

UC changing how it offers online classes

By Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

UC Riverside senior Matthew Emeterio was worried that he might be short of degree credits and have to delay graduation past next spring. But thanks to a soon-to-debut online program linking far-flung UC campuses, he expects to finish on time.

Starting next month, the political science major will be enrolled in a UC Davis course on climate change that he will be able to take via his computer mainly at night and on weekends, in addition to a full daytime load of traditional in-person courses at UC Riverside. He will be among the pioneers in an effort encouraging UC students to tap into faculty brainpower and curricula across the UC system while also exploring emerging online education.

The new “cross campus enrollment” is a change for a university system criticized for being too slow in adopting online courses and too Balkanized among its nine undergraduate campuses to significantly share teachers and classes.

Read the whole story

Gaines moves outside Senate district boundaries

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

State Sen. Ted Gaines is going home but leaving his 1st Senate

District constituents behind, at least temporarily.

Gaines, who represents Lake Tahoe, recently told recipients of his district's email newsletter that he and his family are leaving Rocklin after deciding to "temporarily move back into our long-time home in Roseville."

In an interview, Gaines said the renters of the family's house in southeast Roseville had recently moved out. Attempts to sell the house or find new tenants were unsuccessful, he said, and it was too expensive to continue renting the family's Rocklin home while paying the mortgage on the empty Roseville house.



State Sen. Ted Gaines no longer lives in the district he represents.
Photo/LTN file

The district starts about a mile east of the Gaines' Roseville home and runs all the way to the state's northeast corner.

While a candidate has to live in the district where he or she is a candidate, lawmakers can move out of the districts they represent between elections, said Los Angeles attorney Fredric Woocher, an election-law expert.

Read the whole story

Olympic Valley wants to be its own town

By Kathryn Reed

Olympic Valley – it might be California's next town.

More than enough signatures were gathered this month for Placer County's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to have to look into the viability of making Olympic Valley a town. Twenty-five percent of the registered voters needed to sign the petitions; 30 percent did so in three weeks.

The town boundaries would be the same as the Squaw Valley Service District, which provides fire, water and parks to the area. If incorporated, it is possible SVSD could become the new town's public works department. The town would go from ridgeline to ridgeline, include the Truckee River corridor south almost to Alpine Meadows and then a little north of the road that leads to the valley.

"A small group started in spring 2013 with the idea we were really frightened by the large-scale proposed expansion of the village," Fred Ilfeld, chairman of Incorporate Olympic Village (IOV) board, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We realized it was possible by incorporating we could get local control of land use planning and other things."



Residents of Olympic Valley want to incorporate the town. Photo/LTN file

Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, a subsidiary of KSL Capital Partners, runs Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts as well as the village at Squaw. In 2012, the company proposed a massive overhaul of the village that would include more housing, a water park and other features that residents balked at. While those plans have since been scaled back, residents still desire having local control instead of deferring to Placer County supervisors who make most of their decisions 80 miles away in Auburn.

About 1,000 people call this area home; of those 560 are registered voters.

Next up is what is likely to be a five-month dual process to have revenue neutrality negotiations between IOV officials and the county, as well a comprehensive fiscal analysis. The latter will be done by an independent agency hired by LAFCo and paid for by IOV.

Public hearings will be scheduled after those two items are completed.

LAFCo officials will then decide whether the issue of incorporation will go before the voters. The decision is supposed to be made based on fact, not emotion. The main facts are whether the town could be fiscally viable and not a liability to the county.

Incorporation proponents would like the voters to be casting ballots in November. The first question would ask if they want Olympic Valley to be incorporated. If yes, a subsequent election would be conducted to elect the town council.

IOV already had to put up \$25,000 with its application to LAFCo to become a town. To date, \$56,000 has been raised for the incorporation process. It's estimated \$155,000 will be needed to complete the process.

"This is something we should have done years ago," Ilfeld said. "We don't want more of the valley to change at the whim of private developers with the support of county supervisors who have a base of representation 80 miles away and 500 feet lower who are not in the same universe."

That doesn't mean IOV supporters don't want the ski resort or others to be able to grow and do new things. What they want is a more direct say in the process.

Proponents also want more of a say as to how the hotel taxes are spent as well what goes on with public transportation. The people of Olympic Valley say they want to govern themselves, to preserve their history, culture and future.

California schools in better financial shape

By Theresa Harrington, Contra Costa Times

SACRAMENTO — California Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson declared a fiscal state of emergency in K-12 education 3½ years ago.

But much has changed since then. Now, Torlakson says, schools are in better financial shape and ready to take on the challenges of new education standards and computerized testing, which are expected to better prepare students for college and careers.

Below is an excerpt of an end-of-the-year phone interview with Torlakson that also touched on parent involvement in schools, controversy over new Common Core standards, and the federal government's threat to withhold funding due to the state's elimination of most STAR tests.

Read the whole story

Civil attorney running a second time for judge

By Kathryn Reed

Joe Hoffman isn't letting the bitter, nasty campaign of 2012 stop him from running again for El Dorado County Superior Court judge.

The 44-year-old is running to replace Judge Daniel Proud, who is retiring. The contentious battle of 2012 was against incumbent Curt Stracener.

"I think this time will be different than last. It's very difficult to unseat a sitting judge. I believe that was part of the challenge last time," Hoffman told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We never put out a single piece of negative mail or other medium. I'm proud of that."



Joe Hoffman

Many of the reasons remain as to why Hoffman wants to be a judge and believes he is who should be elected.

“My belief is we need people who have been practicing in the county with a broad-based legal background who want to be in that position,” Hoffman said.

Since graduating from law school in 1994 Hoffman has been a private attorney in El Dorado County. He opened his law firm in January 1995. His goal was to practice every type of law he could so he would always be learning.

He and his wife run the law practice together. For a while they narrowed their focus to family law, but have since broadened it again. Hoffman believes this has prepared him well to be a judge because he has a diverse background and is not afraid to learn new things.

“No doubt there will be a steep learning curve with criminal cases,” he said. “With my background and nature, I can learn a new area of law and become proficient in a short period of time.”

Hoffman has been a judge pro tem since 2001, which means he is assigned by the court to help resolve cases before they go to trial. The goals are the litigants resolve their issues and a trial is not needed. He does not get paid for this work.

One thing Hoffman wants to bring to the bench is a more

effective way to run the courtroom. Complaints are fairly consistent that the local courthouses are backed up and improvement is needed.

“I think there is a more efficient way to run the courtrooms so you don’t waste time and therefore money,” Hoffman said.

He believes his years of managing his office in a fiscally prudent and time-sensitive manner will serve him well as a judge.

Tech investor wants to divide Calif. in sixths

By Peter Delevett, San Jose Mercury News

Lots of folks believe California is ungovernable. Venture capitalist Tim Draper has a solution: Six Californias, including one called Silicon Valley.

Draper, a maverick tech investor who once poured \$20 million into a statewide school voucher initiative, on Monday laid out his case for a proposed ballot measure that, if passed by voters, would demand Congress slice and dice the nation’s most populous state.

“We’re simply too big and bloated,” Draper declared in a news conference from Draper University of Heroes, the San Mateo school for aspiring startup CEOs he opened earlier this year.

Veteran political observers were quick and unanimous in assessing the plan’s odds of success at zero. At the same time, they said Draper’s modest proposal could spark discussion about how to fix the state’s manifold problems,

such as bursting prisons and jockeying over water rights.

Read the whole story

Should schools teach social media skills?

By Aarti Shahani, KQED-TV

Taking selfies at funerals. Tagging pictures of teens drinking alcohol at parties. Kids (and adults for that matter) post a lot of silly stuff online – and although most of it is chatter, some of what might seem harmless leads to tragic consequences. But is it the job of schools to teach kids the dos and don'ts of social media?

At Lincoln High School in San Francisco's Sunset district, counselor Ian Enriquez teaches students three very big words: "Disinhibition, reputation, anonymity."

Enriquez is using a curriculum created by the non-profit Common Sense Media, a media watchdog group for parents that also offers resources for teachers.

Like many schools throughout the country, Bay Area schools hold workshops on cyberbullying, but don't have uniform practices for teaching social media etiquette beyond that. While teachers use platforms like Facebook as a tool to engage students in learning, ongoing instruction on digital citizenship itself is the exception, not the rule.

Enriquez, who counsels students on health, racism, homophobia, and other topics that aren't purely academic, believes the district should institute a mandatory social media curriculum.

Dennis Kelly, president of the United Educators of San Francisco, the local teachers union, says teachers are already drowning in work – especially now with Common Core. While social media is important, Kelly says, so are other things. “All students should learn to swim, but should it be school’s responsibility to teach them swimming?”

Read the whole story

Opinion: Merry Christmas – or whatever

By Kathryn Reed

It’s OK to say Merry Christmas. It’s OK to say Happy Holidays.

Do we really need to fight and be offended when someone is being nice?

It’s more important to look at the intent of the words. Someone is wishing you a good day, a good season. If you are Christian or not, is it that hard to embrace “good will to all men – and women”? And one would think the Christian thing to do would be to welcome a Happy Holidays and wish the person the same instead of coming unglued they didn’t say Merry Christmas.

As I write this I’m listening to Barbra Streisand, who is Jewish, singing Christmas songs.

There was a time when I didn’t sing the songs in church because I didn’t agree with the words. Then I caught myself singing the lyrics to some inane song while I was driving. I really didn’t agree with those lyrics. And sometimes we belt

them out with heartfelt emotion. Does it matter?

But if you want to be upset over the whole Christmas thing, let me add some fuel to a fire beyond Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays.

Let's just do away with how the majority of people in the United States celebrate Christmas. Really, what is the point? A whole lot of money is spent on crap that no one wants. And what is the point of giving gifts? If there are pearly gates at the end, they aren't going to open wider based on the gifts you gave to someone.

We heard cries from charitable groups that there weren't enough gifts for youngsters. Why don't we look at why we are teaching them to expect gifts from a fictional character and in the name of another? Where is the logic in that?

We've allowed Christmas to become more than a day. It is a season unto itself that for shoppers started before Halloween this year. And for those who really want a bargain, it will mean even better deals tomorrow compared to what you found on Black Friday.

I have no problem celebrating the holiday season starting with Halloween and lasting through New Year's Day. I love the festiveness of it all. There's a distinct change of seasons. Why not celebrate the Winter Solstice?

For those who can find the joy and not the stress, it's a great time. People, for the most part, actually seem happy. I think they are the ones who have realistic expectations for the whole season.

Having that good vibe all fall, into winter ... well, it's a great way to launch a New Year.

I like seeing all the outdoor decorations, even though I have no desire to do the same. I love baking and receiving goodies.

The same goes with writing cards. I don't see them as Christmas cards per se, but a year-end wrap up to what went on in my life or theirs for the past 365 days – especially when it comes to family and friends who don't live in Tahoe.

I suppose in the end the holidays – whichever you celebrate – are what you make of them.

If you are celebrating Christmas today, then a very Merry Christmas; Kwanzaa starts tomorrow, so Happy Kwanzaa; the winter solstice was Saturday, so let's celebrate it and the fact that the days are getting longer.

But it shouldn't matter what you celebrate because our differences are what make the world unique. A little more tolerance – that's all we need.

Happy Holidays ...

Ex-Tahoe resident files suit against Calif., Idaho

By Keith Kinnair, Daily Bee

SANDPOINT, Idaho – A Sandpoint developer is suing the states of Idaho and California, and various public and private individuals for alleged constitutional rights violations.

Daniel Jay Tonnemacher is seeking up to \$2 million in damages, according to a lawsuit filed in Idaho's U.S. District Court on Friday.

Public records here and in California paint starkly opposing portraits of Tonnemacher. One image portrays Tonnemacher as a

disgraced developer with a criminal record, while the other portrays him as victim of government persecution and corruption.

Tonnemacher, 63, said in the suit that he was falsely accused of an unspecified felony offense in El Dorado County about a decade ago and was unlawfully coerced into entering a plea of guilt.

He lived on the streets of South Lake Tahoe and Southern California when he wasn't incarcerated with unreasonably high bail, the suit said.

Read the whole story

Health insurance elusive for many Californians

By Ken Carlson, Modesto Bee

A much smaller percentage of California residents receive health insurance through an employer than was the case 25 years ago, a report said.

Data compiled by the California Healthcare Foundation showed that 54 percent of residents received coverage through their jobs last year. That's down from 63 percent in 1988.

Despite its reputation for sunny beaches and affluent lifestyles, California has more residents than any other state who live without insurance to pay for medical bills, which restricts their access to doctors and makes them vulnerable to financial ruin if they get sick.

Although more residents have resorted to public health programs, 1 in 5 Californians under age 65 have no insurance, the seventh-highest uninsured rate in the nation.

Read the whole story