Dozens evacuated from Heavenly chairlift



Comet chair at Heavenly is popular with skiers on the Nevada side. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

No one was injured New Year's Day when the entire Comet Express chairlift at Heavenly Mountain Resort had to be evacuated.

It came to a stop in the late morning because of mechanical problems.

"Heavenly lift maintenance personnel are currently assessing the mechanical issue and stoppage, and will continue to work in conjunction with state and regulatory agencies until all

issues are resolved," Coop Cooper told *Lake Tahoe News* in a prepared statement.

It is not known when the lift, which is one of the more popular chairs on the Nevada side, will resume operations.

A witness said it appeared to be an orderly evacuation of the lift, with no one seeming to panic. Heavenly did not release how many people were on the chairlift when it stopped.

While this chair appeared to have people in every seat, overall the mountain was not very crowded on New Year's Day.

Per the resort's agreement with the U.S. Forest Service, Heavenly's personnel must be able to handle such an evacuation on their own. And that's just what happened on Sunday. No outsides agencies were involved with the rescue.

"Between each pole they seemed to have a separate team of about three people. They looped a rope and some sort of harness, I'll call it a T-bar," Steve Haerr of South Lake Tahoe told *Lake Tahoe News.*

He and family members watched as ski patrollers helped skiers and snowboarders to the ground. The skiers put a rope across their chest and sat on what looked like a T-bar.

The detachable quad chairlift is 20 to 40 feet off the ground. When it was installed in 1988, Comet was the resort's first high-speed lift.

Bargains await the smart

traveler in 2017

By Jack Chang, Sacramento Bee

Change likely will define 2017 in many ways, and the travel industry is no outlier in that forecast.

Airlines, as they occasionally do, will look for new revenue streams by going extra-budget. Cities will continue building their allure through their food and drink cultures. More private homes will welcome guests in more cities as Airbnb forges stronger partnerships with local governments.

That’s at least how CSU Chico Professor Matthew Stone sees this new year shaping up. As an expert in recreation, hospitality and parks management, Stone identified several travel trends that point to more options for the smart bargain hunter.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Outcome of 2017 depends on all of us

By Kathryn Reed

As the fog of ringing in a new year fades, we must collectively begin to face the reality that 2017 is going to be much different than 2016. Some of it we will have control over, some we won’t. The worst part will be if people stop being engaged.

As the late U.S. Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill said, “All

politics is local."

The Lake Tahoe Basin has plenty of issues that need to be addressed – housing, wages, transportation, and climate change are just a few. These are big topics with no easy answers. They are problems that should not be solved in a vacuum by only a few people. All of these issues affect everyone who lives in and visits the basin. That is why we, the residents, need to have a say in the cure that will be used to treat what ails us as a community.

Don't wait until the eleventh hour, don't wait to be asked for your opinion – just find a forum to express it in a manner that could effect change.

Housing – lack of it and the exorbitant price – is not unique to Tahoe. *Lake Tahoe News* will be exploring this topic through a series of stories beginning later this month.

One thing Tahoe will likely always face is a housing shortage. In some ways this is a good thing because it means we did not pave over paradise. The fact that there is a limit on what can be developed in the basin is a good thing. It means we will continue to live in a wooded forest instead of a concrete jungle.

Should employers provide housing for employees? Should people expect to live and work in the same town? What role should government have in housing? These are some of the bigger questions we need to address collectively to find consensus.

I wonder if people were paid a livable wage, if the housing crisis would not be as severe because they could then afford more. At the same time, it is unrealistic to expect everyone who wants to live here to be able to do so.

California's minimum wage as of today is $10.50/hour. By 2021 it will be $15/hour. Nevada's minimum wage is $8.25 an hour, but drops to $7.25 if an employer offers health insurance. The

federal minimum wage of $7.25/hour was set in 2009. The average annual household income on the California side of the South Shore is $28,565.

Vail Resorts, one of the larger employers in the greater Lake Tahoe area, in June 2015 made a big splash by announcing it would have a minimum wage of $10/hour. For its three California resorts, it's no longer relevant.

I'm all for companies making a profit, but at some point that money needs to trickle down to the workers who are doing the heavy lifting. This is true of all sectors. The economic divide is growing dramatically between the haves and the have nots.

Climate change is real. Argue all you want as to why, but it is changing. Scientists have proven this. Look at all that rain we had in the fall. Is this going to be the new norm? The snow line is rising. This could dramatically change our economy if the winter sports season is shorter. It might also mean a longer off-season, as evidenced by the bustling fall the basin and Truckee areas experienced in 2016.

People are clearly wanting to recreate in the basin and Truckee – just look at how congested our roads are. It's great they want to enjoy our home and drop some cash while doing so. But if their experience is miserable because of the congestion and lack of functional public transportation, how long will it be before they play elsewhere?

It is mindboggling to me that the powers that be keep approving development projects with no answers to how to mitigate the impacts the projects will have on roads and other infrastructure. Nor do these policymakers seem to care that the lack of housing for the workers at these developments means those people will be commuting, thus adding to the congestion. This then adds to air pollution and degradation of Lake Tahoe's clarity.

As for what is going on nationally – Jan. 20 brings a new president. I have had friends tell me Trump will not be their president. To date I have failed to be persuasive to argue otherwise. Bridges cannot be built with that thinking.

He will be the president of the United States. (It is alarming that a Qualtrics poll taken in December showed 29 percent of the respondents believed Trump won the popular vote. Fifty-two percent of Republicans said Trump won the popular vote. The reality is Hillary Clinton won that count by more than 2.8 million votes.)

This is part of our collective problem – people refusing to learn (accept?) the truth, the facts.

It is our choice if we want to remain the Divided States.

Finding even the smallest commonality and building on that is critical. Educating people through civil discourse, listening – these are things that need to be done. Protesting and making oneself heard has its place, too. In all of this, there must be purpose beyond anger and telling others they are wrong. That is where the education piece becomes so important. It's a critical component for all sides.

Drawing a line in the sand for equality, to thwart discrimination, and to uphold the Constitution and Supreme Court decisions is righteous. Drawing a line in the sand because you didn't get your way and your person isn't in office is beyond unproductive.

The questions now are – How do we overcome being the Divided States of America? How do we make the greater Lake Tahoe region sustainable for future generations?

Sheriffs won’t enforce Nevada gun law

By Mark Robison, Reno Gazette-Journal

The next steps for proponents of expanded gun background checks in Nevada are unclear after a legal opinion that for all intents blocks a voter-approved initiative set to go into effect Sunday.

What is clear is that the Background Check Act to require a federal database check of private party gun transfers will not be enforced. That’s according to Nevada sheriffs.

The Douglas County Sheriff’s Office reported receiving numerous inquiries about the ballot question. It put out a statement that it is “advising its citizens that they may proceed with private party firearm sells and transfers as they did prior to the passing of ballot question #1.”

Read the whole story

Vetting casino games takes team of techies

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

Jim Barbee stood in the Gaming Control Board’s technical lab, a small utilitarian room filled with slot machines and video poker games blinking away, some with the doors open and their

bill changers, video screens, slot reels and electronic guts on display.

“The first two things you learn when you work here are one, how to turn off the sound,” Barbee said. “And the second, is to make sure you get your money out when you’re done. If you leave it in, it’s gone and goes to the office doughnut fund. We haven’t had any doughnuts around here for a while.”

Barbee is chief of the board’s technical division, which has a number of roles when it comes to Nevada’s gaming regulations. One of them is approving new games and modifications to existing casino games.

As part of that process, they have to examine the games and run them through their paces. Hence the room full of various slots and video games.

Read the whole story

New Year vision from Tahoe residents-agencies

Lake Tahoe News asked a variety of people and agencies in the Lake Tahoe Basin to talk about what their resolutions, so to speak, are for 2017. Here are the responses:

John Rice, general manager of Sierra-at-Tahoe: “We are hoping for another ‘normal’ winter of 450 plus inches of snow, followed by a nice wet spring to put water back in our lake, give our thirsty forest a drink and keep the bark beetles at bay. We would also like a minimum of 30 powder days in 2017 please! We don’t ask for much.”

Andy Wirth, president and CEO, Squaw Valley Ski Holdings LLC: "Professionally: A complete reboot and reestablishment of folks being civil, polite, courteous, gracious, cordial and respectful to each other and reverential of diverse opinions – globally, nationally, state-wide, regionally and locally. Personally: Lots of time spent on our horses with my daughter and a great outcome for her 4H steer project at the Nevada and then Placer County fairs!"

Brandi Ledbetter Brown, owner of Tahoe Production House in South Lake Tahoe: "I am looking forward to watching my new business laikastream.com launch, be involved in the community as much as I can with Tahoe Regional Young Professionals – big things are coming, and watch my daughter grow up in this beautiful place we call home. If you can make it in Tahoe, you can make it anywhere!"



Jerry Goodman, longtime South Lake Tahoe resident: "To see the reduction of vacation home rentals in our residential

neighborhoods and lots more snow."

Suzanne Kingsbury, El Dorado County Superior Court judge: "In terms of a personal wish, it is that all of Tahoe's citizens – as well as my friends, coworkers and family – have a healthy and happy 2017. From the perspective of my agency, we hope for less repeat customers! And if I could get through the year without having any dental work, that would be a blessing. Sorry Dr. Gordon, but I prefer to see you outside your office."

Evon J. Yakar, rabbi Temple Bat Yam: "In 2017, I am looking forward to great ways to strengthen our Tahoe community through economic opportunities and social justice efforts. On a global scale, I am hopeful that our human values of equality and care for the Earth will be held in high regard."

Duane Wallace, South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce president: "I'm hoping that the two chambers will find some common ground. I'm hoping that real progress will be made so that those who work here or grew up here will be able to afford to live here."

Todd Offenbacher, founder of Tahoe Adventure Film Festival: "My new year's resolution is to make Tahoe better through more community events and activities that connect us and our guest (visitors) to the outdoors. I want to see more rock climbing, mountain trails, bike paths, exploration, and adventures for everyone. Plus, we need more parking for this recreation in Tahoe."

Tim Alameda, Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District chief: "1. Biggest and best Firefighters Ball ever – held on March 10, 2017 at Edgewood

2. Only free range organic eggs at this year' s Easter Egg hunt at Tahoe Paradise Park

3. A celebration of remembrance for the 10-year anniversary of the Angora Fire – June 24, 2007

4. Please, no illegal fireworks during the 4th of July … how about for the whole summer

5. Sept. 11 – Never Forget

6. Oct. 13 – Anniversary of Chief Alameda's first year at Lake Valley Fire and the anniversary of the Emerald Fire

7. Thanksgiving – do not try the fried turkey routine in your garage

8. Lake Valley Fire's Christmas Engine makes its rounds. See you then, here comes 2018!

9. Everyone have a safe and fun 2017 and hike Mt. Tallac, at least once!"

Ellie Waller, Tahoe Vista resident and local activist: "Tahoe specific: Real agency – local jurisdictions as well as TRPA – transparency with more clarity in code of ordinance, goals and policies and not subjective interpretation that is tailored to an outcome. Actual public participation: Example, the environmental groups and members of the public that consistently come to meetings are not necessarily represented by the League to Save Lake Tahoe's views when it comes to compromise with developers."

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board staff: "1. Working collaboratively with stakeholders to adapt to climate change by creating more resilient watersheds, conserving and recycling water and protecting infrastructure from flooding.

2. Continuing to support Caltrans and local government efforts to reduce stormwater pollutants from entering Lake Tahoe through stormwater treatment and road sweeping.

3. Ensuring clean surface and groundwater is available to all users, including disadvantaged communities.

4. Supporting private-public partnerships in tackling aquatic invasive species and near shore water quality concerns. The Lake Tahoe marina association is setting the example in working with Lahontan, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, League to Save Lake Tahoe and TRPA to tackle these issues.

Nevada Department of Transportation staff: "As 2016 ends, preliminary data tragically shows approximately 32 deaths on Nevada roads. In 2017, the Nevada Department of Transportation and partners will continue work to save lives on Nevada roads, from enhanced enforcement of traffic laws to roadway improvements such as the shared use path and safety enhancements under construction on Highway 28 near Incline Village. With the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reporting that approximately 94 percent of traffic deaths are the result of driver behavior, the top wish for the new year is for lives saved thanks to continued safety efforts and everyone on the road being safer and more attentive."

Clint Purvance, CEO and president Barton Health: "My hope is to find additional and innovative ways to meet the health and wellness needs of our community. Barton oncology will begin seeing patients as a member of UC Davis' Cancer Care Network, work will finish on the expanded Women's Health Suite at Medical Imaging, and the Robert Maloff Center of Excellence will open and begin serving our community and patients. We are taking big steps in 2017 toward our commitment to our community's health, and wellness will continue to be top of mind as we shape our future."

Molly Hucklebridge Coolidge, South Lake Tahoe resident: "In 2017, I want to prioritize spending time with positive, genuine, and loving people. I also hope to be considered a strong advocate for peace on our planet and for preservation of our natural surroundings."

Jeff Marsolais, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit forest

supervisor: “Beyond hoping for a happy and healthy 2017 for all, looking forward, I’d like to continue to expand the collaborative efforts between agencies, partners, communities, and interested citizens to tackle the challenges of the basin like improving forest resiliency and providing for sustainable recreation. I am hopeful we can do so while engaging our local and visiting public, involving and inspiring our youth, and visioning for a future we will be proud to say we had a small part in shaping.”

Drug abuse, criminal acts why casino workers lose registration

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

Anyone who is defined as a gaming employee, according to Nevada Revised Statute 463.0157, must be registered before they can work in the gaming industry.

Becoming a registered employee is different than getting a gaming license. But it still involves a background investigation, and registered employees must not break the law.

The casino jobs that require registration include dealers, change personnel, counting-room personnel, keno runners, keno writers, machine mechanics, oddsmakers and line setters, security personnel, shift or pit bosses and a host of other gambling-related jobs.

Read the whole story

Lift technology opens mountains to kids, disabled

By First Tracks

KLOSTERS, Switzerland – The Swiss Alps offer breath-taking panoramic views and year-round adventure. Yet, the challenges of making the mountains accessible require monumental feats of engineering expertise.

A new ski lift for children and handicapped persons will enable them to enjoy remarkable mountain scenery and activity. ABB is powering the new six-seater chairlift in the Klosters-Madrisa mountain resort, one of the most popular ski and mountain regions in the Swiss Alps.

“I am a person like everyone,” said eight-time Paralympic medalist Edith Wolf-Hunkeler. “I want to be free. I don’t feel handicapped. If you can go skiing with your family and you are together all of the time, that’s what makes it an experience.”

Read the whole story

Kingsbury Grade sink hole growing daily

By Kathryn Reed

The gradual sinking of part of Kingsbury Grade has Nevada transportation officials concerned.

“Our NDOT roadway maintenance staff have been monitoring it numerous times each day to ensure traffic safety and evaluate any changes to the roadway itself,” Meg Ragonese, Nevada Department of Transportation spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Safety is our top priority, and if we feel there are any immediate safety concerns to drivers, we will close this section of Kingsbury Grade for safety.”

The troublesome area is on the Carson Valley side of the road near mile marker 4.3. It was first noticed last week.

A drainage pipe and culvert cross under the road at this location.



NDOT is keeping an eye on a growing hazard on Kingsbury Grade. Photo/Lisa Huard

“Roadway sinkholes like this can progress at different rates, based on a number of factors,” Ragonese said.

A sign to the side of the road says “bump.”

“Every time we drive it it is worse,” Lisa Huard told *Lake Tahoe News*. The South Lake Tahoe resident said it started like a ripple, but now is more pronounced.

NDOT plans to repair the road in the next few weeks. Contract documents are in the works. This will mean Kingsbury Grade at times will be closed to motorists. (About 5,600 vehicles travel on Kingsbury Grade every day.)

Even before this trouble arose NDOT was planning a $5 million erosion control project for this area of Kingsbury Grade in 2019.

Quakes near Tahoe could have been a disaster

By Patrick Perron, Bay Area News Group

A trio of significant earthquakes that struck a remote part of western Nevada early Wednesday were big enough to cause as much as $1 billion in damage if they had been centered beneath a big city, a leading expert said.

The first of two magnitude-5.7 quakes that began shortly after midnight and a third that registered 5.5 resulted in no injuries or reports of significant damage. The epicenter was east of the Sierra range and the Nevada-California line near rural Hawthorne about 100 miles southeast of Lake Tahoe and 90 miles south of Reno.

“Thankfully, it’s not underneath a big city because a sequence of 5.7s could certainly do a lot of damage,” said Graham Kent, director of the University of Nevada’s Seismological Laboratory.

“If you put this underneath Reno, we are probably looking at a $1 billion event, probably with some fatalities and many casualties,” he told the *Associated Press*. “It’s much better to be beneath a ranch 20 miles outside of Hawthorne.”

Bodie State Historic Park sustained damage and is closed while officials assess the buildings.

Read the whole story