

Festival full of extraordinary trees



Best in show for the 6th annual Festival of Trees and Lights goes to the Chanel tree. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Judges had no trouble determining the most elegant designer tree gracing the convention center of Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Unanimously they selected the Chanel tree.

It also received best in show for the sixth annual Festival of Trees and Lights. (Designer: Katie Long, Thran's Flowers.)

Every year Barton Foundation puts out a call to designers to decorate a tree and then to continue the theme in the surrounding area. A multitude of gifts come with each tree. They are then auctioned off at the annual gala.

Each year all proceeds benefit a different component of Barton Health, with this year's recipient being Barton Hospice.

The event runs through Dec. 7.

Even those who are not big into Christmas or don't even celebrate the holiday are apt to find the spectacle engaging. The Chanel tree – all done in black and white – is not traditional by any means – especially since the tree is black. While the tree itself is exquisite, all the accouterments make it outstanding.



Sew Wonderful is an unnatural green color.

But the tree that was rewarded for thinking outside the box was Sew Wonderful. (Designer: Caryn Hughes.) It's unique and garish at the same time.

The best interpretation of the theme went to Moulin Rouge. (Designer: The Merry Widows and The Gallant Widowers.) The designer even created a mechanical swing with a showgirl on it. Best tabletop designer tree went to Out of this World. (Designer: Katie Long, Thran's Flowers.)

South Shore schools competed against each other with trees that size-wise were in between the two designer categories. Awarded the best handcrafted tree was the magnet school,

Sierra House Elementary won for best of theme, and Bijou Community School won for most creative.



Judges like the
Faith, Love and
Hope's
authenticity.

The best Barton tree was Faith, Love and Hope. (Designer: Community Health Center.) The Barton wreath winner is Silver and White. (Designer: ICU.)

Judges were from *Lake Tahoe News*, Lake Tahoe Television, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, Lake Tahoe Community College and Edgewood Tahoe.

For more info about the festival, go online.

– Kathryn Reed

Hospitals killing tens of thousands fewer people

By Jason Millman, Washington Post

Wide-ranging efforts to make hospital care safer have resulted in an estimated 50,000 fewer patients dying because of avoidable errors in the past three years, according to a report presented by government and industry officials on Tuesday.

Hospitals reported 1.3 million fewer hospital-acquired infections in all between 2011-2013 compared to the rate of mistakes that hospitals made in 2010, according to the report from the Department of Health and Human Services. That represented a 17 percent drop in hospital errors from 2010, but about 12 percent of all hospitalizations as of 2013 still experienced an adverse event during the course of care.

The reduction of these avoidable incidents – such as falls, pressure ulcers, adverse drug events and more – meant \$12 billion in savings to the health-care system between 2011 and 2013, according to HHS.

[Read the whole story](#)

LTCC on dual course to offer 4-year degrees

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College is on a path that would allow

students to obtain a four-year degree two ways.

One is through allowing universities to offer their programs on the South Lake Tahoe campus, the other is by being selected as one of the 15 community colleges in California to be part of a pilot program offering baccalaureate degrees.

"We really want to bring programs to Tahoe that will benefit Tahoe," LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We would love to have UC Davis on campus. I think it would be a good partnership with (Tahoe Environmental Research Center) on the North Shore (at Sierra Nevada College)."

Through Measure F, the \$55 million facilities bond that voters approved last month, one line item was for a university center. There is \$825,000 in the bond to renovate a section of campus to allow for a CSU, UC or UNR to have a presence at LTCC.

The state will not pay for a university center.

But the ideal situation would be to have a standalone building that the higher education institutions could use for classrooms, registration and counseling.

Lisa Maloff is allowing this to occur with her \$5 million gift to LTCC. She is the widow of Bob Maloff, who at one time owned what was the Timber Cove Lodge. They both have been and continue to be, through this donation, supporters of the college. This is the single largest donation the college has ever received.

Maloff was not available for comment.

"She doesn't want a lot of recognition. She is very humble about this. She wants to do something for the college and the community," Murillo said.

A university center is a location on a community college campus occupied by staff from four-year colleges who offer

their programs locally. It gives them their own identity.

"They are not part of us," Murillo explained. That means LTCC staff does not register students for those classes, nor offer counseling or anything else. The universities are essentially renting space from LTCC.

Depending on how many institutions are interested and when classes would be offered, the center could handle three to four colleges.

"One thing I'd like to see is a teaching credential, particularly for bi-literate teachers," Murillo said. "I have to directly negotiate with the university and work with them."

That will be done over the course of the next year.

It's estimated it will take about 3½ years from now for the building to be done. Plans need to be drawn, permits obtained, the state architect's office will be involved, and then construction of the approximately 5,500-square-foot facility begins.

If the \$825,000 from the bond is needed for the larger facility, then that is where it will go. Otherwise the college will figure out how it will be spent on other facilities.

The other way the college is looking to add four-year degrees is through the state. The college this week filed an application with the intent to be part of a pilot program. LTCC is proposing a public safety administration degree.

With the current course offerings, this would complement what is in place. Today LTCC offers an associate of arts and transfer degree in criminal justice, and three AA degrees and certificates in the area of fire, including fire science, fire officer, and fire academy.

A team comprised of Chancellor's Office staff, a member of the business and workforce community, CSU and UC representatives,

and community college staff from districts that did not apply to host a program will review the proposals. The chancellor will then make a recommendation to the CSU and UC systems. The final decision is expected Jan. 21.

House votes to expand N. Nevada tribal land

By Steve Tetreault, Stephens Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A bill to expand the reservations of six Indian tribes in Northern Nevada was approved Monday in the U.S. House.

Lawmakers by voice vote passed a measure that places 45,000 acres in trust for tribes in Humboldt, Washoe and Elko counties and for the Pyramid Lake Paiutes, whose land encompasses parts of Lyon, Washoe and Storey counties.

The bill also allows the sale of 275 acres to the city of Elko for a motocross park.

Read the whole story

What will GOP do with its new

power in Nevada?

By Kyle Roerink, Las Vegas Sun

Gov. Brian Sandoval and Nevada's Republican Party will call the shots in the Legislature.

They will drive the hard decisions on the state's \$20 billion budget, Clark County's failing public school system and the rising costs of health care.

But the Republican Party also must deal with itself.

The GOP scored an Election Day victory that was as unexpected as it was unprecedented. The party united for the win but now must remain together during the legislative session. It won't be easy.

Ideologically, Nevada Republicans cover the spectrum.

Read the whole story

Management firms change Tahoe rental market

By Kathryn Reed

Owning a vacation rental may be a luxury, but it is also a business.

And for most people, they would prefer a middleman handle the business end. That's why property management firms became so popular. The industry for a time had become static, but now it is growing and changing.

With about 75 percent of the residences on the South Shore being owned by second homeowners, there is a definite market for people to handle renting them. While not all of those people put their property on the rental market, a large percentage do.

The going rate is 30 to 50 percent of a night's fee to handle renting the property. The firms deal with noise complaints, cleaning services, and checking people in and out.

TurnKey is a firm out of Austin that this fall opened an office in South Lake Tahoe. It's biggest selling point is that for the first year it takes a 14 percent cut, with that figure going to 18 percent in subsequent years.

It is handling properties from Glenbrook to Christmas Valley and out to Camp Richardson. Expanding to the North Shore and Truckee are goals.

"We had been with the other company a long time. We were dissatisfied," John Puccinelli of Cupertino told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It was brick and mortar. This is Internet. I thought that's where the future is."

He has owned a vacation rental in the Tahoe Keys for 20 years and was with the same company that whole time. Puccinelli said it was time for a change and opted for TurnKey.

One thing that TurnKey does that most other agencies don't do is treat vacation rentals more like hotels. While hotels and airlines traditionally raise and lower rates based on peak times, vacation rental rates are often stagnant – except perhaps for Christmas, New Year's and Fourth of July – the three busiest weeks of the year in Lake Tahoe.

Jon Sween, general manager of the South Lake Tahoe office, said being able to tweak prices for clients allows for annual revenues to be greater and less emphasis on actual nights rented.

Using algorithms for people inquiring about a rental helps operators in Texas to determine if queries were sent out to multiple agencies or just TurnKey. This then allows them to direct their resources to whom they deem to be the most serious potential renters.

Technology is something that separates TurnKey from other rental agencies.

“I like the ability for them to change door locks remotely and track people when they come in and out of the house so they can provide security for the house as well and not just for vacation rental,” Roger Isaac told *Lake Tahoe News*. He has had a vacation rental off North Upper Truckee for a couple years and is now using TurnKey. “When a vacation renter comes up they change the lock remotely so each person has a personalized entry key to come in the house.”

TurnKey also uses an Android tablet to communicate with renters. This includes eliminating the traditional binder full of info in the rental; it’s on the tablet. The tablet is also available for guests to use while in Tahoe to research places to go.

Housekeepers must take 25 photos with it when they are done. Guests are asked to rate the cleanliness when they check in.

“If they check five, the housekeeper receives a bonus. If it’s a one, we call the client about it right away,” Sween told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Renters also receive a welcome call when they arrive; which in part is to check on any issues at the get-go.

The tablet also has a built in decibel meter. This has to do with noise being the biggest complaint about vacation rentals. If it gets too loud, the renters are sent a message to keep it down. They don’t know (until now) that their noise level is being monitored.

TurnKey isn't the only newcomer to the market. Denver-based Evolve mailed info to owners last month offering 10 percent fees. Evolve and Red Awning offer marketing and reservation services only. TurnKey will do the same. It just means no active management, just bookings.

Breath test being developed to detect pot

By Melissa Santos, News Tribune

A team at Washington State University is working to develop a breath test that could quickly determine whether a driver is under the influence of marijuana.

Law enforcement officers already use preliminary breath tests in the field to estimate drivers' blood alcohol content. But no similar portable tool exists to test for marijuana impairment via a breath sample.

Stoned drivers have become an increasing concern since Washington voters legalized recreational use of marijuana in 2012. A quarter of blood samples taken from drivers in 2013, the first full year the initiative was in effect, came back positive for pot.

WSU chemistry professor Herbert Hill said that existing technologies – including those already used by airport security and customs agents to detect drugs and explosives – can be re-purposed to test breath for THC, the psychoactive component of marijuana.

Read the whole story

Thanksgiving weekend sales slide 11%

By Hiroko Tabuchinov, New York Times

Have Americans finally had enough of Black Friday madness?

Sales, both in stores and online, from Thanksgiving through the weekend were estimated to have dropped 11 percent, to \$50.9 billion, from \$57.4 billion last year, according to preliminary survey results released Sunday by the National Retail Federation. Sales fell despite many stores' opening earlier than ever on Thanksgiving Day.

And though many retailers offered the same aggressive discounts online as they did in their stores, the web failed to attract more shoppers or spending over the four-day holiday weekend than it did last year, the group said. The average person who shopped over the weekend spent \$159.55 at online retailers, down 10.2 percent from last year.

Over all, 133.7 million people shopped or planned to shop at stores or online over the four-day weekend, 5.2 percent fewer than last year, the federation said. And shoppers spent an average of \$380.95 over the four days, 6.4 percent less than the \$407.02 they spent last year.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Choir losing director, gaining singer



Linda Mitchell is stepping down after 21 years as director of the Tahoe Choir. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

A voice that has been missing from the Tahoe Choir for the last 21 years will soon be returning. But it also means the choir will have a new director after Sunday's concert.

This is the last season Linda Mitchell will be the choir's director.

"The reason I'm leaving now is I feel like it is time. I feel like you need blood, new ideas, new music, new thoughts. So, I said I'm going to be stepping down," Mitchell told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I'm really looking forward to being able to sing in the choir."

It was in 1971 that Linda Madden Hughes started the choir. It's a community choir – made up of about 50 men and women of all ages who like to sing. Most are from the South Shore, with some members from the Carson Valley and North Shore. They put on two performances a year – one in December, one in May.

The ability to sing, and the time to rehearse and perform are the requirements to join.

The community choir is tied to Lake Tahoe Community College's choir. The two come together for the concerts. It's possible to get college credit while singing. Those taking the fall class are part of this month's concert, and those in the winter-spring classes perform in May.

Mitchell, 71, has been the instructor at LTCC as well; another job she is giving up at the end of this calendar year.

"Linda is not only a beautiful singer, but an inspiration to all of us as an excellent teacher – one who imparts to the Tahoe Choir a love of music and a desire to make beautiful sound. Her passion for music is obvious to all of us and she has taught us all so much," Julie Frame, Tahoe Choir board member, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A board runs the choir, but mostly it is the director who does the work.

"I come up with the idea for the program and I then run it by the board," Mitchell said. "Sometimes people might look at me and say, 'Are you sure?' One board member looked at me when I wanted to do Disney cartoon music. Then I explained Disney movies. She understood then. That was one of our most popular ones."

The Dec. 7 – as is tradition with all the December concerts – is more focused on Christmas music. There will be the sing-along type songs, as well as more serious pieces. Mitchell picked "Lord Nelson Mass" by Joseph Haydn because it was written for four-part harmony.

"A choir is made up of different voice parts – soprano, alto, tenor and bass – so you have melody and harmony," Mitchell explained. "Some pieces can be just the song, but it might not lend itself being written out for four different parts."

She found that to be true when the choir did music of the 1960's. It was hard to come up with music to harmonize. Other than the Beatles, the choices were limited.

Mitchell tries to find music that lends itself to solos, duets and ensembles.

"I've grown into a singer and a better person under Linda's direction. She's a lion tamer and a fabulous teacher in front of the choir," Catherine Schoen, Tahoe Choir board member, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While the singers are performing for free, there is a cost associated with putting on the performances. All of the rights to the music must be bought. This covers copyright issues. Through the years it has gotten more expensive.

"We have saved enough money to buy music risers to perform on. They were several thousand dollars," Mitchell said.

The choir also pays the accompanist. The Tahoe Choir gives Mitchell a small stipend, while the college pays her to teach.

While the choir has a vast music library, something new is always desirable.

Mitchell said last spring's concert featuring music from Cole Porter and George Gershwin was one of the best-attended performances because people were so familiar with the songs.

"I tend to love whatever I'm working on at the particular moment because I've invested so much into it," Mitchell said.

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Notes:

- Tahoe Choir and Lake Tahoe Community College Chorus' winter concert is Dec. 7 at 3pm at St. Theresa Catholic Church, 1041 Lyons Ave., South Lake Tahoe.

- Cost: \$10 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, and free for children under 5.
 - For more info, call 530.541.2635.
 - A replacement for Mitchell has not been named.
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Crews race to mulch barren King Fire terrain

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Contractors working for the U.S. Forest Service are racing against Mother Nature to spread straw mulch over 1,200 acres of fire-scorched mountainside exposed by the King fire.

As several storms arrive in the next week, forest officials fear a big, wet one will hit. Without the underbrush and plant material that normally cover the forest, massive erosion will wash away roads, fill reservoirs and harm other critical infrastructure.

The September wildfire burned 97,717 acres. While much of the damaged forest survived with the trees' canopy largely intact, an estimated 30 percent of the damage is severe, said Mary Moore, a key member of the team assessing the damage. Of that area, 1,200 acres were identified as key to protect through an aerial drop of mulch on the steep slopes near roads, waterways and other assets.

Read the whole story