

Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival returns to its roots

By Kathryn Reed

Shakespeare is back – *really* back.

Last season the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival did not put on a full play of William Shakespeare. While officials say the abridged version of his work that was staged was well received by audiences, plenty of others stayed away because it wasn't a true Shakespeare play.

"Twelfth Night" will be performed in July and August on the shores of Lake Tahoe at Sand Harbor in Incline Village. Officials have their fingers crossed the economy will continue to improve and a second play will be added in 2012 as has been the norm in prior years.



Karen Buranch
as Julia Child
in 2010.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

"It's going to be a wonderful show. It's full of great costumes and great music," said Daphne Lange, marketing director for the festival. "I think people will enjoy the return to traditional Shakespeare."

The actors have Mondays off. Festival organizers hope to fill in those days with other events. So far the Reno Philharmonic is booked for July 18. A Chautauqua performance will be part of the playbill Aug. 8.

Chautauqua is when a performer is dressed as a historical figure and shares stories about the character's life. Ginny Liebner Yates organizes the Chautauqua group that comes to Tahoe. Last year it was titled Hot Dogs to Haute Cuisine. It was appropriately named as husband-wife Gene and Karen Buranch took on the persons of Babe Ruth and Julia Child.

Dressed as if they were these American icons and with a minimalist setting of a kitchen of sorts for Julia Child, and a beer and baseball bat for Babe Ruth, it was almost as though they were really the people they were playing. This is because they are more than actors; they are historians and must know their character beyond the role.

As is the norm with Chautauqua, the actors stay in character to take questions from the audience – answering from the perspective of the character and in the time period they were alive. So no questions about steroids in baseball could be asked.



Gene Buranch
as Babe Ruth.

This summer Karen Buranch will be back. Doug Watson will be her partner. They will be playing Western outlaw Belle Star and cowboy Will Rogers.

Changes at the venue this year include the lower gallery – aka beach chair section – will be assigned seating. This means not longer having to queue up hours before the performance.

The upper gallery will have beach chairs provided, though people can still bring blankets to sit on.

The entire venue seats 1,200 people.

Lange said the menu will be changing, but didn't have specifics just yet.

Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival's website has more information. Tickets for some performances are on sale now.

Northstar striving to be California's premier ski resort

By Susan Wood

TRUCKEE – Could Northstar-at-Tahoe be the next Beaver Creek? Or a Deer Valley?

Those are the questions Vail Resorts is posing as it plans to invest \$30 million in capital improvements into the Truckee-area resort for the 2011-12 ski season. Upgrades include a mid-mountain lodge at the top of the Tahoe Zephyr Express chair, more snowmaking off the Drifter run and another lift off the backside that services two new runs.

Once considered a modest family resort years ago, "Northstar has come a long way" in the last few years, Chief Operating

Officer Bill Rock told *Lake Tahoe News* on a recent media ski day. "That's what attracted Vail."



Adding a lift next season will allow access to more of Northstar's backside.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Vail bought Northstar a few months ago from Booth Creek partners, who maintain ownership of Sierra-at-Tahoe on the South Shore. The acquisition comes on the heels of consistent minor- to-moderate upgrades and a major one that includes the building of the first five-star hotel in the Lake Tahoe region – the Ritz-Carlton situated off the Highlands Gondola.

Rock admitted the improvements were already on the drawing board but would have been finished years in the future. Now, the plans have been fast-forwarded with bringing a ski conglomerate like Vail to the North Shore. The Colorado-based company expects to sink at least \$83 million in improvements in all its resorts for next ski season.

"That's what Vail brings to the table," Rock said.

Vail also owns Heavenly Mountain Resort on the South Shore, along with Vail, Breckenridge, Keystone and Beaver Creek in Colorado. These resorts are considered to be some of most upscale by most U.S. standards. At some, tissue is handed out

at the lodges, along with warm chocolate chip cookies and gourmet hot chocolate at the base and summit.

“We’re not interested in being a cookie-cutter resort,” Rock said, noting how travelers are seeking “the California experience” when they arrive. He hinted a chef with the reputation of the Ritz-Carlton’s Traci Des Jardins would be running the menu at the new lodge. It’s still unclear who will own the lodge at this point because Vail holds a 40-year lease to operations of the resort, while CNL Lifestyle Properties owns the land.

The aim is to relieve congestion at the top of the popular Big Springs Express Gondola, where hundreds gather at the day lodge or in front of three mid-mountain, high-speed lifts – Vista, Arrow and Tahoe Zephyr.

“From here (at the top of Tahoe Zephyr), you could ski the backside without ever returning (to the base),” Rock said.

While this “California” experience calls for amenities that go way beyond skiing the snow surface, it doesn’t mean Vail isn’t seeking uniformity in some of its properties. The signs of the new 500-seat, on-mountain restaurant show images that look precisely like Heavenly’s Tamarack Lodge, which was completed in February between its Tamarack chairlift and gondola.

Northstar’s is expected to break ground in June and will serve gourmet pizza, specialty soups and sandwiches, with a large salad bar.

Although the lodge cannot be seen off the mountain, the 200-foot deck will jut out from the ridge for a view that still excites veteran planner Tim Beck, who’s worked for Booth Creek for 13 years before becoming the chief planner for Vail Resorts.

With all the changes, Beck views Northstar as a ski resort that splits its appeal and attention between the day skier

coming up from the Bay Area feeder market and the destination skier who stays longer and spends more. The latter visitor expects more in venues as Beaver Creek has shown.

"We think this is a special spot," Beck told the media group at the site. A sign marks the spot. Northstar has already started tree thinning. About 60 will need to be removed, and still more thinned.

"I'd like them to focus more on the mountain," said Carson City resident Mike Johnson, who has skied around the lake at the various resorts for years. Northstar answered his call for more terrain opportunity with the other part of the improvements – a lift and two runs.

The project makes way for a detachable quad that runs through a wooded area overlooking the Martis Valley and Sawtooth range. One new run will be more traditional, while the other is tree lined. The runs will provide tree islands that add to the fun – much like its black diamond clad Martis run.

Placer County, Lahontan Regional Water Control Board and the California Department of Fish & Game oversee the resort. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has no jurisdiction on Northstar's plans. But with the extent of them, Beck and company enlisted the early support of Sierra Watch and other environmental groups, which have a watchful eye on Martis Valley development. The Sierra Watch website has called the collaboration "another great example of our strategic foresight." No authority for the group agreed to comment.

Northstar is in the process of creating the environmental-related documents.

Plans for the village include the opening of retail outlets Patagonia and Burton as well as an expansion for the North Face store.

Northstar-at-Tahoe is located off Highway 267 between Kings

Beach and Truckee.

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Giants World Series trophy a big hit in Tahoe

By Susan Wood

It was a win-win Saturday.

Thousands of the orange-and-black faithful enjoyed a dominant 10-0 win by San Francisco Giants pitcher Matt Cain over their rival Los Angeles Dodgers, while hundreds of fans remembered last year's performance by coming out to view the World Series Championship trophy on tour in South Lake Tahoe that afternoon.

The line to see the cherished symbol formed at 9am when the city recreation complex opened with first-in-line, die-hard fans Paula Bruyn and Jahn Henderson of South Lake Tahoe. It wrapped around the building, which was decorated in orange and black along with a sea of fans adorned in Giants gear.

"Matty's gonna do it," Henderson predicted of Saturday's game, while waiting in line. He had the confidence that Cain would bring home a win on such a big day for he and Bruyn.



A line of
Giants fans
wrapped around
the city Parks
and Recreation
complex to
view the World
Series
Championship
trophy on
Saturday.
Photo/Susan
Wood

At the 2pm trophy showing start time, both Giants and city parks staff allowed the loyalists to enter the room to the sounds of whoops and whistles. In sheer Tahoe style, dogs, babies and others reading books or watching Saturday's game passed the time until it was their turn to have a photo taken with the trophy.

Giants tour organizer Casey Conroy said it's like bringing a rock star to town. The trophy is wrapping up its multi-city tour that has taken it from San Francisco to New York and back. It's the first time the Giants have won the World Series in the Bay Area. The team left New York in 1957. Three years before, the New York team won the World Series.

Mick Flaire, "Bowler Bob," remembers that time as if it were yesterday. He happened to catch opening day in 1962 when Willie Mays hit a home run during a 6-0 shutout. Hence, the true baseball fan recalls statistics like a family recipe.

"I literally waited since I was 3 months old for this championship," said the Brisbane resident, who came up to Lake Tahoe for the weekend. He now has a place to perhaps stay as he made friends waiting in line with local sports enthusiast Don Bosson, who taught Little League baseball for 16 years.

"Here's my card," Bosson said, as he handed Flaire his business card. Flaire was holding a "Giants" labeled bowling ball. Bosson said he feels like he knows Flaire because the Bay Area resident frequently calls in to KNBR, the station with a Giants radio show.

"I've listened to him on the radio forever," Bosson said.

After she viewed the trophy, Lyn Maher of Incline Village moved over to a cardboard cutout of veteran first baseman Will Clark to have her photo taken with the Giants prop.

"I've been heartbroken since 2002. But all the pain and suffering is gone now," she said, referring to when the Giants lost the Series to the Anaheim Angels, which later became the Los Angeles Angels. With a photo of the trophy now, Maher has even "one-upped" her sister who got to see the Giants win in Game 2 of the World Series at home.

She has the right to claim the fame.

"I named my cat after him," she said, pointing to the life-size Clark cutout situated behind the trophy presentation.

All types got to have their photograph taken.

There was Argo, the police dog on a break from duty. Sandra Sandoval of Sacramento brought "Clutch" the boxer up for the weekend. Dustin Robinson pulled into the recreation center parking lot and asked if he could bring 1-year-old Roscoe in for a photo op. His request was granted, and it appeared the pit bull was happy.

The award for the youngest person might have gone to 7-month-

old Zephyr, who showed up in Giants fashion gear reading: “My first Giants T-shirt.”

“They’ve been world champions his entire life,” said a wild-eyed father, Bill Pappani of Nevada City as his wife, Laura, took in the long-awaited moment by fixing the baby’s shirt.

Once wasn’t enough to go through the line for South Shore resident Sue Novasel – despite her husband Robert not accompanying her. Being from Cleveland, he’s an Indians fan.

“He’s just jealous,” a defiant Novasel described her husband. She returned the second time around with her Giants buddy, mom Vernice Rianda. Mom knew to hold up the strike-out “K” foam finger ornament, while her daughter watched Saturday’s game on a Sling Box program. A crowd had gathered around Novasel to watch the tiny screen on her smart phone.

Outside the recreation center, another attraction was two San Francisco men – one referring to himself as Ira Supreme – who have followed the trophy on its multi-city tour. Wrapped in full Giants gear including a cape, “Supreme” said they’re groupies “trying to sleep with the trophy.” At the same time, the buddies were making money selling Giants shirts.

After all, the team is based in San Francisco – the city of character. South Lake Tahoe seemed to fit right in.

Engineer claims facts about Lake Tahoe are wrong

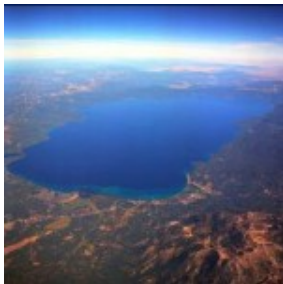
By Linda Fine Conaboy

Author, professional speaker, civil and environmental engineer

and self-proclaimed myth buster, David Antonucci says he just wants to set the record straight about, as he puts it, the widely repeated fibs, fakes and falsehoods surrounding Lake Tahoe.

In a recent interview with *Lake Tahoe News*, Antonucci said, "We spend hundreds of millions of dollars protecting Lake Tahoe and heavily regulate the built environment. We should at least have our basic facts about Lake Tahoe correct."

And what, you ask, are these falsehoods? According to excerpts from his blog, Antonucci states that instead of 72 miles of shoreline, the lake is really 75.1 miles in circumference. The distance from north to south is in actuality 21.2 miles instead of the purported 22, and the width is 11.9 miles, which is close to the often-quoted 12 miles.



Facts about Lake Tahoe are being questioned.

What initially generated his suspicions was the frequently cited 72 miles of shoreline.

"I knew it could not be true because the encircling highways total 71.8 miles and the highways shortcut the major points jutting out into Lake Tahoe."

He said he used his knowledge of Lake Tahoe, going back to his studies in environmental engineering at graduate school in 1972, to judge whether a fact seemed reasonable or not.

"I did my project for my master's degree on Lake Tahoe water pollution control facilities," he said. "These corrected scientific facts are based on my professional opinion as a civil and environmental engineer with a total of 37-years experience, including 36 at Lake Tahoe."

Antonucci said he measured the length, width and circumference himself using U.S. Geological Service mapping.

"I got the shoreline length from the TRPA Shorezone Plan – they measured it directly – and I compared that to the USGS mapping for agreement. I spoke with UC Davis Lake Tahoe researchers on various issues. Most of my information comes directly or indirectly from research performed by UC Davis and others."

Antonucci said he compared the cited facts to various credible sources and used his professional judgment to determine the truth for himself using his skills as an engineer.

"The initial problem was inexperienced people who went to various sources such as the book 'Saga of Lake Tahoe', but they got wrong information," he said. "It got much worse with the advent of the Internet because people with no science or media training and no critical thinking skills were doing websites. They simply lifted the wrong information from another website and then mindlessly repeated the misinformation with reckless unrestraint over a modern-day digital path paved with laziness, naivety and fallacy."

Not only is Antonucci at odds with the lake's dimensions, he also takes aim at the reasons for its astonishing palette of blue and green. We all know Lake Tahoe is a mirror, reflecting the ebbs and flows of the sky, right? Wrong. While it is widely believed that the lake's brilliant colors are a result of the sky's reflection on the water, Antonucci says not so.



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“The blue color is from the backscatter of blue light that penetrates the lake and overwhelms any reflection that may be occurring,” Antonucci said. “However, when the sun angle is flat and obscured by clouds, the lake surface can reflect the sky. I have seen orange and pink reflections, but the important point is that the famous blue color is not from the blue sky but from backscatter of blue light.”

Heather Segale, education and outreach director for UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center located on the Incline Village campus of Sierra Nevada College said the dimensions of the lake may be splitting hairs, but she agreed with Antonucci about the color, which she said has everything to with the important matter of Lake Tahoe’s clarity.

“There is definitely a bunch of stuff out there that’s not true,” she said. “Some of the sites that have wrong facts are various chambers of commerce and the USGS has some incorrect info too.

“The most important fact that is incorrect is the explanation why the lake is blue,” Segale said. “It has to do with clarity, sediment and the algae in the water. Because there’s so much emphasis on keeping Tahoe blue, people need to understand it’s a function of the clarity and not the

reflection of the sky. Otherwise all lakes would be blue like the sky, and they're not."

Unlike Segale, though, there are those who may not be as passionate about setting the facts straight as Antonucci.

Lake Tahoe weather historian, author and professional speaker, Mark McLaughlin said he thinks Antonucci may be too concerned about fairly minor matters, although he has not looked into the assertions and said he can't comment on their veracity.

McLaughlin has his own bucket list of incorrect facts, such as the claim that the region receives 300 days of sunshine a year or that Jacques Cousteau explored Tahoe in a submersible, perhaps both subjects of another article.

Jeff Cowan, community liaison for TRPA has known Antonucci for a number of years and said he holds him in high regard.

"I think David's claim is a delightful addition to the lore and mystery of Lake Tahoe," he said. "We would defer to the USGS and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the official dimensions, but I don't think changing Tahoe's measurements could ever change how awe-inspiring this place can be."

Chiming in, too, is Cheva Heck, public affairs officer for the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. She says her agency uses USGS as its last word on matters pertaining to Lake Tahoe. When asked about the interpretative signs around the lake and what it would mean as far as changing them to reflect potentially incorrect information, Heck said should that happen the signs would be corrected as they're due for replacement.

"The signs are costly," she said. "We'd want to be sure of the official numbers, but we'd change the numbers on the signs as they're replaced."

With a plethora of credentials to his credit (Antonucci has

undergraduate and graduate degrees from Cal Poly and Oregon State; is qualified as an expert on Lake Tahoe water quality in various courts in Nevada and California; spent several years on the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Board; served as the general manager and chief engineer of the Tahoe City Public Utility District, and more), he sticks to his guns when it comes to setting the record straight about Lake Tahoe's basic facts.

And he's serious about getting the word out. He developed his website, www.tahoefacts.com, wrote a booklet about Lake Tahoe entitled "Natural World of Lake Tahoe", hands out his Tahoe Facts summary sheet when and where he can and gives free lectures to local, nonprofit groups.

"I think most people agree (with me) when presented with all the facts and an understandable explanation," he said. "Most people don't have a strong scientific background, so they rely on experts to interpret and make it understandable."

For now, Antonucci will continue his quest to officially make what he believes are necessary changes to correct the record.

"I'm a myth buster at heart," he said. "I like to use science to solve mysteries and debunk myths."

Green Lodging Conference brings change to hotel business

By Linda Fine Conaboy

Hilton Hotels is changing the way it does business because of

a green lodging conference in South Lake Tahoe.

Will something that significant happen at this summer's conference? Only time can answer that question. But those putting the Aug. 22-25 seminar together are aiming for big things.

"It'll be a larger conference coming off the momentum of last year," Bill Cottrill, director of sales and marketing at Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe said. His property, which is part of the Hilton family, is hosting the second annual West Coast Green Lodging Conference like it did last year.



Hilton Hotels
is changing
how it lights
its
properties.
Photos/Provided

The meeting is aimed at hotel general managers, chief engineers, innkeepers and owners.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm. Last year many corporate folks learned a lot; this year they want their entire team here," Cottrill said.

He pointed out that the cost, about \$300, is not much for a conference, especially for one where attendees can learn such things as how to begin and implement a green program, why going green is valuable and even how the community benefits.

“They definitely got their money’s worth last year,” said David Hansen, engineer at the South Lake Tahoe Embassy Suites. “If they implemented just one or two things, the pay back could be in just a couple of weeks. Just simple things like changing light bulbs. If they took just that one idea back, it was more than worth the price of admission.”

Hansen says attendees will also learn about waste reduction and recycling, food waste composting and compostable products, all of which will be on the agenda in August.

Hansen said he received feedback from Embassy Suites in San Luis Obispo that has realized savings in its energy costs as well as the Hilton Chicago where all of the food waste is now being composted. The Hilton website reveals the chain is the first in the world to earn LEED and Green Seal environmental certifications.

“My hope this year is that someone who was at the last conference can speak about how they’ve instituted sustainability at their property,” Hansen said.



David Hansen

So dedicated has Hilton become to implementing sustainability within their brand, they developed, tested and last year officially unveiled LightStay, a proprietary system developed to calculate and analyze the environmental impact of Hilton Worldwide’s 1,300 properties using the system. Results showed enough energy was saved to power 5,700 homes for a year, while enough water was conserved to fill more than 650 Olympic-size swimming pools. In addition, these properties reduced carbon

output equivalent to taking close to 35,000 cars off the road, all of which resulted in an estimated savings of more than \$29 million in utility costs in one year.

Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe is participating in LightStay.

“We are able to benchmark ourselves against other Hilton Properties,” Cottrill says, adding that Lake Tahoe is No. 1 within the Embassy brand and No. 5 in electrical efficiency for the entire Hilton organization.

Always conscious of additional ways to add to their property’s sustainability program, Cottrill and Hansen ticked off a number of programs implemented there. Here are a few:

- A computer system designed for the automated control and monitoring of the heating, ventilation and lighting needs of the buildings.
- All 400 suites have programmable occupancy sensing thermostats.
- The hotel is testing “Green Switch” in a few suites to pinpoint the return on investment on this device designed to save energy consumption by turning off the power to certain outlets (like the TV) and lighting when guests leave for the day.
- Replacement of 165, 40-watt incandescent exit lights with one watt LED light.
- Replacement of 80 garage lighting fixtures with LED lighting.
- Removal of over 300 unnecessary lights.
- The use of only compostable, plant based plates, cups, spoons, etc. in food take- out facilities.
- Ozone laundry systems.

- Collecting and re-selling recyclables such as cans and bottles.
- Promoting zero waste events.

In addition, Embassy Suites has formed collaborative relationships with South Tahoe Refuse and Full Circle Compost, a company producing organic compost and soil nutrition needs in Minden.

“It probably will never end,” Cottrill says. “Our green efforts have brought us some business we wouldn’t have had. Sustainability is now at the forefront of many meeting planner’s minds,” he says. “It’s not just money you can save from the program; it’s top line revenue (money to be made), whereas bottom line savings is the profit from changing your efficiencies—very simple things.”

“You never stop,” Hansen said in regards to being green enough.. “People ask me all the time, ‘when will you be finished going green?’ The answer is never. It’s a lifestyle change. I come up with new ideas all the time. Employees come up with new ideas—it’s endless.”

For details about this year’s green conference, go online.

Snow survey leads to drought lifting

By Susan Wood and Brenda Knox

PHILLIPS – The last snow survey of the season is for all Lake Tahoe residents who lamented over shoveling enough to skew the view of the neighborhood while others who chose the slopes to

lose sight of their skis and boards.

Snow measurements taken by California Department of Water Resources hydrologists on Wednesday show the water content coming in at 154 percent of average for the Phillips site at the base of the Sierra-at-Tahoe road for this time of year.

The readings amount to 124.2 inches in snow depth and 43.5 inches of water – nearly one foot more water than the site's measurement last year but about one foot less than what would constitute as the big years of 1969 and 1983. And forget the epic winter of 1951-52 – which is honored with much humility at a South Lake Tahoe party every summer.

Essentially, the season has been phenomenal but not record breaking. One would need another 20 inches of water for that.



DWR
hydrologist
Frank Gehrke
takes a snow
measurement
with a longer-
than-usual
pole.

Photo/Brenda
Knox

Still, the readings were large enough to prompt California Gov. Jerry Brown to lift the drought issued by his predecessor three years ago. The winter has also prompted Lake Tahoe ski areas including Squaw Valley among others to extend the season

through Memorial Day weekend with a record 700 inches.

"It's been 16 years since we've seen this kind of snow," DWR chief hydrologist Frank Gehrke told Lake Tahoe News.

Overall, the long spine of the Sierra Nevada mountain range brought out water measurements in the snowpack of 165 percent. Electronic readings for the northern Sierra were as high as 174 percent for the April 1 seasonal average.

By contrast, reports on March 1 showed the central Sierra seasonal average at 106 percent. This latest reading was just the tip of the iceberg on summarizing a wild winter that roared over the region in December, cooled in mid January into February and returned with a vengeance in March. Ironically, the "Miracle March" tends to happen in drought years as in the period from 1987-1992.

DWR takes the readings to determine water allocations for the state's 25 million Californians and almost one million acres of irrigated farmland. The state agency estimates it can deliver 70 percent of the requested amount for the State Water Project, the Central Valley's flagship program.

"While this season's storms have lifted us out of the drought, it's critical that Californians continue to watch their water use," Brown said in a statement upon ending the drought declaration. "Drought or no drought, demand for water in California way outstrips supply. Continued conservation is key."

The statement serves as a reminder that abundance is one thing. Water management is quite another.

Currently all reservoirs in the state are filled to marks above average, but there's more anticipated snowpack runoff than what can be stored in the reservoirs. This makes management of the flows more of a challenge.

Demand for building down

By Linda Fine Conaboy

When times are tough in a community, there seem to be multiple indicators signifying just how bad things really are. You see closed storefronts, not much exterior maintenance being done to spruce up buildings, unfinished building projects or simply not many new building starts, and fairly high unemployment.

In the Lake Tahoe region, another indicator is the number of unused building permits (allocations) that have been carried forward, unused from year-to-year.

Normally, by this time, the 2011 permits would have been distributed by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. But this year, the designated date is sometime in April. Some in the basin question why and even worry the TRPA will not be issuing allocations this year.



While construction has been robust at South Tahoe High for a couple years, small projects

in the basin
are near non-
existent.
Photo/LTN file

Not so, said Jeff Cowen, TRPA community liaison.

Although the agency has also found itself mired in various financial issues mandating reorganization with a plan to eliminate eight positions and reclassify 12 others, the reason for late allocations isn't an internal staffing issue, he said.

In addition, according to Cowen, the jurisdictions making up the Lake Tahoe Basin are not pounding down the door for allocations. There's a direct relationship between a lack of requests for allocations and the region's economic activities, he said.

Although the process of granting building permits or allocations is an intricate one, with many nuances sometimes making it difficult for the lay person to understand, the official definition of an allocation, provided by Cowen is: an apportionment of additional development opportunity for residential, commercial, tourist accommodation and certain recreational projects.

Although this may sound convoluted, it all boils down to who can build where.

"We were not in a hurry to release the allocations this year even though we are closing out the allocations pool from the 1987 Regional Plan. We are a couple of months behind," Cowen admitted, explaining usually the process is completed in January. However, he said, no new allocations will be allotted until the Regional Plan is updated – an ongoing work in process for a number of years, but according to Cowen, it's in the final stages of development.

The current Regional Plan, in place since 1987, was set to sunset in 2007.

“Things are contentious in the basin,” he said. “That’s why we’re still working on the plan. We’ve actually been working on it since 2004.”

A bit of history

He said because of runaway growth, TRPA put the brakes on rampant building in 1969.

“Come the 1980s, all the harmful growth was stopped, but [we] failed to put in place practices that would make things good – all the broken stuff was still there. The majority of Tahoe’s development was created without environmental guidelines. The lake’s clarity was still declining.”

In 1997, then-President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore came to Lake Tahoe to establish the Environmental Improvement Program, which is a federal, local, state and private partnership.

And in 2007 the EIP was updated, followed just recently by the potential reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which hit the floor of Congress on March 2. This act continues the federal commitment at Lake Tahoe by authorizing \$415 million over eight years to improve water clarity, reduce the threat of fire and restore the environment. Cowen said the act has broad support and has a good chance of being approved.

By way of explanation, the area benefitting from the allocation process is located between the Carson Range on the east and the Sierra Nevada on the west, straddling the California-Nevada state line. It consists of a large geographical area including South Lake Tahoe, as well as portions of Douglas, El Dorado, Placer, Carson and Washoe counties. About two-thirds of the region is in California, with the remaining one-third in Nevada.

There are about 50,000 year-round residents within the region, a number that is in decline. With 44,000 developed parcels, about 50 to 65 percent of homes are occupied by seasonal residents. About 13 percent of the region is developed.

Who gets what

While all of the machinations at TRPA may not be apparent to the builder or homeowner who's anxious to begin a building project, they are important to the overall process.

Although Cowen says he understands the urgency of getting shovels in the ground and the short digging season in the Tahoe basin (May 1-Oct. 15), the simple fact of the matter is that none of the jurisdictions is hammering on the TRPA's door for allocations. Building is definitely slow, he reiterated.

He said TRPA understands it has a reputation of being dense and obtuse stemming from years back. But he also said the agency has changed a lot.

"We're on a strict path to improve our business processes," Cowen said.

At the time this article was written, Cowen said there will be allocations available, but he didn't know how many. "We're working on that now."

In 2009 TRPA issued allocations to local jurisdictions without the normal expiration date at the end of the year.

"So, the 2009 allocations that were distributed have lasted through two building seasons and all but one jurisdiction (Douglas County) still has allocations remaining from that pool as we head into a third year. In the past, that kind of retention would have been unheard of."

Here's a distribution recap for 2009-10:

- South Lake Tahoe: 32 distributed with six remaining – these

are all on hold for multi-family projects; no single-family available right now

- Douglas County: 15 distributed; none remaining
- El Dorado County: 69 distributed; more than 30 remaining
- Placer County: 50 distributed; 42 remaining
- Washoe County: 40 distributed; 32 remaining.

As far as the total number of allocations remaining for years to come, Cowen said TRPA planners are still working on that figure and will know more in April.

What others think

Jill Bricker, a local Realtor and the governmental relations chair for the South Tahoe Association of Realtors, knows the local market well and has some words of advice.

“If you’re planning to apply for a building allocation now, be prepared to have patience. The staffs at [TRPA], the city and the county have been drastically cut because of consolidation, etc.”

Anyone who can build right now should do so, she said – it creates jobs.

Bricker said STAR and the Sierra Board of Realtors recently completed a joint study, the results of which will be passed on to TRPA and the California Tahoe Conservancy so these agencies can better understand what realtors deal with and how it affects the timing of various projects.

“Although response was limited, the majority of the membership feels allocations are not such a hot commodity anymore,” Bricker said.

“TRPA is one of the toughest planning agencies in the nation and sets the standard for environmental issues and protections

when it comes to development. What we are concerned with are commercial allocations and tourist accommodation units, which are now being redefined.”

The TRPA website defines TAUs as a saleable commodity within the Tahoe basin. They are available for purchase from the California Tahoe Conservancy, private parties or can be transferred from existing projects.

Roger Trout is the El Dorado County director of development services and in his position deals with building allocations.

“Quite a few people let their allocations expire and they go back into the pool,” he said. “In the past, we’d get 70, 80, 100 allocations each year and they would all be consumed and we had a waiting list. Now, probably because of the state of the global housing market, the need for allocations has declined.”

Trout said he is hopeful TRPA will issue new allocations and re-supply El Dorado County.

“Back in the 1980s and early 1990s we always had more requests than we had allocations,” Trout said.

Mimi Moss, community development director for Douglas County, concurred with Trout when it comes to the number of requests for allocations, although Douglas County has used all of its for the current time period.

“Previously, Douglas County issued 12-13 allocations per year and we had a waiting list. If someone is not issued an allocation, the list rolls to the next year, which is why we have a large waiting list,” Moss said.

If it’s any consolation to the citizens of Tahoe, the area is not alone in its current building malaise – the entire United States housing market is in the deep doldrums.

According to an article on cnnmoney.com, the housing market

can't catch a break. The article reports that the number of permits issued in February for future housing construction fell to a new all-time low, according to a government report issued recently.

Building permits are down 8.2 percent, nationally, from January, the U.S. Department of Commerce Department said. That was the lowest level seen since the government started tracking the figures in 1959.

But spring is here, soon the snow will melt, the allocations will be issued and life may make a stab at normal. Maybe when the building season opens May 1 the sounds of construction will reverberate throughout the basin.

El Dorado Passport vintners weather first weekend

By Susan Wood

PLACERVILLE – El Dorado County wineries represent a gutsy, resilient lot.

First, some have found their pricing endured the economic recession.

Plus, an aging America hasn't dampened the spirits of a youth movement interested in wine – with this county being no exception.

Now, a wild winter came out in full force this past weekend when a major storm Saturday knocked out power to some of the mostly southern wineries during their premier event – Passport weekend. The event prompts wineries in the association to

feature their product of Chardonnays, Viogniers, Barberas, Sirahs and signature Zinfandels as well as cook for the wine lovers on tour.

The power went out at around noon at Charles B. Mitchell Winery off Fairplay Road. Thankfully, the staff was still able to cook its wood-fired pizzas outside.



Charles B.
Mitchell
winery workers
Kyle Gazlay
and Noelle
Savage serve
up the wood-
fired pizzas.
Photo/Susan
Wood

Elliot Graham at Busby Cellars noticed that attendance dropped off to almost half the 600 wine drinkers who usually tour the wineries on the Passport day.

At Latcham Winery off Omo Ranch Road, the storm and power outage prompted the staff and customers to improvise.

“We dressed warmer the second day,” regular customer Sheila Sanchez of Somerset said Sunday on her family’s second day of their outing.

“We lit lots of candles,” winery owner Margaret Latcham said Sunday.

She tried to seize the generator from her nephew running its sister winery, Granite Springs, but to no avail.

“Sorry, Auntie Margaret. You’re not getting the generator,” Latcham quipped, as she recalled what he said. Being that they had no heat, staff wore gloves.

“It was like a wine cave,” Latcham added. The staff scrambled to find light.

Customers cleared out – many to the north end of the tour route – but returned on Sunday. And next weekend’s forecast appears to look like a blue skies Passport event when the association hosts its second weekend on April 2 and 3.

The wine business comes with its ebbs and flows of trends in agriculture and consumer demand. Adjustment is the name of the game.

Two trends have made Latcham and other vintners pleased with business – more younger drinkers contributing to a segment returning to the pricier wines than the bottles that were bought at the start of the severe economic recession.

For that, Latcham’s maestro of winemaking, Ruggero Mastroserio, has introduced an ultra premium label of Zinfandel, which was on the table for tasting and buying at as much as \$50 a bottle. Latcham is well known for its quality Zins hovering at about \$14 to \$30 a bottle as well as their signature table wines – Gold Rush Red and Gold Rush White. They can be picked up for as low as \$8 a bottle with wine discounts and bulk pricing.

The middle-of-the-road wines priced over \$20 are being bought up in greater numbers according to the Nielsen Co., which tracks U.S. wine trends. Total U.S. wine sales rose 4.1 percent to \$9.3 billion last year. Recent studies have pointed to the millennial generation as an up-and-coming market joining its baby boomer counterparts.

"We're definitely seeing more young people buying wine," Latcham confirmed.

The same goes for Charles B. Mitchell wine tasting room manager Patty Forester. She had noticed many wine buyers seeking "a sale" when the recession hit. Moreover, some were canceling their wine club memberships because spouses lost their jobs. Things have improved.

"Now we're seeing people tired of conserving. They want to spend money," Forester said.

Winery Association spokeswoman Jolaine Collins had noticed the "recession has worked to our benefit" in terms of seizing the customers looking for the mid-range wine purchases.

Pam Miller of Single Leaf has seen an upsurge in dollars spent per visit. Miller has not only witnessed more of the younger set coming to the winery off Fairplay Road, but she's also seen those who make it to the winery wanting "to make the most of their trip," because of higher gas prices.

Most of the vintners are optimistic this coming Passport weekend's sunny weather in the forecast will bring out the enthusiasm among their customers. A sellout is anticipated – especially with the recent trends.

"We're finding the young consumers are very interested in wine, and they're coming for the intimate settings where they can learn about the wine," said Winery Association President Beth Jones, who works for Lava Cap. The north-end winery fared better during the storm Saturday and only lost power for seconds.

Jones insists El Dorado is being "discovered more" as a choice for wine up to Napa and Sonoma. Unlike the latter counties' national push, this county tends to focus its marketing efforts on the region.

The El Dorado Winery Association may be reached at 800.306.3956.

Meth, domestic violence top list of concerns for Nev. AG

By Nancy Oliver Hayden

STATELINE – The room was so quiet one could have heard a pin drop when Nevada Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto started talking about the myriad issues in the Silver State.

“The first of many issues in Nevada is the methamphetamine problem,” she said. “Very few people knew it was a problem when I first took office.”

She brought agencies together to address the issue and now the state is moving forward regarding methamphetamine as well as other drug abuse problems.



Catherine
Cortez Masto

“The No. 1 problem in Nevada is prescription drug abuse and now there are synthetic or designer drugs. This is a challenge because there are more than 500 formulas for synthetic drugs and we have to investigate each one separately,” she said.

Masto and her office created the Drug Round-up program, where people can bring their unused prescription drugs to designated locations to be incinerated. They also established a Substance Abuse Task Force.

Masto, a strong advocate for women and children, spoke about women in leadership positions and discussed her programs and passions with Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe on March 23 at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

After asking the audience how many knew what an attorney general did and only a few raised their hand, she acknowledged that not many others know either.

"The attorney general is considered the top law official in the state. We are the largest law firm, work closely with law enforcement and district attorneys, and investigate and prosecute criminal cases" she said.

Masto, a native Nevadan, said she ran for Nevada attorney general because she saw so many issues that needed to be addressed at the state level. She took the oath of office in January 2007 for her first term and was sworn in Jan. 3, 2011, for her second term.

Another issue facing the state is domestic violence, which impacts women and children as well as animals. Masto chairs the Domestic Violence Prevention Council.

"Nevada leads the nation in the number of women murdered through domestic violence. My office has put together a Fatality Review Team and we have a prosecutor on staff. There is a need to understand what it means to be a domestic violence victim. It includes a cycle of violence and is a control issue," she said.

The Attorney General's Office has established a Prevention Partner program, where employees partner with groups such as Girl Scouts. Called Peace Begins at Home, the girls learn

where they can find out more information and where they can go for help. The office is also looking to partner with the Boy Scouts, Board of Cosmetologists and Nurses Association.

One of the issues Masto plans to focus on in the next four years is how juvenile offenders are handled on the state level. She said this is an issue that has never been studied. When she worked as assistant county manager for Clark County she assisted in the creation of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative to build a better legal system for juveniles.

The attorney general is passionate about issues of elder abuse and exploitation of seniors. Because she was so close to her grandparents while growing up, she saw the problems that seniors experience.

"Nevada has a growing senior population and we will continue to work on these issues," she said.

Missing children in Nevada is a concern for her office. Investigators travel all over the world to locate non-custodial parents. Human trafficking is also a problem as children are forced into prostitution and Nevada doesn't have programs to address these issues.

"We don't have a safe place for these young girls to go. We arrest them and put them in jail to keep them safe and then they go back into the same environment. We are trying to get funds to establish a home for them in southern Nevada," Masto said.

"Also an issue is cyber safety. Kids are on the Internet, it is an extension of their being, and there is no control," she said. "Young people need to be educated about cyber bullying, sexting and protecting their identity on line. Face Book pages are used by sexual predators to gain their confidence to sexually exploit them."

Golf course provides scenic, tranquil cross country ski

By Kathryn Reed

Frustration isn't the emotion one should have while cross country skiing.

But this particular day it was my word of choice – at least initially. So I took the skis off, stuck them in the snow hoping no one would walk off with them, and decided to walk the golf course.



Sue Wood uses the disc golf basket at Bijou to clean her skis. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Sue stayed on her skis, which eventually turned out to be the better choice.

Not too long into my walk and her ski we came across a woman on skis wondering where mine were. I said I took them off because I wasn't able to glide with all the snow piling up on

them and that it was easier to walk. She suggested using cooking spray on the bottom, saying it will seem like the best wax job ever.

I plan to take her advice before I venture out on my skis again.

Plenty of snow on this particular day had me sinking knee deep. Sue glided in the tracks laid by earlier recreationists. At that point I was frustrated again – wishing I had my skis.

Despite my poor judgment in what to have on my feet for the outing, the beauty brought me out of funk.

Like most golf courses, this municipal facility is in a scenic location. And like most golf courses – it's flat.

That combination makes it a great trek for all ability levels.

It also allows for short or long outings; out and backs; loops; and various entry points.

Trails are all over Bijou Golf Course. This is a perfect trek for people living in the neighborhood. They don't have to drive anywhere.

And although the park has an area just for dogs, the golf course provides them an even larger playground.

The nine-hole course usually opens in May. The city's Parks and Recreation website still has the opening day for 2010 listed.

Getting there:

From the Y in South Lake Tahoe, turn right on Al Tahoe Boulevard. Go through the intersection at Johnson Boulevard. Turn left into Bijou Community Park. Go straight and park as far down as you can.

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