Queen safe at the dock, but unable to sail

By Kathryn Reed

Coast Guard officials spent Wednesday scouring the Tahoe Queen after a fire swept through it the day before.

It has been determined to be structurally sound and poses no threat to the public. However, it won't be leaving the dock anytime soon.

"They are making sure the vessel is sea worthy at the pier – that it is not going to sink or capsize," Coast Guard Lt. Lt. Jake Aulner told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The vessel is not sea worthy for getting under way or carrying passengers."

While the cause of the fire has not been determined, investigators said it started on the second level.

Painters and welders were working on renovating the boat when the fire broke out just after 8am Aug. 16. Aulner said the investigation will determine if the two types of contractors working in the same area sparked the blaze or if was something else.

The Coast Guard will also eventually put a dollar value on the loss.



The future of the Tahoe Queen is in limbo after the Aug. 16 fire. Photo/LTN

Ultimately it will be up to owner Aramark and insurance investigators to determine the future of the paddle-wheeler.

“We are cooperating with the U.S. Coast Guard as they investigate the cause of the fire. We are still in the process of determining extent of damage,” Karen Cutler, spokeswoman for Aramark, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

There appears to be no environmental damage from the blaze.

“There was some ash/burn debris on the water, but they did not

see any sign of fuel or oil spilled associated with the fire and all the fire retardant was contained," Tom Lotshaw with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency told *Lake Tahoe News.*

That was the same conclusion of the Coast Guard and the U.S. Forest Service.

At the time of the fire there were approximately 800 gallons of diesel fuel and 100 gallons of hydraulic oil onboard. None was lost during the blaze.

"No petroleum product reached the lake; any sheen on the surface of the water was from the Class A foam that Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District used to put out the fire," Lisa Herron, spokeswoman for the Forest Service, told *Lake Tahoe News*. The USFS owns the land, with Aramark being the concessionaire.

The pier did not sustain any damage or scorching.

Aramark has a permit from the TRPA to operate one boat out of Zephyr Cove Marina, though more than one can be stored there. The Dixie operates there and the Queen was on site during renovations. It was only eight years ago that the Queen received a make-over to the tune of more than a half million dollars. She was originally launched the last week of June 1983. The first public cruise was Aug. 11, 1983.

The Queen used to be able to carry 500 passengers. That number dropped to 300 with the 2008 renovation in order to create a more relaxing, spacious setting.

Even though the Tahoe Queen has been at Zephyr Cove for more than a year, the lease with Ski Run Marina is still in effect – meaning they still have to pay that rent. That agreement, though, expires at the end of the year.

The Dixie resumed normal operations on Wednesday after two cruises were canceled Tuesday. It had been tied up near the

Queen when the fire started, but crews were able to take her out so she didn’t catch fire.

July ‘absolutely’ Earth’s hottest month recorded

By Jason Samenow, Washington Post

NASA data reveal the Earth’s temperature reached its highest point in 136 years of record-keeping during July.

“July 2016 was absolutely the hottest month since the instrumental records began,” tweeted Gavin Schmidt, who directs NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies, which is responsible for temperature measurements.

It was the 10th-straight month of record-breaking temperatures in NASA’s analysis, a substantial 0.18 degrees (0.1 Celsius) warmer than the previous hottest July in 2011.

Read the whole story

Fire torches elk, trout habitat in Great Basin



The severity of the fire in Great Basin National Park is partially being blamed on climate change and past management practices. Photo/National Park Service/Gretchen Baker

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

In addition to one human fatality the Strawberry Fire in Great Basin National Park has burned thousands of acres of wildlife habitat.

Park officials are just now beginning to survey damage from the lightning-caused fire that’s burned 4,600 acres and resulted in the death of a firefighter who was struck by a falling tree.

The fire three miles northwest of the park visitor center is 76 percent contained and full containment is expected by Friday.

Read the whole story

Calif. water districts ready if drought continues

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

State officials will not force most California water districts to reduce water use this year, even as they caution that the five-year drought persists and note that drought-fueled wildfires continue to wreak havoc.

The State Water Resources Control Board in May asked California's 411 urban water districts to evaluate how much water they would need in the next three years if drought continued – and whether their supplies would meet that demand. Districts that certified their supplies are adequate do not face mandatory water-use cuts. Those with inadequate supplies must set conservation goals proportional to their anticipated shortfall.

About 85 percent of the state's water districts told the water board that they believe they have adequate supplies to handle continued drought and should not be subject to state-mandated conservation targets, according to results released Tuesday by the water board.

Read the whole story

SLT signs settlement in Conner lawsuit

By Kathryn Reed

Mayor Wendy David on Aug. 16 signed the settlement agreement on behalf of South Lake Tahoe. Once City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner does the same, the nearly year-old issue goes away.



JoAnn Conner

Conner in fall 2015 filed a lawsuit against the city – essentially her four colleagues and her employee City Manager Nancy Kerry – because of a censure motion and how she was restricted regarding interacting with staff.

The judge early on said the matter of censure was not something he would rule on.

Going forward Conner will be treated like the other four councilmembers – she may interact with staff, with the city manager copied on all such emails. This is done so council does not start telling staff what to do. It is the council's job to set policy, not tell people – other than the city manager and city attorney – how to do their job.

Also agreed to is there will be no exchange of money.

The city has spent about $90,000 on the case; Conner has a bill of a little more than $30,000. The taxpayers pay the city's bill. This year the city has spent about $107,000 in

outside legal bills, so the bulk of it is on this one case.

Both sides point fingers at the other regarding why it took so long to settle the case, especially when an agreement was reached in June.

Conner deferred comment to her attorney.

“The city manager refused to sign off on parts that she initialed in mediation, so the agreement had to be modified as a result of that,” attorney Jacqueline Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Bill Chisum, who represented the city and Kerry, told *Lake Tahoe News*, “I would dispute that statement. All parties had issues we worked into the agreement. I would dispute that any one party was refusing to sign.”

Mittelstadt said her client is ready to sign. At that time the two sides intend to issue a joint statement as well as the full settlement agreement.

Fire damage may be too great to save Queen



Flames shoot up from the Tahoe Queen on Aug. 16. Photo/LTN

Updated 8:20pm

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – The Tahoe Queen on Tuesday morning sustained substantial damage when a fire ripped through the paddle-wheeler.

"It is probably not salvageable, but the owners and insurance have to decide," Tahoe Douglas Fire Marshal Eric Guevin told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It will be a very close call either way."

Aramark, which owns the tourist boat, is self-insured.

Earlier on Aug. 16, Karen Cutler with Aramark public relations in Arizona told *Lake Tahoe News,* "We are still determining the damage so we cannot address future plans at this time."

Aramark officials at the resort shut a door on *Lake Tahoe News.*

Two people were injured Aug. 16, but both refused to be transported to a hospital. One person sustained a sprained back and the other smoke inhalation.

Painters and welders were working on the renovation when the fire broke out after 8am.



Potentially toxic smoke spews from the Tahoe Queen. Photo/Jaymi Hardy

“When we arrived there was a large body of fire in the Tahoe Queen. It spread to the outside of the vessel,” Guevin said.

Booms were placed in the water at Zephyr Cove Marina to catch any chemicals if they spilled from the boat as well as the foam from the firefighting efforts. A sheen of what looked like oil was floating on the surface of Lake Tahoe in the morning.

The front of the boat clearly has fire damage. Flames could be seen from Highway 50, smoke from much farther away.

Normally the Tahoe Queen is docked at Ski Run Marina, but it has been moored at the Nevada marina because the lake is too low at the California site for it to reach the dock. The other reason the Queen has been at Zephyr Cove is that it is undergoing another remodel.



Firefighters on land and water work to suppress the flames on the Tahoe Queen. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The Dixie, the other paddle-wheeler operated by Aramark, had to cancel its cruises on Tuesday.

“We are awaiting additional information to determine when service can resume,” Cutler said.

Aramark operates the resort on U.S. Forest Service land.

The Forest Service also wasn’t available for comment, though their crews helped with the fire and a management team had arrived.



The Tahoe Queen is engulfed in flames the morning of Aug. 16. Photo/Joe Besson

Where the fire started is not known and the cause is under investigation.

The U.S. Coast Guard will lead the investigation. A team from the Bay Area has arrived and will work with Tahoe Douglas fire officials more in the morning.

Dogs on the losing end of porcupine encounters

By Kathryn Reed

Dogs and porcupines are not a good combination. Seldom does the dog win.

There have been several reports of dogs with muzzles full of

quills in the Truckee marsh area of South Lake Tahoe.

However, area veterinarians say this is normal every summer, even though some residents in the area believe it's more rampant this year.

"It is a technique to get them out. Some people pull them out and that is very painful for the dog," Brenda Daly, veterinarian assistant at Carson Tahoe Veterinary Hospital in Carson City, said of the quills. She said it's best if the dog is sedated for removal of the quills.

Her facility gets emergency cases from the South Shore, Incline Village and other areas around the lake.

"It can be really painful for them," Daly told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It is annoying for them; they paw at the face."



When dogs interact with porcupines it can be painful for the canine. Photo/Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care

Teresa Sullivan, a nurse at Sierra Veterinary Hospital in

South Lake Tahoe, said the number of dogs coming in with quills is about the same as most summers, and she's been here for 30 years.

At least a few dogs a month are seen at each of the various vet offices in the region. Early morning and dusk seem to be when most of the encounters occur.

The offices said it can be an expensive procedure to remove the quills. The time involved depends on how many there are and how deep.

"Often dogs that get quilled by porcupines are dogs that it's happened to repeatedly. Either they are not enclosed properly or they are let out early," Sullivan told *Lake Tahoe News.*

El Dorado County Animal Control only gets involved if the dog is a stray.

Cheryl Millham, founder of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, said if people would abide by the leash laws or have command of their dogs, there wouldn't be canine-porcupine interactions.

"Their tail is one of their major defense mechanisms. They can swish fast and drive quills real deep," Millham told *Lake Tahoe News.*

She said porcupines are slow and don't attack, but they will defend themselves. Millham added that when people see one, to just give it space and walk by.

Most of the porcupines her animal rehab center has cared for have come from the Tahoe Mountain and Fallen Leaf Lake areas.

Consumers willing to spend money on travel



The coaster at Heavenly is an added reason to visit the South Shore resort. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Dennis Schaal, Skift

There is a broad shift under way in U.S. consumer spending that could have very positive implications for the travel industry if the trend persists.

Analyzing the federal government's July 2016 numbers on retail sales, the *Wall Street Journal* pointed Saturday to a "seismic shift in consumer spending."

"Americans are still splashing out, but they are splurging less on goods such as apparel and electronics and more on entertainment, travel and health care," the *Wall Street*

Journal states.

First Data Corp. reported that travel sales in July increased 8.6 percent compared with July 2015.

Read the whole story

Unions plan massive Nev. election campaign

By Ben Botkin Las Vegas Review-Journal

Labor-backed groups are putting their organizing muscle and manpower into the 2016 campaign season in Nevada, an effort that will deploy thousands of canvassers and result in hundreds of thousands of voter contacts.

It’s a massive undertaking that labor leaders hope will tip the scales in Nevada, a swing state in the presidential election and ground zero for a hotly contested U.S. Senate race for the open seat of outgoing Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

Republican Congressman Joe Heck and Democratic candidate Catherine Cortez Masto, a former Nevada attorney general, are facing off for that seat.

The AFL-CIO’s 2016 effort is its largest compared with efforts during prior elections, the organization says. Nevada is one of six battleground states that the powerful AFL-CIO, which backs Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, has made a priority. The other five are Florida, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Read the whole story

Elite, novice BMX riders compete in SLT



2012 BMX Olympic bronze medalist Donny Robinson (No. 10) competes in South Lake Tahoe on Aug. 13. Photo Copyright 2016 Dale Roberts

By Dale Roberts

California Points Qualifier at Bijou Bike Park proved South Lake Tahoe is an up and coming venue in the world of BMX racing.

More than 300 riders from all over the state competed in the fast-paced, high-action cycling event on Aug. 13.



Crashes are fairly routine in BMX races. Photo Copyright 2016 Dale Roberts

The main event of the day was the Tangent Pro-Am series with a $2,000 purse attracting top pros, including 2008 Beijing Olympic bronze medalist Donny Robinson.



Youngsters get an early start in the Strider race. Photo Copyright 2016 Dale Roberts

The riders raced in elimination heats with as many as eight on the track at a time. Shoulder-to-shoulder they sped around banked turns, over rollers, and flew off tabletop jumps. Each heat lasted 30-40 seconds, with the following heat starting as soon as the previous riders crossed the finish line.

The action only slowed down to clear the track of crashes, of which there were many.



A BMX rider has his eyes fixed on the next feature. Photo Copyright 2016 Dale Roberts

BMX attracts riders of all ages, some as young as the “Diaper Derby” riders of 2 and 3 year olds on their Strider bikes, to athletes in their 50s; all separated into corresponding age groups so everyone races against their peers.

Of the pro-am riders, Jordan Miranda of Bakersfield took the top spot. For a complete list of results, go **online**.