Ex-cop Poland to spend 18 mos. in prison

Former South Lake Tahoe police Officer Johnny Poland is going to prison for 18 months.

The sentence came down Wednesday. Poland must turn himself in to the Bureau of Prison on Nov. 6.

Poland had pleaded guilty in May to one count of obstruction of an official proceeding. The maximum sentence he could have received was 20 years behind bars.



Former South Tahoe Officer Johnny Poland receives 18-month sentence. Photo/LTN file

The 45-year-old has been on the other side of the law since June 2007 when he was initially fired by the local police department because of an incident in November 2006 at South Tahoe High school.

He fought that termination and was reinstated in fall 2009.

A federal investigation began in November 2011, at which time Poland was put on paid administrative leave. He was indicted at the beginning of this year.

Poland started with SLTPD in 1998. He resigned after admitting guilt and his position has since been filled.

“Mr. Poland ended his career in law enforcement by abusing his position of trust at every turn,” U.S. Attorney Benjamin Wagner told the court. “When faced with the consequences of his misdeeds, he then attempted to influence witnesses who were called to testify against him. Such behavior cannot be tolerated. Mr. Poland stands in contrast to the other outstanding men and women in law enforcement who conduct themselves with dedication and honor every single day.”

Court documents, on June 29, 2011, Poland interfered with a federal investigation of a South Lake Tahoe gang member. Poland persuaded the gang member’s girlfriend to conceal and destroy evidence. In October and November 2011, Poland tampered with this witness in an investigation into his own conduct as well as the conduct of the gang member. Poland instructed another witness to conceal and destroy evidence rather than provide it to federal authorities. Poland admitted that he corruptly attempted to alter, destroy, mutilate, and conceal evidence material to an official proceeding.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. on verge of changing environmental law

By Adam Nagourney, New York Times

SACRAMENTO – A landmark law that has been a symbol of California’s tough environmental philosophy for more than 40 years is facing an unlikely challenge from Democrats,

including Gov. Jerry Brown, who contend that regulations protecting the environment have been abused and are thwarting legitimate development.

With the Legislature moving toward adjournment this week, prospects of weakening the law, known as the California Environmental Quality Act, seem stronger than in recent memory, lawmakers said. Brown called rewriting the law “the Lord’s work,” and the effort has won widespread support from newspaper editorial boards.

State Sen. Darrell Steinberg, the Democratic leader, said Tuesday that he was confident that his proposed changes to the law would win legislative approval this week and be sent to Brown.

Read the whole story

LTCC needs more students to balance budget

By Kathryn Reed

When classes start Sept. 23 at Lake Tahoe Community College officials hope to see a lot more students than last year. The budget the board approved Tuesday night is banking on it.

Enrollment dropped dramatically last school compared to the previous year. The 2013-14 budget is calling for 1,750 fulltime equivalent students.



Lake Tahoe Community College's finances are not quite on solid ground. Photo/LTN file

"Until we know the FTES, the budget is only as good as the assumptions it was built on," LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

FTES history:

- 2008-09 – 1,935
- 2009-10 – 2,021
- 2010-11 – 1,834
- 2011-12 – 1,819
- 2012-13 – 1,530.

Between 2008 and 2010 the college had a dramatic drop in the number of Lake Tahoe Basin residents attending the college. This is based on a study done by ZIP codes. In 2008-09, 5,925 basin residents took classes at LTCC, while in 2012-13 that number was 3,766.

People keep moving out of the area, fees increased, the number of classes declined, the state changed how it calculates FTES, the good neighbor policy with Nevada went away – those are some of the reasons for the decline in numbers.

Online classes have helped increase the enrollment for people living outside the basin.

While Sept. 10 was the public hearing on the budget, no one showed up.

The board has discussed the budget extensively, with a tentative budget presented at the June 25 board meeting, lots of talk at the Aug. 23 retreat and then again at a study session on Sept. 5.

The college is taking $403,408 out of reserves to balance its budget.

In Murillo's summary of the budget she wrote, "The major goal of the budget development process has been to create a budget that more accurately reflects the fiscal outlook, knowing that it does not benefit students or the college if the organization does not have a true picture of the budget when making decisions."

Murillo has been working to establish a realistic budget since she came to the college. The previous practice had actual expenses coming at about $1 million less than projected. She and Jeff DeFranco, vice president of administrative services, have strived to make the budget more factual.

"There's no longer fluff," Murillo said. "It's as close to real as you can get."

A potentially fluctuating number is what the college pays out in health and welfare benefits. The agreement with all bargaining units for that segment of their contracts expires Nov. 30.

The college pays for the entire premier health plan for each employee. This comes to $17,350 annually per employee.

(Murillo and two board members have opted for the school to pay for the standard plan for them.)

It is the college's desire to have all employees go to the standard plan. A committee has been formed to come up with a proposal that would be presented to Murillo who would in turn bring it before the board.

The board on Tuesday agreed to set aside $10,000, if need be, to have a consultant compare the current options available to LTCC through the health and welfare joint powers authority it belongs to to others in the state.

In other action:

• The college has tentatively set June 7 as the date to celebrate its 40th anniversary.

Increasing number of Nevadans going hungry

By Catherine Van, KOLO-TV

Too many Nevadans are going hungry.

According to a study done by the U.S. Department of agriculture, Nevada is ranked No. 8 in the nation low food insecurity.

The percentage of households in Nevada that faced food insecurity jumped from 9 percent to 16 percent in 10 years, which is the largest increase in the nation. Local charities are even feeling the impact.

Food insecurity is a struggle that 3-year-old Maya and her mother, Trinity face every week. Trinity has a part-time job at a retail store, but with a child to raise on her own, bills

start to add up and she’s worried she can’t feed her family.

“I would just like to be able to have her eat a good meal, a good three meals every day,” she said. “I’m worried she’s not getting enough of nutritional things.”

She spends about $40-$50 a week on groceries, but sometimes health falls on the wayside.

“It’s almost cheaper to like get stuff off the dollar menu.”

She’s one of more than 300,000 Nevadans dependent on food stamps or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Programs.

Read the whole story

Potential continuing drought has officials on edge

By Matt Weiser

State water officials are urging residents and local water agencies to begin preparing for the possibility that 2014 could be a third dry year.

The California Department of Water Resources issued the cautionary statement last week partly because the state will head into winter with hardly any surplus water in its reservoirs as a cushion against drought. That is because the cushion is being drained off by the dry year now under way.

Problems could be especially acute for small water systems that rely on groundwater, said Jeanine Jones, DWR interstate resources manager.

“Smaller systems don’t have a lot of staff capacity, so often they don’t even do such basic things as regularly monitor groundwater levels or maintain their wells,” Jones said.

Read the whole story

A hiker’s paradise at Homewood ski resort



Quail Lake at Homewood Mountain Lake is inviting to those who can tolerate chilly water. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

HOMEWOOD – Straight up. That’s one way to define what a black diamond hiking trail is.

Ski resort hiking is nothing like being in the forest or a state or national park. The routes don't follow the contour of the mountain. Switchbacks are unheard of. Instead, many of the trails are straight up or straight down – the better for when snow covers the dirt and skiers are making tracks.

But we didn't let the uphill climb deter us even though we whined a bit. AJ didn't seem to mind the vertical ascent as she ran in front of us.

This is the first season the owners of Homewood Mountain Resort have opened the trails to hiking. While the legend on the map rates the trails at "less difficult", "more difficult" and "most difficult", the majority falls into the latter. And one trail we came down was a double black diamond because of the steepness.

We parked at the main parking lot, walked through the neighborhood and started on the Homeward Connector trail.

It doesn't take long for a view of Lake Tahoe to come into view. That's the thing about Homewood – the views of the lake are the best of any ski resort. You are so close. When skiing the face it's like you are going to land in the water.

And while the hiking is free, various signs caution people that the trails are not patrolled. Trail markers are signs attached to a round of wood. This just adds to the funkiness.

Based on being at Homewood on Labor Day weekend it is obvious this West Shore oasis is still not on the radar for many people. We saw only handful of hikers.

More people were at the top of Quail lift where employees were setting up for that night's Farm to Peak dinner. While we don't know how the food was for the five-course dinner, we can attest to the view being outstanding.

Before we reached the top of the lift we had taken the

Sunnyside Loop that took us to Quail Lake. Barely a ripple could be seen. The calmness and warm surface temperature lured us to take a dip.

AJ had beaten us to the water. She took a shortcut through the thicket.

Lily pads cover much of the lake. Dragonflies and minnows are the only wildlife we see.

Above us is a wall of ski runs – Main Cirque, 55 Chutes, Wally's Folly and The Shoulder. While patches of color dot the mountain, winter seems so far away as we bask in the sun. The snowmaking machines at various locations, though, remind us opening day is coming soon.

A log is perfectly placed by the lake as a great rest spot to have a bite to eat.

We return to our climb. At times Rubicon Peak stands out above all others.

Most of the trails are soft dirt, wood chips or loose rocks.

We hook up with Homeward Bound trail that then leads to Cedar Ridge trail. Finally we are walking on level ground – not uphill. And this is where those picture postcard views of Tahoe come into view. It's like you are able to see the entire lake – all shores. To the north we see the boats at Sunnyside, to the south we can see the hut on the pier at Chambers Landing. And the smoke has lifted so we can see across to the East Shore.

It's amazing looking down at civilization – the bustling arts and crafts fair in the Homewood parking lot and all the boats on the lake – that we essentially have the mountain to ourselves. We will be back.

But first we must ease down the double black diamond Ore Car trail. This is when those with bad knees would need poles.

The perfect cap to the hike was a cocktail at our favorite bar in Tahoe – West Shore Café.

—-

Notes:

• Here is the Homewood hiking map.

• To get there from South Lake Tahoe, go north on Highway 89. The ski resort is on the left in Homewood. Plenty of parking. Trails start from the north and south lodges. The north is the main area. The south is at the end of Tahoe Ski Bowl Way, which is off Highway 89.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

Tablet manufacturers target toddlers

By Matt Townsend, Bloomberg

Toddler-safe texting has arrived.

Spurred by burgeoning demand for kid-styled tablets, LeapFrog Enterprises Inc. and VTech Holdings Ltd. revamped their tyke-targeted devices to add features that let three-year-olds send short messages to grandma and even watch online videos without stumbling across websites kids shouldn’t see.

“Exposing our children to the Internet at an early age is incredibly valuable, but how do you do it safely?” John Barbour, chief executive officer of Emeryville-based LeapFrog,

said in an interview.

By tackling parents' fears about their kids going online, these toymakers are seeking to extend their dominance in a niche category of the booming tablet market that they created two years ago after releasing the first versions of LeapFrog's LeapPad and VTech's InnoTab.

With the added Web features in the recently released $150 LeapPad Ultra and $100 InnoTab 3s, they are also presenting more of an alternative to devices from Amazon.com Inc. , Samsung Electronics Co. and Apple Inc. in the larger market for tablets that is projected by researcher IDC to increase 34 percent to 67 million units shipped this year.

Read the whole story

El Dorado rethinking medical pot dispensaries

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

With a moratorium on new medical marijuana dispensaries in unincorporated El Dorado County set to expire at the end of October, the county Planning Commission has called for an ordinance to allow and regulate the facilities.

The commission at its Aug. 22 meeting objected to a proposed ordinance amendment, initiated by the Board of Supervisors, that would ban all medical marijuana distribution facilities.

"After about four hours of listening and discussion, it was the commission's directive to allow the existing collectives that are in place today," said commission Chairman Dave Pratt.

“In a second motion, we asked the board to give us a shot at coming up with rules for collectives.”

Pratt suggested it is time for the county to start viewing medical marijuana dispensaries as tax-paying enterprises that can provide jobs and contribute to the local economy.

Read the whole story

Fatality underscores importance of car seats

By Kathryn Reed

Not even a grandma’s embrace is strong enough to save a child when the vehicle she is traveling in is involved in an accident.

Motor vehicle crashes are the No. 1 cause of death for ages 1-12. Two children in the United States die each day as a passenger in a vehicle, and 325 are injured. Those numbers could be cut in half if child seats were used, and used properly. These facts are from the U.S. Department of Transportation, based on 2010 figures, the latest available.

It’s possible 3-year-old Caroline Maxfield of Colorado would be alive today had she been in a car seat. She died July 30 in a vehicle accident near Cave Rock.



This is one of three vehicles involved in an accident in July where a toddler died. Photo/Provided

Three other children were asleep in the back of the Suburban that was involved in that three-vehicle collision. They survived.

The toddler was on the lap of her grandma with a seatbelt going across both of them. Not really being strapped in, this scenario is more like putting a child in a slingshot, according to officials.

“Sometimes people overlook safety and it has tragic results. That is what happened here,” Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Science and engineering go into the design of car seats. A minimum safety standard must be adhered to in order for a manufacturer to be able to sell the seats.

But even when people use the seats, about 60 percent of the time they are not installed correctly, according to Guevin.

The July fatality has Tahoe Douglas on a campaign to educate parents about the importance of restraining their children in a vehicle – and doing so properly. Tahoe Douglas Fire is the only agency on the South Shore that does care seat safety inspections.

“Car seats are specially designed to transport the frailest of our passengers,” Guevin said. “The five-point harness … shoulders, hips and in between legs … is the same as a racing harness. Pilots use it because of G force. It spreads the crash forces over a wider area.”

Chris Lucas is one of the firefighters certified in car seat safety. He has spoken at Barton Health classes to tell expectant parents all about the seats. More firefighters are going to a training at the end of the month.

Each state has different requirements, with weight and height the main criteria.

The angle of the seat is important to prevent neck injuries. Making sure the seat doesn’t move much is also important.

“Statistics show there is still a lot of misuse. And it’s totally avoidable,” Guevin said.

To contact Tahoe Douglas about a child car safety seat inspection, call (775) 588.3591.

Technology helping grocery store customers

By Andrea Chang and Tiffany Hsu, Los Angeles Times

Like many grocery shoppers, Michele Ricketts dreads long checkout lines.

But lately, she’s been breezing by the cash register at her neighborhood Ralphs even with the usual crowds at the store.

“In the last month, I have noticed it was faster,” said Ricketts, 27, an actress from the Miracle Mile. “I thought I was dreaming.”

She wasn’t. To shave precious minutes off wait times, Ralphs has been installing technology to measure foot traffic in nearly all of its supermarkets.

Known as QueVision, the system uses hidden infrared cameras with body heat trackers to figure out how many customers are shopping at any given time. Managers use that information to redeploy workers to the cash registers when things get busy.

Read the whole story