Woodpecker may alter how USFS manages its land

By Kathryn Reed

A woodpecker may change the way the U.S. Forest Service and others approach thinning projects and forest restoration work in California.

This is because on Dec. 15 the state Fish and Game Commission on a 3-1 vote said the black-backed woodpecker is a candidate for protection under the state's Endangered Species Act. (Commissioner Daniel Richards was the dissenting vote.)



Black-backed woodpecker

This is the same woodpecker species that Earth Island Justice's John Muir Project said should prevent the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit from initiating the South Shore Fuels Reduction Project and the same animal Earth Justice wants to protect in its quest to halt the Angora Fire restoration project.

It could be a year before the state decides what to do about the woodpecker. The Department of Fish & Game has until next December to prepare a status review on the species. After that, the commission votes on whether to protect the bird.

It's the Center for Biological Diversity and the Earth Island

Institute’s John Muir Project that are pushing for the woodpecker’s protection.

“Black-backeds are heavily associated with areas burned at higher fire severities, much more so than unburned forest or low-intensity burn areas (Hutto 2008). Unless steps are taken to ensure that significant habitat is created and allowed for this species in the project area, the project could threaten the viability of the black-backed woodpecker by further reducing potential habitat across the landscape, thus violating the forest plan’s requirement to ensure viability,” Chad Hanson, director of the John Muir Project, wrote in his October letter to the USFS. His group wants the final environmental impact statement for the South Shore Fuels Reduction Project to be withdrawn and a supplemental environmental impact statement be prepared.

Those same arguments are being used to lobby the state.

Hanson is the author of a paper titled “Myth of ‘Catastrophic’ Wildfire”.

A judge sided with the Forest Service over conservation groups regarding the Angora project. This meant work started this summer to thin the area – an area the John Muir Project believes should be left alone because it says it provides habitat for the woodpecker.

This is the Forest Service owned land near where 254 houses burned to the ground in June 2007.

The Forest Service says not clearing the trees will increase the threat of another catastrophic fire.

While the thinning project started this summer, the case is still tied up in the Ninth U.S. District Court of Appeals. If the state says the woodpecker should be listed as endangered, it could make the court case a moot point.

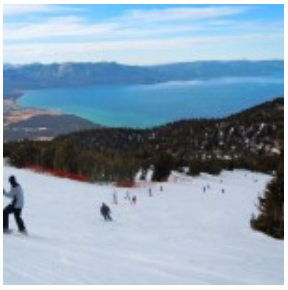
The bird is rare, with people differing over whether it’s always been rare or if its numbers are in decline.

Families create holiday memories on the ski slopes

By Kathryn Reed

For those dreaming of a white Christmas, they had to leave the lake behind. But only for a short time and even then Lake Tahoe could still be in full view.

“The lack of natural snow has not put any damper on our fun,” Joe Hilliard of Corpus Christi, Texas, said.



Skiers and snowboarders schuss down the slopes of Heavenly on Christmas Day. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Three generations of Hilliards are on the South Shore for the Christmas holiday. With Joe Hilliard's parents enjoying gambling, and his wife and kids wanting to ski, Lake Tahoe was the perfect vacation spot.

Six-year-old Savannah said the best part about skiing at Heavenly was going fast. She and 4-year-old brother Hunter spent two days in the kids' ski camp at Heavenly Mountain Resort learning the sport. This was the first time both kids had been on skis.

Based on the apparel in line for the gondola as well as at Tamarack Lodge on Christmas Day, it was obvious this was not an ordinary ski day. The number of ski or snowboard boots seemed to equal that of those clearly not participating in either sport.

Fun hats, and bright colored jackets and pants filled the lodge and slopes. Pink, at least this day, was one of the dominate colors.

Steve from Sacramento came dressed in a Santa outfit. He had no trouble negotiating the runs off Dipper despite the crowded slopes.

Twenty-seven-year-old Brenton could be enjoying a much warmer holiday if he were home in Australia. Instead, he'd rather travel with his snowboard. This year Tahoe, last year Japan.

While his Aussie accent was easy to discern, plenty of foreign

languages and accents could be overheard in the lodge. The lodge felt like it was more full of out-of-towners than locals on this holiday.

Jayashre Tanbon brought her 3½-year-old daughter Aishwerya to enjoy the snow. The duo from San Jose comes to Tahoe about once year.

The little one likes to make snowballs, while mom said it's the weather and scenery that captivate her.

A family of six from Oahu wanted to go tubing, but it was sold out for the day. Still, the mom, dad, daughter, son, cousin and niece all took the ride up the gondola to check things out.

"It's beautiful," Antonio Manrique, 14, said of the resort and Tahoe in general. "We like the cold."

Coming from a much warmer climate meant some long-sleeve articles of clothing were under the tree.

Rhonda Kadokawa, the cousin in the group, said it had been about 30 years since she was last in Tahoe. She remembers snowmobiling then. While ski resorts can accommodate riders with manmade snow, the same cannot be said of businesses that operate the gas-powered sleds.

A family from Monterey was in line early enough to buy tubing tickets. This was the first time for any of them to visit Tahoe. While they said it was fun, it tired the kids out so they were all getting a bite to eat at the year-old lodge.

Chanel Sims, 12, said she liked how fast the tubes go on the snow; while Javionce Proctor, 13, said he was ready to up again.

Bags of ice sat on the table next to Linda Doller of Los Altos. On the first run of the day she tweaked her knee. With an elevated leg, she waited for her husband and two college-

age daughters to get off the slopes. It had been 10 years since she last skied. She’s hoping whatever she did to her knee won’t keep her off the slopes for long.

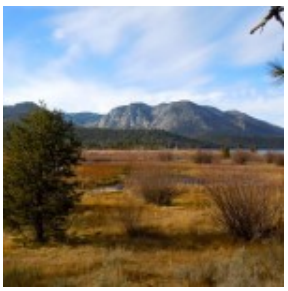
ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

South Shore’s 2 best known lakes on 1 easy hike

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – Tahoe’s past, present and possible future unfold along the shore of Lake Tahoe and Fallen Leaf Lake on an easy five-mile trek that never gets old.

Meandering through the estates of the Tallac Site on the South Shore, the buildings of yester-year dot the landscape. If only they could talk. Life in the basin was much different when the Baldwins, Hellers and Popes called this lakefront oasis home.



Looking across the meadow toward Taylor Creek. Photos/Kathryn

Reed

Now it’s a historic site on land owned by the U.S. Forest Service. In the summer it’s more populated with tourists and the buildings are in use. The old boathouse is a theater. The grand hall is used for weddings and other functions.

Markers along the way tell the story of how these buildings came to be.

Walking close to the shore, the lake looks cold and uninviting in December. With the abundance of snowfall last year, the water level is 2½ feet higher than it was a year ago at this time.

We come to Taylor Creek Visitors Center and walk through the Rainbow Trail. The dead foliage looks otherworldly.

The stench of decaying fish fills our nostrils. A couple months ago the creek was teeming with kokanee salmon on their annual migration to spawn.

The four of us cross Highway 89 to go up Cathedral Road. The Forest Service is looking at making this a safer crossing, along with a slew of other improvements to the trail system in the area.

Signage is lacking. It’s a good thing we know where we are going. Plus, this is a common running loop for Brenda so she is our leader this afternoon.

We cross the dam at Fallen Leaf Lake. That too is old. In 1934, Anita Baldwin put up the money for it to be built.

We come out at the campground, then head across the highway again, headed back to our vehicles parked at the Beacon restaurant.

No wildlife to be seen on this particular day. But the scenery is ever changing with the lakes, meadow and forest.

If you can do five miles of walking, this is one of the best routes on the South Shore for ease, beauty and history.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 89 north to Camp Richardson. Turn right to park at the Beacon restaurant.

Begin walking to the left of the restaurant at the beach and into the Tallac Site. If you see signs for Taylor Creek Visitor Center, follow those. Then take the Rainbow Trail. Cross the highway on the other side of the stream profile center.

Go up Cathedral Road. A dirt trail juts off from the road to the left. From there, well, stay to the left and hopefully you will find the dam. (There are no signs.) Keep walking and you'll hit the campground. That leads you to Fallen Leaf Lake Road, which goes to Highway 89. Cross the highway and follow the bike path to Camp Rich.

ngg_shortcode_1_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

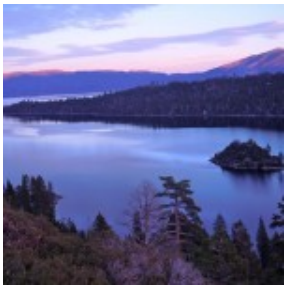
Extended hiking season in

Tahoe worth braving the cold

By Kathryn Reed

Conflicted between wanting to go slow enough to embrace the beauty and fast enough to ward off the biting cold – such are the hazards of hiking in Lake Tahoe in December.

Hiking in the basin this time of year feels so foreign. But with no snow at lake level to snowshoe or cross country ski on, hiking becomes the default sport. The positive thing about the current weather is being able to visit trails I usually reserve for another season.



Emerald Bay at sunset on Dec. 18. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Our intent was to do a one-way between the parking lot for Vikingsholm and D.L. Bliss State Park. While the distance to drive the route is two miles, the hike is more than four miles. On a warm summer day it’s great to start at one end (we’ve always started at Emerald Bay because it’s closer to home), have lunch at the beach, and then traipse back to the starting point.

Not starting until the afternoon last Sunday we knew we didn’t have enough daylight to do a roundtrip. But we didn’t want to start sooner because being out in the cold any earlier could

have meant excessive whining.

The problem was when we got to the stream-waterfall (I use those words extremely loosely) crossing. With ice having formed on either side of the path and the amount of water just deep enough to get my boots wetter than I wanted on this day, the rocks looking slippery, and the fall (if there were to be one) treacherous, I called “uncle”.

It became an out-and-back hike.

Still, it was worth it.

The Rubicon Trail has some of the most stunning views of the lake. *San Francisco Chronicle* outdoor writer Tom Stienstra calls it one of the most spectacular hikes in the U.S.

The only bad part about it is the one-mile trek from the parking lot to the Vikingsholm castle feels like at least three miles going up.

Few people are on the trail compared to the number of cars in the lot. All I could think is “no wonder California State Parks is broke” when I saw the parking was free and the lot was full.

My dismay subsided as we got to the bottom and we started walking along the north side of Emerald Bay. Hikers going in the opposite direction saying hello sporadically break up the solitude.

No campers at the boat in campsites. If only it were warmer, the bay is like glass. On the way back the only ripples on the water are from the mallards.

Shades of emerald dot the shoreline in the bay as well as along sections of the trail paralleling Lake Tahoe.

This is what makes this hike so stunning – the varied colors of the water, cedars too large for Sue and I to wrap our arms

around, boulders seeming to bob, distant peaks without snow belying the time of year.

Much of the trail to the point is flat. Then it goes up a bit, with some granite staircases of sorts in a few spots.

Starting at the hour we did meant seeing the sunset. With clouds strewn across the sky, it made for a dramatic ending to an already spectacular hike.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 89 north past Camp Richardson and to the far side of Emerald Bay. Park to the right in the lot for Vikingsholm.

Descend the path, then go the to left before reaching the castle.

ngg_shortcode_2_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

No snow doesn’t mean no skiing in Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

In 11 days, the first snow survey of the season will be conducted by the state Department of Water Resources. National Weather Service forecasters say the next two weeks will be dry and that the snowpack is 15 percent of normal.

In a normal month, South Lake Tahoe receives 1.84 inches of precipitation by Dec. 22 for the month of December. The city

has received a trace this month.



Northstar's terrain park has plenty of snow to play in. Photos/Kathryn Reed

For the entire month of December, Tahoe City averages 5.5 inches of precip. It has recorded zero this month.

Ski resorts for the 2010-11 season boasted of a record snowfall. Squaw Valley had more than 800 inches. This season resorts like Heavenly and Northstar are bragging about their snowmaking capabilities.

When will it snow?

“So many different global patterns and influences affect the weather. The main thing that needs to happen is the ridge of high pressure off the West Coast needs to shift and head south,” explained Scott McGuire, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno.

The La Nina jet stream is keeping storms north of Lake Tahoe. While the basin basks in sunshine, it is also freezing with below normal temperatures. The morning low Dec. 22 was 10 degrees in South Lake Tahoe. The normal low is 16 degrees.

“There is no indication this overall pattern is going to

change for the better," McGuire told *Lake Tahoe News*. "(Models) just show a couple storms trying to drop, so the southern edge of the storms may clip us. It's hard to believe it will sit like this the entire winter, but it could."

Drought conditions?

Last winter's deluge has reservoirs in California and Nevada faring well so far – even better than a year ago this time. Lake Tahoe on Dec. 22 was at 6,226.85 feet, while on that date in 2010 it was at 6,224.37 feet.

It's losing about one-hundredth of a foot a day because of evaporation – even more when it's windy.

The Climate Prediction Center issues a "drought monitor" for the whole country. Tahoe was recently listed at the bottom rung, or "abnormally dry". This is the first of five stages.

"If we don't see improvement in January, they will probably worsen the outlook," Gary Barbato, hydrologist and federal water master in Reno, said. "We typically have two good months left. We'll see how we do."

While there have been "March Miracles", they are a rare occurrence. January and February need to be wet for any optimism to continue.

Barbato said with Tahoe and Lahontan Reservoir being above average, he is not alarmed yet by the lack of snow – even though the wet season usually starts in November and it's been dry all this time.

Lake Tahoe, while is supplies water to some water purveyors in the basin, is the main water source for Reno via the Truckee River.

The Sierra snowpack is the source of water for much of California. Reservoirs in California are faring well despite a dry December.

“We are not unduly worried yet. The reservoirs are still in very good shape with carryover storage from last winter’s storms,” Ted Thomas with the California Department of Water Resources told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This is a very dry December, obviously, one of the driest so far.”

Helping Mother Nature

There was a time when skiing at Christmas in Lake Tahoe was iffy. That was before snowmaking became the norm.

Those who skied on the manmade white stuff in the early days could not find anything positive to say about it. What comes out of the guns today is so far superior at times it’s hard to distinguish between what is real and what is fake.

Another advantage customers have today is getting the truth about conditions from other skiers and riders. Resort and personal Facebook pages tell it like it is. No longer can resorts embellish the snow report.

Skiers at Northstar on Dec. 20 may have had doubts about the conditions based on riding a chairlift over rocks, grass and logs, but at the end of the ride were perfectly groomed conditions.

That’s the other thing that has changed through the years – the groomers. Between the machine and the operators they lay out corduroy each day that makes people forget it didn’t snow the night before.

So, there isn’t tree skiing and Tahoe is waiting for its first powder day – those who like groomers or have a need to schuss are likely to be satisfied. Just don’t look at what’s at lake level to know what the slopes are all about. Plus, most of the resorts have made a concerted effort to have terrain parks open.

At Northstar this week skiers and boarders were spinning,

jumping, back scratching, and twisting their way over features. The 22-foot superpipe where Shaun White will train is expected to be finished any day.

Heavenly had its terrain park operating on opening day – last month.

While most resorts in the greater Lake Tahoe area are open at some level, Heavenly has the largest snowmaking capabilities.

Heavenly can cover 73 percent of its mountain with manmade snow. Today about 25 percent of the resort's 97 trails are open. More are opening every day, with Boulder expected to open Christmas Day and Groove potentially, as well.

Northstar is bragging of snow depths of 18 to 24 inches on 25 trails. In a 24-hour period they use 5 million gallons of water to cover 100 acres.

Squaw uses 2,000 gallons of water per minute. It has a 12-inch base on eight runs.

"We could go all season making snow, but we hope Mother Nature will kick in and help us out at some point," Russ Pecoraro, Heavenly spokesman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

ngg_shortcode_3_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

Zephyr Lodge – bring an appetite, wallet, camera

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – No snow at a ski resort can be a good thing – at least when your business is construction.

With winter delayed in the Sierra, it meant the team of builders from SMC Contractors could complete the Zephyr Lodge at Northstar in five months. No days off also allowed the 17,000-square-foot facility to open this week.



Zephyr Lodge increases seating at Northstar by 50 percent. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Joe Stewart of SMC was at the resort Tuesday to see firsthand what it looks like with people using the multimillion-dollar lodge.

While building at nearly 7,000 feet presents an array of challenges, Stewart and his team had a head start on this

project with having completed the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly Mountain Resort a year ago. Zephyr's design is based on her sister resort's lodge.

"This has a lot of character," Stewart told *Lake Tahoe News* as he looked at the reclaimed wood on the exterior.

While the interior of the two lodges feels similar, the exterior does not even though the design is much the same. Much of the difference is the initial look of the lodge from Zephyr chairlift and then skiing to it.

The gray of the wood seems to blend in to the backdrop of the Sierra Crest.

With the entrance on what could be called the side wall, the building does not appear as large as it is.

This addition to Northstar could mean the era of long food lines and little room to sit is over. The 500 indoor chairs and more than 200 outdoor seats increased the overall mountain seating by 50 percent.

On a sunny day like Dec. 20, sitting outside with views of the snowcapped mountains was inviting. But the ambiance and energy of the warm indoors kept most people inside. Plus, the massive windows provide stunning views.

While the lack of snow was good for SMC, with the snowmaking guns going full tilt, the white stuff eventually presented a few challenges.

"They've been delivering furniture by snowcat the past couple weeks," Northstar COO Bill Rock said.

Noting California's dismal economy, state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, spoke of how the $30 million infusion of cash into Northstar for this season by owner Vail Resorts is good for the local and state economies. He also presented Rock with a proclamation from the state Senate.

Food and drink

Building on the success of their Colorado resorts, the more upscale food court is what Zephyr and Tamarack lodges offer. Often eating at a ski resort is a less than desirable experience for a vegetarian. Not at Zephyr.

The veggie burger ($10.25) is made on site. It's tasty and a bit messy. But what a nice change from the usual cardboard restaurants often pass off as a veggie burger.

The tomato bisque ($7.75) comes in a decent size bowl. Definitely worth having. Christine, who manages the lodge, says sharing recipes is something that's being talked about. This would be a soup worth making at home.

The veggie pizza is good, but at $8.50 a slice, not worth it.

For some reason, the fries at Northstar, Heavenly, Vail and Beaver Creek are all lacking and can be skipped.

The Asian bowls are said to be one of the "must haves" – and based on flavor we agree. You get to choose a variety of items. Brown rice, tofu, veggies, water chestnuts and Kung Pao sauce filled my bowl. Sue's had snow peas, squash, sticky rice, shrimp and a green curry coconut sauce. Each bowl is $14.75.

Of the seven drinks we tried (samplers, not full glasses), we placed the same in the top four, just a different order. My favorite was the African Winter – dark rum, hot African tea, peach liqueur, lemon, orange bitters. Hot and refreshing – though not often two words that go together – they do with this drink.

Sue's favorite was the Zinger – Hangar One Kaffir lime vodka, ginger beer, lime juice, orange liqueur. It was a perfect complement for her Asian bowl.

Rounding out our top four were the Pimm's Royale (sparkling

wine, Pimm’s No. 1, cucumber spear) and S’more Snow (Firelit coffee liqueur, Absolute vanilla, hot cocoa, whipped cream).

The Z Bar inside Zephyr Lodge has 13 specialty drinks not served anywhere else on the mountain. All are $12.

All the juices in the drinks are fresh squeezed at the lodge.

The easiest way to get to Zephyr Lodge is via the Zephyr lift from mid-mountain. It’s to the right at the top. But the lodge will be a convenient gathering spot for people skiing the Back Side, including The Promised Land lift that opened this week, too. And even if you aren’t eating or drinking, the setting is gorgeous and worth stopping to have a look.

ngg_shortcode_4_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

---

3 top youth shredder movies shot by S. Lake Tahoe firm

By Kathryn Reed

Snowboarding over a car may not be an original trick, but how many 5-year-olds can say they’ve done it?

Bailey Duran for one.

First Tracks Productions in South Lake Tahoe immortalized the event on film. This video and two others by the local company

caught the attention of Ski Channel. The three are part of a top 10 list of best mini shredder (aka kid) videos of the year. The one of Bailey jumping the car is No. 1.



Lexis Roland at Regan Beach in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Carrie Reiter

“The folks at Ski Channel came across them organically. We didn’t send them to them,” said Anthony Cupaiuolo, who with his wife, Karen Johnson, started the ski film company in fall 2001.

Bailey is from Connecticut and mostly skis Vermont. Dylan Heinstein is from the Bay Area and is part of the Burton program at Northstar. His whole video was shot at Northstar. Lexi Roland is from Minnesota, though a significant amount of the winning video was shot in Lake Tahoe.

It’s not that First Tracks doesn’t work with Tahoe area youth; it’s all about parents finding them. And with the Internet making the world smaller, people have more choices readily available for whatever they want.

While there are “Little League parents” in the ski world, Cupaiuolo says most of the parents he runs into are easy to work with. Parents aren’t likely to ask someone to shoot their kid knowing a tantrum might be thrown. The kids Cupaiuolo has worked with all want to be on the slopes.

“It’s easy because all the kids I work with are doing this because they love it,” Cupaiuolo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

When he started in the ski film industry it was all about the backcountry and making a DVD to sell each year. But with everyone thinking they can shoot quality video, YouTube’s popularity and the public’s desire for immediacy, the last DVD First Tracks Productions put out was in 2009.

That’s not to say the company is only shooting kids. They like to mix it up. Cupaiuolo likes being in the backcountry on a splitboard.

“Working with adults you can talk about what it is we are looking for,” Cupaiuolo said. “Kids want to play and have fun.”

But at the same time those youngsters have seen plenty of film to know what tricks are hot, who’s doing what and that camera angles, sunlight and shadows all play a part in how a video of them will ultimately look.

And these aren’t your average youngsters.

“The kids we have been filming are already on a level where they are doing stuff I don’t do. You have to check your ego aside,” Cupaiuolo said.

His footage of Lexi was part of the Warren Miller movie two years ago. The legendary film company has been talking to Cupaiuolo about the talent he will be shooting this winter in case there is an opportunity to incorporate it into the 2012 Warren Miller film.

With a bit more time on their hands now that First Tracks isn’t doing an annual video, the company is expanding a bit.

This summer they were at Northstar to shoot the All Women Sports Camp.

Mountain biking and BMX were sports shot this past year by First Tracks. Next summer kayaking and surfing are on the list of things to film.

They regularly shoot promotional footage for Prior Splitboards in British Columbia, as well as work for other companies. With video being a growing segment for how companies promote themselves, short travel vignettes are becoming popular.

What Cupaiuolo is working on is securing a six-episode television project featuring young athletes. He wouldn't give more away about it at this point.

While Cupaiuolo and Johnson have a 9-month-old daughter, she isn't on YouTube yet. Cupaiuolo said family and friends don't understand why only four videos of the little one exist. He says that may change when Olivia starts riding. Then he'll definitely have a Tahoe kid in his stable.

Group wants decisions centered on kids' interests

By Kathryn Reed

Putting children first. Ensuring their needs are met. Taking a pledge to do so. Helping shape policy.



Those are the goals of Small World, an organization launched Dec. 1 in South Lake Tahoe. But it's not just about Tahoe – it's about children throughout the country, throughout the world. And it's not just parents uniting to have a voice. It's other relatives and concerned people.

"I'm looking at what decisions we are making as people or collectively through government. What is the impact of those decisions on our children or on children across the globe," John Friedrich said.

Friedrich was thinking about this Small World concept before his daughter was born more than five years ago. Having recently moved back to Tahoe with his family, he believes now is the time to put his idea into action.

The first meeting of like-minded individuals is Dec. 21. More information about it may be obtained by emailing smallworldaction@gmail.com

"The idea is putting the good of all children, the best interest of children at the center of decision-making," Friedrich said.

While there is no hard and fast agenda for the first meeting, there is also no preconceived action plan. Friedrich doesn't see any concern not being able to be tackled.

He wants people to think about their actions – whether it's dropping bombs and knowing whom those deadly devices will hit, to environmental and natural resources policies and their impacts on kids, to access to health care, to the food available to them.

Reinventing what's being done is not the goal. Instead, Small World will bring like-minded people together. From there they may partner with other organizations already working on behalf

of children.

What makes this a unifying vision is parents throughout most of the world want the best for their children. Small World intends to give them a voice beyond their home.

In the short time Small World has been active, more than 100 people in 18 states and three countries have signed the online pledge to: "… help create a peaceful, livable, just planet for all children on earth."

As Small World spreads, the idea is community networks will evolve to be a voice in their town, then as a whole to be a louder voice for children on a broader scale.

"The vision would be people speaking out for the interest of all children would collectively have a stronger voice and definitely influence policy decisions," Friedrich said.

Lake Tahoe music scene changes with the season

By Susan Wood

If there were any doubt Lake Tahoe tourism through the generations is as much about the synergy between its beauty and recreation as its leisure activities and nightlife,

consider this: even the bands who play here want to take part in its splendor.

Hence, New Zealand's Sola Rosa band leader Andrew Spraggon telling *Lake Tahoe News* before his recent late-night performance at MontBleu's Blu Nightclub that as a first-timer to Tahoe he was just as interested in playing on his snowboard as he was his multi-track techno keyboard. The band, which stands for "sun and rose" in Spanish, brings out a vibrant following of young dancers enjoying what Spraggon calls a "groove music rally." The "winter welcome" party for ski resort employees was no exception.



It's not unusual for music at Blu inside MontBleu to start close to midnight. Photo/LTN

"I can't think of a place to have three free days between dates than Lake Tahoe. I've always wanted to come here," Spraggon said. A change in schedule cut the visit short, but he pledged to return – with his board.

Tahoe offers that perfect mix of daytime sport and after-hours frolic. And as summer's distant past gives way to winter's promise, some of the South Shore's largest players in activities, and specifically the music scene, are hosting a

huge lineup of bands and acts.

Warning: If you're older than 40, you may not recognize the band names.

During the three days leading up to the new year, South Lake Tahoe's city officials have teamed up with Lake Tahoe Community College to bring to campus the inaugural SnowGlobe festival, which city spokeswoman Nancy Kerry says is "definitely targeting a younger crowd." Billed as a "mix of mountains and music," the featured bands include: Bassnectar, Pretty Lights, Thievery Corporation, Glitch Mob and Childish. (Note: Doctor P won't make it.)

There's no secret here in Marketing 101. The casinos and the ski resorts – working hand in hand – have noticed the consistent double-digit growth of the snowboarder market, which brings a younger demographic of millennials and Gen Xers from November to April. In line with the U.S. Census' 9.7 percent population growth, sports participation went up 6.9 percent in the last decade, the National Ski Areas Association reported last year.

Baby boomers had their day, or season, with Delta Blues singer Keb Mo at Harrah's South Shore Room and Florida-based disco group K.C. and the Sunshine Band at MontBleu this year.

In winter, the young rule. The Cataracs play Dec. 30 at MontBleu. Others include The Expendable Winter Blackout Tour 2012, Iration/Trevor Hall/Thrive and 311/Dirty Heads.

"There is definitely a seasonal strategy when promoting shows in Tahoe. I like to bring in acts that will cater to the majority of visitors in the market, so during ski-snowboard season it just makes sense to present headliners that would cater to a younger demographic. Acts like 311, Whitney Cummins and Iration definitely will hit that core group of young people who are here for the snow activity," said Paul Reder of PREpresents, a longtime entertainment booking agent on the

South Shore.

Even young families will find something in it for them. Magician Tony Clark will return to Tahoe at the Horizon for a show called Illusion Fusion.

Still, you'll need to be 21 or older for a few shows down the street at Harrah's this winter. Fitz and the Tantrums and G. Love & Special Sauce for example are expected to bring out large crowds numbering more than 1,000 for the weekend Winter Snow Blast events, so the casino would like more control on alcohol consumption.

Come Jan. 21, Young the Giant is expected to bring out the younger set at Harrah's as the main event for Tahoe Snowcial, a coordinated effort with Heavenly Mountain Resort. The ski resort is focusing its marketing on the deemed "trendsetters" – those who want "to pack as much into their vacation as possible," Heavenly spokesman Russ Pecoraro explained.

"This type of music is more like alternative or even college bands," Harrah's entertainment guru John Packer said.

With what the show Rain did with the Beatles music, Harrah's is continuing a legacy of mixing generations. The Hollywood Stones tribute show to the Rolling Stones slated for Jan. 7 will kick off an exuberant lineup to the casino's South Shore Room.

The South Shore Room does include acts for the boomers. Expect Kenny Loggins to continue going footloose Feb. 18. And one may only hope rocker George Thorogood, slated for March 17, can still play his guitar behind his head.

Conflicting info clouds South Tahoe ice rink bond sales

By Kathryn Reed

Private operators of the South Lake Tahoe Ice Rink may be frozen out of being able to make a profit any time soon.



With the need to have all agreements finalized in January so the bonds could be converted from non-taxable to taxable by March 1, questions unresolved, and the season of little government work accomplished approaching, the deal is teetering on thin ice.

Conflicting letters delivered to El Dorado County Board of Supervisors is part of the problem. That board at its meeting last week directed the chief administrative officer and auditor to craft a letter to the city for clarification.

While the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority this month agreed to change the designation of the bonds, the three member agencies must do so as well. Those agencies are South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado County and Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District.

The city and county on the same day – Dec. 13 – at their respective meetings heard a presentation by the private financial advisor hired by the JPA (Mark Northcross with Northcross-Hill-Ach) and JPA staff member John Upton.

The city wants to convert the bonds to taxable because IRS

rules prevent a private entity from benefiting from non-taxable bonds while the bonds are outstanding. The ice rink was paid from Measure S funds, now called Measure R. That South Shore recreation measure will sunset in 2030.

In a letter dated Dec. 6 from Upton to the county it says, “If the refinancing results in greater debt service, the city will be obligated to pay the JPA that difference. Bond counsel will create the necessary agreement and manner for assured collection. … The cash contribution is currently at $415,000.”

In a letter dated Dec. 8 from City Manager Tony O’Rourke to the county it says, “The ice arena operator and TSE [Tahoe Sports Entertainment], will need to bear any cost obligation associated with the refinancing of the Measure S outstanding debt from tax-exempt to taxable.”

The conflicting information about what entity is responsible for the more than $400,000 is what has the county concerned. The board wants this cleared up before it is slated to vote on the refinancing in late January.

After the county meeting, Supervisor Norma Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News*, “The only motion was that the auditor work with the CAO to write a letter to the city manager asking for clarity on a statement included in this letter.” Then she quoted the conflicting message from O’Rourke.

Santiago added, “As you are well aware, during the course of our discussion at the JPA meeting, the city said that they would be bearing the costs. Obviously, things are changing and this refinancing of the bond to a taxable bond is a ‘moving’ target. Everyone, however, agrees that refinancing the tax-exempt bonds would provide additional savings to the taxpayers that then could be further invested in projects supported by both Measure S and R.”

At the City Council meeting, O’Rourke said, “We have made it crystal clear the JPA won’t pick up the cost or the city.”

Van Oleson and Chris Cefalu, who operate the rink under the business name Tahoe Sports Entertainment, were out of town and unavailable for comment. Despite the uncertainty, TSE is going forward with trying to obtain a beer and wine license.

In other action from the Dec. 13 City Council meeting:

• The council agreed to take $21,613.70 from the General Fund Undesignated Reserves to pay bills for outside legal counsel for the 2010-11 fiscal year. The bulk of that – $14,096 – went to an attorney to deal with labor negotiations.

• Agreements with the remaining city labor groups have been reached so all employees are paying their share of PERS retirement funds.

• The city will put out a request for proposal to hire a firm to monitor vacation home rentals, with the idea it would generate income.

• The council allocated up to $10,000 to be spent on a feasibility study regarding the South Shore Vision Plan.