Home sales, prices increase in Lake Tahoe

While third quarter home sales in the Lake Tahoe Basin surged, the federal government shutdown could bring those numbers down this quarter.

Ninety percent of the Federal Housing Administration has been furloughed. FHA-approved loans account for about one-third of the loans. The IRS doesn't have the staff to verify income. Cash sales won't be impacted.

Most experts are saying the housing market will weather the shutdown as long as it doesn't last long. The nation is now in week two of the shutdown.

For the quarter ending Sept. 30, the number of home sales in the Tahoe basin with a price tag of less than $1 million was up 293 percent. Overall the volume was up 60 percent from a year ago.

"The luxury market seems to be adding to our market rebound," Sue Lowe, corporate vice president for Chase International Real Estate, said in a statement. "Sales across the board are increasing, but luxury is making a substantial comeback."

The median price of a home in Lake Tahoe is up 33 percent from 2012 to $440,000.

According to the National Association of Realtors, sales across the nation are at the highest pace since February 2007, and have remained above year-ago levels for the past 26 months.

California is second to Florida for the most attractive state for foreign buyers of U.S. property, according to an Asia Society report. More than half the homes sold to foreign

buyers in California go to Chinese nationals, estimates CNN Money.

Representatives from Sierra Sotheby's International Realty recently attended an event in Hong Kong in an effort to form relationships with Asian homebuyers in the market to purchase property on the California side of Lake Tahoe.

The median home prices are up on the South Shore 36 percent to $325,000 for the third quarter compared to 2012.

In the same time period, Tahoe City is up 18 percent to $499,900; Incline Village is up 26 percent to $885,000; Truckee is up 13 percent to $499,90; Carson Valley is up 28 percent to $250,000; and Reno-Sparks area is up 31 percent to $210,000.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Matthew Shepard's legacy lives on 15 years later

Publisher's note: *A documentary film about the life of Matthew Shepard will be shown at Lake Tahoe Community College on Oct. 12 at 7:30pm in the Duke Theatre. Tickets are $5 at the door. The LTCC Theater Arts Department will present the play "The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later" in November.*

By John M. Glionna, Los Angeles Times

LARAMIE, Wyo. – Every year, the day sneaks on up Judy Shepard to deliver its sucker punch from the past: The 12th of October. The day Matthew died.

“It hits you and you say to yourself: Oh, this is the day,” she says. “This is why I feel so terrible.”

Fifteen years ago this week, gay college student Matthew Shepard was pistol-whipped and left for dead: unconscious, barely alive, lashed to a jagged wooden fence outside this small prairie city by two men disgusted by his homosexuality. A passerby mistook the diminutive, 105-pound Shepard for a scarecrow – a forlorn and unthinkable image that still haunts a generation of Americans.

Judy Shepard refuses to associate her son with that image or with the date that he died, six days after the attack. Instead, she summons memories of her eldest boy on Dec. 1, his birthday, celebrating his love for politics, languages and the spectacle of the musical “The Phantom of the Opera.”

On the anniversary of her son’s death, Shepard thinks not of the past, but of the future. As co-founder of the Matthew Shepard Foundation and a tireless advocate for gay rights, she’s hosting the annual mid-October fundraiser at the group’s Denver headquarters to support its work promoting tolerance. That’s when she tries to gauge just how far Wyoming and the nation have come in their acceptance of others in the years since Matthew’s murder.

Often the answer isn’t comforting.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Verde residents upset

with new owners

By Kathryn Reed

Tahoe Verde mobile home park residents must feel like they are living in a bit of a time warp. The topic of rental control is back.

In 2007 and 2008 occupants of the more than 200 units were in a dispute with the owners at the time that escalated to the South Lake Tahoe City Council. The council said no to mandating rent control. Rent control would have to apply to all such dwellings in the city limits and would be overseen by city staff.

The mobile home park has new owners, rents are going up, new leases are being circulated and rent control is back on the table. The five-year leases were distributed in September, but not everyone is signing them. Residents are talking privately to council members and anticipate bringing the issue of rent control to a vote of the council.

“As far as what my rent pays for, I would expect it to pay for any maintenance of the park. But this lease would make it otherwise,” Kim Love told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Love and Mike Gwin have been talking to fellow Tahoe Verde residents to inform them of their rights and to create a united front. Attorney Ted Long, who helped with the rent control measure the first time, is again working on behalf of the tenants.

“We are not asking for special treatment. What we want is a level playing field,” Long told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He and the residents also want to talk to the owners about their concerns, but that has yet to happen.

Owners of the mobile homes occupy most of the 268 spaces. But

mobile is a bit of a misnomer. The structures are for the most part permanent and not able to be hitched to a vehicle and carted out of the park. The land is what these people are renting.

One of the issues is that they can't just leave like an apartment or house renter could because of owning the structure. And residents don't believe they could sell based on what many see as a one-sided lease agreement.

HCA Management Company out of Novato is managing the property.

"We try to be above board in our leases. They are sometimes maybe difficult for someone to read," Phil Taylor, regional manager with HCA, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I believe the concern of residents boils down to this – we have made almost $1 million worth of improvements since we purchased it last December. I think residents are apprehensive they are going to have to pay for that now and they are not. If they read the lease, we could not ask for them to pay for improvements unless they voted for it."

The lease actually says capital replacement and capital mandates can be done without consent of residents. Capital improvements of more than $10,000 must be agreed to by at least 51 percent (each space gets one vote) of residents. Then any improvement costs above $10,000 would be divvied up among the residents.

Rent increases are loosely tied to the consumer price index, though the management company can up the fee 3 percent each year no matter what the CPI is and won't hike it more 6 percent as long as the CPI is not above 10 percent.

And if all the spaces are not occupied, any fees beyond rent will be divvied up among the occupied spaces. This, residents say, gives the owners zero incentive to keep the park full.

Water is included in the price of rent as is landscaping of

the common area.

Previous leases with prior owners did not require residents to pay for capital improvements.

“What are they doing with their money?” Gwin wonders of the current owners.

His base rent is now $654 month. In 2000 it was $480. He has put $40,000 into improving his home.

Many who live at Tahoe Verde are on fixed incomes. Even those who aren’t, like Gwin, aren’t seeing their paychecks increase. He hasn’t had a raise in three years.

“People are scared,” Gwin said.

Tahoe, Reno to be set for major motion picture

By Carl Lygren, KOLO-TV

It’s a sign Nevada’s film incentive program will be successful; a local casting agency is holding auditions this week for a film that’s set to be shot in Reno and Lake Tahoe in the coming weeks.

The production will take place entirely within the state of Nevada. Even though film incentives don’t become law until next year, producers tell us they’re building a framework now, so they can hit the ground running in January.

Lake Tahoe’s tranquil waters, disrupted by a carnivorous beast.

“It’s a thriller movie; it’s being directed by a local director, Jerry Duggan,” said Jeffrey Spilman, a producer with Reno Tahoe Studios.

“Shark Movie,” as it is currently being called, is set to begin filming next Monday in Northern Nevada.

Read the whole story

Sandoval: Prolonged shutdown will devastate Nev.

By Anjeanette Damon and Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Gov. Brian Sandoval said Wednesday Nevada is in danger of “catastrophic” consequences if the federal government shutdown persists until the end of the month.

Most state agencies are able to continue federal programs until the end of the month, Sandoval was told in a mini-cabinet meeting today. But the cash-strapped state is already beginning to rack up a significant bill keeping essential programs running without the guarantee of the federal government reimbursing the costs.

“Particularly at the end of the month, I think that’s really when we are going to start to see … some catastrophic issues going on for the state,” Sandoval said.

“Time is short. We have hundreds of thousands of Nevadans facing real consequences. The first of the month is right around the corner.”

Most immediately, 362,000 food stamp recipients will see their

benefits halt on Nov. 1 and the 500 state employees who administer that program will face potential furloughs if the shutdown is not resolved. About 74,000 women, infants and children would also stop seeing food benefits.

To continue both programs without federal money would cost the state $50 million a month.

“We don’t have it,” Sandoval said, of the state’s $6.1 billion biennial budget. “We can’t afford it.”

Read the whole story

Hikers retrace portions of Donner Party’s trail



Guide Greg Zirbel points out the mortars on a granite boulder. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

By Jessie Marchesseau

TRUCKEE – The thermometer read 32 degrees when I pulled into the Sugar Bowl parking lot. It was 8am on the first Saturday in October, and summer was obviously over.

Sugar Bowl's Mt. Judah lodge was the launching point for the 21st annual Donner Party Hike. The yearly event offers a variety of guided interpretive hikes giving participants a chance to explore Truckee's abundant mountain trails while getting in a history lesson at the same time.

Included in the weekend event is an afternoon speaker. This year it was Ethan Rarick, author of "Desperate Passage – the Donner Party's Perilous Journey West". Sunday's activities included a walking tour focused specifically on the Donner Party and entrance to the Emigrant Trail Museum.

The seven hikes available on Saturday provided hikers with options ranging from 3.5 to 6 miles in a variety of skill levels.

I chose the four-mile Summit Meadows hike. New to the roster this year, the route explores the Summit Valley, also known as Lake Van Norden. The area is part of a 2,900-acre parcel of land acquired this year by the Truckee Donner Land Trust.

Kathy Hess, Donner Party Hike event coordinator, said they add, subtract and change hikes frequently to keep things fresh for the hikers who return year after year. Of this year's 200 hikers, Hess said about 90 percent are from out of town. A little nip in the air was not going to keep them away, in past years they have seen snow.

From the lodge, some groups were shipped off to their trailheads by bus. Since the starting point for Summit Meadows

was fairly close, our group carpooled. A short drive down Highway 40 brought us to Soda Springs and the Van Norden Dam where we parked our vehicles.

Built in 1890, the dam was breached in 1976, and what had been Lake Van Norden became a vast meadow surrounded by emigrant and Native American history. Though no longer full of water, the concrete walls of the dam still stand tall.

Sporting hats, mittens, beanies and jackets to ward off the crisp autumn air, we set out, passing through the parking lot, over a metal bridge, and climbing down into the spillway. Our guides for the day, Greg Zirbel and Penelope Curtis, led the way.

With 11 hikers and two guides, we must have been one of the smaller groups. Two men from San Francisco were participating in the event for the ninth time, another for his fifth time. A few of the hikers were from Reno, a few from Chico. My friend Megan and I were the only ones from Truckee-Tahoe.

Meandering through the forest as a group, our first historical stop was at a large granite boulder. We gathered round while Zirbel explained how and why the Native Americans who once inhabited this place carved the bowl-like indentations called mortars into the granite. Each of us had a chance to see and touch the mortars that are hundreds, possibly thousands of years old. Zirbel passed around laminated black and white photographs of what the place looked like a century ago, something he did periodically throughout our journey.

We tromped along, branches and pine needles crunching beneath our feet.

“Aren’t you glad you’re not trying to find all this on your own,” Zirbel laughed. “It’s not really a well-marked trail.”

In fact, it’s not a trail at all. Having just been opened to the public this year, the meadow is practically devoid of

trails. There are, however, several signs posted high up on trees for visitors to the Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Resort which offered trails through this area last winter. Luckily, Zirbel had done the hike half a dozen times this season and was able to locate all the highlights along the way.

We passed by several boulders with mortars and metates, flat grinding surfaces, often with sweeping views of the valley for the women to admire while they worked. We walked down the wide indentation left from an old wagon road, stood at the site of an all-but-forgotten cabin and peered through the window frames of the old sheepherders' shack.

The last portion of the expedition was along a dirt road allowing for relaxed walking, chatting and reading of informational plaques along the way.

Many in the group had been on Donner Party Hikes in the past.

"It's always interesting because you live around here, but you don't see everything," said Jeanne Wendel of Reno who was on her third Donner Party Hike.

Geoffrey Caldwell, an English teacher from San Francisco, said it is becoming a tradition for him and his wife who were on their fifth year at the event.

We reached our cars about three hours after we set out and just in time for a complimentary hamburger/veggie burger lunch.

On the deck of the Mt. Judah lodge, the sun was shining while nearly all of the 200 hikers milled about discussing their morning adventures and the wildlife they saw along the way.

Before long, Ethan Rarick took the stage to offer another history lesson, though this one did not involve any hiking. As author of "Desperate Passage – the Donner Party's Perilous Journey West", Rarick has a wealth of knowledge about the

Donner Party and its individual members. He offered a short Donner Party narrative before opening the floor to questions of which there were plenty. He had answers for nearly every inquiry and dispelled a few myths as well.

Pulling out of the Sugar Bowl parking lot later that afternoon, I felt a little tired, a little smarter and a lot warmer.

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Tahoe's assemblyman accused of not living in district

By Joe Hart, KRNV-TV

Nevada Republican Assemblyman Jim Wheeler is the target of an official complaint filed with Nevada Secretary of State's office and the Assembly Ethics Committe.

The complaint says Wheeler, a Republican from Douglas County , does not live in the district he was elected to represent.

Wheeler, who represents Lake Tahoe in the Assembly, lists his official residence with the Secretary of State's office as 965 Tillman Lane in Gardnerville.



Jim Wheeler

The house on Tillman is owned by Jim DeGraffenreid, the newly elected vice chair of the Nevada Republican party, and a friend of Wheeler's.

News 4 contacted DeGraffenreid and asked him how often Wheeler stays at his house.

DeGraffenreid told us, "I can't say for sure. Maybe one or two nights a week."

We asked Stephanie Kearney who lives right next door at 963 Tillman Lane if Wheeler lives next door.

"Not to my knowledge, no," Kearney told us.

Read the whole story

No offers for KMS; DCSD enrollment stabilizing

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – While people have expressed interest in buying the former Kingsbury Middle School site, no one has put in an offer. And that has the Douglas County school board worried.

Even sitting vacant, the 36,000-square-feet of building space

is costing DCSD more than $10,000 a month.

The Douglas County School District board first voted to put the 10-acre site on the market in January 2012. It comes with a cafeteria-commercial kitchen, full-size gymnasium, locker room and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency required BMPs.

At the next meeting the board will have a discussion about whether the $4 million asking price should be changed. That conversation did not happen at the Oct. 8 meeting because board members Cindy Trigg and Ross Chichester were absent.

In the meantime, Superintendent Lisa Noonan will also contact the two companies that appraised the site to see if they would say the asking price is above or below the current market rate. It was appraised at $4 million.

Noonan told the board on Tuesday that she has met with one group multiple times.

“My sense is they are serious,” she said.

Declining enrollment forced the district’s hand to close the school. It was fall 2008 that the district went to two schools at the lake.

And student numbers continue to go down, but not as dramatically as years past.

“This is the first year we have not had a true or significant decline in enrollment,” CFO Holly Luna said.

Districtwide enrollment is down four students this year from last year or 0.1 percent. However, at Lake Tahoe there are 32 fewer students for a 7.7 percent drop from 2012-13. The decline at the lake is the highest since 2008-09.

Brandon Mitchell Underhill – 1979-2013

Mitch Underhill, born and raised in South Lake Tahoe, and an avid all-mountain adventurer, unexpectedly passed away. He was 34.

Family and friends will deeply miss his loving, kind, and beautiful spirit, as well as his warm smile, infectious laugh, and passion for the outdoors. Mitch had a deep connection to the mountains and said that the higher he climbed, the closer he felt to God.

From an early age, Mitch loved exploring Lake Tahoe and the surrounding Sierra Nevada – with a particular affection for Yosemite National Park and the Eastern Sierra. Mitch was a natural athlete. His preferred sports were rock climbing, skiing, surfing, and more recently paddleboarding.



Mitch Underhill

From elementary school through middle school, he participated in the Buddy Werner ski program at Sierra-at-Tahoe. At age 17, Mitch and his best friend, Ryan Shreve, climbed the Nose of El Capitan in Yosemite for their senior high school project.

Mitch’s passion for the outdoors continued on with thousands of adventures that included surfing and climbing trips to Thailand, Nicaragua, Hawaii, the Alps, and Alaska.

There is no doubt that Mitch lived his life to its fullest – every day.

His love of the outdoors ultimately led him to his beloved wife, Sarah (Felchlin) Underhill, who shared his passion for climbing, adventure, and Lake Tahoe.

Mitch and Sarah were married at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park in 2007. They have two boys, Mason James (3 years) and Cedar Matthew (16 months). Mitch was a proud and exceptional father and adored his young sons. He frequently took them on backpacking, climbing, skiing, paddleboarding, and fishing excursions. Mitch was seen often the past few summers paddleboarding with his oldest son, Mason, and Springer Spaniel, Juniper, at Baldwin Beach, Rubicon Point, and Emerald Bay.

Mitch also had a profound love for music and was a beautiful guitarist, playing music for his wife and sons daily.

Mitch graduated from South Tahoe High School in 1997. He earned a bachelor’s of science in kinesiology from Westmont College in Montecito in 2002. While at college, Mitch gained a profound appreciation for surfing and the Pacific Ocean. Over the years after college, he worked as ski patrol for Sierra-at-Tahoe and as a U.S. Forest Service backcountry ranger. He graduated from paramedic school in early 2005 and later that year was hired as a firefighter-paramedic with Lake Valley Fire Protection District. Mitch was among the first brave firefighters on scene to battle the 2007 Angora wildfire, often recalling his experience driving through a wall of flames along Tahoe Mountain Road en route to save homes in the neighborhood below Angora Ridge.

Mitch is survived by his loving and devoted wife, Sarah

(Felchlin) Underhill; sons Mason and Cedar Underhill; father and mother John and Jody Underhill; brother and sister-in-law Matthew and Danielle Underhill; sister and brother-in-law Corrie and Brian Aggers; father-in-law J. Chris Felchlin; mother-in-law Vera Freeman Felchlin (Benjamin R. Fletcher); brother-in-law Chris Felchlin; nieces Mattison and Marin Underhill; nephews, Drew Aggers and Jake and Alex Felchlin; godson, Lars Romsos, and cousins, Scott, Shane, Mollie and Lauren Romsos.

He was preceded in death by his grandfathers and grandmothers, Warren and Margaret Romsos and Thomas and Ruth Underhill, and uncle, Brian Romsos.

The Underhill and Felchlin families would like to express their sincere appreciation for all of the love and support provided by the community and friends from afar. A website has been established for family and friends to share pictures and memories of their treasured time with Mitch.

A memorial service will be on Oct. 20 at 2pm at St. Theresa Church, 1041 Lyons Ave., South Lake Tahoe.

In lieu of flowers, donations to help Mitch’s family may be made at any El Dorado Savings Bank branch or sent to El Dorado Savings Bank, 1036 Al Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150 under the “Sarah Underhill Family Fund”.

NIAA creating policy for transgender athletes

By Catherine Van, KOLO-TV

Should transgender high school athletes be able to decide for themselves whether to play on the boys team or girls team? Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association is considering granting transgender students the ability to choose.

High school sports can be gender exclusive but for those athletes who identify with the opposite sex, those eligibility lines can be blurry. More than half a dozen states including Washington and California have adopted the policies to allow transgender students to compete on teams of their choosing and Nevada could be next.

“Issues with respect to high school athletics has become somewhat of a larger and open issue on a national basis,” Paul Anderson, NIAA legal counsel said.

Transgender students are a small but growing group across the nation and Nevada plans to stay ahead of the curve.

The NIAA includes high schools in the Lake Tahoe Basin that are in California as well as Truckee.

Read the whole story