

Drones may cloud seed Sierra

By KPIX-TV

California communities suffering from extreme drought could soon get help from an unlikely source – unmanned aerial vehicles, a.k.a. drones.

For years, ground-based machines have injected tiny silver iodide particles into passing storm clouds – a process called cloud seeding. The process can squeeze about 10% more precipitation during a storm.

Meteorologist Jeff Tilley and his team at Nevada's Desert Research Institute in Reno are developing a first-of-its-kind drone to take the seeding process high in the sky.

Read the whole story

Reid's highs and lows as Senate majority leader

By Amber Phillips, Las Vegas Sun

To understand the pinnacle of Sen. Harry Reid's career, let's go back nine years, to Election Day 2006.

Senate Democrats were on the verge of taking control of the Senate for the first time since 2001. Reid, their leader, watched election results anxiously with close aides and fellow senators from a suite in the Capitol Hill Hyatt. When one of their most endangered candidates, Claire McCaskill, won a hard-fought race in Missouri, Reid jumped off his chair and

kissed the TV screen.

"I never thought we could do it," he told the New York Times when the party cinched the majority.

Nevada's senior senator would go on to serve for eight years as Senate majority leader. In that role, he decided which bills went to the floor and when, controlled a sometimes fractious party and played a key part in high-level negotiations with two presidents, guiding our nation's policy on everything from national debt to immigration. All while keeping a watchful eye on his home state.

But now Reid must step aside. After a disastrous midterm election for Democrats, Reid will hand over control of the Senate to Republicans when Congress comes back in January.

Read the whole story

Casino, hotels once planned for East Shore park



Year-round people can be seen in scuba gear at Divers Cove. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – If it weren't for George Whittell's desire to keep out private developers, it is possible Sand Harbor State Park might not exist. In fact, the recluse is the reason much of the East Shore is undeveloped.

That's not to say he didn't have grand plans. His vision was to develop a huge casino with several hotels where the park now sits.

But in 1963 per court order Whittell had to sell 5,000 acres for \$3 million.

In 1971, it became a state park. Nevada owns 14,000 acres, which encompasses Sand Harbor and Spooner Lake, in what is officially called Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park. Much of the land is in the backcountry.

This history is some of the wisdom that is imparted during ranger led hikes. This is the third December the park has been putting on these free excursions.



In a normal year this boulder field would be under water.

Down the road and visible from the main beach is a corner of Whittell's Thunderbird Lodge, which is operated by a nonprofit.

Most of the trees are second-generation growth; the original forest was wiped out during the Comstock. Lumber was needed in the silver mines of Virginia City.

The sophisticated flume system with inverted siphons was used to get the wood across the mountain range.

At that time the land was mostly in the hands of the Hobart family, who were lumber barons.

Walking along the footpath, the group of 10 from Incline, San Francisco, Georgia and South Africa, stopped above Divers Cove. Lines on the boulders indicate how low the lake is.



Ranger Allen Wooldridge, center, talks about the history of Sand Harbor.

Fresh water and high elevation divers are often found here – including last Sunday.

“There are some submerged boulder gardens, but not much biology,” Alisa Johansson with state parks said of what’s under the water.

While there are interpretive signs along the path, Johansson and Ranger Allen Wooldridge share more details than what’s written and they can answer visitors’ questions.

For those unfamiliar with Tahoe’s formation – tectonic and glacial – the park employees explain how it came into being and that seismic activity is still very real here.

Wooldridge said a common question he gets asked is if all the sand is natural or if it’s trucked in. He explained how the prevailing southeast winds push sand toward the park. There is a logical reason the park is named Sand Harbor.

While boulders are a common sight on the north side, more areas are becoming exposed as the lake level declines.



Few people visit the beach
in winter.

On this chilly, overcast day not many of the park's residents are out. Chipmunks, squirrels, jack rabbits, bobcats, deer, gulls, ducks, magpies, mountain chickadees and bears are some of the critters that call this park home.

But people also heavily use it, with more than 1 million visitors a year.

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Notes:

- Dec. 27, 10-11am, Before It Was a Park History Talk, free. Meet at visitors center.
- Dec. 27, 1-2pm, Hike the Point with Rangers, free. Meet at visitors center.
- Dec. 28, 10-11am, Christmas Heritage Talk, free. Meet at visitors center.
- Dec. 28, 1-2pm, Hike the Point with Rangers, free. Meet at visitors center.
- Weekends through Jan. 4 there will be sleigh rides (with wheels if necessary) and the restaurant will be open.
- The park will be open on weekends through March, including the visitors center, which has a fireplace where people may get warm.

- For more info, call 775.831.0494.
 - The park is three miles south of Incline Village on Highway 28.
 - It costs \$8 to park.
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Beavers may be good for the environment

By Samantha Clark, Santa Cruz Sentinel

Californians are crossing their fingers for more rain after three punishing years of drought have left streams, rivers and wetland parched.

One animal has the potential to restore these dry landscapes.

With their industrial buck teeth and flat tails, beavers and their dams offer a defense against drought, a solution to reversing the effects of climate change. The rodents are known as ecosystem engineers. And they once populated most of California (and the Bay Area) until fur traders nearly wiped them out in the 19th century,

“This state has lost more of its wetlands than all other states, and beavers can rebuild those wetlands,” said Rick Lanman of the Institute for Historical Ecology in Los Altos. “Knowing that it is native should help guide restoration efforts.”

Beaver dams bestow benefits to the environment that we humans

can't easily copy. They turn land into a sponge for water. Their gnawing and nesting promotes richer soil and slows down water, improving imperiled fish habitat. Their dams raise water tables, nourishing shrubbery alongside streams that stabilize eroding banks and add habitat for birds and deer. They also help the endangered California Red-legged frog.

Read the whole story

Caesars Entertainment to buy affiliate

By Associated Press

NEW YORK — Caesars Entertainment, parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys at Stateline, will buy an affiliate as it tries to smooth the reorganization of a struggling division and balance its debt load.

The Las Vegas company will take Caesar's Acquisition in an all-stock deal, giving its shareholders an approximately 62 percent in the combined company.

Shares jumped 24 percent heavy trading before the opening bell Monday.

Chairman and CEO Gary Loveman says the maneuver will result in a simpler and more straightforward corporate structure.

Caesars Entertainment Operating Co. received a default notice earlier this month, although it disagreed that a default had occurred. Last month, Caesars said it was in discussions with its creditors to lower its \$24.2 billion in debt.

Caesar's Entertainment Operating Co. will file for bankruptcy as part of the deal announced Monday.

The new company will have \$1.7 billion in cash and operate its casinos in addition properties like Planet Hollywood and online gambling.

Shares of Caesars Entertainment Operating Co. rose \$3.21 to \$16.70 in premarket trading.

Artistic talent not a criteria at Paint and Sip



Theodore Scott and Morgan Garrity brought 10 friends together for a birthday celebration at Paint and Sip this month. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Painting within the lines is not required. Colors – it's OK to be bold and original. Having fun – that's the ultimate goal.

"My favorite part is there is so much creativity," Shalynn Swails tells *Lake Tahoe News*.

She gives the same direction to everyone, but no two paintings are alike.

On this particular night a private party has taken over Lake Tahoe Paint and Sip Studio at the Ski Run Marina in South Lake Tahoe.

These types of businesses have been around for several years, but are now becoming the rage. The South Shore entity opened in August.



Matt Kauffmann says drawing the straight line for the horizon on the Emerald Bay painting is the hardest part for people.

"We have visited here many times over the years. Every time we left we said 'what can we do to live here?'," Frank Slipper said. "We have a friend who opened a studio in a small town in New York about the size of South Lake Tahoe. We visited, got the fever and thought this is where we are going to try."

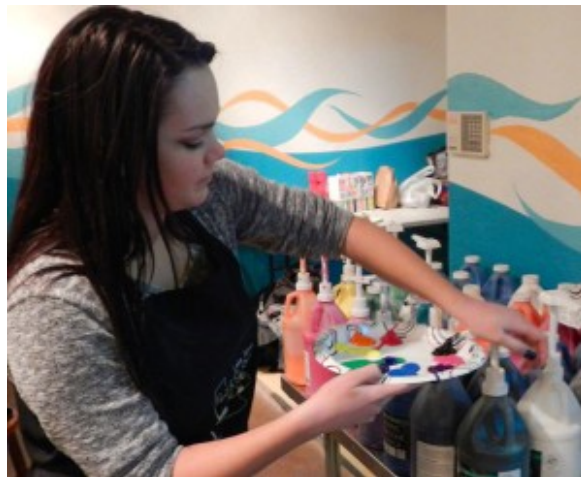
He and his wife, Jill, are making it work. So far it's a split

between locals and tourists picking up a brush, but he foresees this being mostly a locals' hangout. Slipher said people get addicted to it.

Walking in, blank 16-inch-by-20-inch canvases sit on easels. Multiple paintbrushes and a water glass are to the side. Aprons are on the stools.

With the first glass of beer or wine being included in the price, it helps ease tensions of budding artists.

"Usually after the second glass of wine folks don't care and it becomes less intimidating," Slipher said.



Shalynn Swails gets paint ready for people.

This isn't an art class. It's not a competition. No one is being graded. And even those who have problems drawing stick figures are encouraged to come paint.

"We say our business is about fun art, not fine art," Slipher told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The artists have a finished painting to show the rookies what the end product should look like. Then there is a blank canvas. Step-by-step the artist shows the clients what to do, how different size brushes are important, that if the brush is wet, the paint will run, and how sometimes it's OK to mix

colors.

"We encourage people to come experiment with different colors and techniques – to not paint within the lines, so to speak," Matt Kauffmann told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Kauffmann is one of the three artists who works at Paint and Sip.

While scenes of Lake Tahoe are popular, Van Gogh's *Starry Night* is another favorite. Sip and Paint has a calendar on its website listing what the upcoming painting will be. For private parties, they may request something in particular or submit their own.

Theodore Scott Jr. wanted a Day of the Dead skull for his 34 birthday last week. He and 11 others from South Lake Tahoe sketched out what they were going to draw and then Swails, one of the artists, led them through ways to paint their creations.

Ashley Ratoni had done some research before arriving Dec. 17. She wanted a rose on top of her skull, so she copied a rendering on her phone to the canvas.

For Lizzy Kirkpatrick she started off by creating a multicolored background before outlining the skull.



Individuality is encouraged.

Scott's girlfriend, Morgan Garrity, was introduced to Paint and Sip at a fundraiser this fall at Hard Rock Café. Then she and two friends did a session at the studio. She said Scott was a bit jealous of all the fun she was having, so that's how the birthday bash came about.

"I like getting together with friends and doing something different," Garrity told *Lake Tahoe News* of why she is a repeat Paint and Sipper.

Emerald Bay was the subject her first time, an owl the second. Garrity isn't sure what she is going to do with her artwork, but they may turn into gifts.

A quiet fills the room as the painters work on their creations. Swails gives advice. Some ask for individual help. Others order another round.

It's an interactive party. Each session lasts between 2 and 2½ hours. It depends on the speed of the participants and difficulty of the painting.

Sip and Paint last month took over an adjoining suite in the center.

“The main reason we expanded to the second studio is we wanted to have the capability to accommodate children,” Slipher said. “We couldn’t do it with the liquor license so we are in the process of building a secluded area just for kids.”

Sessions are at 7pm Tuesday-Saturday, and at 2pm Saturday-Sunday, or by appointment. Drop-ins are OK if space allows. One Monday a month Sip and Paint opens the doors to nonprofits as a fundraiser. The nonprofit sells the tickets and Sip and Paint donates half back to the group.

More info is online.

Pot to be focal point of Nev. Legislature

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

Even though the growing and selling of medical marijuana was approved by the 2013 Legislature, the cannabis plant will remain a point of contention and debate at the 2015 Nevada Legislature, lawmakers said.

“I personally think it will (be a big issue),” said state Sen Richard “Tick” Segerblom, D-Las Vegas. “The press will cover it because it is a sexy issue. But the fact is, there are a lot of things we need to do about it.”

Lawmakers are expected to debate legalizing recreational use of marijuana and propose a study on the issues surrounding DUIs, employment drug testing and how it relates to Nevada’s medical marijuana law.

Another bill will seek the legalization of hemp, a cannabis

plant that only has traces of the ingredient that gets you high. But hemp takes about half the water needed to grow a rural Nevada favorite – alfalfa – and can be used in various ways such as clothing, oils, carpeting, auto parts, ropes and biofuels.

Another bill would allow the transfer of medical marijuana licenses to be transferred between people. Now, if the licensee dies or the license is revoked, the license goes back to the state.

Read the whole story

Holiday shopping season comes down to the wire

By Anne D’Innocenzio, Associated Press

NEW YORK – Despite an early start, sales data provided to the Associated Press shows that stores may once again have to rely on procrastinators to save the holiday shopping season.

Sales were up 1.8 percent from Nov. 1 through Monday compared with the same period a year ago, according to data tracker First Data Corp., which declined to provide sales figures.

The numbers are modest considering the National Retail Federation, the nation’s largest retail trade group, expects sales for the entire season – November and December – to rise 4.1 percent to \$616.9 billion.

The slow growth also comes at a time when retailers tried to do a number of things to jumpstart the season and encourage shoppers to spend. Some offered “holiday” discounts as early

as Halloween instead of waiting until the day after Thanksgiving known as Black Friday. And more stores opened on Thanksgiving Day itself to offer people early enticements to spend.

But the incentives seem to have backfired. Shoppers took advantage of the earlier sales and hours, but that had the effect of syphoning away sales from Black Friday, which is typically the biggest sales day of the year.

"The numbers are lower than what people expected them to be so it will be interesting to see what happens in the final days of the holiday shopping season," said Rishi Chhabra, First Data's vice president of information and analytics.

As a result of the modest sales, retailers are making a big final push to lure shoppers into stores. And they're employing tactics they've had to use since the recession.

Dennis May, CEO and president of Hhgregg Inc., said the consumer electronics chain, added a "buy more, save-more" sales event for the week that ended Saturday. And it's also extending the cutoff date for online shoppers who want to pick up their items in the store until noon Christmas Eve. Last year, the cutoff date was Dec. 23.

"I think the consumer is very savvy," he said. "They're not shopping with abandon. They're not throwing their budgets to the wind. "

Major retailers including Macy's and Toys R Us are offering marathon shopping hours. Kohl's, for instance, is opening its stores for 132 hours straight until 6 p.m. Christmas Eve. That compares with 108-hour stretch last year.

"Customers can rely on us around the clock for their last-minute gift-giving solutions," said Michelle Gass, Kohl's chief customer officer.

Despite the frenzy, retailers don't necessarily have to panic. There still are big potential spending days ahead, including this Saturday, which some industry watchers are saying could be the biggest shopping day of the year. In fact, the average holiday shopper had completed only 52.9 percent of their holiday shopping as of December 10, according to a survey of more than 6,165 shoppers conducted by the retail trade group.

But retailers also have to watch their bottom lines. Shoppers have become more accustomed to deals, and many aren't willing to pay regular price anymore.

Indeed, C. Britt Beemer, chairman of America's Research Group, said 60 percent of 1,000 shoppers polled last weekend said they were only buying deals this holiday season. That compares with 40 percent last year.

But all the discounts eat away profits. According to First Data, the number of transactions rose 1.8 percent, but the average transaction was flat at \$73.85, showing how heavy discounting can hurt the bottom line.

"I don't think it's great out there," said Ron Friedman, head of the retail and consumer products group at accounting firm Marcum LLP who estimates that holiday sales will be up 2 percent from last year. "People are out in the stores and shopping, but they're all looking for deals."

Indeed, some shoppers are hesitant to spend a lot, despite some recent good economic news. Average gas prices nationally have dropped and the unemployment rate is at a six-year low. But some shoppers still struggle with higher costs and stagnant wages.

"I have to still watch what I spend and make sure everything's on sale," said Teresa Conrad, 51, who was shopping recently at a suburban Indianapolis mall.

AP business writer Tom Murphy in Indianapolis contributed to

this report.

Bridges add beauty, recreation to cities



The old and new Bay Bridge linking Oakland and San Francisco. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Bridges aren't just about getting people from point A to point B, they can be an architectural wonder – no matter when they were built.

This is true for two iconic bridges in the United States. The new San Francisco Bay Bridge, while it will always take a backseat to the Golden Gate Bridge, is more aesthetically pleasing than what was there. The Brooklyn Bridge, built in 1883, remains a visual beauty.

I had the opportunity to walk across both bridges this year. Doing so provides a more intimate experience with the structures compared to driving.



The foot path adjacent to the new section of the Bay Bridge.

Replacing the Bay Bridge became necessary after the 1989 earthquake saw the upper deck collapse onto the lower deck. But it has been one boondoggle after the next. Even to this day there are questions about how safe bolts are, as well as if and when the bike-pedestrian lane will be extended to Yerba Buena Island.

It's an out-and-back trek of about 7 miles depending on where one starts. This is the first time people have been able to walk on the eastern span of the Bay Bridge.

The only thing that could have made it better is if the path were on the other side – where the Golden Gate is.

While you are parallel to traffic, the vehicles seem far enough away to feel safe. And it was not nearly as loud as any of us expected.

Markings on the path indicate a separation of walkers and

cyclists, which helps avoid unpleasant collisions. There is a lane in each direction for two-wheelers; one lane of the 15.5-foot wide path is for pedestrians.

In order to continue the non-motorized path the old bridge has to be removed – which is happening.



The Brooklyn Bridge was built in the 1800s.

When the Brooklyn Bridge was built it was the longest suspension bridge.

We opted to take the subway to Brooklyn and then walk into Manhattan. According to the New York Department of Transportation, 4,000 pedestrians and 3,100 bicyclists cross the Brooklyn Bridge every day.

It is 4-miles long.

What is great about this old bridge is the wooden walking path is above where the vehicles are. You don't even know cars and trucks are whizzing by below you. Maybe it's because the skyline is so mesmerizing. At one point the Statue of Liberty is the focal point.

While the United States has an infrastructure problem, these bridges are testaments to why keeping up with maintenance is critical. These are not just tourist attractions, but means of transport for commuters and others.



New York City's skyline from
the Brooklyn Bridge.

According to the 2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure, "Over 200 million trips are taken daily across deficient bridges in the nation's 102 largest metropolitan regions. In total, one in nine of the nation's bridges are rated as structurally deficient, while the average age of the nation's 607,380 bridges is currently 42 years. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that to eliminate the nation's bridge deficient backlog by 2028, we would need to invest \$20.5 billion annually, while only \$12.8 billion is being spent currently. The challenge for federal, state, and local governments is to increase bridge investments by \$8 billion annually to address the identified \$76 billion in needs for deficient bridges across the United States."

Poll: Race is country's most important issue

By Mark Berman, Washington Post

For the first time in more than two decades, more than one in 10 Americans say that race is the most pressing issue facing the country, according to a new Gallup poll.

The poll showed that 13 percent of Americans think that race

relations and racism are the most important problems, the same number of people who said the economy, and more than than those who cited unemployment (8 percent), immigration (7 percent) and terrorism (2 percent), among many other things.

In fact, the only thing that more people named as a problem was general dissatisfaction with the government, Congress and politicians, with 15 percent of people citing that.

Read the whole story