

STPUD plots rate plan for capital upgrades

By Kathryn Reed

Pros and cons of various time lines to complete capital improvement projects were discussed last week by the South Tahoe Public Utility District board.

No action was taken, but the board is on track to go forward with the multi-year rate increase plan for sewer and water customers that was approved last year. Rates will go up another 6 percent on the sewer side and 6.5 percent on the water starting July 1.

The district looks at projects in 10-, 20- and 30-year intervals.

The three biggest issues facing South Tahoe PUD are installing the state mandated water meters, replacing water lines so there is adequate fire flow and replacing the aging sewer system.

The remaining 7,000 meters should be installed to all residential customers within five years. The district obtained a \$21.5 million zero percent loan from the state to be able to complete the project.

With the projected rate increases going forward, it will take the district 30 years to install all of the water lines to meet today's standards. While inflation is built into budgets when looking forward, it is impossible to know what other rules might come down the pike.

In the next 10 years it means spending \$69.5 million, and \$173.8 million in 20 years. The district has spent \$59.4 million in the last 10 years on water projects.

Staff looked at three alternatives – no water or sewer improvements, appropriate/adequate improvements that would accomplish the goals in 10 to 15 years. This is the least risky choice, but also the most expensive.

The board is going with the third, or delayed, plan. For the water line replacement to be done in a 30-year period, it means rate increases of 6.5 percent through 2017, 5 percent in 2018, 2 percent between 2019 and 2024, and 4.5 percent from 2025-44. The currently quarterly water fee is \$130.25, by 2034 it would be \$288.92, and \$448.67 by 2044 if the increases are approved.

For the \$140.6 million worth of sewer improvements that have been identified to be completed in 20 years, the rates would have to increase by 6 percent in years 2015-18, 2 percent from 2019-24 and 4 percent from 2025-2034.

The quarterly bill will go from \$100.02 to \$210.49.

Board member Jim Jones advocated for a more aggressive plan to replace the infrastructure. Other board members want a more tempered approach that people would be better able to afford.

Only two people showed up for the Feb. 5 workshop – a former board member and a contractor.

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Notes:

- There will be a board workshop March 3 at 2pm.
- May 7, 6pm – public hearing.
- May 21, 2pm – public hearing and consider rate approval.
- All meetings are at the district office, 1275 Meadow Crest Drive, South Lake Tahoe.

English Beat rocks despite issues at Vinyl



The English Beat rocked Hard Rock Lake Tahoe on Feb. 7.

Photo/Adrian

Boot/UrbanImage.tv

By Kim Wyatt

STATELINE – Tahoe is going to have some sore knees, and it's no thanks to snow. The English Beat brought its signature ska to a lively show at the newly opened Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Saturday night. The almost two-hour set was packed with crowd-pleasing tunes that afforded the largely middle-aged mob a chance to bop and fist pump to the late seventies Birmingham sound.

Progenitors of the 2-Tone ska revival, The English Beat brought hit after hit to the audience of a few hundred, who seldom stopped dancing. Founding Beat member, vocalist, and lead guitar player Dave Wakeling, a rebel in a red polo shirt, brought an impish charm to a show riddled with sound issues.

The concert was staged at Vinyl – formerly the Cabaret –

touted by the Hard Rock as an “intimate” setting. Intimate is right. A few dozen folding chairs lined the wall, and tall tables were scattered randomly on the dance floor in the tiny showroom. Since this was The English Beat, the expectation was that we would not be sitting, but it’s a fairly bleak environment in contrast to the vibrant scene just outside the door. A porta-bar in the corner provided the best cocktail value at the Hard Rock.

Because this is the Hard Rock, I reasoned, perhaps they focused on the sound in the smaller venue, rather than its appearance. I expected the Hard Rock to have state-of the art-sound. But the sound was unbalanced and muddled, with lyrics to even the most straightforward songs, like “Sooner or Later” and General Public’s hit “Tenderness,” unintelligible. Fortunately, the audience knew the words and helped carry the songs through.

Wakeling was joined by band members Rhythmm Epkins (drums, vocals), Matt Morrish (sax, vocals), Kevin Lum (keyboards, vocals), Larry Young (bass, vocals) and Jared Palazzolo (guitar, vocals). Sharing the stage on this leg of the tour, Trinidadian reggae singer King Schascha brought the rasta, calling for love and unity, and Roddy Radiation, formerly of the Specials, guested for a three-song set injecting the show with some Specials-style cool.

In addition to English Beat hits, the band performed songs from Wakeling’s post-English Beat band with Ranking Roger, General Public. The English Beat also performed three great covers, “Tears of a Clown,” “I’ll Take You There,” and “Can’t Get Used to Losing You.” And in testimony to Wakeling’s songwriting talent, even the new songs sounded like hits.

But the sound. The sound was so inconsistent it detracted. Wakeling, visibly frustrated by a lack of communication with the sound crew, carried on.

“I hope you can hear my vocals, because I can’t,” he said during “I Confess,” a song that must have been vocally challenging even in his prime. During other songs, instruments would drop off or disappear.

Yet the hits kept coming, culminating in a rocking performance of the 1980 anthem “Mirror in the Bathroom.”

In the end, fans are willing to forgive a lot to fist pump for a night. I wanted to muse here about mortality and nostalgia – these were the songs of my freshman year in high school (and music is probably the only part I want to remember). The English Beat is now an oldies act. Even so, the writers of infectious songs that have permeated our culture should have better sound. While it’s great to have another affordable music venue in town, here’s hoping that Vinyl gets a tune-up.

Kim Wyatt was an arts reviewer for the Anchorage Daily News and now owns Bona Fide Books in Meyers.

U.S. men make stunning leap in downhill



Travis Ganong of Squaw

Valley at Beaver Creek on
Feb. 7. Photo/Cody Downard

By Bill Pennington, New York Times

BEAVER CREEK — When the Alpine world ski championships were last on American soil, in 1999, no member of the United States team won a medal. With the championships back in Colorado this month, the event was expected to be a chance for the American racers to show how far they had come as an international power.

Instead, during the first week of competition, the Americans' lone reason to celebrate was Lindsey Vonn's bronze medal in the super-G.

By Saturday, the pressure on the Americans was mounting. The United States racers, many of whom were unheralded in the country, had to enter the men's downhill, the championships' marquee event, without their best-known teammate, Bode Miller, who severed a hamstring tendon in a tumbling crash Thursday.

But in a startling recovery, three American racers burst into the top 10, led by Travis Ganong of Squaw Valley, who won the silver medal Saturday with a fearless, stirring descent that left him 0.24 of a second behind the winning time of Patrick Küng of Switzerland, who finished in 1 minute 43.18 seconds. Another Swiss skier, Beat Feuz, was third, 0.31 of a second behind his countryman.

Read the whole story

No subject off-limits for humorist Black



Lewis Black tackles current issues with humor at MontBleu on Feb. 6. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Mental health isn't a laughing matter until one hears Lewis Black's rant about the system.

It's not that he finds mental illness humorous, but he pokes fun at how people in the United States deal with it.

Black, the king of angry humor, brought his show to a full house at MontBleu on Feb. 6.

He tackles serious issues, but in doing so illustrates the absurdity of it all. He does so with colorful language, emphatic gestures and exaggerated eye rolls. His delivery is as much a part of the humor as the words themselves. It's

edgy, provocative and a bit in your face.

If you can't handle the F word, well, you won't enjoy the show.

"If you have a kid, you vaccinate the f-ing kid. ... It's called the public good. Whether we like it or not we live with people. We don't get to do what we want because we live with people," Black said.

Black doesn't understand how the Republican Party can call the November election a mandate when voter turnout was 34.6 percent. He pointed out how the last time it was so low was 1942, during WWII – with people dying for our right to vote.

"Both parties did something that terrorists couldn't do – immobilize us," Black said. "We don't have a government anymore, we just have Groundhog Day."

He said the only thing President Obama has done well is give a speech. House Speaker John Boehner "is a mood ring come to life." Listening to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi is like nails on a blackboard.

"The only way I can deal with the Tea Party is if I believe they are fictional characters," Black said.

Audience members and others could submit questions that he read from his iPad. That segment then is shown on his website the next day. One was about whether women should be allowed to go topless. This led him on a diatribe for several minutes that didn't garner much reaction.

Someone asked about what to do about Valentine's. He called it a BS holiday.

His political humor brought about the most laughs, but the reaction to his show was tepid for much of the night. It's hard to know if this was because it was a mixed crowd of tourists and locals or that this liberal Jew from New York was

out of his element in conservative, small town Nevada.

Black has garnered a huge following from his work on “The Daily Show”, his books, more than 40 plays and five Grammy nominations, of which he has won two.

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Notes:

- For more about the comedian, go online. Here is the stream from the Stateline show.

SLT cracking down on storm drain pollution

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe businesses with contaminants at their businesses that could reach Lake Tahoe via a storm drain are soon going to face stricter scrutiny.

The city is developing a commercial stormwater program that will affect 188 businesses – 12 gas stations, 33 automotive related businesses, 141 restaurants and two industrial enterprises.

Jason Burke, the city’s stormwater program manager, explained to the City Council earlier this week the reasons for the fee and how the inspections will work.

The council still needs to formally adopt the program. Before that happens, though, Burke and his colleagues want to schedule a meeting with businesses so most questions are

answered before the council votes.

Part of the city's stormwater permit from the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board requires this oversight. Plus, in 2009 the city failed an audit by the EPA.

"They looked into the stormwater program and we were not proactively inspecting these businesses," Burke told *Lake Tahoe News*.



What goes in storm drains
ends up in Lake Tahoe.
Photo/LTN

The permit with Lahontan holds the city liable for anything that goes in its storm drains no matter how it got there or who put it there.

Burke said staff cutbacks and working on other issues regarding Lahontan's mandate to reduce pollutants getting into the lake took precedence which is why the new program is just now getting under way.

The change will have the city being proactive instead of reactive. Burke showed photos of examples of issues the city has dealt with – including an auto repair shop on Jan. 12 leaking brake fluid into a gutter that is 200 feet from a stream environmental zone, a restaurant waste leaking into a drain on Jan. 7, and a non-secure grease bin dumped and washed into a drain next to the Upper Truckee River on Aug. 7, 2014.

The new policy is designed to identify potential pollutant sources so the types of issues above are less likely to occur.

An inspector has been hired. The inspection fees are designed to cover the bulk of the program – about \$20,000. The city is not allowed to profit off the fee, only recover costs.

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Notes:

- Businesses that have questions may contact Jason Burke at 530.542.6038 or jburke@cityofslt.us.

Caesars CEO lacks casino experience, stormy exit from Hertz

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

Caesars Entertainment's next chief executive left his last job after revelations of accounting problems at his company and calls for his resignation from some investors.

Mark Frissora, the Caesars CEO-designate who formerly headed the rental car company Hertz, now wades into another financially fraught corporate environment. The largest operating division of Caesars is trying to eliminate nearly \$10 billion of debt through a complicated – and controversial – bankruptcy restructuring.

Nonetheless, Caesars executives and casino analysts seem relatively confident that Frissora can successfully take the

reins from outgoing CEO Gary Loveman.

For one thing, Loveman is staying on as Caesars chairman, and the company said he would continue to oversee the restructuring process. Also, Frissora's previous management experience, though outside the casino industry, isn't as unrelated to his new post as it may initially appear.

Read the whole story

Efforts made to keep LT Water Trail afloat

By Kathryn Reed

Twenty years ago images of people playing on Lake Tahoe all involved motorized watercraft. Today it's almost always human powered vessels that are in photographs and video.

Some of that change has to do with a project that started 20 years ago – Lake Tahoe Water Trail. The idea then and now is to promote non-motorized boating. The Lake Tahoe Water Trail Association has been active for the last 11 years.

The California Tahoe Conservancy board on Feb. 5 further committed to this goal by authorizing up to \$50,000 on planning activities for the trail and in large part turned control over to the Sierra Business Council. The money is coming from a donation the state agency received years ago.

"We use it as incubator money to spin things off of us," Executive Director Patrick Wright said of this pot of cash.

He equated it to how the CTC helped the Tahoe Fund get started

and how it is now run as a standalone entity. Wright foresees the water trail doing the same thing under the guidance of SBC.



Paddling is a growing attraction for Tahoe locals and visitors. Photo/LTN file

SBC hired Becky Bell as the project manager. One of her tasks will be to find more money. It's anticipated Nevada Commission on Tourism grants will be applied for so then there will be money from both states funding the trail.

Initial goals of SBC are to improve trail maps and signs, do outreach and education, work on the lodge-to-lodge network, and create a business plan.

The trail is the 72-mile perimeter of Lake Tahoe. But not everyone knows where to go once they launch a canoe, kayak or paddleboard or how faraway a destination is or rules about public-private beach access. Signs and education would help answer those questions.

Education is also going to come in the form of explaining about aquatic invasive species and the mantras clean-drain-dry to prevent their spread.

Bell, who has been active in outdoor issues in the basin for a couple decades, also was instrumental in developing Tahoe Keepers, the group promoting clean human-powered watercraft on Lake Tahoe.

"I'll create a marketing plan for stewardship," she told the board Thursday.

Bell said 6 percent of the U.S. population is into paddling, with there being 19.2 million kayakers in 2012 and 8 million standup paddlers. She envisions this being a new type of traveler who will venture to the basin.

Greg Jones, vice president of SBC, said he wants to connect the business community to the trail – to make it an economic driver. And then he wants it to be a destination for national and international travelers. He envisions its being the equivalent to the Tahoe Rim Trail as a draw for locals and visitors, but on water.

The lodging component has been talked about for years, but has not taken off. That is something SBC expects to develop.

Bob Kingman, who is considered the father of the water trail, returned to Tahoe for the meeting. He is a former CTC employee who now works for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

"We have the opportunity to create the flat paddle mecca in the Sierra Nevada," Kingman said. "Lake Tahoe is the gem of this."

Congress revives effort to ban online gambling

By Associated Press

A Utah congressman is reviving an effort to ban online gambling throughout the United States.

Republican Rep. Jason Chaffetz reintroduced his Restoration of America's Wire Act bill on Wednesday. The measure would reverse the Justice Department's 2011 decision allowing online gambling with the exception of sports betting. It's identical to one he introduced during the last session.

The director of the research firm GamblingCompliance Chris Krafcik doesn't expect the bill to pass.

He says two powerful forces have lined up on opposite sides of the issue, which likely will lead to a stalemate. Las Vegas Sands CEO and billionaire political donor Sheldon Adelson supports the ban. Caesars Entertainment, MGM Resorts and lawmakers advocating state's rights oppose the effort.

Online gambling's currently legal in only Nevada, New Jersey and Delaware.

Scientists trying to engineer drought-tolerant plants

By Deborah Netburn, Los Angeles Times

As the California drought enters its fourth year, scientists are trying to genetically engineer plants that survive on less water.

After adding a new piece of genetic code to their DNA, tomatoes and other plants were able to hold on to more water and survive for as many as 12 days without irrigation.

The tactic, described in the journal *Nature*, seeks to control how much water a plant loses through the small pores on its leaves known as stomata.

Stomata, as you may remember from biology class, let carbon dioxide in and oxygen out. The size of the opening is regulated by two guard cells that can inflate like little tires.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Paradise Park turns to EDC for help

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Help is possibly on its way for the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District.

The board that runs this park on the South Shore agreed on a 4-1 vote Feb. 5 to enter a memorandum of understanding with El Dorado County for the government to assist with administrative responsibilities. Judy Clot voted no.

Now the Board of Supervisors must OK the deal.

“We are at a critical mass point where we need help,” Sue Novasel said. She is chair of the TPRID board and the county supervisor representing this area. Novasel said she believes this route is necessary to “ensure our park is viable and that we will be able to do more.”

This South Shore park, which turns 50 in July, in many ways functions like it is a newbie and other ways like a relic of a bygone era. No one knows where the bylaws are, documents are stored in 11 boxes – nothing is digital, the lone employee who lives on site hasn’t been held accountable for the hours he works and now resists having to do so, election of board

members doesn't exist and there is no plan to make this area self-sustaining.



Tahoe Paradise Resort
Improvement District has no
plans to fix the tennis
court nearest the entrance.
Photo/LTN file

The MOU is designed to help resolve some of these issues. Instead of the park district starting from scratch, it will rely on the county's experience with some basic practices like making sure all types of contracts are sound and dealing with the employee when it comes to work assignments and an annual review.

A bigger issue is to have county officials do an assessment of the park's resources. This will help the park figure out what can and should be the focus going forward.

The plan is for the county to act in an advisory role for the next year. Ultimately it is up to the TPRID board to do what it wants.

Some of the nearly 20 people who attended the meeting worried if TPRID is giving up too much control to the county, as well as if the county's attorney would have a conflict of interest if she were to give advice to the board because it might not be her employer's best interest.

It was reiterated that the TPRID board has the ultimate say

and that if needs firm legal advice, that will mean hiring an outside attorney if need be.

TPRID has a nearly \$130,000 grant that has largely been spent on siding and landscape issues. The goal was to install a more permanent rest room, but ultimately the proposal did not meet Tahoe Regional Planning Agency requirements.

A contingency of the grant is that projects must be completed by a certain date in order to be reimbursed for costs or the money goes away. Creative paperwork allowed for the tennis court improvements that were made a couple years ago to suffice for the current deadline.

But the one court that is still unplayable because of the cracks is destined to remain that way for quite a while because a spring runs underneath it that makes continued replacement fiscally irresponsible.

What might happen with that plot of land in the future has not been determined.

The district is working on a master plan, with the goal to bring it to the public at a workshop in the coming months. No date has been set.

This board has been dysfunctional in the past, but played nice Thursday night. Board member Lorraine Anderson resigned effective at the end of the meeting. It will be up to the board to replace her.

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Notes:

- Future board meetings – Feb. 19, March 26 and April 30. The next meeting is at 6pm at Lake Valley Fire Protection District off Highway 89.
- Events committee to meet Feb. 17 at 6pm at Lake Valley Fire.

- A presentation about the budget is expected at the next board meeting.