Forecasters on edge as storms hit Tahoe, Reno

By Kathryn Reed

RENO – Extra personnel have been called in to analyze the vast amount of data flowing into the multitude of computers at the National Weather Service office in Reno.

This storm that is upon Northern California and Nevada is expected to be a doozie, with drenching rains that could cause flooding in the Lake Tahoe Basin, Truckee, Reno-Sparks, and points south on Highway 395.

Of most concern to forecasters is how high the Truckee River will rise in Truckee and Sparks. Rivers are expected to crest on Sunday. All tributaries into Lake Tahoe are also being watched, with the Upper Truckee River being the largest one.

While it's quiet inside the confines of the weather bureau on Thursday morning, plenty of work is going on. Each workstation contains several computers. Most have lots of color on the screens – an indication something other than sunshine is on the horizon.

One screen breaks down the predicted snowfall for the Sierra for the next seven days in six-hour increments.

Jon Mittelstadt, meteorologist in charge, points to the satellite data showing the "atmospheric river from Hawaii" that will bring the heavy rain to the region this weekend. "The satellite has a sensor for water vapor," he explains.

It's looking like after the brunt of the storm things will dry out for a few days before more moisture comes in late next week.

But the severity of this storm has Reno forecasters talking to

FEMA, emergency management crews in California and Nevada, departments of transportation, law enforcement as well as hydrological partners.

Four television screens provide "situational awareness" for the team to keep track of various locales – from a loop of Caltrans cameras over Donner Summit to what is going on at Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

The Reno office, which is one of 124 throughout the United States, handles the forecasts along the crest of the Sierra, Tahoe, and all of Washoe County to the Oregon border, and then points south of Reno. Neighboring offices are in Sacramento, Medford, Ore., Hanford, Elko and Las Vegas.

The River Forecast Center in Sacramento handles all of the rivers.

Inexact science

It's necessary to staff the weather office 24 hours a day, seven days a week because things are always changing. Predictions can be made based on what the data says, but Mother Nature has a mind of her own.

"If you get past five or six days, you can't have confidence in the forecast," Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News.*

A winter weather advisory is in affect above 7,500 feet for Friday from 4am to 4pm. Six to 12 inches could fall at that level. It's expected to be heavy, wet snow – making driving even more precarious. A flood watch remains in effect from Saturday afternoon through Sunday morning for the Lake Tahoe Basin, eastern Alpine County and the Reno-Carson City-Minden area. A period of heavy rain with high snow levels will occur Saturday evening through Sunday. Rainfall amounts Saturday through Sunday morning of 3 to 5 inches are possible in the Lake Tahoe Basin, with isolated amounts up to 7 inches along Highway 89. Areas at greatest risk for flooding are small creeks and streams along and west of Highway 395 from Lassen County, south through the Reno-Tahoe-Carson City area and into northern Mono County. Mud and rockslides are possible in areas of steep terrain and near recent wildfire burn areas. – *National Weather*

Mittelstadt knows weather guys get a bad rap when they say one thing and another occurs.

Service, Reno

One problem with being in the West is no one is in the Pacific Ocean feeding data to those on shore about what the storms are like. Satellites help, but they can only do so much. Ship reports come in, but they don't have data from the upper air.

Reno is all about seven-day forecasts. Of the 24 employees in that office, 15 are forecasters.

In his 20 years with the Weather Service, Mittelstadt has seen tremendous improvement with forecasts. Technology, including the Internet, has helped with that.

He said people are always working on ways to improve forecasting and improving computer models.

"Things happen in very small scales," Mittelstadt said. He pointed to how there may be a forecast for 6 to 12 inches of snow, but one area gets 2 feet. Being able to nail down more precise data to have predicted that 2 feet of snow is what weather gurus would like to be able to do.

More than the daily weather

During the summer fire weather is the big deal. Wind, heat and humidity are the big factors forecasters study. They partner with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Reclamation.



It's going to be a long

weekend for forecasters at the National Weather Service in Reno. Photos/Kathryn Reed

On big fires, a forecaster goes to the site.

Aviation forecasting – focusing on the ceiling and wind – is something pilots tap into. Forecasts are done for South Lake Tahoe, Truckee, Mammoth and Reno airports. In January, the Reno bureau will provide data for Carson City, too.

Throughout the world weather balloons are launched twice a day, at the same time. The hydrogen balloon starts off about the size of a mini van and then gets bigger as the atmospheric pressure decreases. Eventually it bursts. A parachute is deployed that gently guides the instrument to land.

The data being collected is transmitted to the nearest computer center.

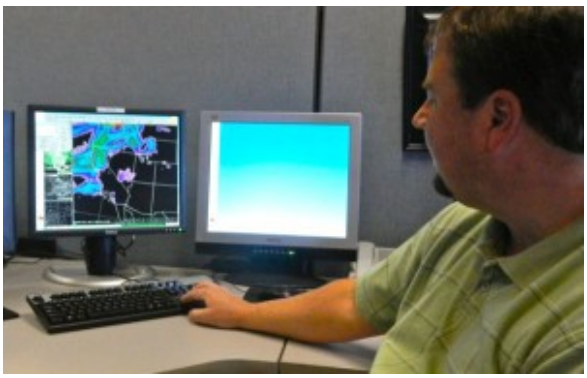
During Hurricane Sandy this fall every station in the United States launched the balloons four times a day to gather more timely information.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Washington deals more with climate concerns and long-term forecasting. Reno handles the weather and water – not the climate.

While the forecast from Washington is locally for a dry, warm winter, Mittelstadt said, "… it's not a strong signal, so it could go either way."

Storm precautions being taken

Randy Kelly with Liberty Utilities, which services the California side of the basin-Truckee-Alpine County, said, "We are definitely paying close attention to this storm."



Meteorologist Jon Mittelstadt looks at data Nov. 29 showing the approaching storms.

His crews have been talking with emergency personnel from NV Energy in Reno and plan to keep in touch today “to see how everyone is doing and who needs help.”

A tree branch falling onto a line Thursday caused about 150 customers near the Y in South Lake Tahoe to be without power.

South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler has reached out to officials in El Dorado County Emergency Management Office.

The city has 10 free sand bags per household available behind Fire Station 3 located at 2101 Lake Tahoe Blvd. (near the Y) and at Bijou Community Park near disc golf hole No. 1. Residents must fill the bags.

Sandbags are available at the Truckee Fire Protection District Station 92, 11479 Donner Pass Road.

In Placer County, sand bags are available at: North Tahoe Fire Station 52, 288 North Shore Blvd., Kings Beach; Placer County Department of Public Works Corporation Yard, 2501 North Lake Blvd., Tahoe City; Old Squaw Valley Fire Station, 1810 Squaw Valley Road, Olympic Valley; Northstar Community Services District Corporation Yard, 50 Trimont Lane; and North Tahoe Fire Station 53, 5425 West Lake Blvd., Homewood.

Washoe County School District has activated the district flood emergency plan.

Follow the Reno National Weather Service office online.

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This video from Kings Beach on Nov. 28 proves some people enjoy wild weather:

Public slow to weigh in on Northstar's expansion

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Electrical transmissions and connectivity of the various land holdings were the two main concerns brought up at the Wednesday scoping session of the Northstar Mountain Master Plan.

Of the approximately 20 people at the Nov. 28 meeting, only two members of the public spoke.

Dave McClure of Tahoe Vista would like to see a power consumption table based on what the ski resort is using today and what it expects to use if the proposed new lifts were operational.

He also asked planners to explain how the CalPeco transmission upgrades will play into this. CalPeco is the parent company of Liberty Utilities, which provides electricity to the California side of Lake Tahoe as well as to the Truckee area.



Gerry Haas with Placer County on Nov. 28 goes over Northstar's proposals. Photo/LTN

Ann Nichols, representing the North Tahoe Preservation Alliance, wants a map that shows Northstar's plans, but one that also includes the CalPeco line, the timberland production zone, along with adjacent parcels and their uses.

The comments will be addressed in the environmental document.

Nichols also brought up the issue of whether the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency will be involved with any of this because she said Mount Pluto – the highest point on the mountain – is considered to be in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Northstar is in Truckee; where the tentacles of TRPA do not reach.

Gerry Hass, senior planner with Placer County, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting that his department has contacted TRPA. There has been no definitive ruling as to whether any of the proposed plans are technically in Lake Tahoe. He pointed to a map showing the changes for the Mount Pluto area on the Truckee side, not the Tahoe side of the peak.

Wednesday's meeting was to gather input from people regarding environmental impacts of the plan. It had nothing to do with the merits of the plan.

Most of Northstar, which is privately held property and not U.S. Forest Service land, is zoned forestry. A portion, mostly on the perimeter, is considered timberland production zone. These TPZ areas are what necessitate a special use permit.

"… such uses and facilities are already permitted by Alpine, Sierra and Lassen counties. Placer County is not being placed in a position of approving a TPZ that has not already been implemented by other surrounding counties," Jessica VanPernis, spokeswoman for Northstar, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting. "Further, Northstar is the only existing resort in Placer County with TPZ lands within its boundaries, therefore limiting the proposed ski lifts, trails, snowmaking and related facility uses to Northstar."

Of the proposed seven new lifts, it's possible five would be built in the short term. They are all labeled with letters for now – which ironically is how Northstar used to label all of its chairlifts.

What's called the C Lift would start on the north side of Sawmill Lake (the reservoir used for snowmaking) and would end just below the current Vista Express. The base of the lift area might have campsites and could be where the cross country center would be relocated.

On the opposite side of the mountain two lifts and a surface lift are being talked about so the Sawtooth Ridge area would be opened up. This would add 550 acres of terrain, but little actual trail creation would be done in order to retain the remote wilderness experience.

The J Lift would go from the village to Lookout Mountain.

Five skier bridges are proposed. They would need to be sturdy enough to hold a snowcat.

Haas said widening of trails is proposed mostly on existing routes.

Expanding the current restaurant at the top of Mount Pluto is planned. Adding a warming hut to the backside is also on the drawing board.

People have until Dec. 6 to comment on what Vail Resorts, owners of Northstar, want to do at the Truckee-area resort in the next 15 years. In the spring the draft environment impact report is expected to be released for a 45-day comment period. Future meetings are planned before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. More information is online. Here is a map of the proposed changes.

The EIR will tackle the usual spectrum of concerns – from aesthetics to air quality to biological and cultural resources – along with any comments people submit.

No written comments had been received before the meeting. Haas said that's pretty typical with a plan like this – comments tend to come in closer to the deadline.

Array of lights, decorations bring holidays to life

Updated Nov. 28 4pm: Rebecca Wass' tree was named "best in

show” by judges.

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Barren open space at dawn became a bevy of activity by noon and when the lights went out Tuesday night the room embodied the essence of the holidays.

Barton Health Foundation’s 4th annual Festival of Trees and Lights begins this week. All the trees and other decorations went up Nov. 27.

Judges will be roaming the MontBleu convention center this morning to pick the best of the 12 large, designer trees, along with best school tree, and best Barton wreath and trees. During the festival the public will be able to weigh in by casting a vote in the “people’s choice” award. At the Dec. 1 gala the bidding begins for those who want to take a tree and trimmings home.



Laurie Brazil strings lights on one of the designer trees. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Having won “best in show” the last two years, Terri Tepper is hoping to make it three consecutive years with her Advent-urous Arch. Instead of a traditional tree she has created an arch out of the faux greenery and added a hanging Advent with table and chairs below it. Each of the candles represents

faith, hope, joy and peace.

“I like to think outside the box. I’m not crazy about artificial trees,” Tepper, who owns Flowers by Terri, said as she was setting up her station Tuesday afternoon.

Though the Barton Foundation festival is not religious, Tepper turns to prayer to find her inspiration each year. She wanted to represent a deeper meaning of Christmas with her creation. But, she added, she didn’t want it to be “in your face”. “People who don’t know the Advent will think it’s a hanging candelabra,” Tepper said.

It’s up to the designers how they want to transform their trees. Up early were the Gingerbread Man and Snowsports trees.

Working on her inaugural tree was Rebecca Wass. She took time off from her job to be able to transform the somewhat pliable branches into Santa’s Workshop.

“I want it to be an attention grabber for kids. I believe Christmas is for the kids,” Wass said.

Whimsical and fun is how she described her tree.

Designers who have participated every year include: Barbara Anderson, Barbara Page Interiors; Après Wine Co.; Katie Long, Thran’s; Keri Lanier Smith, Lake Tahoe Holidays; Terri Tepper, Flowers by Terri; and Tina Hoy-Barnwell, Lavish Floral.

New designers this year are: Elizabeth Leonard, Celadon Events; Cynthia Ferris-Bennett, Events Ink; Interior Motives; Kim Warlow, Cork & More; and Rebecca Wass.

Besides looking at all the brightly decorated trees, there is the Teddy Bear Hospital to visit, letters to Santa to be written, crafts to create, gift buying at Mrs. Claus’ Shop, and photos with Santa. Plus, there is entertainment most days.

The first three years of the festival the proceeds went to

Barton Health’s Community Clinic expansion and renovation. This year the money will be used to turn Barton into a level 3-trauma center. The cost of staff training, equipment and remodel of the emergency room is more than $200,000.

Paul Fry will be honored Dec. 1 with the spirit of philanthropy award.

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Event schedule:

• **Nov. 29:** Senior Stroll and entertainment: 10-11am (Free for seniors 55-plus)

Designer tree public viewing and entertainment: 10am-2pm

• **Nov. 30:** Designer tree public viewing entertainment: 10am-2pm

Family Night: 5-9pm

• **Dec. 1:** Teddy Bear Breakfast: 8:30-9:30am

Designer tree public viewing entertainment: 10am-2pm

The Gala: 5:30pm-midnight

• **Dec. 2:** Designer tree public viewing and entertainment: 10am-2pm

Family movie showing, “The Polar Express”: 3pm

Public viewing ($5 for adults; $3 for senior citizens (55-plus); $3 for children (ages 3-12); children 2 and under are free) and Family Night tickets ($35 for a family of six).

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Hwy. 50 slope expected to be secured next week

By Kathryn Reed

The nearly two-year grind of construction on Highway 50 just below Spooner Summit on the Tahoe side is about to come to an end.

“That project has a grading season exception based on the concern a serious hazard could occur if the project were not allowed to be completed,” Kristi Boosman, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That hazard is the hillside winding up in the middle of the highway.

Usually dirt is not supposed to be moved in the Lake Tahoe Basin after Oct. 15 per TRPA rules. Those rules are in place so added sediment won’t flow into the lake during the wet season.



Slope stabilization along Highway 50 in Douglas County should be completed next week. Photos/Susan Wood

However, with this in part being an erosion control project and it not possible to stop work without leaving the hillside to the south in jeopardy, work has continued well past the first substantial snow. And while heavy rain at lake level and snow at the higher elevations are in the forecast starting Wednesday, work is not expected to be wrapped up until the end of next week.

During the storm earlier this month that had snow at the summit being counted by feet instead of inches, the commute between Tahoe and Carson City was even more gnarly than usual. This is because one lane of the highway headed east is closed with all the construction work. It was bumper to bumper with low visibility and oncoming traffic inches away.

“It’s definitely not an ideal situation. We can’t just remove the barrier and leave the slope exposed. It’s just one of those things. We have to get it done,” Scott MacGruder with the Nevada Department of Transportation told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The work took longer than expected because as the slope was being stabilized the crews realized the hillside was much weaker than anticipated, MacGruder said. This meant more reinforcement was needed, which took more time. He said geologists have been on-site to give input.



Heavy equipment and piles of dirt have been the norm for months along Spooner Summit.

“Sometimes you get sloughing that is unforeseen,” MacGruder said. “You can’t make up time.”

On Nov. 28 an inspector from TRPA is scheduled to assess the work.

Granite Construction is doing the work. The $3.6 million project started in 2011. In all, it included about five miles on Highway 50 from Cave Rock to nearly the junction of Highway 28.

Redevelopment agency dissolution gets stickier, more complicated in South Lake Tahoe

Updated Nov. 28 2:30pm: The oversight committee has been changed to Dec. 7 at 2pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

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By Kathryn Reed

The agency left dealing with South Lake Tahoe's redevelopment issues is fighting the state Department of Finance regarding nearly a half million dollars.

The DOF on Nov. 9 wrote a letter to city officials saying the $426,210 must be given to the taxing entities and not kept in the Low and Moderate Income Housing Fund, as the oversight board voted to do.

The oversight committee at its Thursday meeting has on the agenda a discussion and possible action item regarding the yet-to-be scheduled meeting with the DOF regarding this issue. The agency is appealing the DOF's decision.

"I'm not surprised the Department of Finance wrote a letter supporting the conclusions in my report. I understand that the city is appealing that decision. Regardless, very soon we need to focus on how the bond payments are going to be made," El Dorado County Auditor Joe Harn told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Heavenly Village is one redevelopment area in South Lake Tahoe that comes with outstanding debt. Photo/LTN file

Bondholders from redevelopment projects throughout South Lake Tahoe are owed more than $100 million. The problem is there is likely not going to be enough revenue to pay those bonds.

Harn believes that is where the successor agency should be focusing its attention and not trying to keep the $426,210 for housing.

“I agree with (Joe Harn) when he argued to the state. The revenue should go to pay all bond debt and not distributed to taxing entities. What we disagree on is the revenue,” South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The Redevelopment Agency borrowed it from its own housing fund account, so it’s an internal loan. It’s not between the city and Redevelopment Agency.”

Part of the successor agency’s arguments to the state is that in addition to disputing the $426,210, the agency believes any money should go to bondholders and not the taxing entities, as the DOF would like to happen.

When California officials decided to disband redevelopment agencies throughout the state they didn’t fully think through what happens if there is remaining debt and what happens to items like stormwater basins that are owned by the redevelopment agencies. No one is going to buy those basins.

And as the process went along the Legislature passed a few contradicting laws. So, depending on when an action was taken, it may have been the correct protocol at the time, but not so a few months later. Timing plays into the dispute between the local successor agency and the state.

Kerry said if cash is not in hand to pay bondholders the successor agency can seek a loan from the county or Department of Finance.

But Harn said there is no guarantee either entity would grant such a loan.

Then what?

The state in the Assembly Bill 26 decision promised the California Supreme Court that debtors, bondholders and everybody would be made whole – meaning they would all get their money. Where the state would come up with the money, though, is the big unknown.

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Note:

The successor agency meets Nov. 29 at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport in the downstairs conference room. Here is the agenda.

South Shore behavioral therapist helps resolve

issues with 4-legged family members

By Kathryn Reed

Ignore her. Don’t look her in the eye. And, here, put these treats in your pocket.

That’s what we are supposed to tell everyone who comes over.

With a desire to keep dogs in their homes, especially rescue dogs, Karin Schuller is all about making canines comfortable in their new homes, with their new people, and with whomever enters the house.



Karin Schuller goes over homework with AJ’s people. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It doesn’t take Schuller long to figure out this dog is a bit nervous and overprotective of her people. AJ had been super protective of Joy – especially the last year of her life – so it’s not a surprise she is protective of Sue and me.

And it doesn’t take long for Schuller to see why she has been summoned. Sue is on the floor and Schuller reaches down to get

the paperwork. AJ doesn't like this and makes it known.

If only dogs could talk – tell us what is going on, what they're thinking, why they feel threatened by an innocent gesture.

Well, that's not going to happen. And that's why we decided to enlist help to figure out how to make our new family member more secure. Joy rescued AJ – so there is a period of her life that is a mystery. The 9-year-old is part yellow Lab, part greyhound, and other stuff.

I've known AJ for several years. Honestly, she is so incredibly sweet and loving. But she has some attitude.

Schuller's business is aptly named – Dogs with Issues.

"Female dogs are a lot more bossy," Schuller says. But she adds, "Old dogs can learn new tricks."

Schuller has been working with dogs for years, having worked for two veterinarians when she lived in San Diego and one in Zephyr Cove. She had her certificate to be a veterinarian technician and has taken classes in animal behavior.

Personal experience has also taught her what works. Schuller has rescued 70 dogs, worked with a malamute rescue association, and had a team of them when she lived at Fallen Leaf Lake.

For the past two years it's been all about working with dogs to create a harmonious environment. Her approach is "less is more."

"Dogs mostly live in the moment, but they do have a long memory," Schuller said. "When people spoil or baby them too much, it can make them more aggressive."

Schuller works on making the people have control. She gives us homework. We sign an agreement that says without working on

the training daily, we will have failed – not AJ, not Schuller.

We've added the phrase "leave it" to our vocabulary. Schuller says there are at least a hundred ways to use it.

We are starting with just a couple. More will come on future visits from Schuller. Next time we'll all go for a walk together.

We learn that it's best to have AJ outside (or in a room if the weather is not ideal) when people first come over so the commotion at the door is eliminated. She doesn't know someone hugging us hello isn't hurting us.

It's amazing how much information Schuller gives us in a little more than an hour. She leaves handouts to reinforce the lessons we've learned.

Now it's time to get back to training.

Tips from Schuller:

• People leave the house first, then the dog. Otherwise the dog is in control.

• If the treat is too big, by the time she finishes it, she will have forgotten why she was given it.

• On a leash, keep her close to your side.

• Don't sleep with dogs. It teaches them they are equals.

• Corn-based dog foods make the animal aggressive.

• Don't give her rawhide because it would swell in her stomach.

• Bones are bad. The splinters can cause her to bleed out.

• Don't come over the top of the head of a dog. This is

threatening; especially for dogs that have been hit.

Notes:

• Phone: (530) 577.0263

• Email: highsierramtdogs.att.net

• Facebook: search Dogs with Issues

• Schuller also works with puppies.

Sledding provides hours of outdoor thrills

By Kathryn Reed

SPOONER SUMMIT – Based on the smiles and whoops of joy, sledding clearly has no age limit.

“There’s nothing like this back East,” Bill Stump, 50, of Palo Alto said surveying the hill. He and his family recently moved to the Bay Area from New Jersey. They were in Tahoe for the long Veterans Day weekend.

His 13-year-old daughter, Alexandra, thought the forest they used to live in was fun, but when she talked about the steepness of the hills in the Sierra, a big smile came across her face.



Joe and Nick Cortez are all smiles as they descend the Spooner Summit sledding hill. Photos/Kathryn Reed

And she's been at this a few years, so she knows what type of device works best. Pointing to the rectangular purple sled that has an edge a few inches high all the way around it, she said, "I like these kinds because they are easier to shred." Alexandra said the saucers are too hard to steer.

Steering, though, didn't seem to be on option on any of the sleds. And one that had brakes didn't work. That didn't matter to Nick Cortez.

"I liked the part where I went by myself. I put my legs out to stop like brakes," 4-year-old Nick said.

Before most ski resorts started spinning chairs people were eager to play in the white stuff. This hill at the junction of highways 50 and 28 is popular all winter. Part of it has to do with the steepness, part because it's free, part because it's at a high enough elevation to have snow when it's dirt elsewhere and definitely because it's fun.

Sledding, while seemingly a tame sport, if one can call it a sport, is not necessarily safe.

"Sledding is a lot of fun, but we see most injuries in the early season when hard objects are barely covered, [like]

stumps, branches, rocks and when the snow is very hard," Warren Withers, medical director of Barton Health's Emergency Medical Services, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While objects were clearly visible and the worn path of white was showing dirt Monday last week, no one was taken to the ER. But some bruises turned up.

Withers suggests helmets be worn – just like on the ski slopes. One kid had a helmet, but everyone else was taking his or her chances.

A few parents also didn't heed the doctor's advice when it came to riding with their kids.

"Parents should think twice about going on the same sled with children too small to sled by themselves. Crashes can be bad for smaller children riding with adults," Withers said.

Everyone who wiped out seemed to do some sort of flip or at a least hard fall to one side, so it would be easy to see how a little one could be hurt riding with an adult during a tumble.

Even this early in the season bits of plastic were strewn about – an indication the hill won and the sled lost. An old-time metal saucer needed some waxing to go faster. Then there were the Body Glove sleds that worked well for those going down on their stomach. Plus, they looked durable and like they would work well on the water in another season at Lake Tahoe.

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Property owners file lawsuit to stop KGID from expanding pump station along Tahoe's shores

By Kathryn Reed

A lawsuit was filed this week to stop Kingsbury General Improvement District from making more than $6 million in improvements to its water pumping plant at the shore of Lake Tahoe.

Tahoe Shores, which owns the land where the KGID facility is located in Stateline, has the authority per prior agreements to prevent further expansion. Tahoe Shores is the one who owns the land. But KGID is not abiding by those agreements.

This property is where a mobile home park sits and the future Tahoe Beach Club will go.



KGID and the property owners disagree on who has final say regarding future improvements to the Stateline facility. Photo/Provided.

In October, the KGID board voted for a rate increase to cover

the costs of switching to meters. Some question if the fee is really to pay for the upgrades to the intake facility that are mandated by federal water guidelines.

KGID General Manager Cameron McKay told *Lake Tahoe News* he could not comment on anything regarding the lawsuit until he spoke with legal counsel, which was not expected to be until at least next week.

“We want to put them on notice they are violating the state and federal Constitutions by taking land. And if they want to, they must pay for it,” attorney Lew Feldman, who is representing Tahoe Shores, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This would be government taking if they do it.”

A non-exclusive easement exists, which allows Tahoe Shores and KGID to have rights to the land where the water pump house is. Among other things, it means KGID is not supposed to have locked gates, like it does, to prevent Tahoe Shores from accessing that area.

The agreement states, “KGID is not permitted to add on, modify, increase or relocate the ‘improvements’ without the prior written consent of Tahoe Shores, which may be withheld in its sole and absolute discretion.”

The two sides have been exchanging letters this fall, but not to a resolution that satisfies the owners of Tahoe Shores.

Tahoe Shores has offered a parcel at the other end of the project area where KGID could build the improved facility. This would be inland and not on the shore. It is also being offered for free.

According to Feldman, KGID has turned down that offer.

It would be an obvious boon to the Tahoe Beach Club project because it would mean getting rid of the structure that is a bit of an eyesore.

As a government agency, KGID does have the power of eminent domain and therefore could take the land after paying fair market value for it.

But as long as Tahoe Shores owns the land KGID will have a hard time getting a permit from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency because the property owner has to be involved in that process.

Unless a resolution is found outside of the courthouse, it will be up to a judge in the District Court of Douglas County to resolve the dispute.

Editorial: Thanksgiving – a day to remember not everyone has a bounty to be thankful for

"The Pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts. No Americans have been more impoverished than these who, nevertheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving."

– H.U. Westermayer

Most people will gather this Thanksgiving Day with family and friends to celebrate this iconic American holiday. We will do so with tables full of food that becomes refrigerators overflowing with leftovers.

And as we do so, plenty of our neighbors are struggling to

find something to be thankful for – either because they are alone on this holiday that screams to be with others or because the bounty before them is anything but that.



With South Lake Tahoe's unemployment rate of 12.3 percent being higher than California's (10.1 percent), higher than Nevada's (11.5 percent) and higher than the national average (7.9 percent), we are a community overflowing with have nots. And while South Tahoe once had an unemployment rate at nearly 18 percent, the decline of more than five percentage points does mean full employment. It means some have left the area, some have stopped looking for work, some are working multiple jobs, and so many are underemployed.

Many don't know where the rent or mortgage payment will come from in a week.

While we live in an extremely pretty place, the beauty of the mountains and the lake don't pay the bills. They are good for providing solace in times of struggle, but not much else.

Maybe there is something we can learn from the pilgrims who in 1621 celebrated what is considered the first Thanksgiving. They did so with the Wampanoag Indians. It was a time to be grateful for the fall harvest – for what the land had provided.

Perhaps locally, we should be thankful for our harvest this time of year – the snow. While the white stuff itself does not provide nourishment to be shared at a table, it provides work for so many who call Lake Tahoe home. And work provides the money to buy the fixings for every meal.

We don't all work in the field of tourism, but we all ride the roller coaster of economic good and bad times because tourism is the thread that binds us.

The fabric of this community is thread barren. Instead of picking at the loose ends and watching them unravel into an abyss, perhaps it's time we started to stitch the pieces back together.

The anger, the hate, the divisiveness in the world permeate our little town, our shores, the region. We need to stop beating each other up and start lifting each other up. It is time to be thankful that we have the ability to help and thankful for the help that is offered.

Thanksgiving – it's really two words – *thanks* and *giving*.

DiMatteo indicted on federal charges; S. Tahoe never did background check on pot club owner

By Kathryn Reed

Gino DiMatteo has been indicted by a federal grand jury on three drug charges.

The grand jury had been looking into DiMatteo for longer than the city of South Lake Tahoe has allowed medical marijuana dispensaries to operate within its borders. The federal investigation was between June 1, 2009, and Sept. 5, 2012, with the indictment being handed down Nov. 21.

DiMatteo operated City of Angels II collective until this

summer when he had to close shop because his landlord wanted him out and the City Council would not allow him to move his operation. Since then he bought Push Fitness.



Gino DiMatteo

Right now he is sitting in a Sacramento jail awaiting a bail hearing set for Nov. 26.

The indictment reveals DiMatteo was convicted in January 2002 in New York of conspiracy to distribute marijuana.

No one with a felony conviction was supposed to receive a permit by South Lake Tahoe officials to operate a medical marijuana collective.

When DiMatteo was arrested in August on state charges the documents included reference to a felony weapons charge from 1999 in New Jersey. At that time city officials believed the reason that charge did not turn up in their search was that DiMatteo also goes by Sergio Franco Ottomanelli.

Names can change, but fingerprints don’t; so that logic was suspect.

Lake Tahoe News has since learned that the city does not have DiMatteo’s prints.

“We did have a checklist. We did not have checked off the criminal history review,” Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We dropped the ball. I don’t have any other way of putting it.”

DiMatteo did go in to have his prints run. But he outsmarted officials by having the number at the top of the paperwork go to some obscure firm instead of back to the city, Uhler said.

Ultimately it is the city manager who issues pot club permits. That would have been Tony O'Rourke in this case.

"I was told those applicants were screened," O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Yes, I was ultimately responsible. When I signed off it was based on everything being reviewed and consistent with requirements."

Clearly, that was not the case. And clearly O'Rourke did not review the checklist and instead went with what he was told, not with the facts.

What is not known is why the city attorney would allow the city manager to sign the permit without everything being in order. City Attorney Patrick Enright did not return a phone call.

While it's possible DiMatteo would still be in trouble with the feds because they were looking at him before he set up shop in South Lake Tahoe, had the city done its due diligence and all the players done their jobs accurately, the resulting chaos involving Councilwoman Angela Swanson would not likely have been an issue. This is because DiMatteo would not have had a business from which to make a donation to a nonprofit she is affiliated with.

Swanson got caught up in the DiMatteo matter in August when the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office charged DiMatteo with bribing a public official – Swanson. While the charges against DiMatteo have been dropped, the DA says he is still investigating city officials and keeps Swanson on a yo-yo in what appears to be a game of politics.

The three counts leveled against DiMatteo in the indictment are conspiracy to manufacture and possess with intent to

distribute marijuana; possession with intent to distribute marijuana; and manufacture marijuana.

If DiMatteo were convicted of at least one of the offenses, he would have to give up all his property deemed to have been associated with or bought by money from drug transactions.

If convicted on three counts, DiMatteo could face 60 years to life in prison and fines of more than $30 million.

Rob Woelfel, DiMatteo’s attorney, was not available for comment.