Squaw Valley contending with tainted water



High Camp and Gold Coast do not have potable water. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

Skiers at Squaw Valley are drinking bottled water and eating packaged food – at least on the mountain – because the wells are contaminated.

E. coli and coliform bacteria have been detected in the four wells that service Gold Coast and High Camp. As long as no one drinks the water, there is no danger to the public.

The Olympic Valley has three water purveyors. The on-mountain water company is run by the ski resort and is called Squaw Valley Resort 8200. The Mutual Water Company has about 250 residential customers. Squaw Valley Public Service District is the largest, serving about 750 customers – commercial and residential – including the village.

Testing has been going on every day since the issue was discovered in mid-November. Until there are two consecutive tests done 24 hours apart that show no bacteria the water on

the mountain cannot be consumed.

“We don’t know the cause for sure,” Wesley Nicks, director of Environmental Health for Placer County, told *Lake Tahoe News.* “We have data back to the 1990s on the wells to support there have never been bacteria hits from the aquifer. So it is not a groundwater issue. Anything that gets in the system, of course, has bacteria.”

The resort did extensive work on the water system during the summer. In about a 72-hour window more than 9 inches of rain fell before the entire system was secure. It is believed that is how the wells and new pipes got contaminated. The irony is the existing well-head apparatus was relocated from underground vaults to above-ground secure well-houses, and supply pipelines were replaced in order to diminish risk of surface water intrusion.

A chlorine treatment is being used to flush out the system. One well is clean, but it does not produce enough water to solely rely on it. As of Dec. 1 no E. Coli was detected in the three wells that service the restaurants, however low levels of coliform were measured.

“Until this testing process is complete and the system is returned to normal operation, safe, chlorinated water will be available for hand washing and bathroom use. Clean drinking water has been delivered to Gold Coast for all guest uses. Sanitized water servicing the sinks and toilets should be limited to non-consumptive purposes,” Liesl Kenney with Squaw Valley told *Lake Tahoe News* in a statement.

The packaged food is required because ice made from the water at the restaurants cannot be used for food or drinks, food cannot be washed with that water, and it’s not advised to handle food after washing hands with the water at those lodges.

Eldorado National Forest worker testifies about assault

By Michael Doyle, Sacramento Bee

A U.S. Forest Service firefighter from Eldorado National Forest blew another whistle Thursday on sexual harassment and gender bias inside federal public lands agencies.

Reinforcing claims previously made by many others over many years, fire prevention technician Denice Rice told a House panel of repeated problems facing women, who remain greatly outnumbered by men in the Forest Service.

“Women who report sexual harassment are retaliated against,” Rice advised the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. “It is your word against his, and you know the moment you open your mouth to speak up you are committing career suicide.”

Rice testified that between 2009 and 2011, her second line supervisor repeatedly harassed her sexually. In 2011, she said, he assaulted her; and then, she said, her life “became a living hell.”

Read the whole story

Creativity shines at Festival of Trees and Lights



Elegance oozes from the Winter Ice display. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Restraint was needed to not lick the supersized cupcakes and other sugary delicacies. After all, they were just decorations on a tree.

But these were no ordinary ornaments, so to speak. Gateau et Torta won the most creative, or out of the box tree at the Festival of Trees and Lights. (This reporter was one of the seven judges.)

This is one of 11 decorator trees on display at the four-day event at MontBleu casino that runs through Sunday. Barton Foundation puts on the extravaganza that is all things Christmas – with the trees being the highlight of the festival.

Lisa Shafer with Wildwood Makers Market designed the sweet tree.

A sprawling display that is more like a New Year’s Eve party than a Christmas celebration won most elegant.
Katie Long from Thran’s Flowers designed what she called Winter Ice. It has the only tree that rotates. All of the extras makes it hard to miss in the large convention center.



Woodland Queen took the overall honors at the 2016 Festival of Trees and Lights.

Woodland Queen earned best interpretation of theme as well as best of show. Jeri Oishi and the design team at Enchanted Florist created this masterpiece. It’s so well done it’s hard to know if this is more woman or more tree. It’s almost like she could come alive, but not in a scary way like the trees in “Harry Potter” do. This queen seems regal, almost otherworldly.

Also being judged were the various trees – albeit much smaller in size – that were decorated by area schoolchildren. The

variety of class-crafted ornaments is stellar.



Ornaments crafted by children adorn the school trees.

Winners were:

· Most out of the box: Lake Tahoe Environmental Magnet School

· Best use of theme: Tahoe Valley Elementary School

· Handcrafted with care: Sierra House Elementary School.

All of the designer trees will be auctioned off at the Dec. 3 gala. Most come with an assortment of gifts as well. This is the eighth year for the festival. Every year a different beneficiary within the Barton Health system is chosen. This year the proceeds will go toward cancer wellness programs.



Festive wreaths are also part of the holiday decor.

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Notes:

· The festival runs through Dec. 4. For details on specific events at the festival and prices, go **online**.

Illicit marijuana grows decimate western wildlife



Illegal marijuana grows in the Sierra Nevada are hurting wildlife. Photo/Integral Ecology Research Center

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Tony Magarrell isn't very relaxed for someone who just spent a week in the lush backcountry canyons of Lassen National Forest, 165 miles northwest of Reno.

Magarrell, a special agent for the U.S. Forest Service, wasn't there to enjoy roaring waterfalls or abundant wildlife. He was cleaning up yet another illicit marijuana operation, a job that gives him a front-row seat to environmental wreckage most people will never see.

The bags of trash hauled out by helicopter provided evidence of the damage illicit grows can do to the environment. But the damage goes far beyond the trash left behind.

Both California and Nevada voters have recently approved ballot measures to decriminalize marijuana possession and issue licenses for marijuana businesses. But it's too soon to tell if that will affect illicit grows in the Sierra Nevada and elsewhere. That's because the vast majority of what's grown illicitly is sold through black market channels, which

still exist because most states and the federal government still consider marijuana to be illegal.

Read the whole story

Calif. eyes stricter water conservation rules

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

As the drought enters its fifth year, California is considering tightening its urban water conservation standards.

In a series of proposals released Wednesday, state officials said they might require urban water districts seeking to avoid state conservation mandates to prove they have a five-year water supply on hand.

Under rules that went into effect earlier this year, urban districts have to show only a three-year supply to get out from under the state's previous mandates, which required savings of 25 percent. With the more relaxed standards now in effect in most of the state, Californians haven't been conserving as much as they did last year. Officials with the State Water Resources Control Board have raised the idea of imposing a tougher mechanism for reducing consumption.

Read the whole story

Attic volunteers to be replaced with paid staff

By Kathryn Reed

Devastated. That is how some volunteers with Barton Auxiliary feel after being told they can no longer donate their time at the Attic Thrift Shop or Barton Memorial Hospital's gift shop.

The new rule takes effect Jan. 1.

Auxiliary members learned at their Nov. 21 meeting that paid staff would be taking over their volunteer positions at the thrift and gift stores. They can apply for those jobs. But these people weren't looking for a paid job and the constraints that come with it. They want to give back to the community. Many are older, retirees.

Barton Health CEO Clint Purvance delivered the news in person.

According to the synopsis in the group's monthly newsletter that came out this week, the reason for the change is "due to state and federal laws that prohibit volunteers from working in a commercial retail environment."

During the 10-months the health conglomerate was without a human resources director consultants were brought in to look at various aspects of the organization.

"It was discovered we may be viewed as not in compliance," Purvance told *Lake Tahoe News.* This is in regards to the use of volunteers.



For the first time since the Attic opened in 1961, paid employees will operate it starting in 2017. Photo/LTN

Sandy Killian, Barton auxiliary president, initially deferred comment to Barton's human resources director. Then Barton PR sent out a statement in her name that said, "Yes, we are a bit sad, but are committed to making a positive impact on Barton's patients, families, and visitors."

However, with other auxiliary members she is not being as conciliatory.

One member told *Lake Tahoe News*, "It's sad that this has happened. Volunteers have been and still are the heart of Barton."

The auxiliary primarily makes its money through the thrift shop. The group also has an annual holiday fair each November, operates the hospital gift shop and sells the popular seasonal cheeseballs.

Most of the money is earmarked for a special project at the hospital that the group agrees to. The auxiliary has given more than $6 million to the hospital.

Each year scholarships are also doled out. This year $19,500 went to 14 students in the Lake Tahoe and Carson Valley areas.

The South Lake Tahoe thrift store opened in 1961. Through the years it has raised millions of dollars. In the early days the auxiliary was responsible for paying the doctors at Barton Memorial Hospital.

In 2010, the auxiliary turned 50. There were 89 volunteers that year who “gave” 29,393 hours to the hospital. This saved the health care system $600,000.

“The net revenue generated from both locations will continue to fund the auxiliary’s student scholarships and an annual project, such as acquiring a 3-D Breast Tomosynthesis mammography machine, to benefit the health and wellbeing of our community,” Mindi Befu, spokeswoman for Barton Health, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The auxiliary members will be absorbed into other volunteer jobs if they so desire.

Other jobs involving auxiliary members include: 14 members work at the hospital’s front desk and guide patients and their families throughout the hospital; approximately 10 volunteer at the Skilled Nursing Facility as field trip and activity assistants; on-going programs include blood drives, wellness lab draws, the comfort cart, and liaisons for physician offices; special events include the Festival of Trees & Lights, Holiday Faire, Cocktails for a Cause, Mom’s Morning Out, Tiki Golf Tournament, and sports physicals at the high schools.

“We truly consider each member important and will continue to find new and exciting ways they can be more involved in improving the health and wellbeing of our community,” Befu said. “In no way is this a reflection on the efforts of the volunteers as they have done an outstanding job.”

One way the public may benefit from the change is that it is well known volunteers take first crack at all donations, so there might be better items on the Attic's floor to buy now that auxiliary members won't have first dibs.

Survey: Calif. ski areas boost safety – barely

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

California's winter resorts have more safety measures in place than they did five years ago, but just barely.

That's according to the California Mountain Resort 2016 Safety Survey.

The report, published by the SnowSport Safety Foundation, surveyed safety measures at 19 ski and snowboard resorts, including many in the Lake Tahoe area.

Although it shows slight improvements from a similar survey six years ago it also shows shortcomings in the way resorts manage impact protection, trail design and maintenance, boundaries and terrain parks.

Read the whole story

California Democrats secure supermajority

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

Broadening the path to long-sought deals on affordable housing, transportation infrastructure and climate change, California Democrats have again captured a two-thirds supermajority in both houses of the Legislature.

Enough late votes were counted in Southern California's 29th Senate District for The Associated Press to project that Democrat Josh Newman defeated Republican Assemblywoman Ling Ling Chang, R-Diamond Bar. The outcome gives Senate Democrats 27 seats, the supermajority threshold in the upper house. Assembly Democrats secured their two-thirds margin earlier this month.

Chang initially led balloting for the 29th, which is anchored largely in Orange County, but she slipped behind as officials tallied provisional and late-arriving mail ballots in the days after the Nov. 8 election. The latest update Monday put Newman 2,136 votes ahead.

Read the whole story

Community tells LTCC board theater is a must



Nearly 70 people listen Nov. 29 to why Lake Tahoe Community College may disband the theater arts program. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

The drama that was staged before the Lake Tahoe Community College trustees Tuesday night was complex, passionate, sorrowful and heartfelt.

It's like today is intermission and the audience is left not knowing how many acts there will be in the future. That's because the script is not finished.

This production of sorts was actually the college administration's opportunity to present to the board and public why the theater department may be disbanded following this academic year. It was also the public's first chance to speak directly to the board.

"This program does great work. That has never been the question for us. We know the productions are of high quality," Michelle Risdon, interim vice president of Academic Affairs, said. "We are looking for change in this program. Whether the

program is discontinued or not it has to change.”

Most people were unaware until **last month** that the college was even considering doing away with theater arts as a credit program. Not enough people are taking the classes to make it a viable program, according college officials. They stressed how few people actually get a degree.

Many of those who spoke Tuesday during the 2½ hour special board meeting pointed out that getting a degree is not satisfactory criteria. Many shared their experience of taking courses that have benefitted them despite having no desire to act. Actors spoke of how they have been able to hone their craft.

Susan Boulanger, head of the department, was repeatedly praised for her teaching acumen. She sat in the audience, near the back. While she showed emotion as various people spoke, she remained silent, unable to direct this spectacle.

All of the 21 people who gave testimony Nov. 29 want theater in some form to exist at LTCC. Administrators also want the college to have theater, but as a true community theater model and not an academic model.

Stephanie Arrigoth, professor at Western Nevada College and producer-director of the Western Nevada Musical Theatre Company, suggested LTCC’s program would be viable with fewer productions, developing online courses and having fewer sections of classes so enrollment would increase. She also suggested the possibility of renting the theater out to other groups in a hybrid model.

What the board wants is still unknown.

A task force of community members will be assembled to hash out options. Enrollment numbers from winter and spring quarters will be evaluated. The president – who will be new and has yet to be hired – will make a recommendation to the

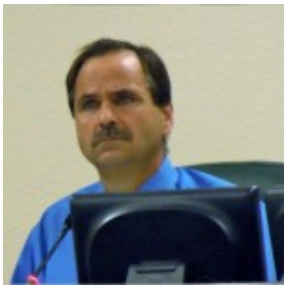
board, then the board will make the ultimate decision.

Ex-EDC Supervisor Nutting loses appeal

By Kathryn Reed

Ray Nutting, the El Dorado County supervisor who lost his seat because of criminal wrongdoing, today lost his appeal regarding that case. He believes the charges were always politically motivated.

The 55-year-old's troubles started in 2013 when he faced four felony counts regarding more than $70,000 he received from the state to clear brush from his 350-acre ranch in Somerset. A jury found him not guilty on those felony charges.



Ray Nutting

In the end, Nutting was convicted on misdemeanor charges related to taking loans from a county employee and a contractor who does business with the county, and for failing to document the loans. His punishment was probation and being removed from office.

The money was to be used to bail him out of jail.

He challenged the lower court's decision in the Third Appellate District on five counts.

The appellate court made its decision public Nov. 29 — denying each of Nutting's contentions.

"… none of the three lenders deposited the bail money with the county," the decision reads. The money was given to Nutting's wife with the intent to use it for bail and for it to eventually be repaid. That is why the funds are deemed a loan. Had the money gone directly to the county, Nutting would not have been convicted of violating his duties of an elected official.

"Our argument is the jury should have acknowledged the money as bail money," Nutting told *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday.

The court document says, "The only intent required to violate the Government Code sections at issue here was the general intent to receive a personal loan from a county employee or contractor who does business with the county. What the parties to the loan intend the borrower to do with the money is irrelevant."

In the appeal Nutting tried to persuade the judges "that the exchange of money between him and those who gave him the money was a trust arrangement or a bailment."

The appeals courts dismissed that argument because Nutting had never made that contention before. Without the Attorney General's Office or district court able to weigh in on that theory, the appellate court said it could not respond to it.

With that said the court went on to say, "In any event, the theory does not help him." Then the justices cited case law to prove their point.

Nutting said, "I don't know if this is the end or what we are going to do."

He learned about the decision when *Lake Tahoe News* called and had not yet spoken to his attorney.

This same appellate court in July 2014 upheld that June's decision of Superior Court Judge Timothy Buckley which said Nutting should be removed from office.

Nutting had also **sued former colleagues** last summer for harassment. He eventually dropped that case for what he said were more pressing family issues.