North Shore launching free ski bus shuttle

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Less than one hour before the Tahoe Transportation District board was to vote on creating a free ski bus shuttle on the North Shore, negotiations were still ongoing.



This is because days before the Dec. 7 vote Northstar and Diamond Peak ski resorts backed out of their previous commitments. Squaw Valley-Alpine stepped in at the last minute with another $40,000 to ensure five of the six planned buses would be able to roll starting Dec. 22.

"We actually are participating in the program. There is recognition that our already existing shuttle system plugs into the system that is being contemplated for the region. Our shuttles currently provide service to/from Incline Village and Tahoe Vista," Jessica VanPernis with Northstar told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting.

However, the signs being devised won't say Northstar.

TTD board President Steve Teshara acknowledged Northstar has a network of buses for its guests, but added that it is not part of the larger regional coordinated transit program that will be launched this month.

Northstar had originally committed to $86,800 for the coordinated program.

VanPernis said that offer was withdrawn “because our existing shuttle services are being utilized as part of the system being proposed.”

That is not at all how it was presented at last week’s meeting.

Brad Wilson, general manager at Diamond Peak, did not return a phone call. The Incline Village resort had originally said it would put up $7,700 for the shuttle.

Talks have been going on in earnest for the last year to devise such a ski bus shuttle, though people have actually been discussing it for the last 20 years.

“Resort operators realize you can go to other ski destinations and have this seamless transit,” Teshara told *Lake Tahoe News*. They wanted to finally implement such a service in Tahoe. Plus, North Shore has the largest concentration of resorts in North America.

The bus service will run on weekends and holiday weeks from Dec. 22-March 31.

Amador Stage Lines was awarded the contract at the Friday meeting. The main reason Amador won out over El Camino Charters is that they guaranteed, per stipulations by TTD, that each bus will be accessible by disabled people.

Buses will seat 38. Skiers and snowboarders will bring their equipment on board.

Funding comes from:

- Homewood Mountain Resort – $5,700
- Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows – $169,000
- Truckee – $5,000
- North Lake Tahoe Resort Association – $65,900.

All but $20,000 of that total will go to the bus company. That $20,000 will be used for marketing and other expenses – which include signs.

Other ski areas are on the route – including Boreal, Royal Gorge, Donner Ski Ranch and Sugar Bowl.

There are more than 30 stops that ring the North Shore and jut into Truckee. The schedule is broken into morning and afternoon time periods.

Route and times may be found online.

Sledders unite to keep space open for their sport

By Kathryn Reed

With the greater Lake Tahoe area being in the news regarding access to public lands for snowmobilers and human-powered recreationists, the California-Nevada Snowmobile Association is having its convention in Stateline.

Greg McKay, a member of the Tahoe Sierra Snowmobile Club, told his group at a Dec. 6 meeting that discussions with Snowlands Network have been amicable, and that more meetings are scheduled for February before the March 1-3 convention at MontBleu.

“We are talking about how to co-exist. We have the right to ride the same area they want to play in,” McKay said.

Two representatives from the U.S. Forest Service were at Thursday’s gathering of snowmobilers at Tep’s restaurant in South Lake Tahoe.



Hanna Bernard of South Lake Tahoe rides as often as she can. Photo/Jeff Schauer

For now, the current level of access to sleds remains the same. This could change in the coming years depending on the outcome of the Forest Plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Snowmobiles are not allowed in wilderness areas. And there was a push by some folks to increase the wilderness designation in Tahoe. However, the LTBMU staff at meetings regarding the plan did not advocate doing so.

(The Forest Plan may be out for comment in late summer/early fall, with a decision in early 2014.)

An updated map for where snowmobilers may ride in the basin is being printed. It will be available by the first of the year at the South Lake Tahoe office or online.

Copies of the Carson Ranger District Winter Recreation Guide, which includes Alpine County, were distributed.

Dan Morris with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest tried to explain why some routes are open to off–highway vehicles, but not to snowmobiles.

“We manage over-the-snow separately from OHV,” Morris told the group. He said the state has different definitions for the user groups.

When it comes to why Sonora Pass access is cut off in April even in heavy snow years, Morris explained that sensitive species live in the area and therefore biologists have found that habitat disturbance can occur.

A change coming to Nevada is that as of July 1, 2013, all Silver State residents must register their sleds – just like a car.

Frank Machler with the LTBMU knows firsthand what is going on in the woods because he’s on a sled patrolling the forests.

“I find my biggest issue is with people not taking responsibility to know what the rules and regulations on the land are,” Machler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Much like operating a boat, no special license is needed to operate a snowmobile so the riders don’t have to pass a written or driving test before turning on the ignition. This can contribute to not knowing the rules.

But through groups like this club, information is passed along. What is open and closed is often posted on the Tahoe Sierra Snowmobile Club’s Facebook page so sledders can stay in the know.

While there is no snow at lake level, there is white stuff to ride on just a little higher up, according to many in the room who’ve already been out riding.

El Dorado County-Red Hawk Casino revised agreement doesn’t help Lake Tahoe area

By Kathryn Reed

Red Hawk Casino and El Dorado County have rewritten their agreement from 2006 and still the Lake Tahoe Basin portion of the county isn’t getting a dime.

“We’ve had the biggest negative impacts on the East Slope. They get all the positives and we get all the negatives,” South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Tom Davis said of folks in the Placerville area.

The South Shore economy tanked for a variety of reasons – a big one being the proliferation of Indian casinos on the three main routes into the Lake Tahoe Basin – Red Hawk on Highway 50, Thunder Valley near Interstate 80, and Jackson Rancheria along Highway 88.



Red Hawk Casino has had financial issues since it opened in December

2008.

The 2006 agreement stemmed from a settlement involving a lawsuit the county had filed against the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians in regards to the interchange that needed to be built to access the casino from Highway 50, along with environmental concerns.

Ultimately, the Indians agreed to pay the county $5.2 million a year for 20 years.

“All the money that the tribe paid to the county was for mitigation … the negative impacts we expected when the casino went in,” Ed Knapp, who today became chief county counsel, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The original agreement hammered out with the tribe was the richest agreement ever in American history of a local public entity and an Indian tribe.”

This was pre-recession, and although gaming was declining, it was still a huge reason to come to the South Shore. Red Hawk opened in December 2008.

While officials on the South Shore made noise about how the Indian casino would be bad for the basin section of the county, the supervisors only saw the potential dollar signs in front of them. What they didn’t listen to were projections that gamblers stopping in Shingle Springs would never make it to Tahoe so it negatively impacted the county as a whole.

No money from the tribe has been used to mitigate that negative impact.

The money must be “spent on things impacted by the casino,” Knapp said.

Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*, “I always advocated some of that money should come to the East Slope because our casino business is impacted.”

Not a penny has been spent in Tahoe on Red Hawk's impact on the South Shore.

"The business community is unclear as to why El Dorado County would in essence subsidize poor business performance of one select business to the detriment of the county's citizens, especially those located in the Tahoe basin," B Gorman, CEO-president of Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "While we may not have all the relevant information, it is difficult to understand why such a concession would be given to a gaming business that has wrought such harm on our local economy."

The 2006 agreement said the money was to be used to build carpool lanes on Highway 50 near the casino to alleviate what officials' thought would be a dramatic increase in traffic. The traffic didn't materialize. And then the federal government offered stimulus money for the same roadwork.

Three payments by the tribe have been made to date. Half was spent to get what became the federal project shovel ready and the other half is sitting in the bank.

County Supervisors Jack Sweeney and Ron Briggs, who are on the Indian Gaming Special Distribution Funds committee, got the revised agreement on a November agenda. It passed 5-0.

Supervisor Norma Santiago said, "There is nothing to indicate Tahoe got screwed. (The money) can be used for specific roads in the area impacted by the casino. The entire county made out very well in the deal."

But neither she nor Knapp could explain how the entire county benefits.

The new deal calls for $2.6 million to be paid by the tribe to the county for road improvements in the general area of the casino.

The other $2.6 million will be given back to the Miwoks for the tribal health clinic. The clinic is open to all county residents.

However, instead of being billed for services rendered, the county is paying a flat fee for the health center even if not a single Band-Aid is ever used on a non-tribal county resident.

In some respects, the new deal amounts to the county only collecting half of what it was originally promised.

This is good for a casino that is financially troubled and just recently renegotiated the deal it has with the state.

Then there is the little issue with the county budget having not been revised, so the $2.6 million check that is due by Dec. 14 can't be written to the tribe.

Flu season taking its time reaching Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

It's beginning to feel and sound a little like flu season.

"Although seasonal influenza seems to be hitting other parts of the country early this year, we have had very low rates of influenza so far in Tahoe," Greg Bergner, physician at Barton Urgent Care, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting a

high number of flu cases in Southern states.

Typically Lake Tahoe's flu season goes from before Christmas to late March or early April.



A South Lake Tahoe boy winces when receiving the mist vaccine during a previous flu season. Photo/LTN file

While the flu can be deadly, that's not usually the case in the basin.

"It is very rare for anyone from Tahoe to die from influenza for a number of reasons. Because of Tahoe's geographic isolation, our altitude, and our rougher winter weather we have fewer patients living here with serious chronic diseases," Bergner explained. "Tahoe's population is generally healthier and consequently less likely to die from influenza infections. Also, children less than 2 years with any serious health conditions are normally transported promptly to tertiary care facilities, where the full cadre of pediatric subspecialty care is available."

The flu and colds are different animals, though some of the

symptoms are the same. Doctors can perform a test to tell the difference. Flu can sometimes be treated with anti-viral medication. Drugs are the most beneficial if taken within the first 72 hours.

“Influenza is nasty. Typically it includes a bad headache, light sensitivity, unusually bad muscle aches, a cough and fever. The common cold has similar symptoms, but in lesser severity,” Bergner said.

Doing all the things mom said to do is what the doc recommends – get plenty of sleep, drink lots of fluids, and Advil or Tylenol will help with the headache and/or fever.

“Although the influenza A virus of today is much like a ‘nasty cold’, the concern from public health officials stems from the possibility that the virus can someday mutate into a much more virulent viral strain, with a much higher death rate,” Bergner said.

Of course, there is always the flu shot or nasal spray to help ward off the chance of getting sick. Through the years Barton officials have noticed a steady increase in the number of people opting for a dose of prevention.

But it’s not an exact science when it comes to developing the vaccine each year.

“The flu shots clearly work and have been scientifically proven to do so. The problem is that the influenza virus has a propensity to change its molecular shape periodically. This change in viral shape can make a vaccine less effective, though not totally ineffective,” Bergner said. “The vaccine must be modeled a year in advance in order it to be manufactured and then distributed. This means that there is always a possibility that the vaccine won’t be as effective as hoped, if the virus changes its shape in that intervening time.”

This is the first year El Dorado County Public Health is mandating healthcare workers wear masks while providing patient care if they have not been immunized for influenza. Vaccinated Barton staff members have a bright green sticker on their ID badge.

Here are tips for not getting and not spreading the flu:

• Don’t visit hospitalized patients if you are ill – especially if you have respiratory symptoms.

• If you visit any health care facility with flu-like symptoms, ask for a mask.

• Get immunized with the influenza vaccine.

• Wash your hands often.

• If you have the flu or any other respiratory illness, be sure to cough or sneeze into your elbow.

• Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

• Stay home from work, school and other activities if you are sick.

Who should be immunized:

• Children aged 6 months to 18 years receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who therefore might be at risk for experiencing Reye syndrome after influenza virus infection;

• Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities;

• American Indians/Alaska Natives;

• People who are morbidly obese (body-mass index is 40 or greater);

• Health-care personnel;

• Household contacts and caregivers of children aged younger than 5 years and adults aged 50 years and older, with particular emphasis on vaccinating contacts of children aged younger than 6 months;

• Household contacts and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza.

Those who should not be vaccinated:

• People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs;

• People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination;

• Children younger than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for children in this age group);

• People who have a moderate to severe illness with a fever (they should wait until they recover to get vaccinated);

• A history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks following receipt of influenza vaccine is a precaution for the use of influenza vaccine.

Caltrans Meyers' enclave becomes a village of seasonal workers sleeping and eating onsite

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Aromas of freshly made food waft from a nondescript building tucked off Highway 89. Three hot meals a day are served here. Boarders are upstairs sleeping – in the middle of day.

Today starts week four of winter at the Meyers' Caltrans depot.

When it's storming out – and it doesn't have to be white stuff that is falling from the sky – the heavy equipment operators are working 12-hour shifts. There may be no time for breaks.

"Anything dealing with our highways we take care of," Mark Wagener explains during lunch Dec. 5. "There's so much sand on the road we have to clean the catch basins regularly."



Twelve-hour shifts at the

Caltrans kitchen in Meyers are routine for Claire Neville. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Rocks are sliding on the road and storm drains are backed up. Most of the mop up is done by hand.

When it's snowing, Wagener is in a plow truck or grader.

This seasonal facility usually operates from sometime in November through April. Though there was the year it opened in October.

Any city, county, state or federal employee can eat here. Lake Valley personnel and California Highway Patrol officers are dining on Dec. 5. Each meal is $4.

The lunch crew can put sack lunches together so workers stay nourished throughout their shift.

On Wednesday, heavy equipment mechanic Walt Wimsett and Wagener are relishing the meal in front of them as they sit in the dining area that seems a bit like a cafeteria. The difference is the quality of food.

"This is the best meatloaf I've ever had," Wimsett says. "This reminds me of the cooking I grew up with."

Real mashed potatoes and green beans are also on his plate. Pudding is available for dessert.

Wagener enjoys fish Fridays the most. He said the choice of a half dozen items from shrimp to salmon to chowder keeps him filled up.

Keeping workers fed

Dennis Russo has been cooking here since 1996 – having been a cook for nearly 50 years. Caltrans has 15 cooks in the state – mostly in snow country. The closest facilities like this to

Tahoe are the one at Caples Lake and the two on Interstate 80.

Russo has three people helping him make sure there is plenty of food for the crew. And like any restaurant, it’s a bit of a guessing game to know how many mouths there will be to feed on any given day.

Russo said after a while he’s gotten good at knowing the forecast and figuring out how many workers will be on duty.

It’s a full commercial kitchen that is capable of producing meals for the masses.

Beef ribs with an Asian rub are on the counter. That’s what was served for dinner last night.

Soup is always available. So are fresh fruit and a salad bar.

“We do cookies, cakes, pies. They are spoiled,” Claire Neville, one of the cooks, says with a smile.

She said newbies to the Meyers’ family – and a family is what they consider themselves – can gain 20 pounds in a season. Healthy and not so healthy items abound. For instance, on Wednesday homemade cinnamon rolls with frosting were whipped up for breakfast. But fresh fruit and yogurt are also available.

The breakfast sandwiches are one of the more popular items first thing in the morning.

Dinners run the gamut from pork, fish, beef – to steak about every 10 days. Burger bars, fresh chili over a hotdog, chicken Monterey and seven-spice chicken are some of the favorites.

Home away from home

Some of Caltrans’ employees live nearby and go home at the end of their shift. More than a dozen are in town for the next six months.

Russo is one of them. He has a room upstairs. He calls Oakdale home the rest of the year.

Their quarters are sparse. Rooms are on the second and third floors, off hallways that look like a rundown hotel, or maybe an old college dorm. The worn brown carpet has seen better days. Rooms have twin beds, a sink, closet, dresser and old TV. Down the hall are the communal bathroom and laundry facility.

Towels and sheets are cleaned by a service, but clothing must be laundered by the individual.

On the first floor near the entrance is a break room of sorts. It doubles as a family room. A pool table, foosball, television and comfy couches fill the room.

“If it snows, there are no days off until the sun shines,” Russo says.

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Police officers out on leave means minimal coverage on streets of South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Going to 12-hour shifts was supposed to put more officers on the streets of South Lake Tahoe on weekend nights during times when crime more often occurs.

That hasn’t happened despite the change from 10-hour to 12-hour shifts about 100 days ago.

Police Chief Brian Uhler blames it on staffing issues. Three officers are out on medical leave, though he would not say if it’s work related or when they may return. Two officers were just hired last month to replace two who had left the department. They are in training. And then there’s Officer Johnny Poland’s spot that cannot be filled until the FBI figures out what it is going to do.



Johnny Poland gets paid to be a South Lake Tahoe police officer even though he hasn’t worked in more than a year. Photo/LTN file

It’s been more than a year since Poland was put on paid administrative because of the federal investigation. But no one to this day is saying what Poland may have done.

FBI spokeswoman Gina Swankie, as in the past, would not speak about the investigation.

Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*, “It is still a joint investigation

involving our agency and the FBI. There have been some developments in the recent past. We are trying to bring this situation to some form of closure in the not so distant future."

What the developments are, what closure means and what the time line is are not being made public.

Poland is training with the National Guard and therefore was unavailable for comment. While he is working for the Guard he is not being paid by the city. When he's not training, he's collecting a check, health benefits and retirement benefits from the city. That total cost for taxpayers is not known. The city is not legally able to fill the void created by his forced departure.

12-hour shifts

Lt. Brian Williams will give the City Council an update Dec. 11 about how the 12-hour shift is working. The council had asked to be briefed at about the 90-day mark.

The council was concerned fatigue could be an issue. Uhler says that has not been an issue to date. Data was collected to see if accidents might go up during the last two hours of the shift. There has not been a single accident.

"We looked at overtime savings in terms of payback time with the shift schedule and there has been a $15,000 savings in the first 90-plus days," Uhler said. "There have been no negatives that are tangible."

When Uhler went before the council in the summer to tell them about how the shifts would be lengthened one of the benefits was supposed to be more manpower at critical times. That has not materialized with officers out. And while they are off duty their positions are vacant.

With the loss of two sergeants and a captain because of budget

constraints, there is no room to move someone down into a patrol car even on a temporary basis.

“We have absorbed some loses through attrition, but we’ve reached the point where we no longer can lose officers and maintain the minimum service levels,” Uhler said.

Competitors become partners to lure skiers, snowboarders to both ends of Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

No ski resort is going to please all of the people, but it is possible one pass can please most of the people.

That is the hope of officials at Sierra-at-Tahoe, Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. (Alpine and Squaw have the same owners.) All three resorts are unique – in terms of terrain, amenities, and vibe. It’s not about becoming a homogenous, non-descript corporate (though all are corporate entities and not indie resorts) mountain.

“What it’s about is the different experiences. The differences

and variety each can offer customers," Andy Wirth, who runs Squaw and Alpine, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Squaw is legendary. After all, it hosted the 1960 Winter Olympics. Terrain is steep. Cliffs are rugged. The mountain is sprawling. Alpine is definitely more laid back. It's known more for its bowls than traditional ski runs. Sierra is all about the mountain – no village necessary – exceptional terrain parks and being a place all ages can feel comfortable.



When it's windy at Squaw, those pass holders will find plenty of sheltered area at Sierra. Photo/Provided

Squaw and Sierra are home to a slew of past and current Olympians and X Gamers – think Tamara McKinney, Jonny Moseley, Julia Mancuso, Travis Cabral, Hannah Teter, and Jaime Anderson. So their mountains aren't just for the recreational skier – though that is mostly who is schussing down their slopes.

"We are partnered with two of the best resorts in the United States," John Rice, general manager of Sierra, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I have had days at Squaw Valley in terms of quality that don't compare to anything else in the U.S. It's got it all."

Rice has intimate knowledge of Squaw, having worked there early in his career. He started as an intern and left as

director of all outdoor operations, which included managing a staff of 350.

What he believes Sierra will offer Squaw and Alpine pass holders is terrain parks like they aren't used to.

"I think we will see a huge sampling from their youth to see what we are about," Rice said.

The three-in-one pass is a one-year deal – at least to start with. Head honchos and money crunchers will assess how the partnership is working throughout the winter and figure out what to do for the 2013-14 year.

(Both resorts have limited deals with other ski resorts that are separate from this offer.)

While resort officials can't completely attribute the bump in season pass sales to the Nov. 12 announcement of this promotion, they know people are excited about it.

Wirth said, "Since the announcement we have seen an overwhelming response from the marketplace. We've clearly seen a lot of new customers through our season pass sales."

He said people have upgraded their passes so they can ski at Sierra.

"On opening day we had 12 Squaw people," Rice said. This was Thanksgiving Day and Squaw was open.

For most pass holders at Squaw-Alpine, it means being able to ski at Sierra throughout the season. For most Sierra pass holders, it means access to Squaw-Alpine until Dec. 21 and after April 15.

With Squaw and Alpine during normal snow years having closing dates in May, this will mean another month of skiing (for free) for Sierra pass holders.

Having a north-south option was appealing to Rice because he had it before when Booth Creek also owned Northstar. He saw the benefit to a deal like that even if skiers are apt to predominately be at one end of the lake.

Wirth likes that Sierra attracts a sizeable crowd from the Sacramento area. Now he hopes they'll take Interstate 80 a few times instead of Highway 50.

Once a rider is at a resort there's more money to be spent beyond having bought the pass. There's food, gear, rentals, lessons, preferred parking and more. That's one way the resorts will cash in on the deal.

It's also about the perceived value of the pass. Even if people don't take advantage of skiing the multiple resorts, the possibility always exists.

Tahoe tourism industry on economic rebound

By Kathryn Reed

People are coming to Lake Tahoe and they are spending money. And projections for 2013 are that more of the same is going to

happen.

“We are going to have our best year sales-wise. It’s a combination of people staying closer to home and fabulous weather,” Tom Turner, owner of the 14-year-old Riva Grill in South Lake Tahoe, said.

Turner told *Lake Tahoe News* that Caliente in Kings Beach and Gar Woods in Carnelian Bay are also having a spectacular year revenue-wise. Bar of America in Truckee was added to his restaurant portfolio in April.

Ski resort officials had plenty to be thankful for during the long Thanksgiving weekend. People flocked to the resorts to enjoy the mix of natural and man-made snow.



Indications are people want to travel again and Lake Tahoe is one place they want to visit. Photo/LTN file

“We had a remarkable Thanksgiving – Thursday through Sunday,” Andy Wirth, CEO of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Skier visits and traffic were near an all-time high (at Squaw) largely because we opened a great deal of terrain on the upper mountain.”

The U.S. Commerce Department reports that numbers to date show the travel and tourism industry is likely going to set another record in 2012 in terms of trips and revenue.

Lakeside Inn in Stateline doesn't spend money marketing its hotel and still it has numbers that prove there is demand to come to Tahoe. Compared to 2011 at this time Lakeside has 2,000 more reservations lined up.

"Given the volume on the books for next year we are doing better than the last three years," Stacy Noyes with Lakeside told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She said the bookings started before summer and before the ski resorts opened.

"Last year people were planning their vacations eight days in advance. This year they are planning 21 days in advance," Noyes said.

Smith Travel Research said U.S. hotels posted a record 8.3 percent increase in room revenue for the third quarter compared to 2011. Occupancy rose 2.7 percentage points to 69 percent, while room rates rose 5.6 percent to an average of $91.08 a night. Revpar, which is the combination of room rates and occupancy, is up 8.3 percent to $62.83.

When the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority was putting together its 2012-13 budget, which took effect July 1, the staff and board did so with the assumption hotel occupancy would be on a gradual incline. Most of LTVA's money comes from hotel taxes collected at the lake on the Nevada side. But a substantial chunk of change also comes from California hoteliers via the Tourism Improvement District.

"Our budget this year is built on the assumption that the world is a brighter, happier place that involves more travel," Carol Chaplin, LTVA executive director, said. But the numbers, she said, are conservative.

Still, this year's budget is $1 million more than it was in 2008. Much of that has to with Douglas County increasing the lodging license fee and the TID upping its contribution.

The uptick has also allowed the LTVA to incrementally add staff to bring the number of workers back to what it was a few years ago. Tony Lyle came on board this fall as director of tourism.

“He is big into social media and he is tech savvy,” Chaplin told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We really thought the position added a new dimension that will help all of us do a better job at what we do and maybe do new things as well.”

Lyle will be tasked with providing the agency with analysis and a plan for connecting with visitors when they are in town and before they reach the South Shore. This includes at the visitors centers, via the phone, email and through social media.

LTVA knows it needs to be where the traveler is – which is on a mobile device and often on social media.

(Marketing chief Andy Chapman at the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association did not respond to an email inquiry, so what the North Shore is doing is unknown.)

“We’re going to see mobile this year represent 35 percent of all searches. Next year, it will be about 45 percent,” Tran Hang, head of Google’s travel industry, told Hotel News Now. “These are outstanding growth rates we can’t ignore.”

On the flip side is Travis Katz, CEO of Gogobot – a travel-related social network. He cautions that people easily get information overload and that they want to be treated as though their vacation is special and unique.

His statements in Hotel News Now give credence to the trend that travel agents are seeing resurgence in business because people want that authentic, specialized trip. But that’s not to say agents aren’t using Google and the like for their customers.

Chaplin said with current staffing there is a greater likelihood the LTVA will attend more events that are designed to reach would-be vacationers – especially those outside the country.

After all, the U.S. Department of Commerce says international visitors this year could infuse $169 billion into the economy.

Below are some stats about Lake Tahoe travel:

FlipKey Travel Trends: Lake Tahoe by vacation rentals site FlipKey.com

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Benefits of Tahoe holiday bazaar stretch to Africa

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – While the cha-ching of cash registers could not be heard, the swiping of credit cards across the Square was evident as people turned out en masse to buy local and think global.

Halfway into the Dec. 1 event more than 100 people had filtered through the doors of Bona Fide HQ in Meyers to peruse the 11 booths filled with items from local artisans. Books, jewelry, pottery, glassware, hand knit hats, photography and more were filling bags as people shopped for themselves and others.

Organizers of the second annual Zawadisha Holiday Bazaar were all smiles with the turn out.

“Zawadisha has sought to develop an effective microfinance program to improve the lives of Kenyan women and their families,” Jen Gurecki, founder of Zawadisha, wrote in a column for *Lake Tahoe News* describing her global enterprise.



The second annual Zawadisha Holiday Bazaar brings out hundreds to Meyers. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Once a year she sells items she has brought back from Kenya. All the money goes to her nonprofit. (Vendors paid a fee to be at the event, which goes to Zawadisha.) Gurecki works with a wholesaler in Nairobi and also picks up things while doing work in Africa that she brings back to share with those in the United States. All are handmade and one-of-a-kind items.

Most of the items for sale on this blustery Saturday were unique.

Allie Broadhurst has been working with copper for the last seven years, but it’s been just the last year that she has ventured into glasswork. All the glasses are hand etched and have a Tahoe theme.

Mostly it’s middle of the night inspirations that drive her creativity. But flowers in her garden provided motivation for etchings on one pair of glasses.

While she doesn’t have a storefront for Revive Tahoe, her work is sold at Gaia-Licious in South Lake Tahoe.



Allie Broadhurst creates original etchings on glasses.

Kim Wyatt, owner of Bona Fide Books in Meyers, and author Suzanne Roberts of South Lake Tahoe are doing a brisk business selling their books. People are telling them they thought about buying their works on Amazon, but decided to keep all the cash local. (Amazon takes more than 50 percent from authors/publishers.)

Wyatt would like to see pop-up stores like this in Meyers every few months.

While this was a one-day event, it is an annual one.

“I want to build a community here to build a community there,” Gurecki said in regards to bringing awareness to Tahoe about the struggles of women and girls in Kenya and in turn helping them to have a better life.

Brunt of storm on its way; flooding likely

By Kathryn Reed

With a wind advisory in effect through 4am Sunday, public works crews in the Lake Tahoe Basin will be patrolling streets through the weekend to make sure storm drains are not clogged with pine needles or other debris, which can cause streets to flood.

But there is nothing crews can do to stop the rivers in the region from rising.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting the Truckee River will be close to 8 feet between 3am and 3pm on Sunday. Flood stage for the portion of the river along Highway 89 near the Placer-Nevada county line is 4.5 feet.

Officials are advising people to avoid traveling on Highway 89 between Truckee and Tahoe City.

Farther downstream, the level of concern is even more heightened.

"(Friday) morning, the National Weather Service issued a flood warning for the Truckee River area and Susanville," said Aaron Kenneston, Washoe County emergency manager, said at a press briefing. "We are joining forces with our regional partners to declare a state

The following are storm totals from the National Weather Service in Reno from 4pm Nov. 27 through 6pm Nov. 30:

Reno 1.47 inches (rain)
Incline Village 1.11 inches (rain)
Mammoth Lakes 26 inches (snow)
Kirkwood Mountain 22

of emergency in Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County in order to access state resources that can help us maintain public safety as we deal with the impact of this 25-year flood. Those resources include the Nevada National Guard, the Division of Forestry, and other agencies that specialize in emergency disaster management and relief."

inches (snow)
Sierra-at-Tahoe 19 inches (snow)
Sugar Bowl 12.0 inches (snow)
Alpine Meadows 9 inches (snow)
Upper Kingsbury Grade 8 inches (snow)

Storms keep rolling

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency inspectors were out Friday checking on projects and storm drains.

"While we don't know right now if this was a 20-year storm, BMPs are engineered to handle 1 inch of rain in one hour, which equates to a 20-year storm event," Jeff Cowen with TRPA told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The key is that the first hour provides the 'first flush' of pollutants. Once that first flush is captured, the stormwater following is much cleaner and less impactful."

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a flood watch from this afternoon through Sunday morning for the Lake Tahoe Basin, eastern Alpine County and the Reno-Carson City-Minden area along and west of Highway 395. Heavy rain with high snow levels is expected to occur tonight through Sunday. This will increase the potential for minor flooding near creeks and streams.

Forecasters are calling for 3 to 5 inches of rain during this time period, with isolated amounts up to 7 inches along Highway 89.

With moisture comes the wind – with gusts expected to hit 120 mph on mountain passes.

Clearing the debris



Bobby Maxwell with South Lake Tahoe public works on Nov. 30 clears a storm drain on Ski Run and David. Photos/Kathryn Reed

In South Lake Tahoe the public works crews were driving all over town dealing with the more than two dozen usual problem areas along with the calls coming in from concerned residents.

By 3pm Friday a couple hundred bags of sand have been filled at the fire station near the Y. Bobby Maxwell with the city's public works department delivered more bags so people can protect their property.

A homeowner on Janet Drive did what he could to clear the water, but Mother Nature was winning. The vactor truck is sent over to suck up the water and debris. Still, sand bags line his driveway while the water ponds on the far side of his street.

This is one of those low-lying parcels, where the street goes up in both directions and the property at the bottom is where

the water collects.

The large vactor truck is running all day – and will be this weekend. When it's full the gunk is dumped in the Caltrans yard at the end of Sierra Boulevard.

The vactor mobile is also one of the tools the city has to help prevent clogs. It along with street sweepers is sent out before storms to rid roads of as much debris as possible.

Maxwell says curbs are a good thing; adding that Highway 50 is noticeably better in this storm because Caltrans installed curbs and gutters the last two years.

But Caltrans' work has caused problems for those on Fremont Avenue. The city had a pump there on Friday to help with drainage flows. Later in the afternoon the center was pumping water from below the parking lot on to Fremont Avenue with a fire-type hose.

Caltrans messed with the city's infrastructure in summer 2011 so the drainage is worse. It nearly caused the businesses in the Fremont Mall to flood last year.

Markers let the crews know what kind of drain is installed. DI = drain inlet, P = pipe, and DW = dry well. The latter don't work all that well because they can only hold so much water. A flooded street is usually the result of a dry well being overloaded, a low-lying area where all the water collects, or a flat area where there is no movement of water – it just puddles.

The drain inlets are where crews can take a metal rake to remove the debris to get the water flowing again.

At Tamarack and Ski Run the water is nearly across both lanes. Water is over the top of Maxwell's boots. But after a few swipes of the grate with the rake the water is spiraling down the drain. The road is wet, but there is no more standing

water.

Along Lakeview Avenue where the city did improvements the last two years it would be hard to know there had been a substantial storm. In winters past about 20 calls came in each season to let crews know water was accumulating.

While snow is more common in Tahoe this time of year than rain, the history books point to plenty of flooding in the area. The most recent significant event was New Year’s Eve 2005.

“It seems like we are working harder in the winter because the storms are more powerful,” Maxwell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

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