

'Sweet Talk' burlesque show leaves a sour taste

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Techno meets burlesque with a side of Cirque du Soliel. It's not a good combination.

"Sweet Talk: A Delicious Electro-Cirque Kiss" misses on nearly every mark.

The redeeming aspect of the 70-minute show at MontBleu is that the athleticism is near Olympic caliber. This is because of the acrobatics. The strength of the woman performing the acts is to be admired.



Acrobatics are the redeeming part of "Sweet Talk" at MontBleu. Photo/Kathryn Reed

She did a pole dance of a different kind that proved agility and strength as she contorted her body into various positions. Then a ladder was suspended from the stage at an angle that allowed the performer to do a dance of sorts in a provocative manner.

South Lake Tahoe resident Angela Smith choreographed the aerial acts.

The two men in the show also put their muscles to use in ways that drew appreciative applause.

But the show is not sexy. The dancing is amateurish. The costumes are uninspiring. The singing is fair.

Burlesque shows can work; Jubilee is still a hit in Las Vegas. Folies Bergere had to call it quits in 2009 after 50 years. But both of those shows were choreographed in a classic showgirl tradition, with excellent dancers, multiple costume changes and a true show that captivated the audience.

And while Lake Tahoe is not Las Vegas on so many levels, there was a time when Stateline was known for topnotch entertainment. Now it's hit or miss.

"Sweet Talk" at MontBleu is a definite miss.

Even though techno is popular, it doesn't cross many generational lines. That's a problem.

Shows like this should be fun and upbeat. Instead, the two of us were bored. The people in front of us didn't find much to applaud. Our tablemates had a look as though they wished the show would end soon.

One of the more disturbing numbers was when the six women came out in black garb that covered their legs, arms, hands and face, while the skimpy clothes were electric neon. It was as though instead of "black face" they did "black body".

What the point of bringing a male audience member onto stage was is still a mystery. That dance number didn't work.

DJ Viola Lala Mia is near the back of the stage for most of the show on what looks like scaffolding. At the end of the show she puts on a fire eating shtick.

While it's great to see a long-running show try to make it here, this just isn't a show that should have made it to the

stage.

Jessica Broyles, who owns Champagne Productions, created the show. The former Gardnerville resident now lives in Los Angeles.

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Notes:

- “Sweet Talk: A Delicious Electro-Cirque Kiss” is at MontBleu Fridays and Saturdays through April 5. Tickets are \$20, plus tax and fees. For more info, call 888.829.7630.
- The show is dark March 8 and March 28.
- The show is 70 minutes.

No easy fix for Calif. teacher pension crisis

By Chris Megerian, Los Angeles Times

WEST SACRAMENTO — When the glass-sheathed headquarters of the California teachers’ pension fund opened five years ago, it was supposed to help anchor developments along the blighted riverfront on the capital’s outskirts.

But as Jack Ehnes, the fund’s chief executive, looked out from a top-floor conference room on a recent afternoon, he could see patches of empty land where nothing had been built.

Construction plans, he said, took a huge blow from the recession.

The same could be said of the California State Teachers' Retirement System, or CalSTRS, which Ehnes has run for more than a decade. Today, the pension fund is one of the biggest financial problems in a state with more than its share of money woes.

Read the whole story

\$687 mil. drought relief proposal for Calif.

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown and legislative leaders on Wednesday unveiled a proposal to spend roughly \$687 million to alleviate the impacts of California's drought, including efforts to clean and recycle water, improve conservation, capture rain, and give emergency food and housing assistance to farmworkers who will be out of work because their fields are fallow.

"The best way to make our communities more resilient to drought is to invest in projects that get the most out of every drop of water," said Senate leader Darrell Steinberg, who joined the governor and Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez in announcing the plan at the state's Office of Emergency Services at Mather Field.

Money for the proposal would largely come from water and flood-prevention bonds voters approved in 2006, which means lawmakers don't have to wait for the annual budget process to approve spending the money. Steinberg and Pérez said they thought the legislation could go through in the next couple of weeks.

Council contemplates Bijou Park's future



AJ will climb over the obstacle, but not run through the tube.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

When Bijou Community Park was formed in 1992 all the potential future amenities could not be imagined.

A disc golf has been added. The dog park came in 2008. A roller derby league uses it as its home rink. The most recent addition was a dog agility course last year. However, only one long tube structure is there now.

It's a well-used park – especially now that parking is allowed in the winter.

On Monday, people were at the dog park, others were using the playground structures, several people were tossing discs, and

even more were walking. The meadow is an ideal spot for walking. It's wide-open, flat and has stunning views of iconic peaks like Freel and Jobs Sister. And tire marks prove it's also popular with mountain bikers.

But more than 20 years since the park opened the city of South Lake Tahoe still does not have a policy in place for deciding how the park can be used. But that soon could change.

The city's parks and recreation commissioners are working on a policy so entities that want to add to the park will have an easy process to do so. The commission brought a policy to the council this month that council members said needed some tweaking.



Disc golf at Bijou is popular year-round.

The council, though, is in a bit of a quandary because it doesn't want to create policy that would conflict with the recreation master plan that is in the works with El Dorado and Douglas counties.

Council members JoAnn Conner and Angela Swanson were tasked with helping the commission iron out wrinkles. It's possible the topic will be before the council again in March.

As the commission has been looking at creating policy it discovered the master plan for the park is so old it does not exist in an electronic version.

But there is urgency for creating a policy because people have ideas they want approved.

TAMBA and the South Lake Tahoe BMX Association have been in talks with South Lake Tahoe officials about building a 4-acre bike park in Bijou Community Park since 2011.

Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative wants to turn a 30-foot-by-80-foot plot of land in the park into a community food garden.

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Park amenities:

- Golf course
- Disc golf
- Basketball court
- Fenced dog park; separated areas for small and large dogs
- Fitness course
- Historic railroad exhibit
- Open meadow for walking
- Skateboard park
- Two covered gazebos with barbecue pits
- Volleyball courts.

Study: People like getting snail mail

By Jennifer Liberto, CNN Money

WASHINGTON — Americans dearly love getting their mail daily. But they can't say what they'd miss if the U.S. Postal Service disappeared.

"People seemed to sense that the Postal Service disappearing would be a bad thing, but they had trouble articulating more specifically how this would affect them personally," the report from the U.S. Postal Service Office Inspector General says.

The inspector general's office commissioned the report, which posed questions to 101 people in 10 focus groups nationwide. It summed up the answers in the white paper called: "What America Wants and Needs from the Postal Service."

[Read the whole story](#)

Bowman takes gold in halfpipe skiing



Maddie Bowman of Meyers celebrates her gold medal in the women's ski halfpipe at the Rosa Khutor Extreme Park on Feb. 20. Photo/Charlie Riedel/AP

By AP

KRASNAYA POLYANA, Russia – This one was for Sarah.

Braid spinning in the chilly mountain air, Maddie Bowman of Meyers soared to the inaugural gold in women's Olympic halfpipe skiing, edging Marie Martinod of France in the final on a night the sport paid tribute to late Canadian freestyle skiing icon Sarah Burke.

Burke, a leading advocate to have several events – including halfpipe – added to the Olympic program, died following a training accident in 2012. Her parents, Gordon Burke and Jan Phelan, watched as Bowman made history.

The 20-year-old put together a pair of athletic runs in the finals. Stringing along dizzying series of spins and grabs, Bowman performed the two highest-scoring runs of the finals.

Her first one, an 85.80, put pressure on Martinod, who led qualifying. Bowman's second run was even better. She clasped the side of her helmet in disbelief then sat and waited to see if Martinod or American teammate Brita Sigourney could top her.

Nope.

Sigourney, who washed out in her first finals run, appeared ready to threaten Bowman before her backside skimmed the snow with only one jump off the 22-foot halfpipe left.

That left Martinod, who retired in 2007 but returned to the sport in 2012 at the urging of Burke. The 29-year-old Frenchwoman was one of the oldest performers in the 23-skier field and her introduction included a series of outtakes with her young daughter.

Martinod was clean but not spectacular. Her 85.40 earned silver but didn't really come close to bumping Bowman from the top of the medal stand.

There were several hard crashes during qualifying, the worst coming when Anais Caradeux slammed into the ice during her second run. The 23-year-old Frenchwoman lay motionless for several seconds before being tended to by medics.

Caradeux sustained lacerations on her face but managed to ski down the halfpipe to the medical tent. She qualified ninth but didn't compete in the finals. Caradeux said afterward she blacked out for "10-15 seconds" and sustained some short-term memory loss.

Then again, Caradeux was hardly alone on a sometimes bruising night. Sigourney took a rough fall during her first finals run, with Bowman sprinting up the halfpipe to help her up. She recovered in time to take a second trip down the slope but it wasn't nearly good enough.

Sigourney blinked back tears of disappointment, though they were soon cast aside during an event that served as a celebration of Burke's legacy.

"A lot of girls were really pushing themselves," said Rosalind Groenewoud of Canada, who finished seventh. "I wish (Sarah) could have won tonight if it wasn't me."

S. Tahoe to finance Harrison Avenue upgrades



This is what Harrison Avenue at Modesto Avenue will look like by the end of the year. Artists rendering/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

Funky, hodgepodge, outdated. Those are just some of the descriptions people use to describe the architecture along Harrison Avenue in South Lake Tahoe.

And while it's not a mandate that the 19 property owners spruce up their Highway 50 frontage buildings, some are in the planning stages to do just that. With the Feb. 18 approval by the City Council to go forward with the Harrison Avenue project after 19 years of planning, property owners are getting more serious.

John Cefalu, who owns the Globin Building that houses the Al Tahoe Laundry Center, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting that he has preliminary designs done. He was waiting for the council to stop talking and act on Harrison's future before he committed more resources. That building is more than 50 years old.

Cefalu's goal is to coordinate the improvements to his structure to coincide with the street improvements.

On Tuesday the council agreed to finance \$3 million over 15 years to compensate for the funding gap that was created when the lowest bid of \$4,806,307 came in 13 percent higher than the engineer's estimates. One of the reasons estimates were so off is that they were more than a year old.

When construction support and contingency funds are added, the actual total cost comes to \$5,688,920. That doesn't include the \$720,074 that has been spent on design and engineering.

Sierra Nevada Construction out of Sparks was the low bidder. Because federal dollars are in part funding the project the city's rule to give preference to local contractors was superseded.

The city has \$2,878,115 in cash to go forward. That comes primarily from a \$1.5 million certificate of participation bond the city took out in 2012. (The total bond was \$5

million; with \$1.5 million allocated to Harrison.) The rest is from federal agencies and \$79,000 from South Tahoe Public Utility District. (STPUD can pay to have utilities relocated or do the work itself.)

This leaves a gap of \$2,810,805. The city is seeking to finance slightly more than that amount to build in a cushion or in case add-ons are sought.



Harrison Avenue will get a multi-million dollar face lift this summer. Photo/LTN file

The council members on Tuesday approved going into debt for Harrison, saying the project will never get less expensive, they don't want to tie up reserves, and it's time to spend money to improve the city.

Property owners in the area have created a special district and will be paying \$971,000 of the total project. A handful of property owners have paid the first installment that is now overdue. Some were waiting to give the city money after the city committed in earnest to do the project.

To pay back the estimated \$294,000 annual debt on the bond the city could use the \$100,000 a year it will be getting from property owners for the next 20 years. There is also an estimated \$970,000 budget surplus that has not been allocated that could be used. There is also parking revenue, assuming

there is a parking program. Ironically, the parking program brings in about the same amount of money the bond debt will be.

The one thing the council could not do Tuesday was award the contract to Sierra Nevada Construction. This is because legally the city must have the cash in hand to do so. That should occur within a month.

Mitch Grayson, superintendent with SNC, said his firm is willing to go forward with the assumption it has the job and funding will be secured.

The goal is to start May 1 and be done by the end of the construction season. Minor improvements may carry over into 2015.

The plans call for a complete overhaul along Harrison Avenue between Los Angeles and San Jose avenues, going back to Riverside Avenue.

A class 1 bike trail will go along Harrison from Los Angeles, down Modesto Avenue, along Riverside, up San Jose and connect to the trail at Lakeview Commons.

Improvements will be made at the triangular parking lot near the boat launch. A new parking lot will go in along Modesto Avenue at the vacant lot across from Sno-Flake Drive-In.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner asked whether that lot would be paid or free.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said free. She added the area will need a parking management plan so people are limited to how long they park. This will lessen the likelihood of people using those spaces for beach parking and taking spots away from customers of area businesses.

Some of the streets will be one-way to improve traffic flow and better accommodate parking. All of the streets will be

completely redone. Right now they all are rated an F.

Landscaping will also be incorporated.

Overhead lights will be installed along Harrison Avenue and the side streets to complement what is already on Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail. On Riverside the lights will be closer to the ground so as not to bother residents.

A future expense is the operating and maintenance costs. Sarah Hussong-Johnson, deputy public works director, said lighting, parking lot upkeep and snow removal of the bike trail will cost the city. Councilwoman Brooke Laine asked her to come back with what those annual expenses are estimated to be.

Parents not always choosing vaccinations for kids

By Tasneem Raja and Chris Mooney, Mother Jones

It's easy to find bad information about the safety of vaccines on the Internet. That's, well, the Internet. But what's scarier is that in many states, parents who buy into those myths can easily opt out of immunizing their children. In some cases, it's no harder than checking a box on a school form saying that vaccines are against their "personal beliefs."

In a 2012 study of vaccine exemption policies across the country, a team of researchers led by Saad Omer, a professor of public health at Emory University, found that of the 20 states that allowed personal belief exemptions for enrollment in a public school or child-care program, less than a third made it "difficult" to do so (for instance, by making parents

re-apply for one each year, explain their beliefs in writing, or get a notarized letter of approval from a health care provider).

In the nine “easy” states identified in the study, the rules required only signing a form. Indeed, Omer suspects that some parents sign vaccine exemption forms not because they actually hold anti-vaccine beliefs, but simply because it’s easier than juggling the doctors’ appointments, missed work, and other inconveniences of getting kids vaccinated.

Read the whole story

Brown puts deep imprint on California judiciary

By Howard Mintz, San Jose Mercury News

As he prepares to fill a surprise opening on the California Supreme Court, Gov. Jerry Brown’s track record of appointing judges strongly points toward a consistent theme – scouring the legal ranks for candidates with some intellectual firepower who might add diversity to the nation’s largest judiciary.

Justice Joyce Kennard’s unexpected announcement this month that she will retire in April has given Brown a chance to name his second Supreme Court justice in his latest go-round as governor, a clear opportunity to heavily influence a court that has tilted conservative since he left office in 1983.

A review of Brown’s 164 judicial appointments since 2011 paints a portrait of a Democratic governor trying to break new

ground on the bench without taking the risks he took back in his first tenure, notably his ill-fated appointment of former Chief Justice Rose Bird, ousted by voters in 1986.

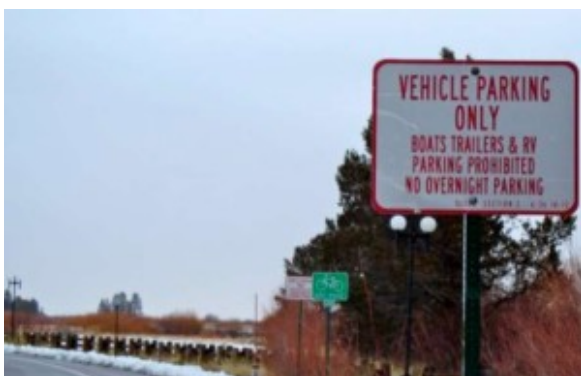
Read the whole story

SLT parking to include reduced fines, locals pass

By Kathryn Reed

Paid parking is going to remain in South Lake Tahoe – for now. But it's going to look different than it did last summer.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on Feb. 18 had a two-part session – morning and evening – so the public could hear where the program is, learn about proposed changes, and give their input.



Venice Drive in South Lake Tahoe will not have paid parking, and the future of boat trailers will be decided later. Photo/LTN file

Changes include:

- A \$35 fine for violations at kiosks. It has been \$55. (There are now times when warnings are issued.)
- The city will have no paid parking on Venice Drive. The issue of boat/trailer parking will be addressed at a future meeting.
- Annual passes for locals will be \$40. A local is defined as anyone living full time on the South Shore in ZIP codes including South Lake Tahoe, Meyers, Stateline and Zephyr Cove. The passes will be valid Monday-Friday.
- The hours of enforcement will be from 8am to 8pm. It had been until 10pm.

Exactly when these changes take place has yet to be decided.

Because the council on Tuesday morning opted to put a question before the voters in June asking if they want the paid parking program to remain, improvements that require money will not take place this summer. The thinking is that it would not be fiscally prudent to make improvements that may turn out to be temporary. (If voters say no, it will not change Bellamy Court, Transit Way or the Heavenly Village parking garage.)

This means the dirt at Lakeside used for parking would not be paved in May as was the original plan. The street was going to be realigned, along with the possibility of creating an employee parking area.

Striping, lighting and signage improvements are also on hold anywhere there are kiosks.

If the entire program were to be scrapped today it would cost about \$620,000. This includes \$191,000 to pay off the kiosks and losing projected revenues that have already been allocated.

The manufacturer of the kiosks has told the city it would not buy them back. The city could on its own try to sell them.

That \$620,000 includes getting rid of Transit Way and Bellamy Court. Revenue there is about \$85,000 a year. And if the city were to get rid of those kiosks, it would have a ripple effect involving the Heavenly Village parking garage. This is because people who purchased the bonds were told there would not be competing free parking nearby.

"Termination of the program is based on what is budgeted," City Manager Nancy Kerry said. "These are estimates."

She added that estimates are on track. For the first three months of the fiscal year that began Oct. 1 \$28,000 has been collected from parking.

Some of the new kiosks were installed in June, others in July. This means the city has not had a full year to know if its projected revenues are accurate. There have been about 63,000 transactions since the inception.

"If parking stays, it's a real opportunity to see what kind of revenue is generated over the long run and where those funds could be spent," Kerry said.

Besides using the parking revenue for operations and maintenance in the areas where the kiosks are located, other ideas for spending that cash include a bike path from Lakeview Commons to Ski Run Boulevard and improvements at Lakeside Beach area. But those ideas will not be fully explored until after the June election.

If parking stays, there is talk of having the neighborhoods with kiosks form groups to have input on how revenues are spent.

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In other news:

- There will be a special council meeting Feb. 24 at 5:30pm to iron out the ballot arguments for the parking question.
- Tahoe Prosperity Center's board is meeting Friday with the goal of hiring an executive director.
- In April the council will hear from the fire chief about how prepared the city is when it comes to dealing with a dry summer.
- Lakeview Commons is officially closed because when there has been snow people were riding the rails and sledding. The city would be liable if anyone got injured.