For people of color, hiking isn’t always an escape

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Earlier this summer Jenna Yokoyama set out to plan a backpacking trip to northern Idaho.

But before committing she wanted to know if non-white hikers would be safe in a region known as a hotbed for white supremacists.

It was an important question for Yokoyama, 34, a Japanese-American and avid hiker who said several years earlier she was a target of racial taunting in Lone Pine while hiking the Pacific Crest Trail.

She posted invitations in Facebook groups for the Pacific Crest, John Muir and Appalachian trails.

Almost immediately the posts generated dozens of comments, many supportive but others accused her of everything from promoting separate trails for white people and non-white people, seeking to form exclusive cliques and even warning her to stay off the trail because she wasn’t worthy of search and rescue help should she get in trouble.

Moderators of the various trail groups sought to prevent hateful and ignorant comments, but the damage was done.

Read the whole story

Cops disband South Shore drug task force

By Kathryn Reed

A South Shore drug task force has disbanded, but it's not because crime has gone away.

Five years ago California said it was shutting down South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team. While the state didn't actually pull its funding until 2014, the remaining two partners – South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County – finally did the same.

"With the significant reduction in assigned personnel, the operational effectiveness of SLEDNET was diminished as major drug investigations require large numbers of law enforcement officers for things like surveillance, drug raids, etc. Last month, the El Dorado County sheriff made the difficult decision to no longer support SLEDNET with assigned personnel, leaving only the SLTPD as a participating agency," Police Chief Brian Uhler said in a statement. "With only one agency, a task force by definition cannot continue."

SLEDNET was formed in 1988, the year before Operation Deep Snow filled headlines. That was the investigation that led to the arrest of South Lake Tahoe Mayor Terry Trupp and 19 others on federal charges that were mostly drug related.

At its peak the narcotics task force included officers from SLTPD, El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, California Department of Justice, California Highway Patrol, El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, El Dorado County Probation Department, Alpine County Sheriff's Department, Douglas County Sheriff's Department, and Nevada Division of Investigation.

El Dorado will continue to have a drug task force based out of

the West Slope. South Lake Tahoe PD's two officers who were in SLEDNET will join the detectives' division. Their focus will still be on drugs.

"Unfortunately, there is a serious problem with drugs in South Lake Tahoe. We see direct connections with drug abuse and crime. Just a few months ago, a marijuana transaction-related homicide occurred in our city," Uhler said. "Social scientists and law enforcement professionals agree that myriad other crimes also have their roots in the drug trade and drug usage. Crimes related to drug use, such as theft, auto theft, and other property crimes, seriously erode the quality of life in our community."

Gaming expert laments industry's lack of innovation

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

Where is the innovation in casino gaming?

It's a simple question and one Mark Yoseloff, executive director of UNLV's Center for Gaming Innovation, seemed to ask repeatedly during his presentation at the Global Gaming Expo (G2E) on Wednesday.

The resort itself has changed, adding day clubs, high-end nightclubs and other new amenities, Yoseloff said, but when it comes to actual gambling, the industry has lagged.

Read the whole story

Forecasters: Wet winter a ‘crapshoot’

By Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

Last year at this time, weather forecasters had a pretty good idea of what was in store as California headed into the rainy season. The Pacific Ocean surface was warming, and they were predicting one of the strongest El Niño weather patterns in recorded history.

El Niño ended up making an appearance, but it wasn’t the series of gully washers for which some had hoped. This year, the forecast is even less certain.

“It really is a crapshoot,” said Michelle Mead, a meteorologist with the Sacramento office of the National Weather Service. “We don’t know what exactly we’re going to get, and it’s going to be storm-by-storm dependent.”

In other words, there’s nearly as much chance that California experiences average precipitation or even flooding as there is for another dry winter akin to 2015 when Gov. Jerry Brown stood on a patch of bare grass where several feet of Sierra snow should have been and declared a statewide drought emergency.

Read the whole story

STR to offer interest free bear box loans

By Kathryn Reed

Homeowners in South Tahoe Refuse's service area at Lake Tahoe are expected to soon have the opportunity to take out an interest free loan for bear boxes.

The South Lake Tahoe Waste Management Authority board this month approved the concept. Actual language for the program is expected to be solidified at the board's November meeting.

The JPA will front $70,000 for the program that will be administered by the garbage company. Homeowners – whether they live in Tahoe full time or not – will be eligible to apply for a loan up to $1,200. It must be paid back in five years.

There was some discussion whether the program should be open to second homeowners.

"The point is to eliminate bears getting into garbage. Anything this agency can do to further that on the South Shore is being proactive," Nancy McDermid said. She is Douglas County's rep to the JPA. (El Dorado County and South Lake Tahoe are the other partners in the JPA.)

The South Shore ordinance is in large part following what Tahoe Truckee Sanitation District is doing in Placer County.

"If the homeowner doesn't make a payment even though it is interest free, then there is 10 percent interest and a late fee," explained Tom Bruen, attorney for the JPA. "It's not a smart thing for the homeowner to skip out on the fee."

It would also be possible to put a lien against the house so the refuse company could recoup its costs at the time of sale.

Homeowners who are currently delinquent with trash bills would not be eligible for the program.

There will be a non-refundable $50 application fee. If a homeowner goes forward with the bear box loan, that $50 will be applied to the $150 administrative fee. That $150 pays for STR to process the paperwork, have a site visit and work with the contractor as to where the box will go. Of that, $100 can be rolled into the overall loan.

It will be possible for people to order less or more expensive boxes, but the loan will not exceed $1,200.

STR at the meeting asked for the stipulation that boxes not be farther than 10 feet from the street. This has to do with crews having to carry the cans to the truck. The farther away the cans are the greater chance for injury.

Another regulation STR wants to ensure is that the cans in the boxes are 32 gallons.

The exception to this rule will be in the Tahoe Keys. The homeowners' association has architectural guidelines for residents stating bear boxes are not allowed. Those rules are being rewritten with input from STR and the city of South Lake Tahoe. Proposals include having the boxes closer to the house and larger totes – 64 gallons. This route would be accessed by a special truck.

A sticking point on finalizing the Tahoe Keys pilot program is the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Coverage is a bugaboo for the bi-state regulatory agency.

STR officials at the meeting pointed out that as more bear boxes are installed it will take longer to service the routes. This is because there is no way for crews to know if the box has garbage in it so they have to check each one.

When *Lake Tahoe News* asked STR President Jeff Tillman if a

flag like what is used on mailboxes could be employed on bear boxes he said no because opponents to this idea have safety concerns. They believe an indicator saying there is no trash is the equivalent to telling would-be burglars there is no one home.

Nev. gaming officials among few to have seen Trump's tax returns



Donald Trump, sitting in the rear, on his way to a fund-raising dinner at Harrah's Lake Tahoe in August. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Chad Day and Jeff Horwitz, AP

While Donald Trump won't publicly release his income tax returns, the New York businessman has turned them over when it suited his needs – if he stood to make a profit, needed a loan or when a judge forced him.

Pennsylvania gaming regulators were given at least five years' worth and eight boxes full of Trump's tax documents. Nevada, Michigan, Missouri, Indiana and other state gaming officials also had access to multiple years of his returns. Large banks that lent Trump money over the years have also obtained Trump's returns.

One common thread ties all those who have seen the documents: They can't talk about them.

Such legal restrictions leave the public with only small glimpses into what Trump's taxes might hold.

In Monday night's debate, Democrat Hillary Clinton cited documents unearthed by reporters to question whether Trump doesn't want to release his tax returns because he has paid little or no federal income taxes.

Trump's response? "That makes me smart," a comment he disavowed just minutes after the debate. Asked by reporters if he had admitted to not paying federal income taxes, Trump said, "I didn't say that at all."

Clinton cited documents unearthed by Politico showing Trump didn't pay any federal income tax during at least two years in the early 1990s because he lost more money than he earned. Other documents show he also didn't pay any federal income taxes in 1978, 1979 and 1984.

Voters know little about Trump's more recent finances beyond his own self-reported estimations of his wealth and listings of his business interests.

In all cases reviewed by The Associated Press, each person, organization, company or government office that has seen Trump's tax returns is barred from discussing their full contents by professional or legal restrictions.

For example, employees of the Pennsylvania Gaming Control

Board could face criminal penalties if they leaked information from Trump's tax returns maintained in the board's electronic files, said board spokesman Doug Harbach.

When asked whether Trump had turned over any returns to the Missouri Gaming Commission, officials said they were barred by state law from saying what Trump turned over.

"I could not tell you whether we had them," said Edward Grewach, the commission's general counsel.

Responses like these leave the decision to publicly release the taxes solely with Trump, who has repeatedly refused. Trump has cited an IRS audit as his reason for withholding the information, but the IRS and tax experts have said an audit doesn't bar Trump from releasing his taxes. At the debate, Trump said he would release his returns – over what he described as his attorney's objections – only after Clinton released roughly 30,000 emails she had deleted from her private server that she had deemed personal.

Earlier this month, Donald Trump Jr. gave a different reason why his father wouldn't release the returns: The American people would ask too many questions.

"He's got a 12,000-page tax return that would create . financial auditors out of every person in the country asking questions that would detract from (his father's) main message," the younger Trump told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

Since 1976, every major party nominee has released the returns and Clinton has publicly released nearly 40 years' worth. Even Trump's running mate, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, released 10 years of his tax returns.

Tax returns don't measure net worth, so they wouldn't verify whether Trump is worth the $10 billion he says he is. But the returns would reveal how much Trump earned from his assets,

helping someone work back to an approximation of his net worth.

Trump’s own estimates of his income and net worth have previously been scrutinized by those who had access to his tax returns.

For a decade, Trump tangled with New York City authorities over his city tax bill, a battle first reported in June by journalist David Cay Johnson in The Daily Beast.

In Trump’s 1984 tax filings, he said he had lost money during a time in which he had just completed Trump Tower and regularly boasted about the success of his business deals. Trump also declared that he was primarily a consultant that year, and that his consulting business had $684,000 in business expenses and no income. He provided no receipts to justify the claimed expenses.

City tax authorities didn’t buy it – and after Trump appealed his tax bill, they fought with him for the next 10 years. Trump lost and was ordered to pay the taxes on more than $1 million in income.

Trump’s multibillion-dollar fortune has been questioned by banks that demanded his tax returns before lending him money. Commercial lenders generally require both personal and business tax returns as part of a loan application, and Trump provided such information to North Fork Bank in 2004 and 2005.

Though the bank’s evaluations aren’t public, discussion of them in a later deposition of Trump revealed they were unflattering. The deposition was taken in a defamation lawsuit Trump filed against journalist Tim O’Brien, who wrote a book that questioned Trump’s net worth. Trump lost the suit.

“(North Fork) concluded in their estimation that your net worth was actually $1.2 billion instead of $3.5 billion as you claimed. Are you aware of that?” asked O’Brien’s attorney,

Andrew Ceresney.

Trump said he had not known that, but dismissed the quality of the bank's opinion.

"The numbers are wrong," he said.

North Fork wasn't alone in marking down Trump's net worth. Deutsche Bank also reviewed Trump's finances as of 2004, deeming him to be worth "give or take $788 million," Ceresney said in the deposition. The attorney did not say whether Deutsche Bank relied on Trump's tax return in its calculation.

Deutsche Bank declined to comment about its evaluation of Trump's worth, but the bank is required to keep customer information confidential by law. Capital One Bank — it bought North Fork in 2006 — did not respond to requests for comment by phone and email.

O'Brien did not respond to requests for comment, but in a story he wrote for Bloomberg, O'Brien said he was barred from discussing the contents of Trump's tax returns because they were produced under seal in the court case.

In addition to a suggestion of his worth, Trump's tax returns would reveal his charitable contributions. Despite boasting of sweeping generosity, the AP reported more than a year ago that there is little record of substantial personal philanthropy from Trump.

Trump has been dogged by questions about his personal giving and how his namesake foundation operates. The Washington Post has reported that Trump used donations given by others to pay for legal settlements, political contributions and even purchase portraits of himself.

Public disclosure would resolve many of these questions for voters.

A new Associated Press-GfK poll found that just under half of

registered voters– 46 percent – say it is very important for candidates to release their tax returns, though Democrats were far more likely say it was very or extremely important than Republicans.

A recent Monmouth University poll also found that most Americans are aware that Trump has not released his tax returns, and just over half think it's because he is hiding something he does not want the public to know.

Undeveloped Chateau property in SLT sold

By Kathryn Reed

The remaining rebar and concrete at the Chateau site near the state line in South Lake Tahoe is going to be developed by a new owner in the near future.

Owens Financial out of Walnut Creek is selling about 8 acres of the undeveloped site, plus the parking structure to Kawana Holdings for $42.5 million. Kawana is a Malaysia-based firm with offices in Corte Madera.

"Their plan was for immediate development of the property rather than hold it or try to do something else," Bill Owens told *Lake Tahoe News.* That is why his company chose to go with Kawana. "Their intention is to build what has been approved."

No one from Kawana could immediately be reached.

It is possible for Kawana to ask for revisions to the approved permit, but substantial changes would likely trigger environmental documents to be recirculated. That would cost

hundreds of thousands of dollars and delay the project for years.

While a convention center, two hotels, retail and spa were planned for the 11-plus acre site, no one expects a convention center to see the light of day. When the now defunct Lake Tahoe Development Company first broke ground it was going to be a $410 million project, with the city having control of the convention center.

Now the city has zero involvement at the site other than permitting.

The sale is expected to go through no later than the end of March. This is contingent upon a tentative map being approved by South Lake Tahoe.

City officials have been in on some of the talks with Kawana, letting them know what is approved for the site, what could occur and the intricacies of commodities – the development rights policy the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency created that has backfired to make it even more difficult to get anything built in the basin.

For now, Owens Financial plans to remain the owner of the developed retail and the Zalanta condominiums that are under construction.

“We have a list of people who want to buy these units. We expect to get a number of contracts signed in the next month,” Owens said.

They should be finished in early 2017.

Palliative care a bridge to end of life care

By Susan Wood

Ask anyone who's been diagnosed with a terminal illness and they'll tell you in some ways their life stopped then.

There are things to deal with that become a full-time job for most people. This means arranging doctors' visits, dealing with insurance companies, receiving social assistance, learning the keys to transportation, getting referrals, conducting pain management and even tapping into mental health services.

All these duties and tactics require professional help because a clear head and undaunted resolve may not be the immediate reaction from a vulnerable person hearing the "c" word for the first time.

Palliative care, as it is called, is a fairly new discipline that demonstrates the evolution of health care. It's a full service realm that provides a little TLC and empowerment at the same time. The terminally ill don't have to feel like their life is over.

Instead, there's often a new character-building beginning that serves to inform the patient in ways that never before existed. And without the fear of the unknown and having an army of support, the patients' confidence is enhanced.

"It's very much a team approach to medicine," said Sherellen Gerhart, who returned to the Barton Health System to serve as the lead palliative care physician after working in the Bay Area. She had worked for Barton between 2007 and 2010 as a hospitalist.

“It’s been my favorite place to work. I should have never left. I really missed being here,” Gerhart told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Working at John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek comes with prestige, but job satisfaction and practicing your passion mean something to this practitioner. Gerhart may be characterized as an up-close-and-personal doctor who has leaned in her career toward wanting to work in geriatric care – not exactly the sexiest discipline of health, but rewarding nonetheless.

“The trend for medicine has focused on improving the quality of care, particularly in oncology, because it’s so complicated,” she said. “People find that when things are complicated, they don’t get their needs met.”

When palliative care does transform into hospice – which emphasizes comfort as one nears death, Barton has a long history of operating a department with that prognosis and mission in mind.

“End of life issues are difficult to talk about anyway,” Gerhart said. “And it’s time we recognize that patient suffering is not acceptable. We have to find processes to deal with that.”

Few locals may know this like Barton’s director of Home Health, Hospice and Palliative Care Barbara Kaufman.

Through the years, Kaufman has seen changes in health care moving toward more of a holistic approach in which care coordination is the general rule.

“With palliative care, we talk to the patient to find out what their goals of treatment are. This empowers the patient and family to understand the disease more,” she said. “And regardless of the need, we help guide and navigate them through the complex health care system.

“This is the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done in life – my true passion,” Kaufman said. “It’s quite humbling to be part of the process. For me personally, every patient has touched my life.”

So there’s something to be said for gaining wisdom from the terminally ill. They know how to cherish life when they feel theirs is getting away from them.

The difference is palliative care still provides hope. Hospice, to be summoned in the last months of one’s life, provides comfort in the surrender.

Palliative care and hospice are similar in philosophy.

“What separates the two is that palliative care can be delivered concurrently with other disease-modifying treatments and interventions in what some refer to as ‘curative’ care,” said Jon Radulovic, spokesman for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization in Alexandria, Va. “In fact, anyone with a serious illness, regardless of life expectancy, can receive palliative care.”

It often transitions into the need for hospice.

“There has been a growth in hospital-based palliative care programs over the past decade, which represents important progress made in caring for the whole person,” Radulovic told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Both disciplines have become extremely necessary in today’s world in which the call for a more seamless continuum of care from diagnosis of death is overwhelming.

Death and the threat thereof is such a major part of life with an aging population that a movement is now in place in which seriously ill patients are using a template to write a last letter while they’re healthy.

It’s called the Stanford Friends and Family Letter Project.

The idea is for letter writers to complete seven life review tasks – acknowledging important people in their lives, remembering treasured moments, apologizing to those they may have hurt, forgiving those who have hurt them and saying thank you, I love you and goodbye.

The project featured this month in the New York Times highlighted many examples of people overcoming regret and professing true love.

Some are complex. Others are simple – including one from a man who wrote to his daughter: "I'm sorry that I wasn't there when you were growing up."

The project is catching on fast, according to the founder VJ Periyakoil.

"There are millions of Americans living with serious illness, and this number is expected to more than double over the next 25 years with the aging of the baby boomers. Most seriously ill people will spend some time in the hospital over the course of their illness, and a majority of their time will be spent in their communities," Director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care Diane Meier told *Lake Tahoe News* from her New York City office.

Meier has been on the forefront of the new discipline as the founder and director of the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute from 1997-2011. She was named one of 20 people who make health care better in the United States by HealthLeaders Media 2010. Two years later, she was awarded the American Cancer Society's medal of honor in recognition of her pioneering spirit.

The center where Meier works is devoted to increasing the number and quality of palliative care programs in the nation.

Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe opened its department a few months ago and has already started to accept

patients. All patients seeking palliative care require a referral from a physician. They can be seen at the care center on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9am to 1pm. Hospital consultations will be provided by Gerhart and Allison Steinmetz, a doctor with Barton Family Medicine.

For more information, Gerhart will make a presentation on Oct. 31 called What is Palliative Care? The classes are slated from 1-3pm at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel.

Poll: Voters back Calif. tax increase, crime measures

By Filipa A. Ioannou, San Francisco Chronicle

Criminal sentencing reform and an extension on tax increases for high earners are among California's November ballot propositions supported by a majority of likely voters, a Field Poll found.

Proposition 56, a $2-per-pack tax on cigarettes, was also leading among the poll's respondents, though by narrower margins. Fifty-three percent of respondents favored the tax, 40 percent were opposed and 7 percent remained undecided.

In several past elections, tobacco tax initiatives have performed competitively in polling only to fail on election day. In 2012, a $1 cigarette tax to fund cancer research was defeated by a margin of only 0.4 percentage points. In 2006, a proposed tax increase prompted $66 million in tobacco industry spending, and the measure failed.

Prop. 56 would redirect the revenue from the cigarette tax –

estimated between $1 billion and $1.4 billion – to health care for low-income Californians. Smoking-related illnesses are costly to the state; a 2015 analysis from the California Health Care Foundation found that among Medicare patients, lung cancer was the deadliest and costliest to treat of the four most common cancers.

Read the whole story

Basic casino cheating scams hardest to catch

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Inside jobs, chip grab-and-runs and craps cheats are the largest ongoing headaches for casinos and casino regulators.

And it’s the most basic scams that can be hardest to catch.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board had 574 arbitration cases in 2015, disputing $51.8 million and made 602 criminal arrests.

Read the whole story