

Treasures revealed as Calif. drought drains lakes

By Javier Panzar, Los Angeles Times

The Lakeview Motel's name is false advertising these dry days.

The same thing is true for the Paradise Cove Lodge down California 178.

That's because the water level in man-made Lake Isabella has dropped about 59 feet since the last big wet year in 2011. There are 32,632 acre-feet of water in the lake – 5.8 percent of the lake's capacity, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The water level is low enough that dozens of ghostly white cottonwood trees at the bottom of the lake have emerged from the water.

The roads leading to three submerged towns beneath Lake Oroville are being slowly exposed as well, said Mike Hubbartt, a state park interpreter at the lake. Officials are checking to make sure hikers don't steal old artifacts there, he said.

In many ways, unearthing the past is a ritual of the drought cycle.

Read the whole story

EJ proves he's 'still standing' after 5 decades



Elton John rarely took a break from cranking out the tunes on the piano Aug. 8 Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – When legendary performer Elton John launched into the “B itch is Back” on a warm Lake Tahoe night, the crowd sprang to its feet, and I was immediately transported into total nostalgia as my childhood took center stage in my mind.

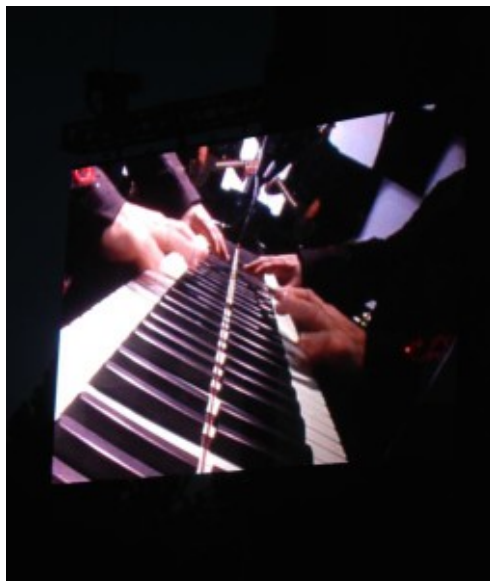
Like many people (a cluster of them around me at the Harveys Summer Outdoor Concert Series Saturday night), I grew up with this rock icon who has sold more than 300 million records and become one of the best-selling artists in the world. Despite the shared experience with so many others, his performance seemed so personal to me.

I owned a handful of albums, and as an adolescent locked myself in my room for hours to listen to his music – even convincing myself “Captain Fantastic” and the “Brown Dirt Cowboy” (named after the 1975 album) represented real people. After all, the songs of EJ aren’t all about his catchy singing, masterful ease of piano playing and ideal sing-along melodies.

His lyricist since 1967, Bernie Taupin, partly spawned my desire to be a writer. His impression spanned beyond me in South Lake Tahoe. I sat next to well-known Realtor Carl Fair most of the evening, and we discussed the show as if we were record producers.

“One of Bernie’s best,” Fair said to a few songs, while I nodded in agreement.

In particular, Fair was patiently waiting for EJ, which the crowd yelled on occasion, to perform his favorite – “Daniel” off the “Don’t Shoot Me, I’m Only the Piano Player” album. John delivered the sentimental piece in more of an electric rock format than the recording. Still, it had an impact.



Elton John’s fingers fly across the ivory.

Since the song is about a brother, I thought of growing up with my late sister – and how music was so instrumental in our lives. The 1973 album came out the same year as one of his best-selling albums “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road.” Back then, albums had passages you could read, and I used to open this one to learn all I could about the English performer. On this song collection, he produced “Bennie and the Jets” – with its signature piano key pounding heard again Aug. 8, complete with the “ssssss” at the end of “Jets.” Also from “Goodbye,” he performed the title song – which everyone mouthed the words to – along with “Candle in the Wind.” The song written for actress Marilyn Monroe is the best-selling single of all time.

Dressed in a black pant suit with simple sequins on the sleeves and back (rather understated compared to when I saw him dance on the piano a few decades ago at the Irvine arena), John played hit after hit with no breaks to speak of except to stretch, bow and reach out to the audience. John provided little dialogue except near the end when he tipped his hat to the audience for supporting him.

“It’s been the most incredible journey. Through 47 years, there’s been one constant – the audience buying the records and the audience coming to these shows,” the 68-year-old said. “Thank you for all the loyalty and love.”

The message was appropriate from a performer who wholeheartedly admits to believing in love and even wrote and performed “Believe” to the enchanted crowd.

Many of John’s library of songs revolve around love, whether it’s the down-to-earth 1970 timeless hit “Your Song” that he also performed to the hushed Tahoe audience or something totally out of this world like his other blockbuster number “Rocket Man” off the “Honky Chateau” album.

As the crowd swayed and recited every word, I returned to my childhood recalling my feelings when I heard this song while

moving to Virginia from Vermont. It was pouring down rain, and my mom could barely see as she followed my father in the truck. Still, I felt safe and confident that my world on Earth was going to pan out as I looked out the window in the pitch-black sky at age 12. Like the astronaut, I longed for a promising, adventurous life. I remember thinking what a genius Taupin was at capturing the human experience: "It's just my job, five days a week." I even bought a jean shirt because Taupin wore one on one of the album photos. I passed on the outrageous costumes and wild glasses John is known for, though a woman sitting behind me wore her glasses.

Through the years, John has slowed on his movement on stage and flashy costumes. His band – complete with original musicians Nigel Olsson on drums and Davey Johnstone on guitar – graced the stage with suits and ties. Even with the fresh, stylish look, a close glimpse of Johnstone's experienced guitar playing showed aging, wrinkled hands. The long-time musicians were joined by bassist Matt Bissonette, Kim Bullard on keyboards and percussionist John Mahon, who was fun to watch as he brought out rattles, chimes and tambourines. John, who played in Tahoe five years ago, got personal pointing out how Mahon was celebrating his 35th wedding anniversary, delighting the mostly older Tahoe concert crowd.

Behind the band, a giant screen flashed images ranging from a checkerboard and psychedelic experience to photographs depicting memories and John's various looks in more than four decades of making at least 50 Top 40 hits.

The music was full and solid – and I especially appreciated the hot vocals since many concert sound engineers tend to up the instruments, thus drowning out the vocals. Not so for a superstar like John, who has lost a slight bit of range, but still puts out a powerful performance.

The singer even overcame being hospitalized for an abnormal swelling of his leg playing tennis near his home in Nice,

France, less than a week ago to make the Tahoe concert, according to a Daily Mail report.



Saturday's show was Elton John's second at Lake Tahoe.

Tennis is one of John's favorite sports. Fans got a hint of this early on when he wrote with Taupin "Philadelphia Freedom" off "Captain Fantastic" in honor of the tennis team of his dear friend Billie Jean King, a legend in her own right on the courts. Patriotic images swirled across the giant screen during that song.

Other images came to mind when EJ started "Tiny Dancer," the poignant tune off the 1971 album "Madman Across the Water." That's what the John-Taupin collaborations accomplished for decades, creating words that have an impact on listeners. We can all share the pain and anguish of "Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word" and "Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me," which I stood up for amid a seated crowd.

Then there are the silly and jovial "Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting" and "Crocodile Rock." The latter was expected as the fun encore, and John delivered. And as a hint the night was coming to a close, John autographed records, shirts and CDs for the concert-goers up front. It was refreshing to see a middle-aged man in front of me yelling: "Rock on that piano, baby."

Notes: The Harveys concert series rocks on with the band Slightly Stoopid on Aug. 13; country act Dierks Bentley on Aug. 23; and Sammy Hagar on Sept. 5.

Truckee planning world-class skate park

By Dave Zook, Moonshine Ink

To bolster the Truckee's skateboarding offerings and honor a fallen friend, a 16-person committee is organizing the construction and management of what they hope will be the standout skatepark in the region, and one that will rival anything in the state.

The new 25,000 square foot park will be called the Rocker Memorial Skatepark in honor of Steve "Rocker" Anderson, an avid local skateboarder who passed away in 2012 in an avalanche on Donner Summit.

The committee's optimism was buoyed in late May after receiving approval from the Truckee Donner Recreation and Park District to use the space in the overflow lot across Estates Drive near the existing skatepark in Truckee River Regional Park. The approval came during a Rec & Park board meeting that was reportedly the highest attended in the department's history, with an estimated 150 people. The committee is now tasked with meeting town and county regulations, finalizing the design, and raising the estimated \$500,000 needed for construction.

Read the whole story

Prop. 47: Fewer prisoners, but public safety impact unclear

By Alexei Koseff, Sacramento Bee

Citrus Heights police Officer Wesley Herman recently arrested a parolee carrying stolen jewelry and a deceased man's identification card.

If the property were valued at more than \$950, the case was a felony that would let him take the man into custody. If not, it was a misdemeanor and he'd get a citation.

The first words out of his mouth, Herman said, were, "Am I going to jail?"

It's been nine months since California voters approved a ballot measure reducing charges for some nonviolent drug and property crimes, and Herman says repeat offenders are getting savvy about the new limits of the law.

Read the whole story

Browne delivers hope and steel guitar



Jackson Browne wows the crowd at Harveys on Aug. 7.
Photos/Kim Wyatt

By Kim Wyatt

STATELINE – I had a whole review written in my mind comparing and contrasting Jackson Browne’s performance of his post-Watergate hit “The Pretender” to the previous evening’s Republican debate. And then he didn’t sing it. So this review will have to be simply about a master songwriter and the large, intimate crowd gathered Aug. 7 at the Lake Tahoe Outdoor Arena at Harveys.

I first saw Jackson Browne when I was 10 years old. It was my first concert, and my dad took me. (I think he couldn’t find a babysitter.) Between this and Buffalo Springfield always

spinning in our house, you'd think my dad was trying to make a little radical. Browne's Summer 2015 "Standing in the Breach" tour – so named for his 14th album inspired by events in Haiti – still amplifies his political mindset, but it was his intimate numbers that moved the crowd. Songs like "These Days" and "Fountain of Sorrow" sandwiched in between lyrics about fracking and corporate corruption, even a love song to the ocean, made for a weirdly satisfying emotional roller coaster – a cycle of hope and despair that fortunately ended on hope. Browne's gift as a songwriter has always been to give voice to our most personal existential crises, to be our Everyman, yet in naming it, he makes us no longer alone. It's a neat trick, and a wild, singular talent.



Jackson Browne is a singer, songwriter and musician.

The 20-song set plus two encores were anchored by Browne's polished band. Greg Leisz delivered on lap and pedal steel guitar, and the electric guitar was handled deftly by Val McCallum. Bob Glaub (bass), Mauricio Lewak (drums) and Jeff Young (Hammond organ, piano) brought up the rhythm section. Alethea Mills offered harmony and the solo vocals that we were all waiting for, so familiar was this crowd with Browne's oeuvre, an almost full house of former hippies, environmentalists and child radicals like myself, I suspect. (A portion of the proceeds from Browne's concerts and sales goes to The Guacamole Fund, a group that supports grassroots

social justice and environmental activities.)

From the first note, the audience knew almost every song. Browne's usual tropes of love and despair, along with the signature steel guitar, were immediately in play: The first song, "The Barricades of Heaven," left no doubt that Browne's new tunes didn't stray far from the old, and made me curious about the new album. His voice still strong and steady, Browne has a knack for making everything seem better and worse at the same time. "The Long Way Around" featured some sweet Allmanesque guitar from McCallum, who shone throughout the night, as did Leisz's omnipresent steel guitar.

One cool surprise of the evening was the appearance of Nevada City's Bob Schafer, one of Browne's mentors, taking the stage for a tender rendition of Hank Williams Sr.'s "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" – a heart-tugging experience under the stars.

After a 10-minute break, the crew returned for the last set. The audience began shouting out Browne's hits. Warm and friendly, he asked us to be patient. Well, maybe not so warm. His hair blowing in the chilly night wind, Browne, from Los Angeles, gave the Tahoe crowd a great compliment: "Thanks for having us, Tahoe. You're hardy people."

After a four-song set from his new album that focused largely on the environment – which got the audience fist pumping, this is Tahoe, after all – Browne yielded and gave the crowd what they wanted: "Doctor My Eyes" and a rousing "Running on Empty" that led to two encores: "Take It Easy," – which Browne co-wrote with Glenn Frey – and the iconic sing-along "The Load Out/Stay."

Browne left the crowd dancing, on their feet, flushed and happy. Yet the sentiment of the night might be wrapped in up this lyric from "Standing in the Breach": *"You don't know why,/But you still try for the world you wish to see."*

So, idealism is alive and well and a little bit older. Despite

modern life, its depredations and defeats, there is no room for apathy, Browne seems to say. We've made it through some dark and lonely times, but we've still got work to do: Let's do it together.

USFS uses bulk of budget to fight fires

By Henry K. Lee, San Francisco Chronicle

The U.S. Forest Service issued a report Wednesday saying that for the first time in its history it was spending more than half of its \$5 billion annual budget battling wildfires, and the toll will only get bigger in years to come

With the increased emphasis on fighting fires, programs that help prevent blazes, such as forest restoration and watershed and landscape management, will continue to suffer, Forest Service officials said.

The report suggested that instead of treating catastrophic wildfires "as a normal agency expense, we must treat them more like other natural disasters, such as tornadoes and hurricanes."

Read the whole story

Justice Dept. memo lets feds close pot shops

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

In a newly disclosed memorandum, President Obama's Justice Department has told federal prosecutors they can file criminal charges against medical marijuana users and suppliers and shut down pot dispensaries, despite a congressional ban on federal interference with medical marijuana laws in California and other states.

The Justice Department had previously made its intentions clear by refusing to drop pending marijuana prosecutions and pursuing forfeiture actions against dispensaries, including Oakland's huge Harborside Health Center. But the Feb. 27 memo, made public Wednesday by Tom Angell of the advocacy group Marijuana Majority, provides the department's rationale for considering the congressional spending restrictions largely toothless.

The budget language passed in mid-December prohibits the department from using its funds to stop states from "implementing their own laws" on medical marijuana. But Patty Merkamp Stemler, chief of the Justice Department's Appellate Section, told federal prosecutors the congressional action "addresses actions directed against states, not individuals."

Read the whole story

Reno job growth impacting Lake Tahoe



Mike Kazmierski, president and CEO of Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada, talks Aug. 7 in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Anne Knowles

By Anne Knowles

Lake Tahoe businesses are going to be facing increasing competition from Reno employers for a range of workers.

That's the downside of anticipated growth in the Reno area led by Tesla Motor's battery factory and Switch's data center, both under construction at the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center, the 107,000-acre business park nine miles east of the Northern Nevada city.

Tesla alone is expected to employ 6,500 people when its factory is fully operational, and that's just a fraction of the 52,400 new jobs expected in the next five years in the Reno area, according to Mike Kazmierski, president and CEO of the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada.

Kazmierski told members of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber

of Commerce and others on Aug. 7 that EDAWN helped create more than 4,000 jobs last year, through recruitment of existing companies, local start-ups and expansion of established businesses, and is waiting to announce the relocation of more than a dozen new companies bringing a total of 1,425 jobs.

EDAWN expects 4.5 percent job growth in the Reno area between now and 2019.

"There will be competition for workforce," said Kazmierski at the Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel lunch meeting.

"I think that's where we're going to feel it," said B. Gorman, chamber CEO. "My concern is I talk to businesses every day who are having trouble hiring people right now."

The audience of about 65 was concerned, too, but more seemed to welcome Reno's resurgence.

When Sandy Evans-Hall, Tahoe Prosperity Center board member, asked if people were worried about Reno's growth, a few hands went up. But when she asked who saw it as an opportunity for their business, about half the people in the room raised a hand.

Kazmierski, too, said there would be plenty of upside for the Tahoe region. He said air service to the Reno Tahoe International Airport would improve, a boon for the visitor traffic Lake Tahoe relies on.

The new companies locating in Northern Nevada will do more business at the lake, as will many of their employees, who are largely expected to be younger.

"Millennials like to be outdoors," said Kazmierski.

And there will be more quality job opportunities for locals.

"Your kids and grandkids can stay here and you can keep your family close," he said.

EDAWN, along with a coalition of area cities and counties, as well as state agencies and infrastructure entities such as NV Energy, the Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County and the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, have been working on a study of the expected impact of the growth.

Kazmierski said the EPIC report, to be released in September, would provide the data needed for the area to prepare.

"We've got to get ahead of the no-growthers before they close the door," said Kazmierski, referring to interests, including some on the Reno City Council and elsewhere, who are opposed to growth.

Kazmierski was asked if water was a limiting factor.

"Water is absolutely no problem for the Reno-Sparks area," he said. "We don't brag about it because of the drought here in California."

Kazmierski said there is enough water available in the Truckee Meadows to double the population.

"If we got serious about conservation, we could probably triple the population," he said.

But at least one attendee was skeptical.

"I think he's misguided on the water," Garry Bowen, of Tahoe Future Forum, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Bowen said he helped commission a study on area sustainability by the American Institute of Architects in 2005. The report included an assessment of water quantity and quality.

"I think he's being misled," said Bowen. "It just doesn't compute."

Runnels must remove abandoned cars at Y

By Kathryn Reed

A judge on Thursday put the brakes on abandoned cars being able to be stored in South Lake Tahoe.

John Runnels has 30 days to get rid of the vehicles sitting on his property on the northwest corner of the Y.

Previous city managers, city attorneys and councils have wanted to rid the vehicles. Until this week, none had succeeded.



John Runnels has a court order to remove the abandoned vehicles on his property in 30 days.

Photo/Ernie Claudio

In October 2006 Runnels went before a city zoning administrator for a nuisance hearing after police

officers cited him. Runnels prevailed.

Runnels was issued a dealers' license in 1979 by the DMV, the same year the city's Planning Commission approved a special use permit allowing him to store unregistered vehicles at the Emerald Bay Road business. Two of the conditions of the city permit were that Runnels had to maintain valid certification from the state to sell and repair vehicles. They both expired. That gave the city the power to revoke the special use permit.

Talks have been going on for about a year, with both sides ultimately putting the matter in a judge's hands. On Aug. 6 after a four-hour hearing, El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Daniel Proud ruled in the city's favor, determining the vehicles are abandoned, which violates city ordinances.

"We did a title search on each vehicle. We had to prove they were abandoned," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We did a history search on each vehicle. All of this history and research determined they are abandoned and not for sale."

Runnels could still operate a store on site. He was not available for comment. He owns the corner lot as well as the parcel behind it.

Report: Sage grouse numbers surged in '14 and '15

By Phil Taylor, E&E Publishing

Greater sage grouse numbers in the West have grown by nearly two-thirds since 2013, marking what could be a significant

rebound to the bird's previous several years of decline, according to scientists in Western states.

Western state biologists said they spotted 80,284 male sage grouse across the West in 2015, a 40 percent jump over the 57,399 that were spotted in 2014 and 63 percent over the 49,397 that were spotted in 2013, according to yet-to-be-published research compiled by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and shared with Greenwire.

Sage grouse experts caution against drawing conclusions from the two-year spike, noting that sage grouse populations appear to fluctuate on roughly decadelong cycles and are influenced in the short term by precipitation.

Read the whole story