. The high pace quickly reduced the field to an elite group of six riders, dropping overnight leader Kendall Ryan (Tibco). Less than a mile from the summit, Hall (UHC) and Tayler Wiles (Trek) attacked and opened a gap of 40 seconds. After the decent, Hall attacked again, opening up a gap on the final climb into Heavenly and took the stage by 25 seconds over Wiles and 1:01 over Katazyna Niewiadoma (Canyon).



Zephyr Cove firefighters watch and applaud the women as they race by. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

In the men's race, another American, Tejay van Garderen (BMC) entered the day as the race leader, with Colombian Egan Bernal (Sky) a mere 23 seconds down. With Saturday's stage in Sacramento designated for the sprinters, the race would be decided on the run into Lake Tahoe.



It was a grind for the men who had started Friday in Folsom.
Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

Eight miles into the race, a nine-rider breakaway separated themselves from the peloton, gaining a maximum advantage of over 5 minutes. The break had three Americans, Sean Bennett (Hagens Berman), Lawson Craddock (EF Education First) and Evan Huffman (Rally). Bennett was only 3:23 down on Tejay van Garderen, forcing BMC to ride on the front to keep the breakaway close.



Mount Tallac looms in the background as the women race through Stateline. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

Sky took over the front of the peloton, and drove a hard pace. Inside of 30 miles to go and the peloton had been reduced to under 40 riders. The last remnants of the early break were caught on the penultimate climb, with 12 miles to the finish. Racing up the same climb where Hall (UHC) had attacked in the women's race, Sky continued to drop riders as they rode a brutally fast pace.

Bernal (Sky) attacked hard from the reduced front group with 10 miles to race, opening up a minute gap over Tejay van Garderen (BMC) by the top of the climb. The chasing group, driven first by van Garderen, and then by Brandon McNulty (Rally) could not close the gap, and Bernal took another solo stage win. Adam Yates (Mitcheton-Scott) finished second at 1:28 down and Tao Geoghegan Hart (Sky) finished third, a further two seconds down.



The men find the strength for the final push to Heavenly. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

Hall and Bernal now confidently lead their overall classifications with the race finish May 19 in Sacramento, on a day that is made for a bunch sprint. Caleb Ewan (Mitcheton-Scott) will look to take his first stage victory after two second place finishes, while Fernando Gaviria (Quick-Step) will look to add to his total.

The final stage of the Tour of California will be live on NBC from noon-2pm on May 19, with the daily race recap available on NBCSN from 7:30-9:30pm.

NCAA tourney games now possible in Reno

By Chris Murray, Reno Gazette-Journal

The NCAA has long considered Nevada taboo territory for hosting its championship events, citing the state's legalized sports betting, but that policy changed Thursday.

The organization, in a press release addressing the Supreme Court's decision to allow sports wagering across the nation, said:

"Also in response to the Supreme Court decision, the NCAA Board of Governors suspended the Association's championships policy related to sports wagering. The board's decision will ensure championship location continuity by temporarily allowing NCAA championship events to occur in states that offer sports wagering."

[Read the whole story](#)