Whittell football field, track to be overhauled



Whittell football players likely will be playing on artificial turf in 2017. Photo/Boyd Dangtongdee

By Kathryn Reed

Track meets will again be able to be run at Whittell High School, possibly as soon as the 2017-18 school year.

A donation of $2.5 million from the Lisa and Robert Maloff Endowment Fund is paying for the football field to be completely renovated as well as the track. The Douglas County School District board is being asked today to accept the donation.

“That football field and stadium have been high on our list, but we could never get to them because they are not a classroom,” Superintendent Teri White told *Lake Tahoe News*.

“The turf if fine, but it’s not as state-of-the-art as other districts. It will be upgraded to an artificial turf football field and an all weather track.”

Drainage issues exist with the current field that will also be remedied with the funds.

Lisa Maloff has been donating millions of dollars to various South Shore entities since her husband, Bob, died in 2011. The South Shore woman gave $10 million for the Robert Maloff Center of Excellence, a health and sports performance center just behind Barton Memorial Hospital near the emergency room. The other significant donation was nearly $8 million to Lake Tahoe Community College for the university center that will bear the Maloff name.

Bob Maloff co-owned and operated Lake Tahoe Inn and Timber Cove Lodge in South Lake Tahoe. Plus, he had other significant real estate dealings. Lisa Maloff was a founding member of the Barton Hospital Auxiliary. Promoting wellness, activity, and fitness in the community have long been goals of the Maloffs, which ties in well with WHS’ plans.



Cheerleaders will be on a track that will have some give instead of compacted dirt. Photo/Boyd Dangtongdee

The current track is dirt. It’s suitable for practices, but not competition. The all weather track will allow the Warriors to actually have home events at home. The number of lanes will be dependent on final costs.

White said the artificial turf is the route most schools are going.

The current stadium is not compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act, so some of the money will go toward those improvements.

Bleachers for visitors will also be built.

If there is any money left over, a concession stand is on the wish list, too.

When it comes to maintaining the new facilities, White said it should be a wash based on watering and mowing the grass today

to needing to vacuum the new field. Snow will need to be removed from the track for its longevity. With artificial turf fields having a life expectancy of 10-12 years, a replacement fund will be needed.

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Notes:

· The July 12 board meeting starts at 3:30pm at the Lake Tahoe Visitors Center conference room in Stateline.

Past transfers of federal land to Nevada led to corruption, history suggests

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Some Nevadans are pushing the federal government to transfer more public acreage to state control, but history suggests past management of these lands by those entrusted with their care was mired in corruption.

The current push for a transfer is underway because about 85 percent of Nevada is controlled by various federal agencies, primarily the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, according to the Nevada Legislature.

But if Nevada officials failed before, what guarantee is there that it won't happen again?

The late Republican Gov. Charles Russell, in an oral history recorded in 1965-66, strongly criticized Nevada's management

of the lands the state received from the federal government when it became a state in 1864.

Read the whole story

Threat of wildfires growing in Nevada

By Daniel Rothberg, Las Vegas Sun

A changing climate could increase the risk of large wildfires in states across the West, including Nevada, which has seen relatively mild wildfire activity in the past. That's according to a report from nonprofit organization Climate Central, which expects Nevada will add 20 days of annual high wildfire potential by 2050, the fifth-largest increase among the 11 Western states included in the study.

Rising temperatures, increasingly parched landscapes and changes to the snowpack are contributing to the regional trend, argues the wildfire report released last month. The study, which pulled from U.S. Forest Service records and climate-change models, said fires in the West had increased in frequency and size since the 1970s. The overall season is now 105 days longer than it was then.

Nevada has relatively few large fires compared with California or Arizona, but it's poised for an increase in potential for wildfire and associated risks, the study says.

Read the whole story

EDC elected schools chief job subject of probe

By Kathryn Reed

Why El Dorado County has an elected superintendent of schools was the subject of a grand jury investigation this past year.

In the recently released report, the grand jury recommends: "The El Dorado County board of education should thoroughly examine the pros and cons of retaining an elected superintendent of schools and issue a report to the Board of Supervisors of their findings and recommendation."

Taking the issue to the voters would be the next step, according to the grand jury.

The investigation was initiated after then-Superintendent Jeremy Meyers was arrested on driving under the influence charges twice in 2015. He later resigned, though has **since been hired** to be a principal in a district in the county.

The California Constitution mandates each county have a superintendent of schools. Five districts have appointed leaders, while 53 – one being El Dorado County – elect the superintendent. This person is essentially a bridge between individual districts and the state. County offices of education also oversee federal programs like Head Start.

El Dorado County has a history of when a vacancy has been created, the board of education appoints a superintendent and then that person is elected in his or her own right. The grand jury could not find a contested election in the last 35 years.

"There has been a demonstrable lack of interest by anyone in

this county to step forward and challenge an incumbent. We can only speculate as to the reasons," the report says. "A candidate must reside in this county, possess at least a master's degree in an area of relevant study and have a valid California administrative credential. Further, this individual must be willing to finance a campaign and go through the rigors of an election challenging an incumbent."

Vicki Barber had the job from 1994-June 2013. She took over for Ken Lowry after he quit mid-term. Hers would be the only name on the ballot every four years.

Barber then quit one year before her last term was up.

Taking her place was Meyers, who previously had been the assistant superintendent of schools. He was elected in 2014 with no problem since he ran unopposed.

The grand jury pointed out how the board of education has little control over the superintendent because it is an elected position. The current board could not fire Meyers for his DUIs. Had he been an appointed superintendent, the board could have removed him. Options were a settlement agreement or recall. The former occurred because the later could have cost the district $300,000 for a special election.

The jurors tried to ascertain the advantages of an elected superintendent over an appointed one.

"There is scant evidence and fewer studies to provide guidance on this issue," the report states.

Some of the findings include:

· Perceived benefits of having an elected superintendent:

o The public may feel it has more control over the schools.

o An elected superintendent may be more responsive to the

citizen’s needs.

o Lower turnover.

o Elected superintendents must reside within the county.

o Generally, an elected official has considerably more independence and may not experience as much pressure from the unions, Legislature and hiring board.

· Perceived disadvantages of having an elected superintendent:

o There is no performance review, goal setting or direction from an elected executive board.

o Limits candidate pool to only those residing in EDC.

o Qualified candidates may be dissuaded to pursue this position because of the need to launch and fund an election campaign.

o Anyone with the required credentials may run for office. They may not be the most knowledgeable or have the highest skills. A less qualified candidate may prevail on name recognition or popularity.

o As witnessed in our county, outright removal from office can only be done via recall with substantial public cost.

· Perceived benefits of having an appointed superintendent:

o Board of Education would be allowed to recruit qualified candidates from all over the country.

o Potential increase in administrative efficiency.

o Having a professional rather than political superintendent.

o The ability to discipline and/or remove a failing superintendent.

· Perceived disadvantages of having an appointed superintendent:

o Higher turnover

o Expense to COE for recruitment.

The Board of Supervisors has until Sept. 22 to respond to the grad jury report.

Pot backers hope Calif. vote pressures Congress to ease laws

By Sean Cockerham, McClatchy News Service

When Lynette Davies, co-operator of the Canna Care medical marijuana dispensary in Sacramento, pays her California taxes she needs to haul a bag with $20,000 in cash to the state tax office.

“That’s really unsafe for me, and it’s unsafe for my employees to have this cash in the store,” said Davies, whose business is legal under state law as a result of California’s 1996 vote on the use of medical marijuana. “All because the banks that want to bank with us can’t.”

Marijuana advocates are counting on Californians to vote to legalize recreational weed this fall, bringing pressure on Congress to end anti-pot policies that include federal

obstruction of banks doing business with the industry. California is nearly six times larger than any other state that has legalized pot for recreational use, and its potential cannabis market has been estimated at nearly $7 billion.

Read the whole story

Burning Man challenges BLM's $2.8M bill

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Burning Man organization is challenging a $2.8 million bill from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management after last year's 70,000-person arts festival in the Black Rock Desert, according to a federal appeal filed by the San Francisco-based arts nonprofit.

The arts organization submitted a 1,000-page appeal in April that accuses the BLM of trying to cover up budget shortfalls and financial missteps with an annual permit that Burning Man says has consistently been overpriced since 2012. The invoice for last year's permit was about $2.8 million, which Burning Man organizers have started paying off in installments.

The appeal comes a year after BLM officials retracted a request for a $1.2 million VIP compound reserved for higher-ups at Burning Man. The compound was just the tip of the iceberg, according to Burning Man organizers, who are appealing everything from $940,000 in law enforcement costs to

a more than $1,000 bill for the shipping of an unknown item from Reno to Gerlach.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe couple uses life's lessons to teach others how to cope with mental illness

Publisher's note: ***This is one of several stories about mental health issues in the Lake Tahoe Basin that will be running through October. All stories may be accessed by going to the Home page, Special Projects, then hit Mental Health.***

By Jeanne Nelson

Nearly five years ago a kind nurse saw me sobbing in the waiting area of a psychiatric hospital.

I told her, "I don't know what to do to help our young adult son."



Because of overly restrictive HIPPA laws and our lack of psycho-education at the time we did not know the right questions to ask or the right information to proactively share to get him the help he needed and deserved. This kind nurse whispered in my ear, "You need to find NAMI."

We had recently retired and moved to this beautiful rural area from the Bay Area. We could not find NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) support and education locally so we would drive five hours each way monthly to attend NAMI Family Support groups in Palo Alto. Our loved one was living in the Bay Area receiving mental health services and supports there.

Through NAMI support we found hope, education and healing. At first we did not comprehend that recovery was possible. The doctors and nurses helping our loved one were so confident about his ability to recover and thrive. We learned quickly the importance of believing in recovery and learned the important role psycho-education of the family/caregiver/friend community support system plays in the recovery process.

Based on our experience we felt compelled to help expand the availability of information about mental illness within the community; hoping to help others avoid the frustrations that we experienced. We now facilitate a NAMI monthly support group for family members and friends of those living with mental illness (second Tuesday of each month at 6pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library). We also offer a yearly evidence-based NAMI Family-to-Family class to help family members learn how to best help their loved ones, and themselves.

After struggling to find our way though the gaps in the mental health and criminal justice system for years we have identified several things that seem crucial to implementing an effective mental health support system, but are often unavailable. First and foremost there is a severe shortage of mental health providers. Psychiatrists are few and far between, and those willing to take on cases involving psychosis are mind-numbingly hard to find.

We need greater cross training for primary care physicians, cross training of mental health professionals in co-occurring addiction, and need greater cross-training of mental health professionals in actual brain science. The notion that bad

parenting or purely trauma caused all psychiatric issues is outdated.



Jeanne and Alan Nelson use their experience to help others with mental health issues. Photo/Provided

Trauma is a powerful thing, but genetic predisposition plays a strong role. We are fortunate in South Lake Tahoe to have two psychiatrists (three as of Aug. 1) plus tele-medicine for psychiatry. We also have many quality therapists locally.

LTUSD has secured excellent counselors, psychologists and nurses skilled in mental health focusing on early education and intervention.

We have far superior mental health services in our rural South Lake Tahoe than the vast majority of rural communities across

the nation heavily due to the facilitation Barton Health has provided in pulling the community leaders and service providers together to work collaboratively on strategic priorities. Still, the waiting lists are often several months long and you must have very specific types of insurance to access the providers.

Within the mental health system there is no universally recognized standard of care as there is in other fields of medicine. Policies must be enhanced toward a standard of care that is patient-centric. Metrics needs to drive this change in staff behavior and performance.

We had so many families calling us in the South Lake Tahoe area saying their loved one was released from the hospital but they do not have an outpatient appointment yet and they did not know what to do. This is one of the most common places our loved ones slip through the cracks.

This led us to publishing a post-hospitalization tip guide for El Dorado County. They are available at our NAMI support group meeting or one of the six new mental health kiosks located at these locations: Barton ER, Barton Family Medicine, Barton Community Health, El Dorado County Library on Rufus Allen Boulevard, and Lake Tahoe Community College.

Mental health care workers have not yet evolved to a community care approach. In-patient and outpatient workers need to see themselves as part of a single treatment team. The notion that my patient has been released from the in-patient psychiatric unit in Sacramento so my job is done needs to be more than just frowned upon. Policies must be enhanced toward a standard of care that is patient-centric.



Jeanne Nelson believes a sense of humor is critical to get through hard times. Photo/Provided

We know that the jails in the United States are the largest provider of mental health services, and yet, they are not equipped to adequately deal with the mentally ill inmates. It is crucial to have a behavioral health court to divert some of the mentally ill arrestees to treatment, rather than jail.

Other counties such as San Mateo and Santa Clara have loads of folks lining up to get into those diversion programs and they have some superbly trained compassionate probation officers skilled at recognizing signs of de-compensation and skilled at facilitating treatment adherence.

Behavioral health court diversion programs require proactive collaboration by the jail nurse, probation, county mental health and substance abuse clinicians, the judge, and NAMI. If any of these key player-ingredients are not playing their position to proactively hunt for improvements in the overall program, we are falling short.

The Mental Health Commission (which is comprised of experienced volunteers) recently agreed to assess our EDC

Behavioral Health Court in South Lake Tahoe. Such assessments may inspire establishment of improved performance metrics. The results will be available by late summer.

Another thing that concerns us greatly is that many states across the U.S. have now “voted-in” marijuana as medicine, completely bypassing the FDA required studies to understand fully the potential effectiveness of a drug on a particular illness, as well as the side effects of the drug. Unfortunately, there is extremely limited research to support most of the claims of marijuana’s efficacy as a medicine and there is significant research to suggest that marijuana has a role in the onset of schizophrenia. Thirty-eight percent of those living with alcohol addiction and 53 percent of those with drug addiction have a co-occurring mental health condition and many do not realize it. This is why we emphasize the importance of having the crucial family history conversation with adolescents so they understand family genetics and the risks their choices can play on their life-long wellness.

We often think about how things could have been if we had been better educated about mental health before our journey began and consider what we would have done differently. We now know that family/caregiver support is a key ingredient in the recovery journey.

We now know who to talk to and what questions to ask psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. We know to use California’s AB-1424 form (medical history) and advise all family members with loved ones with mental health conditions to get familiar with this form (available on the El Dorado County website or at our NAMI support group meetings).

In hindsight we should have intervened much sooner in spite of others believing it was “just marijuana” causing the symptoms. We would have attended NAMI support group earlier in the process. We would have attended NAMI education sooner and

would have pursued understanding our family history by assessing both addiction and mental health genetic predisposition risks sooner. We would have had crucial conversations with our children earlier.

South Lake Tahoe has made impressive improvements in mental health services and support in the past year, and we are on the verge of a major transformation in the coming years. The better educated we all are about mental illness, the greater our progress and transformation will be.

We encourage a sense of humor within our family and in our community. My husband makes me laugh every day. This spring he surprised me with daffodils he planted in the shape of a giant happy face.

Jeanne and Alan Nelson are the NAMI – National Alliance on Mental Illness – representatives on the South Shore.

Casinos look to video games to draw millennials

By Laura Parker, New York Times

Forget slot machines and money wheels. American casinos may soon look more like video game arcades.

In February, Nevada and New Jersey passed legislation allowing for the introduction of skill-based games in casinos as a way to draw in younger players. Imagine “Angry Birds” and “Candy Crush” machines next to a high-stakes poker table at Bellagio.

The idea is that one day, different types of skill-based games will exist on casino floors, including games that look and feel more like console video games, from shooters to racing games.

They could be games where single players go against the house, cooperative games like blackjack, or player versus player games like poker. Eric Meyerhofer, the chief executive of Gamblit Gaming, a California company that makes skill-based games for casinos, said the biggest attractions could even be well-known franchises like “Call of Duty.”

“It won’t be a sea of slot machines. You’ll see smaller, more intimate areas with specialized themes,” he said.

Read the whole story

Dugard talks ‘Freedom’ since escaping captivity



Jaycee Lee Dugard talked to ABC News about life after captivity. Photo/ABC News

By Robert Salonga, Bay Area News Group

At long last, Jaycee Lee Dugard looks like she is in control.

So much so that in an hourlong TV special with ABC's Diane Sawyer that aired Friday, one of the most prominent segments shows her directing and calming a horse with a series of nonverbal gestures and commands.

The exercise was among the kinds of therapy that have helped transform Dugard, who famously survived 18 years of captivity in an Antioch backyard, during which she bore two daughters fathered by her rapist kidnapper. She had been kidnapped from a school bus stop in Meyers.

Since she resurfaced in August 2009, and released a best-selling memoir in 2011 – the year she gave her first public interview, with Sawyer, as a coming out of sorts – Dugard has come to exude a preternatural confidence and acceptance of how half her life was stolen by captors Phillip and Nancy Garrido.

Read the whole story

DUIs don't keep Meyers out of education

By Kathryn Reed

Jeremy Meyers, the disgraced ex-superintendent of El Dorado County Office of Education, was hired this week to work even closer with children.

The Black Oak Mine Unified School District board in Georgetown on July 6 voted 4-0 (Darcy Knight was absent) to hire Meyers

on a 90-day contract to be principal of Golden Sierra Junior Senior High School. This is a 7-12 school.



Jeremy Meyers

In May, Meyers was sentenced to 110 days in jail after being arrested on driving under the influence charges twice in five months in 2015. Both were misdemeanors. He pleaded no contest to the first offense and guilty to the second.

For the first offense he was sentenced to five days on home arrest. The second driving under the influence charge came with the jail time, four years of formal probation and having to install an alcohol device in his vehicle.

However, the only time Meyers actually spent in jail was when he was initially arrested the second time. Still, he has served his sentence. The brief time in jail counted toward time served, the bulk was alternative sentencing. The two main forms of alternative sentences are community service and being confined to one's home with a monitor. *Lake Tahoe News* was not able to ascertain Meyers' specific sentence or how he was able to fulfill the 110 days when the sentence was rendered May 25 – just 44 days ago.

The county board was not able to fire him because the superintendent is an elected position. Meyers told the board the only way he would leave is if they paid him through June 30, 2016. He was gone in November with two checks – $114,821.55 was essentially his salary, with another $10,930 for the value of his medical, dental and life insurance for that same time period.

In hiring Meyers, the Black Oak Mine board overlooked the fact that both of his arrests came in the middle of workdays, with his blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit.

Meyers has never issued a public apology for his behavior.

“That is shocking, but not surprising as poorly as that school board runs their district,” Mike Patterson, California Teachers Association board member, said of the hiring. Patterson represents certificated personnel on the state board.

“I was at one of the their school board meetings last year. The current board has done such a horrible job. They pretty much forced the automotive and construction teacher to resign,” Patterson told *Lake Tahoe News*. “A lot of other teachers have resigned and found other jobs where they are more valued and more fairly compensated.”

Meyers can take this job because his convictions were not felonies and he never lost his credential.

“Normally when there is an issue with a credentialed person it is the school district or county school board that notifies the California credentials department,” Patterson said. “Being that he was the county superintendent, I’m sure no one at the county office notified the state there was an issue, which in and of itself should be an issue.”

Black Oak Mine is struggling to keep people at all positions. This has to do with why Meyers has a short-term contract. Enrollment has also been declining as parents seek better opportunities for their children, including schools with more advanced placement classes.

Since mid-April Superintendent Robert Williams has been out on stress leave, with no indication of if or when he’ll return. Elizabeth Haines, who formerly worked for the district, has been brought in to be the substitute superintendent.

Brian Spears lasted one year as principal of Golden Sierra Junior Senior High School. That is why there was a vacancy Meyers could fill.

The board, though, has voted to ultimately consolidate the superintendent and principal positions into one job. That can’t happen as long as the current superintendent is on the payroll. But it might mean Meyers would have the opportunity to extend his contract.