LTWC could have new home in 2014

By Kathryn Reed

In a matter of days Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care may secure a 27-acre parcel on the South Shore where it will move to and develop a facility that encompasses its current rehabilitation headquarters, and add an education center and a site where animals that can't be released will live out their lives.

Tom and Cheryl Millham, who founded and have operated LTWC for more than 30 years, will be meeting with a representative of the property owner on Oct. 8 with the intent to cement a deal.

Until an agreement is signed the exact location is not being made public.



Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care has been rehabbing animals for more than three decades. Photo/LTWC

The plan is to enter a long-term lease agreement instead of the center buying the land.

Some of the money for the deal would come from a pot of cash that was left to LTWC by a South Lake Tahoe resident who died. However, it will only cover a fraction of the more than $10

million that the new facility plus lease is expected to cost.

Securing necessary permits from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the jurisdiction where the property is located would still have to happen.

When LTWC was looking at the Echo Creek parcel at the bottom of the Old Meyers Grade, TRPA was open to having the animal care center go there.

LTWC is now in the middle of a residential community on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe. For years they have been looking to move.

The Echo Creek deal fell through when the property owner wouldn't budge on the asking price and more areas were deemed stream environmental zones, which meant less land could be covered with structures.

The plot of land across from Lake Tahoe Airport where people sled in the winter has been considered. LTWC reps have looked at about a half dozen locations this year, including two outside the basin. But in the end they want Lake Tahoe be a place as much as part of the name.

The parcel now under serious consideration is flat and comes with more than 200,000 square feet of coverage.

If all goes as planned, the first phase would be built next year. It would include all of the cages, roads, maintenance garage and house for the caretaker. At all times someone will be on site.

In addition to increasing the number of cages of injured animals, many will be larger than they are today.

It's possible the great horned owl at LTWC could become its first animal at the permanent care facility. With it being blind in its right eye, the bird may not be able to be released into the wild. That decision will be up to officials

with the state Fish and Wildlife Department.

Today LTWC has three bear cubs, the owl, some squirrels, a red-tailed hawk, and nine raccoons. The raccoons will be released Oct. 12.

USFS firefighting air fleet inadequate

By W.J. Hennigan, Los Angeles Times

The blaze near Yosemite National Park had incinerated scores of acres and was spreading fast. It was time, federal officials decided, to attack it from the air with all the resources at their command.

As the nation’s armada of air tankers began landing at a staging area near here, it was clear that this was a fleet from another era.

The planes showed their age. Propellers coughed to a stop and smoke spewed from their piston engines. Many of these restored tankers were built during the Eisenhower administration.

The Forest Service fleet, which drops retardant to give firefighters on the ground crucial time to put out raging wildfires, is too old, industry and government officials say. Because there are so few planes, critics contend, the fleet is no longer capable of doing all it should to contain fires. Over the last decade, the service reduced its fleet from 47 to just 12, all operated by businesses under federal contract.

Critics also say the planes are dangerous. Since 2001, tanker crashes have killed 22 aviators. Six died last year.

“It’s pathetic,” said Tony Kern, former Forest Service chief of aviation. “We have brave aviators using ancient technologies and as a result they’re losing their lives. It’s a horrifying fact that won’t change unless government action is taken.”

Since 2001, tanker crashes have killed 22 aviators. Six died last year.

Demands that the Forest Service replace these planes have come from former pilots, government officials, firefighter advocacy groups and CalFire.

Read the whole story

Poll: Calif. water improvement price tags too high

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

Californians say the state’s water supply system has serious problems that require improvement, but they are unwilling to spend billions of dollars in ratepayer and taxpayer funds on the task, according to a new USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll.



Shasta Dam is an integral component of California's water system. Photo/LTN file

The results suggest an uphill fight for proponents of a state water bond and for a proposal to replumb the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the transfer point for Northern California supplies delivered to the San Joaquin Valley and urban Southern California.

Reluctance to pay for big public works projects was reflected throughout the survey, which also questioned voters on the California prison system and the high-speed rail project.

"On all three of these issues voters have very clear concerns and want to see something done – until they see the price tag," said Dan Schnur, director of USC's Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics.

In initial questioning, 60 percent of those polled said they would favor a bond to finance statewide water improvements such as levee repair and groundwater cleanup. But when told the bond would require the state to borrow $5 billion to $6 billion, support plunged to 36 percent.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe attractions on USFS property to close during government shutdown

By Kathryn Reed

With the majority of the land in the Lake Tahoe Basin being owned by the feds, the impact of the government shutdown is starting to be felt.

This will be the last weekend Camp Richardson, Tahoe Tallac Site, Round Hill Pines and Zephyr Cove Resort will be open during the government shutdown. That is because the U.S. Forest Service owns the land.



Activities at Camp Richardson may not continue past this weekend if the federal government shutdown continues. Photo/LTN file

It doesn't matter that independent concessionaires operate those entities on the South Shore.

"We got a 48-hour cease-and-desist notice (Wednesday) night," Ginger Nicolay Davis, president of the Tahoe Tallac Association, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Thursday afternoon. That was the same message delivered by the USFS to the other

concessionaires.

But by Thursday evening the Forest Service had changed its mind. A reprieve was given to the Tahoe entities through the weekend. This means the weddings scheduled at Valhalla will go on, Oktoberfest will happen and the paddle-wheelers will set sail.

However, on Monday all of the concessionaires are anticipating receiving a letter from the USFS explaining the closure procedure. This is assuming Congress has not resolved its differences and the federal government remains in shut down mode.

“This will likely have a major impact on tourism at Lake Tahoe in the short term,” Douglas County Manager Steve Mokrohisky told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There is an important point that should not be missed here: local governments and businesses are becoming increasingly important in providing services and information to our residents at a time when the federal government is literally inoperable.”

The two leaders within the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the USFS – Nancy Gibson and Jeff Marsolais – are talking to government and tourism officials, but not to the media.

“If people stay home and don’t travel and tourists don’t come, it affects everyone,” South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “If the federal government can’t get its act together and realize that their decisions affect everybody, they shouldn’t get paid. It’s unbelievable they are still getting their salaries. We have people here who don’t get to work.”

The local economic toll from the shutdown remains to be seen. Federal paychecks have stopped – which means those people are watching how much money they spend. And if concessionaires close up, those employees will be without income. The Tallac Association, which is a small nonprofit, counts on weddings to

fund the summer arts and music festival.

“I truly believe this is coming from way, way up and not a local thing,” Davis said of closing Tahoe sites. “I do believe it’s a political move to get as much attention around this as they can, to get enough people mad so more people will start calling their congressmen.”

Davis had rearranged the two weddings set for this weekend before the reprieve was issued. While she said it was hard to call the brides to tell them a Plan B had to be found just days before the big event, they were understanding. The call to tell them Plan A was back on was a much more pleasant conversation.

The Tahoe Tallac Association has multiple weddings scheduled every weekend in October, so alternative locations need to be found now just in case the shutdown continues.

And with 50 guests for one of the weddings staying at Camp Richardson this weekend, word that the resort is staying open for at least the next three days was welcome news to many.

Kris Knox, general manager for Camp Rich, was not available for comment.

“The city is reaching out to anybody and everyone who has events. We will do whatever we can to accommodate them,” Kerry said.

Aramark, which operates Zephyr Cove Resort, and the M.S. Dixie II and Tahoe Queen paddle-wheelers, did not know about this weekend’s potential shutdown until *Lake Tahoe News* called. Officials never got back to *LTN* after saying they would.

The Queen would still be able operate because it is docked at a private marina in the city limits.

Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority sent out a special press release Thursday letting people know Tahoe is open for business. North

Lake Tahoe Resort Association officials said thy have no intention of doing anything special based on what Congress is doing.

Even though the Forest Service operates many of the trails in the basin, they remain open. There would be no way to close them even though USFS law enforcement officers are not furloughed.

In addition, there are state parks in both states in the basin that are not affected by the feds, as well as other commercial vessels on the lake.

Calif. changing rules for toxics in consumer products

By Marc Lifsher, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Hundreds of items found on supermarket shelves, such as shampoos, cleaning supplies, cosmetics and food packaging, could get chemical makeovers under new rules being put in force by California.

On Thursday, state toxic chemical regulators unveiled what they say is the nation's most comprehensive program for identifying and reformulating common consumer products containing hazardous chemicals.

In the past, the state took a piecemeal approach. Lawmakers would ban specific chemicals from particular products, such as bisphenol A in baby bottles and sippy cups.

That’s being replaced by a more systematic approach. Under the new rules, which go into effect Oct. 1, the state will identify classes of products for review, such as nail polish. Manufacturers will then have to perform detailed analyses to justify whether hazardous chemicals are needed or whether substitutes are available.

Read the whole story

Photo potentially altered to hurt STHS teacher

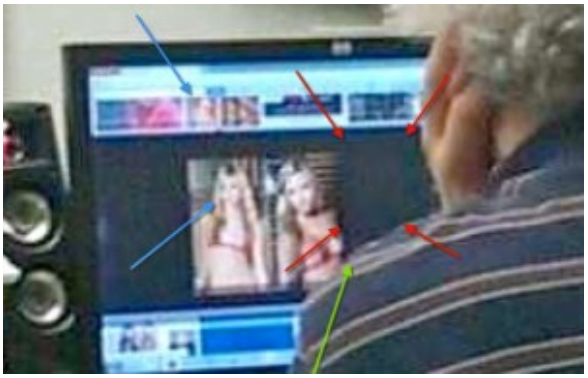
By Kathryn Reed

A photo showing a South Tahoe High School teacher looking at half naked women on a computer in his classroom has been circulating around the district and beyond.

“The teacher is on administrative leave pending an investigation. Since this is a personnel matter, we have no further comment,” Lake Tahoe Unified School District Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It is easy to look at the history of websites that have been viewed on a computer. It is not known if the district has done so and what was found.

Lake Tahoe News had an independent photo attorney analyze the picture to help determine if it is real.



According to attorney Carolyn Wright, “The square indicated by the red arrows indicates someone blocked out what was there. The green shows the shoulder is not a clean line, indicating poor cloning. The blue arrows show the women’s faces are clearer but the photos on the top and bottom of the screen are extremely blurry.”



This is the original photograph sent to Lake Tahoe

News.

“There are several indications that this photo has been altered,” attorney and professional photographer Carolyn Wright told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The photo shows teacher Paul Kushner looking at a questionable website. It’s a picture of the back of his head with him focused on a computer that has images of women in bras.

But the pixilation is not the same throughout the photo.

Plus, the whiteboard in the background and his clothing are in focus, while images on the computer are blurry. Cameras can’t make the middle part of photo blurry. They can make the foreground or background sharp or fuzzy – not the middle, as is the case with the photo in question. And cell phone cameras don’t have the capability to do anything but keep everything in focus.

Kushner has been teaching in Lake Tahoe Unified School District for decades and is the founder of the district’s choral program. He has a master’s degree in computer education.

He was not available for comment. Jodi Dayberry, head of the local teacher’s union, did not respond to an inquiry.

However, this is not the district’s first foray down this path. In 2006, Meyers Elementary School teacher Karsten Gronwald was arrested on child pornography charges. In 2008, he was sentenced to eight years in prison.

If it turns out someone was out to slander Kushner, they could face criminal charges.

Tahoe trying to find sustainable workforce

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – Employers, educators and workforce providers spent nearly threes hours Wednesday trying to figure out how the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee can have a sustainable, year-round pool of workers that people want to hire.

Two of the main objectives of the meeting were to find out what the people in the room have to offer and what they need to better perform their jobs. Their needs, along with challenges they have and what they have to offer were recorded on large sheets of paper.



Kim Bateman, dean of Sierra College in Truckee, talks Oct. 2 about course offerings. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The diverse group gathered at the Parasol Foundation in Incline Village on Oct. 2. Representatives were from the four colleges in the region – Lake Tahoe Community College, Sierra Nevada College, Western Nevada College and Sierra College in Truckee, along with Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe, California Conservation Corps, Harrah's Lake Tahoe, Sierra-at-Tahoe, El

Dorado County, real estate, artists and others.

For more than a year the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative has been meeting to deal with a variety of issues. The workforce issue is the focus of the Economy-Education-Culture working group.

Inadequate public transportation, housing that isn't affordable and lack of communication between the sectors were major issues that were unearthed.

But as the human resources rep from the Ritz said, nothing he heard on Wednesday was new. And that concerned him – that nothing innovative came out of the meeting.

College personnel said they could do a better of job of getting the word out on what they offer.

Those helping workers find jobs said rules about crossing county and state lines make it difficult at times to place people.

Simple things that could come out of the session include developing a more robust internship program at the colleges with area businesses; and having businesses communicate with colleges what they would like from a graduate so perhaps courses could be developed to meet those needs.

The soft skills are what employers said they need more than workers with technical skills. They are able to train the person to do the job. What they can't do is teach them how to set an alarm, not call in sick on a powder day and the importance of proper hygiene.

The group not at the table was the actual workers. So it's not known if they are having a hard time figuring out the higher education opportunities in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee area, or if they know about job placement services, or if they know what employers want. And without workers it is not known why people

are looking to leave, why they never accepted the job here, or even why they stay to find out what might be working.

One placement person said she has been told people leave the area because of lack of leadership within organizations in the area.

A man who has a small engineering firm said even a six-figure salaried position is hard to fill because people want more than the area can offer. They want better schools, more opportunities for their children and more personal professional development.

But expecting to find what a metropolitan area has to offer in a rural location is not realistic. Any professional in Tahoe looking for training beyond the work site has to travel to find it. There are tradeoffs to living and working anywhere.

On the other end of the spectrum was the desire to work with seasonal businesses to find year-round work for their employees so they aren’t continually training new people.

And while the arts received substantive discussion time as a potential economic savior in the way of providing a destination for visitors, tapping colleges that already have recognized programs, and embracing the renowned artists who live in the basin, their numbers skewed the discussion so it was hard to know if that is truly a viable and desired direction for the basin to go in.

The attendees said they want to meet again to possibly drill deeper into some of the issues that were broached.

Calif. won’t pay to keep national parks open

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Thousand of visitors were turned away Tuesday from national parks across California as the federal government shutdown took effect.

But for parks lovers and tourist businesses hoping for a bailout from Sacramento to keep iconic sites open, the answer was no. California Gov. Jerry Brown, whose state is home to 26 national park units, from Yosemite to Death Valley to Point Reyes National Seashore, said no state money will be offered to keep the gates open.

Not only are there a lot of parks, said H.D. Palmer, a spokesman for the state Department of Finance, but California’s budget is finally balanced after years of multi-billion-dollar deficits, and can’t afford the expense.

“Also, if the state were to take that action, there is no guarantee that it would be reimbursed,” Palmer said.

On Monday, the governor of South Dakota, Republican Dennis Daugaard, sent a letter to the director of the National Park Service offering state funding and employees to help keep open Mount Rushmore, the state’s top tourist attraction. Arizona’s governor used state money in 1995 in an arrangement with national parks leaders to keep Grand Canyon National Park open during the last federal shutdown. Arizona’s current Gov. Jan Brewer said Monday her cabinet considered the idea but the state won’t bail out the Grand Canyon this time.

Read the whole story

Sportsbooks picking Dodgers to win the Series

By Case Keefer, Las Vegas Sun

The Los Angeles Dodgers became the talk of Major League Baseball during a win streak that saw them victorious in 26 of their first 30 contests after the All-Star Game.

Las Vegas oddsmakers turned into the ones who needed a break as it felt like 26 out of every 30 people to enter the sports book wagered on the Dodgers to win the World Series.

“There are some people who have them at pretty decent odds,” conceded Chris Bennett, assistant manager and overseer of baseball odds at the LVH Superbook. “But even when we lowered their odds drastically when it became clear they were going to win their division, people were still firing away, which was a little surprising to me. I don’t think it’s a good bet now.”

No matter, the action on Los Angeles continues to pour in. With baseball’s postseason officially under way the Dodgers are alone as World Series favorites at 3-to-1.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe says no to

plastic bags

By Kathryn Reed

If you like plastic bags, then load up on them now because on Jan. 15 retailers will no longer be allowed to use them in South Lake Tahoe.

On a 3-2 vote Oct. 1, the City Council agreed to ban single-use plastic bags that are given out at the cash register. Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner cast the dissenting votes.

With the passage on Tuesday, this brings the number of municipalities in California with such a ban to 89. (Santa Barbara passed a ban on Oct. 1, too.)

It was in October 2009 that the city's Sustainability Commission first started talking about the plastic bag ban. Several meetings focused on that topic, with tons of community input.

Since the council disbanded the commission a group of concerned citizens has continued the quest to have the city ban the bags. Part of the reason is to eliminate an item that most people only use once, to keep the product out of landfills, to stop the production of a product that uses tons of petroleum, and to make the city an environmental leader.

Davis, in all seriousness, said the city is already an environmental leader because of its bike paths and public transportation.

Davis, as he has said at multiple meetings, also said plastic bags are not a problem.

"You've gotta show me it's a local problem," Davis said. "If there are 8 million bags (in South Lake Tahoe used each year) and you only picked up 275 (on Coastal Cleanup Day), I would

say that is not a problem."

To this Councilman Hal Cole said, "Even if all the bags are off the street, they are in a landfill and that's a problem." A stat from the meeting is that 5 percent of what is in landfills is plastic. "They measure by weight. That's a lot of plastic," Cole added.

It's not like plastic bags have always been a part of daily life. They arrived at grocery stores as an alternative to paper in 1977. From there department stores started using them.

Assuming the council on Oct. 15 at the second reading of the ordinance approves the ban, the first stores that must get rid of their plastic bags are grocery stores. That happens Jan. 15. Then on Oct. 15, 2014, all other retail entities must eliminate their plastic.

Produce bags and bags from the meat department will be allowed. Nonprofits will be able to use plastic bags. For example, each Monday at Bread & Broth people are given a plastic bag full of food to take with them. Pharmacies are also exempt from the regulation.

Retailers, if they want, will be able to charge whatever they want for paper bags. Many cities have imposed a mandatory fee for paper as a way to incentivize people to bring reusable bags with them.

Cole was adamant this was a fee or another tax. Such an imposition here was going to be a deal breaker for him.

When the 5-cent fee that had been recommended was stricken from the ordinance, Cole was able to vote for it.

Other towns, like Aspen, have used the bag fee to fund outreach – including buying reusable bags for people; while giving a percentage of the funds to the retailer. Aspen has a

20-cent fee that has raised $44,826 since May 2012, according to the *Aspen Times*.

Five of the eight people who spoke at the Oct. 1 South Tahoe meeting were in favor of the ban, including Jim Warlow who owns Cork & More. The nine emails the council received regarding the bag ban were all in favor of the ordinance.