

Gas prices expected to start dropping

By Gary Richards, San Jose Mercury News

If \$4.26 for a gallon of gas seems painful, relax. The price at the pump in California is ever so slowly falling after four weeks of constant increases – and could drop as much as 40 to 50 cents by July 4.

“They just started to ease. The worst may be behind us,” said Patrick DeHaan, petroleum analyst for GasBuddy.com. “The next week is crucial. Let’s see what happens if oil is lower.”

The price of oil fell below \$100 a barrel Thursday for the first time in three weeks, as the price of gas reached a state average of \$4.261, down ever so slightly from \$4.263 the day before.

Read the whole story

El Dorado workers call out bosses in survey

Enough El Dorado County employees are so unhappy with their work environment it prompted the Board of Supervisors to launch an investigation.

Non-equal employment opportunity violations will be looked into.

Sixty-three percent of the staff participated in the cultural

assessment survey conducted by Van Dermyden Maddux Law Corporation. Out of the 1,228 current and former employees who participated, 474 provided information beyond what was asked. A substantial number of comments raised concerns of “bullying, harassment, and retaliation” as well as concerns of nepotism, referring to the “good ol’ boy network.”

Only one-third believes the harassment policy is understood and adhered to.

Supervisors had a special meeting this week to go over the results from the survey that was taken this year.

The glimmer of good in the survey is 60 percent of respondents are generally satisfied with their job. The following departments had satisfaction rates higher than average: Air Quality Management District (100 percent); Risk Management (100 percent); Clerk of the Board (100 percent); Elections (100 percent); Library (92 percent); Auditor Controller’s Office (92 percent); Assessor’s Office (78 percent); Veteran Affairs (75 percent); and County Counsel (86 percent).

On the flip side, 17.5 percent of county employees were “dissatisfied” with their employment. The following departments each had dissatisfaction rates higher than average: Information Technology (41 percent); Probation Field (32 percent); Public Defender (26.5 percent); Sheriff’s Office (23.5 percent); Community Development Agency (22 percent).

Managers are a problem for 378 of the survey takers – the highest complaint. Employees believe retaliation would occur if they filed a complaint.

One person wrote, “Depending on who the complaint is against is a factor whether action will be taken or not.” Another said, “Things often do not stay confidential.”

More than one-quarter of the workforce is actively planning to leave.

Opinion: Will a free press survive?

By Kathryn Reed

Does news matter? *Yes.*

Do the media matter? *Depends who you ask.*

Does where you get your news from matter? *Depends who you ask.*

Do people still care about unbiased news? *Not as much as they once did.*

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Today is World Press Freedom Day. The UN General Assembly designated May 3 as such in 1993. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

In the United States we have had such freedoms since 1787 when the Constitution was signed. The First Amendment says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Not a week goes by that someone tells me I should take down the comments section on *Lake Tahoe News*. It's because they don't like the tone of the comments, they don't like the meanness, they disagree with what is being said, and they don't like the anonymity.

Too bad, they are staying.

I agree, though, the anger, the meanness, the name-calling, the childish behavior – it's all horrible.

But I tell people a few things. First, stop reading the comments if they are so offended by them. Second, there is no way to know someone is really Jane Doe. People contend Facebook is a way of getting people to use their real name, but people use fake names there, too. And using a third party like FB is a bad way of doing business. Third, my guess is 98 percent of the people believe what they are writing, while the other 2 percent just want to stir the pot. Read the message and not the tone. I believe people are angry, they are disgruntled and they want to be heard. Maybe we should be exploring why there is such venom out there instead of trying to quash it. Real name or not, this is still their belief. Fourth, some people because of their job need to use a different name.

I think some people in the Lake Tahoe Basin are afraid of the truth. They don't want it in a news story, an opinion piece or a comment. Most of all, they don't want it in black and white for the entire world to see. (*LTN* is read in more than 100 countries, and

2013 in figures

- 71 journalists killed
- 826 journalists arrested
- 2,160 journalists threatened or physically attacked
- 87 journalists kidnapped

more than 3,000 cities.)

Lake Tahoe News is here to publish the truth. We don't believe there is good or bad news, positive or negative news – there is just news.

News is like people. It comes in different shapes, sizes, colors, warts and all. It can be elegant, ugly, hard to look at and pleasing. It can be fun, entertaining, enlightening and educational. It can be mundane and boring. It can change your life – just like people can.

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People have more choices of where they get their news today. They can get it from nearly every spectrum of the political wheel. They can get just headlines. Internet sites will filter news based on a person's interests.

I worry that the plethora of news/information that is available today is actually making us a society that is less informed. We can't take everything in.

We used to rely on newspaper and broadcast editors to filter out the unimportant from the important. Now there is so much information available every day it would be impossible to read or listen to all of it in a 24-hour period.

We know a lot more, at least superficially, while at the same time we know a lot less on a deeper level.

It's hard to absorb things when we are on constant overload.

And then I wonder if some people even pay attention to what is

- 77 journalists who fled their country
- 6 media assistants killed
- 39 netizens and citizen-journalists killed
- 127 bloggers and netizens arrested

Source: *Reporters Without Borders*

going on.

The individual has always been responsible for needing to gather her own information. We in the media cannot spoon-feed you. Ignorance, while it's a choice, is not a viable excuse for not knowing what is going on.

It is up to you where you get your news.

And people want their news for free. That worries me beyond the fact it can be a struggle to pay my bills. Philosophically it worries me because news organizations are continuing to make cutbacks. People, like in most professions, are the No. 1 expense of media companies. But if reporters and editors are let go, then who will provide the news? Where will our news come from in the next 10 years? Who will you trust to provide it to you? Would you even notice if *Lake Tahoe News* went away?

Whether the news is online or in print, it takes the same amount of resources to create the story. The difference between print vs. online is the printing costs; but rest assured there are expenses related to an online news site.

Bringing people the news is not an easy job. It can even be a deadly one. In 2013, 71 journalists were killed.

It's certainly not a way to get rich.

Journalists have always been considered bottom feeders, right up there with lawyers and used car salesman.

We do it because we have a love for the truth. We want to hold people accountable. We want to tell your story, as well as the stories people don't necessarily want told but the public has a right to know.

It's a job that never ends. There's job security in that. But only if people are reading and willing to financially support

their news source(s) of choice via cash as well as by supporting the advertisers.

World Press Freedom Day will not matter if the press no longer exists. Our existence, though, in many ways is out of our hands. It's up to you – the reader.

Delayed access to court records raises First Amendment concerns

By Tony Biasotti, Columbia Journalism Review

It's been a routine for generations of legal beat reporters: Every weekday afternoon, at courthouses across the United States, a reporter steps behind the records counter and thumbs through the lawsuits filed that day, looking for news.

This custom is endangered, though, and not just because files have moved online, or because there aren't as many legal beat reporters as there used to be. Many state courts now keep new civil cases out of sight of the press and public for days, and sometimes even weeks, after they're filed.

"It's a nationwide plague," said Bill Girdner, the founder and editor of Courthouse News Service.

But now, a federal trial court in California will have to

determine whether the standard delays at a local courthouse are permissible—after a higher court ruled that Girdner’s complaints raise First Amendment concerns.

Based in Pasadena, Courthouse News is a wire service that specializes in civil litigation and covers the courts for both its own website and around 3,000 subscribers, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, and other major news organizations.

In 2011, Courthouse News sued the Superior Court of Ventura County after the court stopped letting the newswire’s local correspondent see every new civil suit on the day it was filed. A federal judge dismissed the case. But Courthouse News appealed, and on April 7 a panel of three Ninth Circuit judges ruled that the trial court had to hear the case.

Circuit Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw’s opinion said the case “presents an important First Amendment question” and thus should be heard in federal court.

Read the whole story

Ski resort CEOs wage war of words as lawsuit lingers

By Mike Gorrell, Salt Lake Tribune

The CEOs of Park City Mountain Resort and Vail Resorts are engaging in a public war of words that parallels the high-profile lawsuit between the Park City-area ski giants.

John Cumming from Powdr Corp., PCMR’s parent company, fired the latest shot Friday in response to two letters sent in the

past three weeks by Vail Chief Executive Rob Katz. Like Katz's letters, Cumming's answer was shared with the news media.

"Your letters," Cumming wrote Katz, "are part of a transparent plan to pressure me and my company into agreeing to a Vail takeover" of PCMR. It will never happen, he added. "We won't cave in, and we won't agree to a Vail takeover that would deprive our guests and our community of all the benefits offered by three resorts that compete with each other."

Cumming was referring to Park City's three ski areas: Deer Valley Resort, along with PCMR and Canyons Resort, which Vail operates on a long-term contract for Talisker Corp.

In California, Powder owns Boreal; Vail owns Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood.

Read the whole story

Scooterists to test endurance throughout Tahoe



Alan Spears, above, during the Hell's Loop T.T. 375-Mile Extreme Endurance Race; Linda Hurley, top right; Raven Fischer, right, on her 1981 Vespa PX200e.

Photos/Provided

By Jessie Marchesseau

Extreme is not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of motor scooters. However, this weekend's 320-mile Lake Tahoe T.T. Motor-Scooter Endurance Race may just change your opinion of scooting.

Riders will set out from Motel 6 in South Lake Tahoe at 7:30am May 4 traveling east to Carson City, then through Reno, Truckee, Auburn, Placerville, back to South Lake, then around the lake through Tahoe City and Incline Village, ending once again at the Motel 6. According to Mapquest.com, the entire route should take more than seven hours in a car.

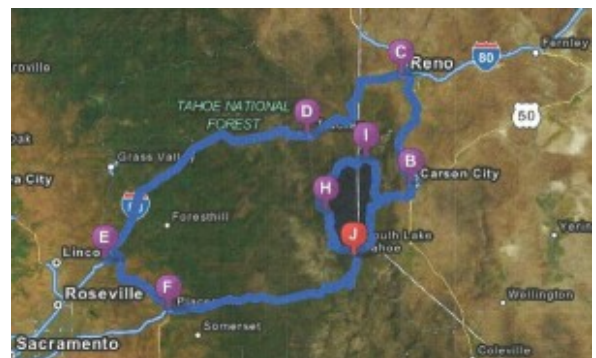
But these are not cars, they are scooters. They range from 49cc to 650cc. These machines won't be doing 75 up a mountain pass. Alan Spears, president-CEO of Motor-Scooter International Land-Speed Federation, said most of them will only do 60 to 65 mph on a good day.

Participant Raven Fischer rides a 1981 Vespa that she said is

“comfortable going 45 miles per hour.” Fischer is expecting to ride her scooter for at least nine hours straight on race day.

The term “race” is somewhat of a misnomer for an event that is really more of a rally. Riders will have designated checkpoints along the route, and breaking the law in any way, including speeding, is grounds for instant disqualification.

Participant Linda Hurley considers herself a very conservative rider; she does not break any traffic laws and hardly ever splits lanes. She also has one of the smallest engines in her class. However, she has won three MSILSF scooter endurance races and placed second in another. Her advantage, she said, comes from planning and sheer endurance.



The course.

“I definitely like the preparation and studying the route and trying to figure out what my competitive edge would be,” she said.

Hurley has added an auxiliary fuel tank to her scooter for this race. She estimates the entire route will take around 8.5 gallons of gas. The extra 5-gallon tank means she will likely not have to make any fuel stops all day. This four to six minute time saver could mean the difference between first and second place.

Fischer, on the other hand, is not concerned about what place she finishes. As the rider of one of very few vintage scooters in the field, she expects to be in the back of the pack, and

is just fine with that. Fischer is a newcomer to the MSILSF circuit looking for a fun ride and the opportunity to connect with other riders who share her love of scooters.

“You make your own fun in this world,” she told *Lake Tahoe News*. “That’s why I like scooterists; they make their own fun.”

Having recently completely rebuilt her Vespa by herself, Fischer, who is not a mechanic and did the work entirely from a handbook and YouTube videos, is hoping her handiwork holds up to the stress of an endurance race. She acknowledges that she may have to make adjustments during the race and could even encounter mechanical problems. But for her, that is part of the excitement.

All competitors will race at the same time, but the field is divided into four classes based on engine size, plus a sidecar division. Spears, who raced sidecar motorcycles professionally for Harley-Davidson in the late 1970s, will be participating in the sidecar class.

After taking a break from motorcycle racing, Spears switched to scooters for medical reasons. He wanted to give scooterists an opportunity to race, too, and founded MSILSF in 2010. The organization had its first land-speed trials in late 2010 and its first endurance race in 2011. The Lake Tahoe T.T. will be the sixth event hosted by MSILSF and one of the most challenging.

There will be a \$500 purse for the first place rider, but for most it’s not about the money. They are in it for fun, for a challenge, to enjoy the open road and to meet other riders. And for Spears, to bring a little recognition to scooting.

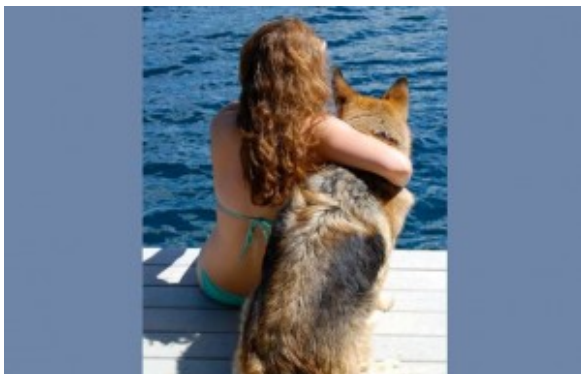
“Because someday we’ll all be riding them because of gas,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lasting memories of Fallen Leaf Lake's magic

By Blair Scott

The two-mile, dirt road leading to the cabin transports me back to my carefree childhood. Every summer, for a long weekend, my family has driven up to Tahoe to relive the sweet, savory memories of past years. Winding through patches of dense pine trees and passing intermittent, bright green meadows, the familiar drive leads us to the cabin we outgrew many years ago, but continue to come back to each summer.

Our two German shepherds, Heidi and Chloe, squeezed into the back of our 1998 Ford Expedition next to a stack of four duffel bags and colorful beach towels, start to whine as we get closer to the cabin. As we pull up to the house, my eyes soak in the warm, brown, gingerbread color of its exterior and the sweetness of the delicately shingled roof. Its petite chimney peaks out the top – void of smoke since it is mid-July – and the graham cracker colored shutters frame the dusty windows on the front of the house.



Blair Scott and her dog
Chloe at Fallen Leaf Lake.

Photo/Provided

Opening the car doors, the warm summer air floods in, and my nose breathes the fresh, familiar fragrance. Stepping out onto the pine-needle-covered dirt driveway, I open the trunk to release the impatient pups. Finally free, after five long hours of sitting in the car, they leap out of the back, rushing to sniff the familiar bushes, scattered with red berries that line the perimeter of the driveway.

The cabin sits atop wooden stilts, tucked into the dry, fire-hungry, California forest at the bottom of a steep hill. Inside, there is one king bed, a small kitchen with a wood burning stove and a closet-sized bathroom. In the middle of the room, a wooden ladder ascends to the attic, where my brother and I sleep. As a kid, I dreaded sleeping up there; it was filled with spider webs, dead bugs, dusty surfaces and old mattresses. But we had no choice. By the time we were nearing our 20s, we were simply too big for the attic; we had to duck when we walked, so our heads wouldn't hit the ceiling, and our feet dangled off the end of the mattresses. We had definitely outgrown the cabin, but we ignored the inevitable size problem so that we could spend one final, jobless, commitment-free, summer there as a family.

Taking our bags up with us into the attic, we crack the windows to release the trapped summer air, while trying to dodge the sheets of spider webs. I look out the window, past all of the trees, to see Fallen Leaf Lake for the first time. Peeking through the sea of intoxicatingly green treetops, I am beckoned by the water's enticing cobalt color.

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The sparkling blue light blinds me as I run toward the end of the dock. Leaping off the edge, I feel myself suspended in the air, vulnerable and helpless. Below me, the clear glassy water awaits my splash. Thoughts of my childhood rush through my

head, of all 19, consecutive, summers we have come to the lake, of all the memories that have occurred in this exact spot. I prepare for the bone-numbing, heart-stopping chill of the water that I am about to plunge into. I gasp. The sparkling elixir reviving my sunburned body as I enter the lake. Coming up for air as soon as I can, I struggle to catch my breath, looking back up at the dock, where the unofficial lifeguards, my dogs, peer over the edge to make sure I am OK.

The 60-degree water permeates my skin; I can actually feel my legs starting to go numb. The freezing lake is shocking, yet soothing. The first swim is always the best, but the temperature makes it impossible to stay in any longer so I rush toward the ladder to get out. My dogs greet me, wagging their tails in excited relief that I am finally out of the water.

Wrapping myself up in my favorite, faded, blue and green towel, I lie on the warm dock as my body thaws. Heidi and Chloe lie next to me, their eyes watching the bees that hover around us. If a bee flies too close to Heidi, she will swat at it with her paw and try to capture it in her mouth. An hour passes; I hear the distant sounds of motorboats swirling around the lake. Above me, the calm, blue canvas is streaked with delicate wisps of white clouds. There is a certain stillness that exists on the dock, and I cherish the peaceful surroundings.

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Beep beep, beep beep, beep beep. I can hear my dad's alarm going off from the attic. I roll over in bed to look out of the window toward the lake. Glass. No wind. The lake is still. Which means it's time to go. Every morning, my dad and I wake up hoping to go out in the boat to water ski, but only if the conditions are nearly perfect. This morning they are.

I get up and put on sweat pants and a sweat shirt over my

bathing suit. I descend down the ladder, and my dad is waiting, ready to go. Much to their disappointment, the dogs have to stay at the cabin with my mom and brother while they continue sleeping. The dogs will bark and whine the entire time we're gone. With me leading the way, my dad and I head down the steep hillside to the dock to meet Uncle Tom who brings his boat over from the other end of the lake. He's waiting for us when we get there; ready to take us out on the lake to claim the untouched water as our own. Leaving our flip-flops on the dock, we climb onto the boat.

The sun peaks over the snow-topped mountains that surround the lake as we zoom to the far end where the water is always the calmest. Leaving a thick white stream of boat wake behind us, the steady rumble of the boat's engine allows us to enjoy a conversation-less, calm morning boat ride. The cool wind whips through my hair, and my dad firmly holds his San Francisco Giants baseball hat onto his head.

I cherish this moment, knowing it will probably be one of the last morning boat rides we have, and one of the last summers we go up to the lake as a family before my brother and I enter adulthood. We may be growing up, but the memories I have from the lake will stay with me forever.

Dry ground during final Sierra snow survey

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – Soft, dry soil. It makes measuring snow rather easy. There is none.

The last snow survey of the season by the Department of Water Resources on May 1 turned up no snow at the field next to the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe and little snow at the other surveys.

Statewide the water content is at 18 percent of average.

“We need well above average to replace the reservoir storage,” Frank Gehrke with the DWR said of next winter. And predictions of an El Nino are no guarantee it will bring the much-needed moisture.



Frank Gehrke with the Department of Water Resources stands in dirt for the final snow survey of the season. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The dismal snowpack means the runoff, which is usually robust in May, will be more like a trickle. That in turn means the reservoirs downstream are not going to be replenished.

Those reservoirs are what irrigates much of California's farmland and provide a substantial amount of the drinking water for the state.

Lake Oroville in Butte County is at 53 percent of its 3.5 million acre-foot capacity and is normally at 65 percent this time of year. Shasta Lake north of Redding is at 53 percent of its 4.5 million acre-foot capacity when it should be at 61

percent.

Watersheds at lower elevations are already dry. This has fire personnel throughout the state and much of the West on edge.

"It's going to be quite serious," Gehrke said of the threat of fire.

He added, "There is some evidence of tree mortality because of the past two years." Gehrke said. He expects to see more of that as weather heats up and the state enters its third summer of drought.

And while the state is experiencing a bit of a heat wave this week, no records are expected to be set in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The record high for May 1 in South Lake Tahoe is 78 degrees, set in 1978. The forecast high for today is 73 degrees. Tahoe City's record high for Thursday is 74, set in 1947. The high there is expected in the upper 60s.

For May 2, the South Lake Tahoe record is 73 degrees set in 2004; forecast is for 71.

By the weekend temps will cool down, with Saturday being in the upper 60s and Sunday in the low 60s, according to the National Weather Service in Reno. Highs will be in the low 50s next week with a 10 to 30 percent of precipitation. If snow falls, it will be at the upper elevations and is not expected to impact travel.

While people are starting to irrigate, the state is launching the Californians Don't Waste outdoor water campaign.

On April 30 DWR released a report showing that throughout California groundwater resources are at historically low levels.

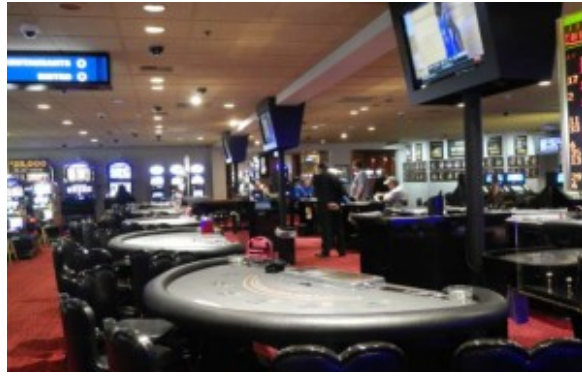
Key findings of the report include:

- Groundwater levels have decreased in nearly all areas of the

state since spring 2013, and more notably since spring 2010.

- The greatest concentration of recently deepened wells is in the fractured bedrock foothill areas of Nevada, Placer, and El Dorado counties.
- The Kaweah and Kings sub basins have the greatest numbers of deepened wells in an alluvial groundwater basin.
- Of California's 515 alluvial groundwater basins, 169 are fully or partially monitored under the California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) program as of April 15.
- Forty of 126 High and Medium priority basins are not monitored under CASGEM as of April 15. There are significant CASGEM groundwater monitoring data gaps in the Sacramento, San Joaquin River, Tulare Lake, Central Coast, and South Lahontan hydrologic regions.
- Several areas of the state lack a current groundwater management plan that addresses all related requirements of the California Water Code.

**Infusion of cash
reinvigorates Boomtown at 50**



Boomtown is now 50-years-old and has had \$20 million in renovations. Photos/LTN

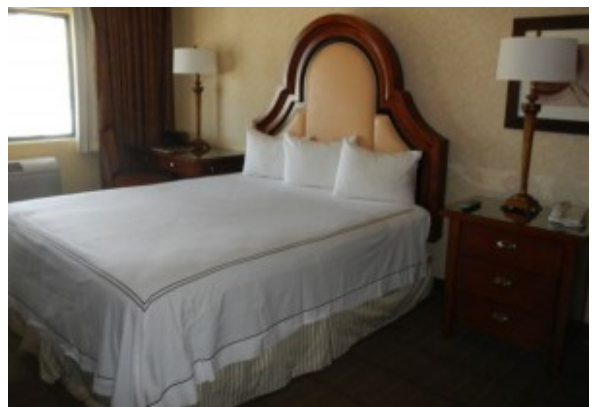
By Kathryn Reed

VERDI – Owners of Boomtown casino have taken an aging property and revamped it a bit.

The property off Interstate 80 on the outskirts of Reno turns 50 this year.

M1 Gaming bought the 318-room hotel, and casino with 15 table games and 560 slot machines from Pinnacle Entertainment in June 2012 for \$12 million. Since that time, \$20 million in upgrades have been made.

When M1, owned by Dean Dilullo, Edward Anthony St. John Jr. and Edward Anthony St. John III, purchased the casino they labeled Boomtown “highly distressed”.



Rooms are modern and

standard.

The casino opened with Reno Mayor Bob Cashell as the owner. He was honored last week at a dinner at the property. He sold it in the 1980s.

Today the property has more life to it than it had in recent years. Money has been spent on new restaurants, bars, slots, table games, sportsbook, poker and keno.

The Guitar Bar has live entertainment every night. The carpet in the casino area – all 40,000 square feet – is new. The sportsbook has wall-to-wall televisions and more comfortable, softer seats.

There is a VIP area with new machines and private bathrooms.

Bistro 2100 is a new restaurant; serving three meals a day. The owners kept the legendary All-You-Can-Eat Lobster Buffet. While there are multiple places to eat, not all are open every night.

The owners have also returned music to Boomtown, with headliners whose heyday was mostly in the 1970s and 1980s – like Brian Howe from Bad Company, Collin Raye and Larry Gatlin. Most performers play two shows for one night.



The Fun Center has games that have nothing to do with

gambling.

What sets this casino apart from many is the size of its arcade. In fact, it's called a Fun Center. A great aspect is that no alcohol or smoking is allowed in this area. It's designed for big and little kids.

The Old West façade is still intact.

While the rooms look like they have been spruced up a bit, the dankness of the hallways and scuffed up carpet and walls could use some attention to make it more appealing.

Boomtown once was a truckers' haven because it meant not having to find a spot to park their rig in Reno or having to be off the interstate. Those days are about to return.

Last June on a 5-1 vote the Reno City Council agreed the Boomtown truck stop could be resurrected. It will have to be in a different location because Cabela's occupies the parcel where the old stop was located. The new one will be on about 14 acres to the west of Cabela's.

Time for Calif. to pay down unfunded liabilities

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

Any struggling family knows that first you put food on the table, make sure there's a roof overhead and lay in some daily essentials. Only then can you realistically think about paying down the credit card.

True, you shouldn't have run wild with the card in the first

place. But that's past. Now, you create a repayment plan and muster some discipline.

That's where Sacramento sits currently with its daunting credit card debt.

The state's annual budget that covers daily expenses is finally balanced after years of recession-plagued deficits. Yes, previous politicians deserve criticism for bad planning. They gave away unaffordable tax cuts and spent lavishly, especially for generous public employee pension upgrades.

But the treasury has been replenished because of the Legislature's program cutting, Gov. Jerry Brown's soak-the-rich tax increase and a recovering economy. Moreover, two years ago, there were some modest pension rollbacks for future state employees and teachers.

Now it's time to tackle those potentially crippling credit cards – especially the unfunded liabilities for retiree pensions and benefits.

Brown listed them in January while unveiling his budget proposal. The unfunded liabilities totaled \$218 billion – including \$80 billion for teachers' pensions, \$64 billion for state retiree healthcare, \$46 billion for state employee pensions, \$25 billion for University of California pensions and retiree healthcare and \$3 billion for judges' pensions.

The most troubling, by far, is the big hole in the California State Teachers' Retirement System, called CalSTRS.

Read the whole story