

Sandoval poised for the national stage

By Kyle Roerink, Las Vegas Sun

The Paradise Park Barber Shop sits in a strip mall still gripped by the recession. It's a suburban relic anchored by a Kmart, Family Dollar and coin laundry. Twelve storefronts in the plaza are empty. The barbershop is not the kind of place where you'd expect to find the CEO of a state paying for a trim. But every few weeks, a navy blue SUV pulls into the parking lot, and Gov. Brian Sandoval steps out.

At public appearances and in campaign ads, Sandoval looks like a man whose haircuts are fashioned by stylists. But the governor waits his turn for a \$14 trim surrounded by trophy buck mounts and bobblehead dolls in a strip mall 30 miles from the Capitol.



Gov. Brian Sandoval is golden in the Silver State.
Photo/LTN

When Sandoval walked in Oct. 16, he was met with handshakes and fawning. A customer who had been alerted the governor was coming handed Sandoval a grocery bag full of venison steaks. A picture of Sandoval and a local Boy Scout troop hangs on the wall. A collegiate pennant from Sandoval's son's college also has a coveted spot. No one talks politics. Why would they?

Sandoval's re-election campaign came without the negative ads, debates and vitriol seen in other statewide races. Despite being vulnerable on a number of fronts – education and health care among them – Sandoval didn't draw a single serious challenger. Even Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev, the architect of the state's Democratic machine, couldn't persuade anyone to step forward.

So why is a governor with an imperfect record being treated as untouchable? The answer lies partly in Sandoval's connections to the state's tight power structure and partly because of his knack to keep headlines positive while maintaining a clean-cut image that goes beyond his regularly trimmed hair.

Read the whole story

Calif. voter turnout may be less than 50%

By Josh Richman and Julia Prodis Sulek, Inside Bay Area

California has tried to make casting a ballot as easy as ordering a pizza online.

We've scooped up potential voters when they come to the DMV to renew their driver's licenses. We've let Californians register to vote on smartphone apps. We've set up voting booths at city halls around the state weeks before Election Day. We've sent registered voters mail-in ballots every election.

But while 17.8 million Californians are now registered, more than for any other gubernatorial general election in the state's history, voting experts project that Tuesday's could

be the first general election in which turnout falls below 50 percent. That's a far cry from the record 80 percent that cast ballots in 1958, when Democrat Pat Brown beat the GOP's William Knowland in a Republican-leaning state.

Yeah, this election has mostly been a snoozer – mostly because Pat Brown's son, Jerry, is expected to win a fourth term in a landslide. But the problem is bigger than one election. With the exception of slightly better turnouts in the last few general elections, the Golden State's voter participation has been slowly declining for half a century.

One big reason is the state's sweeping demographic changes. Simply put: White Californians tend to vote a lot more than other Californians. Although whites now make up only 39 percent of the state's population, they're 57 percent of voters who show up.

In the next quarter century, 8.3 million more Californians will become eligible to vote, 8 million of whom will be people of color. So it will be a tougher task getting people to the polls, unless attitudes toward voting change.

Read the whole story

Nevada's highest peak often overlooked



Boundary Peak at 13,140 feet
is Nevada's highest point.
Photo/Michelle Slaton/U.S.
Forest Service

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

If beauty played a role in deciding Nevada's highest point, Wheeler Peak, crown jewel of Great Basin National Park at the eastern edge of the state, would be the winner hands down.

Instead, geography and topography have conspired to give us Boundary Peak on the state's opposite border – a nondescript, scree-covered bump at the end of California that rises, nevertheless, about 77 feet higher than picturesque Wheeler.

By some estimates, 13,140-foot Boundary is barely even a peak. A website for climbers called summitpost.org describes it as “part of a twin peak with Montgomery Peak,” which is 301 feet higher and just across the border in California. If you keep going south from there, you'll come to even taller Mount Dubois (13,559) and taller still White Mountain Peak (14,246), also completely in California.

“Boundary Peak is at the Northern end of the White Mountains,” writes summitpost.org, “and would not be climbed much except for the fact it is the highest point in Nevada, although it is not the highest peak in the area.”

Read the whole story

Heller quietly steps out of Reid's shadow

By Amber Phillips, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON – Standing on the royal blue carpet of the U.S. Senate chamber in cowboy boots, Republican Sen. Dean Heller looks every bit the Washington power broker as he swaps jokes and slaps backs with the most influential people in the city.

Across the chamber, in a scene that plays out daily, Nevada's senior Sen. Harry Reid hunches over a desk with fellow Democrats. The Senate majority leader, in a plain gray suit, mutters out the side of his mouth about the vote of the day.



Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., wants to be a bigger player on the national stage.
Photo/LTN

Heller and Reid never make eye contact on the Senate floor. But they could soon be staring each other dead on. Heller, an ambitious yet relatively anonymous Washington lawmaker, is quietly putting together a campaign to make his own name in this town, dethrone Reid and become the state's leader on Capitol Hill.

This fall, Heller worked behind the scenes to raise money for key Republicans seeking to win or hold Senate seats. His goal is to cash in on an unpopular Democratic president and, to a lesser extent, an unpopular Reid, to help his party take over the Senate.

Heller will find out Tuesday if he succeeded. "I told my staff there's a path I want to go down," said Heller, 54. "One of those steps is being in the majority."

Heller's political maneuvering comes after he spent two years on policy work to aid the unemployed, help veterans and reduce federal spending. That work has put Heller on Democrats' shortlist to co-sponsor bipartisan bills.

The real Nevada battle, though, will be born in 2016.

The Silver State will be a swing state in a wide open presidential election, and Reid, 74, is expected to run for his sixth term. With those races on the horizon, Heller is lobbying now to become Senate Republicans' top campaign operative. It would be an extraordinary feat for a rookie senator. If he wins the job, his No. 1 target will be none other than Harry Reid.

"He spent \$12 million against me in my last campaign," Heller said in a September interview, referring to Reid's behind-the-scenes meddling in Heller's 2012 Senate race. "And I'll probably return the favor."

The questions for Heller in the next two years: Can the unknown freshman senator climb the ranks of an increasingly conservative Republican party? And can he do it while maintaining a relationship with the still-influential Reid and with Nevadans who are becoming increasingly centrist?

Read the whole story

\$24 mil. overhaul of MontBleu casino-hotel



Suites at MontBleu are more contemporary.
Photos/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Even though MontBleu has been around for more than nine years, remnants of when the hotel-casino was Caesars Tahoe still exist. But those are all about to disappear with a \$24 million remodel of the Stateline property.

“The rooms have not been touched since the Caesars days. It was the mid- to late-’90s since anyone did anything to the rooms. Some of the rooms have Caesars’ logos in them,” General Manager Steve Ditchkus told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Each of the 401 rooms, plus the 36 suites, is practically being gutted. A Tahoe-esque feel is being incorporated with

all of the wood that is being used, along with neutral colors.

For a society that needs to be plugged in even on vacation, the rooms will be wired with multiple outlets.

Flat screen TVs are being added. The headboards, nightstands and other furniture are new.

Bathrooms are also getting a much-needed overhaul, with such improvements as walk-in showers. New vanities and fixtures are coming.

Mountain modern is the overall theme.



Gone are all references to Caesars Tahoe.

Ditchkus said the price of rooms will go up, but how much has not been decided. That's one of the things he plans to discuss with his bosses when he's in Las Vegas this week.

The remodel is designed to cater to what Ditchkus calls their demographic – “the avid gambler from the Bay Area.” This is why the 45,000-square-foot casino floor and showroom are also getting a face-lift.

While carpet was laid when the property changed hands, it is time to be replaced. Ditchkus calls the new carpet, which is in, “elegant”.

Several televisions will be added to the box office.

The showroom – which has Caesars pillars – will get new carpet and tables. The bars are going to be revamped so they are easier to access.

“It will have a new look and a new feel,” Ditchkus said. The showroom should be done by Christmas.

The sports book is going to move to the Zone Bar side, with the bar being redone. Outside upgrades are also in the works, including painting the building, redoing the parking lot and porte cochere.

MontBleu, while it has had outdoor concerts in recent summers, is staying away from that concept and instead is letting Harveys and the future Hard Rock capture that market. Outdoor festivals like this year’s craft beer and crawfish events are what MontBleu plans to do more of.

No changes are planned for the restaurants.

MontBleu is an Edgewood Companies property. The lease with Las Vegas-based Tropicana Entertainment, which operates the hotel-casino, expires in 2028. Ditchkus said it is too soon to know what will happen when that date arrives, but added negotiations are always ongoing with the landlords.

Calif. leads nation in cycling traffic deaths

By Jerry Hirsch, Los Angeles Times

If you are going to be killed by a car while riding a bicycle, there’s a good chance you are male, older than 20 and living in California or Florida.

That's the finding of a report issued Monday by the Governors Highway Safety Association that also noted that between 2010 and 2012, U.S. bicyclist deaths increased by 16 percent.

California, with 338 cyclists killed in collisions with motor vehicles, and Florida, with 329, had the highest totals during that period, the report said.

They also had the largest increases in annual cyclist traffic fatalities from 2010 to 2012. Florida's deaths rose by 37 to 120 in 2012 while cyclist traffic fatalities in California rose by 23 to 123. California had the most bicyclists killed of any state in 2012.

Nationally, cyclist traffic deaths jumped from 621 in 2010 to 680 in 2011 and 722 in 2012. The 16 percent increase was far greater than other motor vehicle fatalities, which rose by just 1 percent during this same time period.

Read the whole story

Officials: Water is going to cost more in Calif.

By Sharon Bernstein, Reuters

Californians face higher water prices and permanent conservation measures amid drought, global warming and population growth in a state that has long struggled to satisfy urban and agricultural needs, the administration of Governor Jerry Brown said Thursday.

It will take up to \$500 billion to improve the state's water infrastructure to improve supplies, reduce flood risk and

shore up the fragile ecosystems that provide water for people, farms and wildlife, the state's top natural resources officials said in a long-awaited update to California's water plan.

"Water is going to cost more for Californians in the future," said Mark Cowin, director of the state department of water resources, in a conference call with reporters on Thursday. "That's a reality we're all going to have to get used to."

But the state has long struggled to meet the water needs of thirsty cities and its mammoth agricultural sector, prompting a century of political fights between the wetter north and the drier south.

Read the whole story

Wild Sonoma Coast soothes the soul



It's all about the ocean when staying at the Timber Cove Inn. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

JENNER – You know you've encountered something unique and untamed upon walking through the lobby with its high-vaulted ceilings and turning right to gaze beyond the expansive setting to the back patio overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Or, maybe it hits you before you even arrive at the Timber Cove Inn. Driving the wild and scenic Sonoma Coast is transformative in itself. Cows wander freely on Highway 1 north of Jenner, mingling with deer in a perfect harmony between ocean and land.

Harmony is just what a soul gets at this iconic, 49-room rustic resort. The half century-old inn melds being active and doing nothing.

After settling in on one recent fall Wednesday evening to a cocktail, French fries and the National League pennant champs San Francisco Giants on the television in the airy, redwood Sequoia Lounge in front of the large, stone fireplace, Kae and I chose the latter for our first-day itinerary. Doing very little hit the spot.



The lounge area at the inn is relaxing.

In a daze while waiting for the coffee to brew in the room, I stood almost motionless on the patio of the ocean view room as AJ jumped down a few feet to conduct her morning ritual. So many hotels come equipped with borders and railings. The openness was a nice change. No obstacles to inhibit the 180-degree view of the ocean. It was like no other I've had before.

And it's one thing to see this massive body of water. Waking up to the sounds of the pounding surf are quite another thing. The rhythm of the waves sets the stage for the entire stay.

We walked with AJ over the 26 acres of the grounds on the bluffs overlooking the Pacific. There was no bad view on the clearly marked trails divided between the North Coast and the South Coast trails – with Lover's Point and Timber Cove Point jutting out at the midpoint. Waves crashed in over the rocky coastline.

Visible from most of the property is the Bufano Obelisk. The 93-foot sculpture made of tile, concrete and redwood was created by Italian artist Benjamin Bufano as a symbol of world peace.

Peacefulness is the general theme here. Upon each bend in the trail, we often stopped at the benches staged just for spending time to take it all in. Only the sunbathing seals

appeared to be lazier than us. The resort gets major points for having several areas to sit and just be. What's striking at the resort is the notion that it's incredibly quiet.

To partake in one of our favorite places to sit, I grabbed a bottle of wine because this is after all Sonoma County – the ultimate Wine Country. We soon learned the Timber Cove Inn's outside fire pit set up just outside the restaurant patio is a big hit. Wednesday night we had checked it out with the provided lantern in the room. Nice touch. On Thursday, wine and reading – and Bananagrams – topped the agenda.

For those who didn't bring their own games, the inn built a bocce ball court off to the side.

Eat, drink and be merry



Alexander's restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Suggested is dinner at the inn's Alexander's restaurant. For starters, the roasted red and yellow beets in the salad melted in my mouth, and the Ricotta cheese provided a perfect accent. And, we loved the sourdough bread.

The Alexander Valley merlot paired well with Kae's polenta lasagna, which looked as good as it tasted. The circle of marinara sauce on the plate was ample enough for every bite of

the concoction. The sauce had a definite homemade flavor.

My seafood pasta was more about the catfish, prawns, salmon and halibut than the noodles – which can be a rarity. The dish was tasty and filling. The view at sunset next to the floor-to-ceiling window was stunning.

After dinner, we hit the bar again for the Giants game and formed a kinship with a small community that turned up there in the evening – with couples from Reno to Rohnert Park enjoying the cushy sofas and fireplace. Bands play there on the weekends.

A sense of adventure beckons



An otter along the Russian River.

With the Timber Cove Inn situated 13 miles north of Jenner, the Russian River represents a good outlet for recreation. We rented a canoe for \$60 that we could have had for four hours from Watertreks' kiosk in downtown Jenner on Friday. I appreciate the worker's tips such as the nature of the currents. With AJ in the middle compartment, we paddled the calm and serene estuary that marks the mouth of the river. It's currently closed off at the ocean by sand. On the ocean side that we walked to is where seals bob their heads in the surf when they're not lounging on the beach. We also spotted a river otter near the island dividing the north and south riverfronts.

The canoe trip was a blend of both the natural world and an architectural tour marking a small civilization of gutsy river inhabitants who are known to rebuild when the river floods because they love the environment so much.

I can see why.



AJ isn't sure what to make of the ocean waves.

The Sonoma Coast doles out a rugged yet relaxed type of lifestyle.

Eating up the experience

For an overcast day, the excursion required a quick hot meal – so we opted for soup at the Jenner Inn Café. My salmon chowder was as close to local ingredients as one could have it. I heard the very helpful clerk tell another customer the salmon is pulled from the ocean in the front yard and grilled in the restaurant's back yard. Kae's squash soup was true warmth with flavor. Fresh French fries topped off the meal, with an interesting ginger lemonade concoction mixed in the café.

The sign out front said it all: "Eat, rest, love."

Loving Sonoma County is a state of mind I may never lose.

We quickly turned off on the way back to the inn with wine in mind, yet again. The Fort Ross Vineyard named after the Russian military fort called out to us, so we climbed the very

steep grade that led us high on the bluff overlooking the ocean. Think Chardonnay and the ever-so temperamental Pinot Noir that thrives in the fog.



This view never gets old.

With the chill of the weather again, we soon headed to the warmth of our room and cranked up the gas stove awaiting the highlight of the day – massages by Karma Tales’ Hannah. (Note of recommendation: set up the head of the table near the slider with the door cracked open to hear a hint of wave action with the new age music.)

It’s beyond relaxing.

(Another note: the menu for room service will not fully match that of the Website, so keep that in mind when ordering in.)

On the prowl for fungi and fun

The Sonoma Coast can be a lush playground where the mushrooms dance – especially when it rains. So after a few light storms giving the coast a hint of winter, off we went with the Sonoma County Mycological Association on the next morning. The experience was like no other.



More than 70 kinds of mushrooms were discovered on the foray.

We traversed up and down hills through the dense wilderness of the 6,000-acre Salt Point State Park at Woodside Campground searching for mushrooms like pioneers searching for game. SOMA, the association, hosts these forays throughout the fall and winter. Plus, the group throws a potluck lunch with many offerings afterward.

From food to wine

The Fort Ross Harvest Festival capped off the afternoon with tasting from a dozen local wineries, including the samplings from an artisan cheese maker from Freestone. It was a picture perfect day – filled with activities commemorating the park and the vineyards that surround it.

The event celebrates the bounty of the Sonoma coast as well as the culture of the historic park set over the bluffs one mile south of Timber Cove.

With unparalleled views all its own, the Timber Cove Inn hosted its year-long celebration called “50 and fab.” The resort is old and has a slight weathered look to it to match

its age, but it also has undergone a renovation of about a quarter of its rooms – mostly the forest view variety.

We were in an ocean view room, equipped for a disabled person with the open shower and plenty of space. In the corner of the room is a huge boulder that spills out onto the sidewalk.

The hot tubs have been taken out in the interest of California's drought.

According to General Manager Sharon Lynn, Sonoma County wants to see a master plan for the hotel before further upgrades are made.



Timber Cove Inn – the view from the room.

Don't count on high-end upscale. But with free WiFi and other standard amenities like a small gym, the rooms serve their purpose. It's really all about the view that makes this place special.

Oh, and don't expect cell service. It's non-existent on a huge swath of this coastline. Lynn said there's talk of a tower going in nearby.

"I tell people to come here to unplug," she said. "It is what it is, with all its quirkiness."

Notes:

- Timber Cove Inn is located at 21780 North Coast Highway 1, Jenner.
 - Contact: 707.847.3231 or online.
 - Rooms start at \$229 a night. Low season runs from January to March.
 - Watertreks Jenner: 707.865.2249.
 - Fort Ross Vineyard and Tasting Room: 15725 Meyers Grade Road, Jenner.
 - Sonoma County Mycological Association.
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Thousands help Nevada turn 150



Nevada Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, who is from Stateline, and his family. Photos/Susan Wood

Thousands of people lined the streets of Carson City to watch the Nevada Day Parade on Nov. 1.

This was no ordinary parade. It was the culmination of a year's worth of partying for the Silver State, which turned 150 on Oct. 31.

Much of its history was represented in floats – including the Virginia City contingent dressed in Old West garb and firing off guns.

Plenty of politicians – current, soon to be termed out and wannabes marched along.

The day started with drizzle and cold temps, but that did not dampen the enthusiasm of those in the parade or those watching.

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– Lake Tahoe News staff report

EDC leader cleans out her office

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County CAO Terri Daly this week moved all of her personal belongings out of her office.

Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Norma Santiago on

Saturday morning was asked what this means.

"I'm not going to tell you. I'll talk to you later. By," Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News* before hanging up abruptly.



Terri Daly

Daly and Santiago are friends, with Santiago always coming to her defense.

But Daly has come under fire for months base on her handling of financial and contractual dealings within the county. She is responsible for taking a budget surplus and turning it into a \$20 million deficit.

Daly earlier this year had a consultant look into how things were functioning. It came out that her office was one of the most dysfunctional. The El Dorado County Grand Jury in its report this year also called the county dysfunctional.

The board on its agendas has an ongoing item of "exposure to litigation" to be able to talk about Daly and Assistant CAO Kim Kerr, a source told *Lake Tahoe News*. But this could be a violation of the Brown Act because more of a description is required. Plus, any action taken in closed session must be reported out.

County Counsel Robyn Drivon when asked if Daly was fired, said, "No. There are rumors aplenty." She would not, though, explain why Daly cleaned out her office, or if she quit.

If the board had fired Daly, she would have only gotten paid for three months. She has had a rolling three-month contract.

On Tuesday, county workers saw Kerr helping Daly carry boxes of personal items out of the building.

With Daly evidently gone, this would leave Kerr in charge. Her pedigree is no better than Daly's. This column by Larry Weitzman spells out Kerr's past.