

Tree festival becomes student art project



Katie Long shows students how to make snowflakes for Bijou's festival tree. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Students gently take the special paper and fold it in triangles, then they make precise, delicate cuts like a surgeon.

What they create proves no two snowflakes are alike.

"Let it Snow" is the theme of the school trees being created for this year's Festival of Trees and Lights. Now in its sixth year, the festival is all about creating a winter wonderland.

Trees will fill Harrah's Lake Tahoe convention center Dec. 3-7. Some are elaborately decorated, others are traditional, some are over the top, others are whimsical. The school trees are generally smaller than the designer trees, but shine

through because of the creativity of youngsters.

“What’s fun is you get to fold and start cutting and it makes really cool designs,” Mia Koda told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She along with other students in Alana Cayabyab’s second-grade class at Bijou Community School is learning from Katie Long how to make the snowflakes. Long is a parent volunteer whose goal was to have about 600 snowflakes for Bijou’s tree. That would be one snowflake per student.

“Because of fire restrictions I ordered this special paper online so if the fire marshal tries to light it, it won’t,” Long told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Student Mia Koda shows off her snowflake.

The class is broken into groups, with Long working with a handful of students at a time. She explains how folding the paper into different triangles will result in a bigger or smaller snowflake. As the students finish their creations, she strings them together, creating a mini snowstorm effect.

And while it’s fun to decorate the trees, they are judged – so there are at least bragging rights to compete for among the

South Shore schools.

Crystal Wolverton was surprised at what her snowflake looked like. What she liked best is how the cutting makes different shapes.

Student Davis Castles is a veteran of the festival, having gone in the past to have his picture taken with Santa and to adopt a teddy bear.

The festival is designed to be an event for all ages to embrace the season without any religious overtones. Each year the festival, which is put on by the Barton Foundation, raises money for a specific cause. This year Barton Health's Hospice Programs & Services is the beneficiary.

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Notes:

- More info about the festival may be found online.
- The event is Dec. 3-7 at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

Slow-growth issues not going away in EDC

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County voters just rejected three growth-control initiatives amid a \$1 million dollar opposition campaign funded by developer and real estate interests. Yet a ballot sequel already looms for 2016 as voters, once again, will consider measures restricting development in the Sierra

foothills county.

Two other citizen-backed measures, which were withheld from the 2014 ballot for further study by county officials, have now received the go-ahead to appear on the county's June 2016 ballot.

The Board of Supervisors on Nov. 21 approved a public vote on an initiative to ban approvals of new subdivisions, apartments and commercial projects if they lack reliable water supplies or connections to public water systems.

Read the whole story

Biggest U.S. casino cuts back on gambling

By Michael Melia, AP

HARTFORD, Conn. — Foxwoods, the largest casino resort in North America, is reducing its number of slot machines and table games to free up space for nightclubs and other new attractions as it adapts to fierce competition, the new CEO said in an interview with The Associated Press.

It's a transition that CEO Felix Rappaport says probably should have started years earlier, held up perhaps by emotional attachments, and one that reflects a decline in the number of people gambling inside the cavernous Foxwoods Resort Casino on a given day.

"We think we have too much gaming," Rappaport said in the interview Monday.

The tribal-owned property in southeastern Connecticut has 5,800 slot machines and 350 table games, spread across several individual casinos. Foxwoods is identifying gaming areas that can be converted for other purposes in a process that Rappaport said would likely leave it with closer to 4,800 slot machines and 250 table games.

Foxwoods enjoyed a monopoly on casino-style gambling in the region for years after it opened in 1992 and had 6,300 slot machines and 380 table games before the Great Recession introduced a decline in gambling revenue that has yet to be reversed.

Now, the embattled resort is positioning itself to endure competition that is expected only to intensify in coming years with as many as three casinos in Massachusetts. Foxwoods and its local rival, Mohegan Sun, already have been losing revenue to casinos in the New York City area and Rhode Island's Twin Rivers Casino, which recently added table games.

At Mohegan Sun, Tribal Gaming Authority CEO Mitchell Etes said on a conference call with industry analysts last week that its gaming floor has shrunk but he does not anticipate more big cuts.

"I think we've really done a good job at getting the floor down to what's manageable and what's right and then scheduling it for the times when the people are here," Etes said.

Rappaport, a Philadelphia native, was named CEO last week by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. He joined Foxwoods in February and had been part of a management team focused on expanding the resort experience including new nightclubs, restaurants and an outlet mall expected to open in the spring.

He worked previously as president of the casinos Excalibur, New York-New York and Luxor in Las Vegas, where he saw each property have a "golden era" and then have to adapt and sometimes contract with changes in the marketplace. Rappaport

said Foxwoods is evolving in the same way, adding attractions with the goal of stirring excitement and keeping visitors on the property for longer periods of time.

“The industry in general has become less gaming centric,” he said. “I think in Foxwoods’ case we have exactly the same opportunities.”

He said he expects Foxwoods will move toward earning 65 or 70 percent of its revenue from gambling – down from 80 percent – as it leans more on entertainment and other offerings.

Associated Press writer Stephen Singer contributed to this report.

Special events drive skiers to Tahoe slopes



A crowd watches Olympic snowboarders face off at the poker table and the big air jump at High Roller Hold 'Em at Heavenly. Photo/Heavenly Mountain Resort

By Kathryn Reed

Events have long been said to be an economic force – no matter the location. It's true for the greater Lake Tahoe Basin as well as the hosting venue.

While it can be hard to put a definitive dollar amount on what the various ski resort events add to the economy, these activities are bringing people to the area who may not otherwise have come. The industry as a whole brings more than \$500 million to the basin each season, according to economic studies.

Events give added value to the passholder and day lift ticket buyer.

“Though I do not have specific numbers, our special events

definitely attract locals as well as traveling visitors. Several events do draw tourists to the resort; who plan their trips around these exciting activities,” Cass Walker, spokeswoman for Northstar, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Paul Raymore with Homewood Mountain Resort, said, “These events are really designed to give our customers unique experiences that they wouldn’t normally get.”

Thea Hardy at Sierra-at-Tahoe, said, “These events are important to build excitement during the season and to give back to the community that supports us all year. Whether they are for spectators or not, Sierra-at-Tahoe events are an important way to communicate our mission and to give our guests an extra incentive to connect with Sierra and feel like they are part of its animation.”

Plus, the promotion associated with the various events gives obvious added attention to that particular resort as well as triggers the thought of Lake Tahoe as a whole to people.

“We think that events at our South Shore ski resorts enhance the visitor experience, which creates the potential for social sharing of that experience and/or enticing a visitor toward a repeat visit,” Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “From the destination differentiation aspect, the events send a brand message. That message boasts the high-energy vibe we have both on and off the slopes. We also know that event marketing helps to heighten awareness and inquisitiveness that might lead to visitation.”

Events also give guests a different view of a resort – more whimsical, more hardcore – depends on the attraction.

“There is more to Heavenly and South Lake Tahoe than incomparable skiing and beautiful views. Events like these take the resort experience to the next level, where guests can go all in with world-class entertainment, après ski parties,

and nonstop casino nightlife,” Liesl Kenney with Heavenly told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Resorts are always looking toward the future. While tradition is important, so is being innovative and having big dreams.

“It is important to continuously create new, unexpected traditions that allow guests to celebrate with each other,” Walker from Northstar said.

Mt. Rose aspires to be an Olympic venue or host an international extreme skiing competition. This could be possible as it is eyed to be one of the few resorts that could host the Olympic men’s downhill.

Homewood would also like to host more high-profile ski/snowboard racing events/competitions.

“Homewood has a racing heritage we’d like to bring back,” Raymore told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Ski resorts were asked to share what they believe are the top three events for this season.

Northstar:

- **Bubbles on the Slopes**

New this winter, Northstar will host *tōst*, the celebratory culinary tradition that redefines the art of the daily toast. Celebrating the mountains, Lake Tahoe and the tradition of toasting to friends and family, Northstar invites guests to raise their flutes and sip bubbles each day on the mountain at 2pm.

- **Mountain Table**

Epicureans are invited to discover the essence of Northstar’s laid-back California luxury through Mountain Table, the new mountaintop culinary experience at Zephyr Lodge, which

features an entire menu of California-sourced ingredients. Meals will be paired with regional artisan wines, craft beers, and distilled spirits. Each Mountain Table dinner will donate proceeds to one of North Lake Tahoe's nonprofit foundations. Dinners are: Dec. 19, Jan. 16, Jan. 30, Feb. 13, Feb. 27, March 13, and March 27 from 6-9pm.

- **Northern Lights**

The inaugural Northern Lights festival will commence Dec. 12 by welcoming connoisseurs to the Brewmaster Dinner at Zephyr Lodge. The five-course menu will feature fresh, seasonal produce and meats from California's finest sources. Each course will be customized to highlight select craft brews and seasonal specialties from Lagunitas Brewing Company. Northern Lights culminates Dec. 13, during which kids and families partake in a day and evening of light-filled revelry and activities, a torch light procession and snowcat light parade – all of which leads to the Village at Northstar where the festivities and entertainment continue with a fireworks grand finale.

Mt. Rose:

- **Chutes Fest**

The Feb. 21 extreme competition is the 10th anniversary celebration of the notorious Mt. Rose Chutes.

- **Local Craft Brew Festival**

This is a gathering of many Tahoe-Reno craft brewers, combined into an outdoor ski festival on March 7.

- **Burner Party**

March 21 is the second annual party recognizing the Burner Spirit on snow.

Homewood:

- **New Year's Eve Party**

Dance to the infectiously funky grooves of Lake Tahoe's Drop Theory from 9pm-1am while enjoying beer, wine and cocktail specials at the Fireplace Tavern bar, inside Homewood's South Lodge. Tickets are \$25 in advance online, or \$30 at the door.

- **First Tracks Breakfasts**

Skiers and snowboarders will want to set their alarms early on select weekends throughout the season as Homewood expands its lineup of First Tracks Breakfasts. Early-birds looking for untracked powder tracks or pristine corduroy are invited to load the Madden Chair from 7:45-8:15am and enjoy all the fresh tracks they can find off the Old Homewood Express chair before the general public is allowed to start loading the Madden Chair at 9am. In addition, participants will enjoy a hearty breakfast at the mid-mountain Big Blue View Bar anytime from 7:55-9:30am. Free for Homewood season passholders, the First Tracks Breakfast events will cost \$40 in addition to the normal lift ticket price for non-pass holders. Dates: Jan. 10, Jan. 24, TBD in February and March.

- **March Music Series**

Dates to be determined.

Heavenly Mountain Resort

- **Winter Ignite**

It spans two weekends, Dec. 5-6 and Dec. 12-13, culminating with a free concert by Young the Giant on Dec. 13 at 7pm in Heavenly Village. Winter Ignite will jumpstart the 2014-15 ski and ride season with on-mountain activities such as pop-up DJ Cat and Unbuckle après kick-off parties as well as off-

mountain events like “Pretty Faces” movie Dec. 12 at Harrah’s and comedy from Daniel Tosh at MontBleu Dec. 12.

- **High Roller Hold ‘Em**

Three Olympic athletes from the inaugural U.S. slopestyle snowboarding team will arrive in South Lake Tahoe on April 4. Olympic gold medalist Sage Kotsenburg will place his bets against fellow Olympians Billy Morgan and Chas Guldemond, as well as High Roller Hold ‘Em veterans Gjermund Braaten and Eric Willett. Developed in partnership with Snow Park Technologies, High Roller Hold ‘Em combines the thrill of snowboard Big Air with the strategy of high-stakes poker into an event that sends the winner home with \$50,000. This event is free and takes place on the World Cup run at Heavenly’s California base area.

- **Unbuckle at Tamarack**

Rated as the No. 1 après ski party in North America by *Forbes* and confirmed by CNN Travel, is Lake Tahoe’s highest elevation après ski party featuring music, drinking, dancing and the Heavenly Angels. Après takes place daily from 3:30-5:30pm with half-priced drinks and food specials and, exclusively on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, a guest DJ. There is no cost for admission to this event.

Diamond Peak

- **6th annual Ullr Fest**

The Jan. 23-25 event to raise funds for the Diamond Peak Ski Team. The action-packed weekend kicks off Friday with a Torch Light Parade, bonfire, and live music, and continues through Sunday with other events including races, competitions, food, entertainment and more. Come dressed in the best Ullr attire as the event is named for the Scandinavian god of winter and snow, who is widely regarded as the patron saint of skiers.

- **Last Tracks Wine/Beer Tastings**

Every Saturday Feb. 7-April 11, enjoy beautiful views of Lake Tahoe from Snowflake Lodge while tasting fine wines or craft brews paired with tasty appetizers. At the end of the event, ski or snowboard down a freshly groomed run at sunset. Last Tracks tickets are \$34 and include a lift ticket valid from 2-4pm. Participants must be 21 years old to attend and ski or snowboard at an intermediate level.

- **15th Annual Dummy Downhill**

The Dummy Downhill (March 15) has been a favorite community event for past 14 years and every year it gets better.

Participants build a dummy on skis or snowboards that get launched off of a big jump and watch as unique characters fly down the hill or crash hard. This is the flugtag for dummies. Dummies will be judged on creativity on the Base Lodge deck, followed by the jumping and an awards ceremony. Prizes and certificates will be awarded for creativity, best crash, furthest distance, and more.

Sierra-at-Tahoe

- **Jamie Anderson's Give Back with Love Sponsorship** (not for spectators)

Women's snowboard slopestyle Olympic gold medalist Jamie Anderson will partner with Sierra and the Lake Tahoe Unified School District to sponsor local students again this winter. Less fortunate students in the community have a chance to experience what it is like to be a sponsored athlete for a season. Each winner receives a season pass at Sierra, complete snowboard set-up including board, bindings, boots and outerwear, and a day of snowboarding with Jamie Anderson.

- **Equinox Spring Festival**

Sierra-at-Tahoe Resort will kick off the spring season on

March 21 with the second annual Equinox Spring Festival. The festival includes a free concert series, events, parties, and more, giving guests an opportunity to enjoy the outdoor Solstice Plaza, listen to live music, reminisce about a great day on the mountain and celebrate spring in the Sierra.

- **Ski With Maddie Bowman Day** (not for spectators)

Women's freeskiing halfpipe Olympic gold medalist, Maddie Bowman, hosts an annual Ski with Maddie Day where up-and-coming skiers in Sierra's Rippers program have the chance to ski with Bowman and receive expert tips. Bowman, being an ex-Ripper, wants to inspire younger kids to follow their dreams and share how her dream came true.

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Notes:

- More info about events may be found on the resorts' respective websites.

Ski resorts selling the lifestyle to Chinese market

By Liz Flora, Jing Daily

Top tourism destinations across the globe are vying for the business of China's booming number of affluent outbound travelers, but one type of luxury world-class destination is still hoping to catch up: the ski resort.

Since the sport requires extensive training and is new to the average Chinese traveler, destinations from Switzerland to Canada are working to take a shortcut to visitor growth numbers by selling the luxury ski lifestyle along with their world-class slopes.

Over the weekend, an inaugural event in Beijing called Ski&Style spotlighted that lifestyle by bringing together top resort representatives from Switzerland, Iceland, France, Canada, and Japan to present their destinations to Chinese VIPs as they sipped Champagne, attended exclusive parties, and viewed a ski style runway show. The aim of the event was to demonstrate that a ski vacation abroad could be worthwhile even for those at the beginner level, which is the case for many of China's skiers.

"In China, ski has been promoted through the angle of the sport. What we wanted to show is that ski before all was a destination, and is a destination," says Delphine Lignières, the CEO of event organizer China Rendez-Vous. "It means that somebody who is not skiing should enjoy the winter lifestyle over there. What we wanted to show as well is that actually, après-ski is the best moment of the day. It's a moment where you mingle with friends; you are enjoying life."

Read the whole story

Wet December on tap for California

By Tim Hearden, Capital Press

SACRAMENTO – Prospects are building for a wet December

throughout California, federal forecasters say.

The large low-pressure system that promises abundant rain and snow this weekend will likely be the first in a series of storms to parade through the Golden State, said Michelle Mead, a National Weather Service warning coordinator here.

Above-average rainfall is favored throughout the state in December, according to the federal Climate Prediction Center. Then El Nino conditions portend chances of above-average precipitation south of Sacramento in January and February, the center predicts.

“The storm track is definitely looking like we’re getting more systems lining up in the Northern Pacific that will have the potential to impact Northern California,” Mead said, noting the intensity of storms will depend on whether a high-pressure ridge builds off the coast.

Read the whole story

Washoe Park trail upgrades improve access



Erick Estrada, from left, Eddie Cuttman and Zackery Schell finish trail improvements at Washoe Meadows State Park. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

WASHOE MEADOWS STATE PARK – Trudging through water or creating a side trail is no longer necessary in sections of Washoe Meadows State Park.

Work was completed this month on about a mile of trail. Included is a rather major bridge over Angora Creek and smaller crossings to get people out of other wet areas.

“Now people have access to this section of the park longer and earlier,” explained Nathan Shasha with California State Parks.

Water had been a barrier.



Before the work began the trail was impassable.
Photo/California State Parks

This nearly 600-acre park on the South Shore is a bit of a secret to many because there are no signs, trailhead markers or parking. But for those who know about it, there are myriad walking, mountain bike, snowshoe and cross country trails, as well as a slew of entrances.

Carol Curran of South Lake Tahoe was walking in the park with her husband, Larry, and their dog last week. This was their second time to Washoe. When they looked up online how to get to it the directions had them go to Sawmill Road. But there is no access from that road.

When the general plan is created for the park basic amenities like signs are expected to be addressed. State Parks has taken inventory of the trails and everything else in the park so it knows what it has, but no plan has been created for what to do with the park. Part of the holdup has to do with a lawsuit involving realigning the Upper Truckee River and moving holes of Lake Tahoe Golf Course.



The park and its access points.

The trail upgrades, which cost about \$70,000, will allow for more recreation throughout the year. The money came from state agency, Tahoe Fund, Proposition 84 and Bureau of Reclamation.

"This is a hundred times better. There is an actual trail. Now I don't have to deal with mud," said Candace Raynar, who was jogging with her two dogs. She drives from Christmas Valley and parks on the Lake Baron side of the park to start her 11-mile run. "The transformation is amazing. It was so needed."

The quickest way to access this improved section that park employees and California Conservation Corps members worked on is from Mountain Meadow Drive. Shasha said this section was chosen for rehabbing because it is a major thoroughfare and is heavily used.

Gone is a trail that was wide as a road with compacted dirt. Even with the limited moisture this fall puddling was occurring which made for less than a pleasant experience.

The trail is now more like a single-track, but it's raised a bit in places. The crown will also help the trail last longer.

Chunks of asphalt were removed. Berms built by previous

landowners are still evident.



Nathan Shasha with State Parks shows the contour of the new trail. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Shasha described creating it being like making lasagna, where various substances are put down in a layered manner – fabric, rock and dirt.

Rocks are on the side so water can run between them. The improvements should also allow more people into the area because of not having to wade into the water and giving access year-round. One user group Shasha would like to restrict is equestrians.

“I would like horses only on park roads. They have such an impact on our trails,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Shasha and his crew will return in the spring to see how things held up and if any changes need to be made. By that time some vegetation should be sprouting along the trail sides.

Dirt used in the project has been stored at the park since it was brought in from the 2007 Angora Fire. This same dirt pile was used for the detention ponds by South Tahoe High School.



A sturdy bridge crosses Angora Creek. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The redwood bridge across Angora Creek is much heftier than what was there. The old one was made out of 2 x 6 plywood by neighbors. Two years ago a horse fell through that necessitated State Parks to do something.

If there were no structure, horses and others would likely still cross the water. The bridge was built for safety reasons as well as environmental. Angora Creek is the largest tributary of the Upper Truckee River.

The bridge is 35-feet long, while the entire crossing is 85 feet. It was built to State Parks specifications. Individual parks don't have much say in how these things are constructed – same with the paths.

Calif. West Nile deaths highest in nearly a decade

By Rebecca Plevin, KPCC

While much of the nation has been focused on Ebola recently, hundreds of Californians have been contracting another virus: West Nile.

There have been 752 cases of West Nile Virus reported in

California so far this year. That's more than three times the average number of annual cases over the past five years.

California has recorded 27 West Nile-related deaths so far this year – about 3.5 percent of all cases. The state hasn't seen that many fatalities from the virus since 2004, when 29 people died of the disease.

El Dorado County has had to birds test positive for West Nile – both on the West Slope – but no people.

More info is available online.

Read the whole story

Ski industry fights perception of elitism

By Thomas Peipert, AP

In 2010, the price of walk-up, single-day lift ticket at Vail and Beaver Creek ski resorts topped \$100. Aspen quickly followed suit, and ticket prices at resorts across the country have consistently increased in the years since. The trend has raised a question that has dogged the ski industry for years: Is the sport becoming unaffordable for the middle class?

Industry leaders say that even though last-minute lift tickets at some resorts now exceed \$100, skiing has never been more affordable if you're savvy about discounts.

But despite the availability of deals, a report commissioned in August by the National Ski Areas Association found that skiing in the U.S. has increasingly become a sport for the

wealthy. The percentage of people who participate in snow sports with household incomes over \$100,000 has risen over the past eight seasons from 45 percent of ski area visitors in the 2006-07 season to 56 percent of visitors in the 2013-14 season, according to the report.

Meanwhile, those with household incomes under \$50,000 dropped from 30 percent of ski area visitors to 19 percent over the same period. Visitors who make between \$50,000 and \$99,999 remained steady over the years at about 25 percent.

“Snow sports participants continue to skew significantly more affluent than the general U.S. population,” according to the report, which was based on surveys of skiers and snowboarders at 87 U.S. resorts. The resorts surveyed hosted 31.9 million of the nation’s 56.5 million skier and snowboarder visits last winter.

David Becher, who helped write the report, said the drop in participation by people earning under \$50,000 may have been due to the recession, but “now that the economy is improving, we might see lower-income segments in the population having more confidence.” He also cited other possible explanations for a lack of participation at lower-income levels, including interests in other sports and lack of exposure to the sport among those who grew up in non-skiing families.

Michael Berry, president of the NSAA, said ski resorts are working to attract participants from all income brackets.

“The trend certainly over the past decade has been to make the price lower, in toto,” he said. Ways to save money include half-day access, skiing at smaller resorts, and discounts for kids, seniors and groups.

Evan Reece, co-founder and CEO of San Francisco-based Liftopia, an online marketplace for lift tickets, says buying early and booking multiple days also goes a long way in lowering the price of getting on the mountain.

“If customers buy in advance, they will be rewarded by doing so,” he said. “It’s very easy to understand. You wouldn’t wait until the last minute to buy an airline ticket.”

Reece, who helped start Liftopia in 2005, also recommends that skiers and snowboarders – especially beginners – look locally when choosing from one of the more than 450 resorts across the country.

“To give skiing a try, you don’t need to book a weeklong vacation to Colorado from New York. There are a lot of local ski areas where you can learn,” he said. “People will be surprised to find what is in their backyard. Sometimes the trendy spots, they’re awesome for a great reason. But there are some areas that will surprise you.”

And while large resorts like Vail, Breckenridge and Keystone offer varied terrain and more amenities, smaller resorts can provide their own charm, shorter lift lines, less crowded slopes and cheaper lift tickets.

CJ Hartland, sales manager for Monarch Mountain in southwest Colorado, says the resort’s owners have kept lift ticket prices down by offering group rates and free skiing to kids age 6 and under and to seniors 69 and over.

The owners “want people to learn and fall in love with the sport and not have to be wealthy to do it,” she said. Walk-up tickets at the 800-acre resort, which has 53 lift-served trails, are \$69; advance tickets run \$57.

At larger resorts, keeping skiing affordable has come down to an intense battle over season pass prices.

Until 2009, an unrestricted pass to Vail Resorts at Vail Mountain, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone cost \$1,900. Now with Vail’s Epic Pass, skiers and snowboarders have access to those four mountains, plus 18 more resorts for \$769.

“People rushed out to buy it because they thought we had made a mistake,” said Vail spokesman Russ Pecoraro. The pass could pay for itself in a week, depending on where and when you go.

The debate over pricing will likely continue, but industry leaders contend that a day of skiing and snowboarding is, well, priceless.

“There’s really no better value for a family,” said Pecoraro. “To get your family out there. To participate together. It’s the value you get from the experience and it’s not always about the price.”

**Bread & Broth carves up 25
years of Thanksgiving
memories with traditional
meal**



On Nov. 24 volunteers dish up more than 200 Thanksgiving dinners at Grace Hall in South Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

An aroma wafted outside, making the cold, hungry diners even more eager to get inside. This was no ordinary dinner they were waiting for.

A buzz filled the kitchen. Placemats were at each setting. Cans of whipping cream were at the ready to top the pumpkin pie. Nearly 50 volunteers helped pull off the annual Bread & Broth Thanksgiving dinner.

Thanksgiving dinner is always the busiest dinner for this nonprofit that is celebrating its 25th year of serving a weekly community meal to those on the South Shore. While mostly it's people in need who attend the Monday meal, it is open to anyone.

Most years more than 250 people line up outside Grace Hall in South Lake Tahoe for the traditional Thanksgiving dinner. This year was no different. Christmas Cheer cooked the Thanksgiving meal 25 years ago, but Bread & Broth soon took over because

they were better organized to do so.

“It actually used to be higher 20 years ago – 300-plus. The whole community part took in the meal, it was an event of the season, still is to a certain extent,” Diane Weidinger, who runs the program, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This year our Monday team will supply Second Serving with trays of the same dishes so people can enjoy another Thanksgiving meal on Friday.”

For Tonya Schmitt the helping was more than she could finish. She was taking the leftovers home.

“It reminds me of home; right down to the sweet potatoes with marshmallows,” Schmitt told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Like all the meals served at Bread & Broth, they are made from scratch by volunteer cooks. Monday’s meal consisted of turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes (with gravy), green beans, sweet potatoes, cranberries, green salad and dessert.

Jasmine Pereschica attended with her daughter and son. Like most kids, her daughter wanted dessert instead of the healthier items on her plate.

“You can tell someone put a lot of thought into it,” Pereschica said of the dinner. “The turkey is moist and not dry. The cranberries are really good.”

Stephan Moise, executive chef at Ridge Tahoe, and his culinary team make 10 gallons of gravy every year.

Students in Irene Kaelin’s fifth-grade class at Tahoe Valley Elementary School and kids from St. Theresa’s religious education class made the festive placemats.

Walmart donated reusable bags that the volunteers filled with groceries so those in need had more to eat as the week went on.



Each week bags of groceries are available.

A quarter-century tradition

When Bread & Broth started it was under the ministry of St. Theresa Church. It has become more than that, even though St. T's is still a big part of the overall concept.

Today, people from other churches and non-believers help.

"When they first started years ago, St. Theresa's Church supported the program with a second collection several times a year," Weidinger said.

Cash was never flush. The recession made things worse. Then the Adopt A Day of Nourishment program and partnership with the Food Bank of El Dorado County started. Those two changes have put the organization on stable ground.

The group also receives donations from grocery stores, businesses and individuals. It comes in the form of cash, food, bags for giveaways, and containers for leftovers.

"B&B is now giving back to the church with its recent – over the last two years – purchases of the following commercial equipment: stove, oven, freezer, refrigerator, warming oven, 50-gallon water heater, prep island, industrial meat slicer and vacuum cleaner. We now pay a percentage of the utility

bills for Grace Hall as well as refuse and repair costs," Weidinger said.



John Mauriello is a regular cook at B&B.

Expanding food offerings

People have the opportunity to eat at Lake Tahoe Presbyterian Church on Fridays. That program is called Second Serving.

Local restaurants provide 5 gallons of soup.

Volunteer cooks then whip up a sandwich or pasta dish to complement the soup.

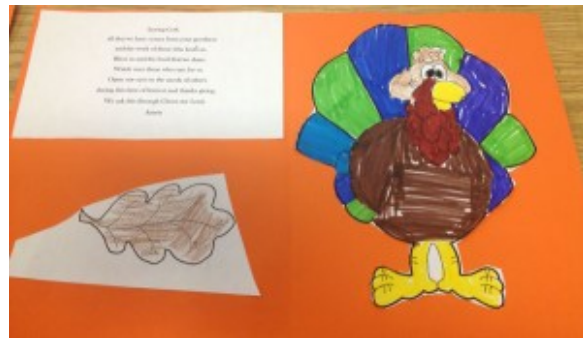
The Presbyterian church was part of the original Bread & Broth team 25 years ago. Founding member Susan Baker is still involved as a Second Serving coordinator. Wendy David, one of the Bread & Broth cooks, has also been around since the beginning.

It takes a dedicated crew to pull off these meals each week. About 100 volunteers work for Bread & Broth, and another 25 for Second Serving.

A 17-person advisory board oversees the big picture. Nine

committees make sure the nuts and bolts get taken care of.

“Unlike 25 years ago we have 20 cooks, plus seven from Second Serving, who cook once a week, once a month,” Weidinger said. “Years ago they had two cooks for each of the two days a week they served (Tuesday and Thursday), those four cooks would be in the kitchen every week. In the 1990s they had approximately 20 volunteers and eight board members.”



Placemats are from children.

No ordinary meals

This is no simple fare being dished up each week.

While the cooks have license to be creative, they are also somewhat limited by what is in the pantry and cooler. They take inventory of what's available a few days beforehand and lay out the protein they want to use.

“They arrive Monday morning to access what products were picked up from the grocery stores a few days earlier and then hope that Monday’s donations from other grocery stores will supplement the meal. They are making decisions on what to make and serve 3½ hours before the doors open at 4pm,” Weidinger explained. “If the donations are weak, they survey the canned products in the pantry and come up with a dish. Most cooks prepare a complete meal – protein, starch, at least one vegetable, salad – that is if greens were donated, otherwise canned fruit salad – hot garlic bread or rolls.”

The goal is to not purchase anything extra. Sometimes it's necessary – like cilantro for a Mexican dish.

Dessert is usually donated by Raley's or Safeway.

It wasn't always this good. Meals used to be simpler.

"We currently serve meals that would be considered gourmet compared to the hotdogs, meatloaf and casseroles cooked in the early '90s. We pride ourselves on serving a meal that our guests might order in a restaurant if they could afford it; chicken picatta with a lemon caper mushroom sauce, roasted root vegetables with a Moroccan apricot sauce (nothing was purchased for these sauces, it was all in the pantry), Ratatouille using fresh farmers market vegetables, mashed potatoes using fresh spuds, spice rubbed lamb, pizza from scratch – even the dough, beef stroganoff, shredded chicken enchiladas, fruit salad with summer ripe berries, salmon and pork shoulder."

Going forward

Weidinger would like Bread & Broth to establish a scholarship fund for people to attend Lake Tahoe Community College's culinary program.

"I believe that education is one of the keys that open doors of opportunity. Hard work and good ethics are two other keys, together with some luck and good fortune people from all social and economic backgrounds can have fulfilling careers," she said.

Providing meals more days of the week is a desire by some.

And while it may not seem like a big deal, getting a washer and dryer on site is a goal. This is because as it is today all the dirty linens – and there are many with all the aprons, wash rags, potholders and other items – have to be washed at someone's house.

Weidinger doesn't believe the need for these types of food programs will go away.

"As long as people are underemployed, jobless and homeless, there will be a need. No one should have food insecurities," she said. "The people we feed are our neighbors; we can't let them go hungry when most of us are enjoying three meals a day."