

Gaming industry likely to keep expanding

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

In the not-too-distant past, Nevada and New Jersey were the only states with casinos.

Now, 39 states have some form of casino gambling – and the industry's presence continues to evolve this year.

And as Las Vegas' major gaming companies are considering further domestic growth, states such as Massachusetts, New Jersey and California are themselves debating the expansion – or retraction – of gambling.

At issue is a question as old as the gaming industry: morality versus money.

This year, that debate is playing out most prominently in Massachusetts, where next month voters will determine the outcome of a ballot measure that would ban casinos in the state.

With similar arguments underway elsewhere, too, it's no surprise that this year the American Gaming Association launched a "Get to Know Gaming" campaign aimed at promoting the industry's impact on communities.

The trade association is trying to boost the industry's public perception by drawing attention to things like its \$240 billion economic impact, which is touted in a recent study released by the AGA.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Paradise Park board struggles with professionalism, how to get anything done



Tahoe Paradise Park's internal workings are becoming a bit dysfunctional. Photos/LTN file

By Jessie Marchesseau

MEYERS – Thirty-five community members were in attendance at the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District board meeting on Thursday night, but by the time the meeting adjourned three and a half hours later only a few remained.

The larger than usual turnout may have been the result of some topics currently circulating through the community. One woman

said she was there because of a notice she found on her door which said the park was closing. Someone else was concerned about what the new Assembly Bill 2762 would mean for the TPRID. Another person voiced concern over rumors that the county was taking over the park.

The board members assured attendees the park is not in danger of closing. Only one board member had even heard of AB2762 with no answers as to what it meant for the future of the district. And Norma Santiago, El Dorado County supervisor and board member, denied any plans for El Dorado County to take over the park.

"The county does not want this park," she said, "this is a community park, this is your park."

However, she did reveal that the governance committee has considered the possibility of asking El Dorado County for administrative support. This is still at the committee level and has not been discussed by the TPRID board. However, the committee reported there is a possibility the county could help with administrative tasks such as invoicing, insurance policies, legal services, personnel policies and so on for a year or so until things get back on track, possibly at no cost to the RID.

Currently, all administrative duties in addition to maintenance are handled by Steve Dunn, the park manager who lives on site. All the board members as well as Dunn agreed this was too much for one person to handle, but a previous attempt to hire a part-time administrative person was unsuccessful.

In his first meeting as a board member, Peter Nelligan voiced his concern about the complete lack of any sort of bylaws or policies and procedures for the RID. In its current operational and administrative state, Nelligan said he believes the park will not be able to sustain itself for more

than a few years.

Nelligan and Victor Babbitt are new to the board this year and appear anxious for change.

"We have a park, we have assets, we have a budget, we have projects that need to get done," Babbitt said Oct. 23.

He reviewed the short-term priority projects for the park, including painting the gate, cleaning up the planter boxes at the entrance, and restraining the recreation center and the residence among a numerous other maintenance items. Some of the projects have already been completed; others are still in the planning process.



Park users will be using porta potties indefinitely.

One of the larger projects in the works over the summer was installing a restroom at the south end of the park. The project was approved by the county, but then TRPA shot it down, according to those at the meeting. However, after the meeting, TRPA told *Lake Tahoe News* that no application to build the bathroom was ever filed. With the restroom off the table, the board now has to find other projects on which to spend their grant money before the March deadline. Without a qualifying project, the RID could face losing a big chunk of the \$60,000 grant.

Board members bickered amongst themselves throughout the evening, with board Chairperson Judy Clot expressing the most disdain about being excluded from budget discussions and individual committees not keeping her in the loop. More than once attendees took the floor to ask members to take their arguing elsewhere.

Board and community members alike expressed concerns about adhering to the Brown Act which outlines requirements for open meetings, public input and accessible information. Clot said she has received several complaints recently. The fact that the only place meetings are consistently announced is on the park bulletin board and the only place one can get meeting minutes is by going to the park and asking Dunn to make them a copy, and that is assuming he has had time to transcribe the audio recording, suggests there is room for improvement. The board agreed to look into getting further Brown Act training from the county.

The meeting concluded with Babbitt making a motion to schedule a special meeting before the regularly scheduled meeting in January. He said there was too much to be done for them to take the next three months off. His suggestion was met with objections and scowls from some of the others. But in the end, a special meeting was tentatively scheduled for Dec. 11. An announcement will be posted on the park bulletin board at least 24 hours in advance.

Drought-stressed trees producing better fruit

By Sasha Khokha, KQED-TV

California's severe drought is putting stress on everyone these days: the residents whose wells are running dry; the farmers forced to experiment with growing their produce with much less water; and of course, the thirsty fruits and vegetables themselves.

But preliminary research suggests the dryness isn't hurting the produce's nutritional value, and with a few added minerals may even boost it.

That's the tantalizing concept Tiziana Centofanti has been studying at the U.S. Department of Agriculture lab in Parlier, a sprawling campus of experimental farmland about half an hour south of Fresno.

Centofanti is a research scientist affiliated with the Center for Irrigation Technology at Fresno State. One of the questions she's asking is how fruit trees react to drought, compared to fruit from trees that get plenty of water.

Read the whole story

Climate change scaring insurance companies

By Tim McDonnell, Mother Jones

In the months after Hurricane Sandy, insurance companies spooked by rising seas dropped coastal policies in droves.

That could become an increasingly common story, according to the largest-ever survey of how insurance companies are dealing with climate change, released Wednesday. Global warming is increasing the risk of damage to lives and property from

natural disasters beyond what many insurers are willing to shoulder. And most insurance companies aren't taking adequate steps to change that trend, the survey found. That's a problem even if you don't live by the coast: When private insurers back out, the government is left to pick up much of the damage costs; already, the federal flood insurance program is one of the nation's largest fiscal liabilities.

Ceres, an environmental nonprofit, evaluated the climate risk management policies of 330 large insurance companies operating in the United States. The results are worrying. Only nine companies, 3 percent of the total, earned the highest ranking.

The insurers that scored highly on the survey (including several of the world's biggest, such as Munich Re, Swiss Re, and Prudential) were those that have adopted a broad range of climate-conscious products and services, such as rate pricing plans that account for potential climate impacts like storms and fires. Some insurers are also investing in high-end climate modeling software to better understand where their risks really are. Others offer environmentally friendly plans like mileage-based car insurance and encourage their customers to rebuild damaged homes using green technologies. And some insurance companies are making significant efforts to monitor and reduce their own carbon footprint.

However, the report finds that one major way insurance companies are adjusting to climate change is by not insuring properties that are threatened by it, said Washington State Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler, a lead author of the report.

Read the whole story

EDC wants vacation rentals to be good neighbors



C.L. Raffety, El Dorado County tax collector, leads a meeting Oct. 23 about vacation rentals.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Vacation rentals aren't going anywhere, so El Dorado County officials want to find a way for neighbors to get along with these temporary guests.

C.L. Raffety, the county treasurer-tax collector, hosted a meeting in South Lake Tahoe on Oct. 23 for people who manage vacation rentals or own them. Her department oversees vacation rentals throughout the county.

"We want to work to prevent violations," Raffety told the group. "They have a right to rent their home, but neighbors also have rights. Everyone has rights that need to be respected."

The county has devised the Good Neighbor Program. A trifold brochure has been created with the intent that it be handed out to all renters. It touts how to be a good neighbor by

following noise, parking, garbage, pet, and occupancy regulations.

It says, "Renters please keep in mind that you may be cited or fined or evicted for creating a noise disturbance or violating any of the provision of the county vacation home rental ordinance chapter 5.56. Neighbors are provided contact numbers and should an occasion arise they are encouraged to report disturbances. Your permanent neighbors have a right to peace and repose and this must be respected at all times of the day but especially into the evening hours."

The goal of the whole program is to reduce the number of complaints.

"It starts with VHR (vacation home rental) owners taking the responsibility to communicate with their VHR neighbors in a diplomatic outreach effort to prevent incidents that lead to complaints," reads a letter the county sent to owners. "The outreach includes distributing to the permanent residents in the vacation home rental neighborhood, a brochure with your local contact person's phone number."

Every vacation rental has to have a person who can be at the property within an hour – no matter the time of day or weather conditions. That person, the owner or property managers are being encouraged by county reps to walk the neighborhoods to get to know the permanent residents before there is an issue.

There are about 700 permitted vacation rentals in the unincorporated area of the Lake Tahoe Basin of El Dorado County. All are supposed to be permitted. County officials at the meeting said they regularly peruse vacation rental websites to check addresses to see if they have a permit.

Those without permits are also not paying transient occupancy tax – which is another issue.

People have 10 days to get into compliance before a fine would

be levied. County officials said only once has someone not complied. The county does not mandate owners put their permit number on any website advertising the property.

South Lake Tahoe, however, does have that rule in its ordinance.

Several representatives from property management firms urged Raffety to get the Board of Supervisors to make that change to the county ordinance. She said she would see what she could do.

Enforcement of rules in the ordinance is an ongoing battle.

"They hired two code enforcement officers for the community development agency. They are so busy with health and welfare issues," Raffety said. "They don't do vacation rentals."

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies can enforce some aspects of the ordinance, but for a citation to be issued the reporting party needs to sign a complaint. That has been a sticking point with some people because they don't want their name to be known. Property managers asked Raffety to coordinate a meeting with the higher ups in the sheriff's department to discuss how things might be able to work better in the field.

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Notes:

- Complaints about vacation rentals may be made to the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office at 530.573.3000 or to Raffety's office at 530.621.5800.
- South Lake Tahoe will be revisiting its vacation rental ordinance early next year.

Plastics industry spends big to reverse Calif. bag ban

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

The clash over California's newly passed ban on single-use plastic bags has moved from the Legislature to the streets as the national plastics industry has donated more than \$1 million for a campaign to undo or delay the law.

Moments after Gov. Jerry Brown announced signing Senate Bill 270 in September, a plastic industry group that vociferously fought the legislation declared its intention to launch a referendum campaign. If proponents secure enough signatures by the end of December, the measure would be placed on the 2016 ballot, suspending the law's implementation until then.

Money has begun pouring in. A new filing shows plastics companies contributing \$1.2 million toward the referendum campaign. All but \$50,000 came from companies based outside of California, illustrating the fight's national dimensions.

Even if the referendum ultimately fails, bag manufacturers would buy themselves a significant reprieve if the signature-gathering campaign succeeds. Large stores are poised to cease offering plastic bags by this summer, with smaller stores to follow by July 2016. Qualifying a referendum that pushes those dates back until after the November 2016 election could be worth a multimillion-dollar price tag of collecting signatures.

Read the whole story

Cubs making progress at LTWC



Gardner is Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care's newest cub.
Photos/Provided

By Tom Millham

Briefly we were 12.

Last Friday, California Department of Fish and Wildlife brought us the Gardner Mountain bear cub we assisted in trapping on Oct. 9. Yes, we still have Cinder (more on her later) and we still have the cubs in the bear cage (also later), but, now, we have Gardner (as we are calling him).

For those of you not familiar with Tahoe's South Shore, Gardner Mountain is the northwest corner of the South Tahoe Y,

where South Tahoe High is located. On Oct. 4, Gardner's mother was hit and killed by a car on Highway 89 across the street from the Cantina. Gardner was up a tree, directly adjacent to where his dead mom was laying.

Over the next five days, LTWC received many calls telling us Gardner was in their area. But he was moving from street to street and from the west side of Highway 89 to the east side of Highway 89.

On Oct. 16, I went on all three local radio stations pleading for help from the residents and workers in the Y area that if they saw Gardner to please call LTWC and let us know where he was.

We had spoken with CDF&W and they were sending a biologist up with a trap to get Gardner and help him.

It worked.

We got a call from 13th Street telling us that Gardner was right across the street from Anderson's Bike Rental. I got there within 10 minutes and found Gardner within another 15 minutes. He had already crossed Highway 89 to the west side. When I saw him he was at the base of a big pine tree and I "convinced" him that his best place was up the tree. He conveniently did as I requested and I awaited the arrival of CDF&W.

They brought two cages and loaded them with all kinds of yummy food. It didn't take his nose long to get the scent of that good, scrumptious food and, shortly he was in the trap chowing down. CDF&W took Gardner to their Region 2 headquarters in Rancho Cordova and kept him there until Oct. 17, at which point they brought him up to LTWC so we can rehab him with the other bears.

So, like I said, that made for 12 cubs at our center. However, that didn't last long. They came up here Oct. 22 to get the

three cubs that came from Paradise (just east of Chico) and will be releasing them in the foothills nearby.

So, almost as quickly as we got cub No. 12, we are down to nine. Eight are in the bear cage and, of course, Cinder, who is in the bobcat cage.



Cinder

Here is some good news for you regarding where we are at with Cinder. Kevin Willitts was here Oct. 9 to examine her paws. He had not seen her since Sept. 30 and at that time he decided to put her into her cage without any bandages on her paws. This was the first time since Aug. 3 that she was without bandages. On Sept 30 he told us to watch and see if she does any excessive licking or if we see any small pools of blood. On Oct. 9, he saw nothing to change his mind and decided to let that good Tahoe air get to her paws and scheduled his next visit for two weeks.

That is indeed great news. In addition, he said that we could go ahead and start preparing to transport her back to Washington around the middle to late November so she can complete her rehab closer to where she will eventually be released. Yes, she will be released sometime next year. He wants her to spend the winter in the same area she came from and then can be released either in the winter or spring next

year near the Methow Valley.

I have contacted the Washington Fish and Wildlife biologist, Rich Beausoleil, who will coordinate the exact location she will spend the rest of her time in rehab. It sounds like Beausoleil wants us to take Cinder to Sally Maughan's Idaho Black Bear Rehabilitation Center in Garden City, Idaho, just outside of Boise. When Cinder was examined Oct. 9 she weighed in at a very healthy 80.8 pounds, more than double her weight when she arrived at LTWC on Aug. 4.

Tom Millham is co-founder and secretary-treasurer of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.

Poverty, hunger near epidemic in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – People in South Lake Tahoe are not only hungry, but they don't know where their next meal is going to come from. That is called food insecurity. And it's a growing problem here.

Poverty, of which hunger and food insecurity are byproducts, is such a concern that a survey was recently conducted by the El Dorado County Food Bank (which receives zero funding from the county) to gauge the needs of South Lake Tahoe.

One of the big things to be revealed is that what was once considered emergency supplemental food is now something people are relying on to sustain themselves on a regular basis. Twenty-two percent of the people surveyed require emergency

food assistance at least once a month – so, 12 times a year.

Ninety-two percent of respondents said food distribution needs to be more often, 89 percent want more fresh food, and 70 percent need the distribution to be closer to where they live. Twenty-three percent have no transportation.

Most who are receiving aid are older and/or disabled, with 41 percent being at least 65 years old. Seventy-five percent are unemployed. Eighty-five percent of those working make less than \$25,000 a year.

Twenty-eight percent of the households have children. And 99 percent of those have incomes of \$25,000 or less a year.

Those statistics are all for South Lake Tahoe.

Respondents were people receiving aid and agencies. They were asked 30 questions.

South Lake Tahoe is following the state's trend. For the second year in a row, the Census this month reported that California has the highest poverty rate in the country – 23.4 percent. That is 8.9 million people. Nevada came in second at 20 percent.

Carey Fong with the Food Bank spoke Oct. 21 to Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe at Harrah's Lake Tahoe about the growing issue of hunger and poverty in the city. Diane Weidinger, who runs the 25-year-old weekly hot meal program Bread & Broth, talked about that program.



Bread & Broth volunteers
serve a hot meal to anyone
who wants it every Monday at
Grace Hall in South Lake
Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

“It’s almost an epidemic,” Weidinger said of the hunger in this community. “It’s a cycle. Once you are born into poverty, it’s almost impossible to get out without some assistance.”

Every Monday about 100 people are served a hot meal at Grace Hall at St. Theresa Catholic Church. It’s families, singles, older people – a mix of those in need. Another 40 receive a meal on Fridays at the Presbyterian Church. Other churches and organizations also give out food.

Bread & Broth is a benefactor of the El Dorado County Food Bank, while Christmas Cheer buys food from the Northern Nevada Food Bank. Fong said they’ve tried to get Christmas Cheer to switch agencies.

The El Dorado County Food Bank brings 360,000 pounds of food to South Lake Tahoe a year, with a value of \$600,000.

The local need is growing and that is not expected to change. Nationwide there will be 79.7 million older adults in 2040. This is twice as many as there were in 2000. They are the ones on fixed incomes with transportation issues, who are in need of food.

The Food Bank is looking at how it can better cater to the needs of those in the basin today and going forward.

Ideas include having a distribution center here to help with storage issues, increasing the number of days and hours when food is handed out, nutrition education, creating community gardens, and advocating for higher paying jobs. A task force has been formed with the goal being to form an action plan.

UC considers limiting out-of-state enrollment

By Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

The University of California is beginning to have second thoughts about its highly successful effort to bring more out-of-state students onto its campuses.

In a bid to boost revenue, the system five years ago began to aggressively recruit students from other parts of the country and from around the world. The significantly higher fees those students paid brought in about \$400 million extra last year. But the effort stirred a backlash from California parents, who suspected that their children's admissions chances were being hurt.

UC officials have taken great pains to argue that qualified California students were not losing slots to those from New York or China. But the complaints from parents and state legislators recently prompted UC President Janet Napolitano and other system leaders to consider putting limits on out-of-state enrollment.

Any such retrenchment faces its own set of complications.

In 2009, a year into the recession that badly hurt higher education funding, a commission on the future of the University of California recommended recruiting outside students whose tuition – triple what state residents pay – would help offset cuts in tax revenue.

Read the whole story

Nurses: Calif. not ready for Ebola

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

The state's largest nurses union said Tuesday that no California hospital is prepared to treat an Ebola patient, pressing Gov. Jerry Brown to require increased training and protective equipment for nurses.

The union's call – and a rebuttal from the California Hospital Association – came as Brown met privately with nurses, public health officials and medical providers to discuss Ebola.

Though there are no known cases of Ebola in California, the virus has gripped public attention since an outbreak in West Africa and the infection of two nurses treating an Ebola patient who died in Texas earlier this month.

The Brown administration issued no mandates but said in a prepared statement that “officials are taking steps to help ensure health care workers, hospitals and first responders are prepared to treat and care for patients with Ebola.”

RoseAnn DeMoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association and National Nurses United, said California hospitals have failed to provide adequate training or equipment to nurses, a claim hospitals disputed.

Read the whole story