

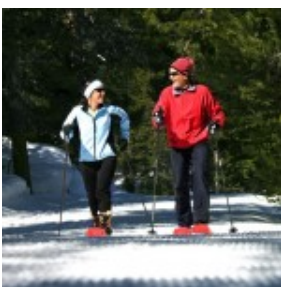
Trails day unites rookies with wonders of outdoors in winter

By Susan Wood

When people allow nature to take its course, they often like the path it takes.

That's just the suggestive nudging winter sports enthusiasts from New England to Lake Tahoe are making on Jan. 8 – National Winter Trails Day. This event is designed to teach first-timers to snowshoes and cross country skis the wonders of human travel in the snow.

The day shows novices the ease, the preparation, the beauty and the importance of appreciating trail systems and tracks – whether they're set by an early riser that morning, the Olympic Games a half century ago or hundreds of years ago by Native American tribal members.



Kirkwood is in its seventh year participating in National Winter Trails Day.

Photo/Provided

"I think that, especially in the (Lake Tahoe) basin, we do have a history of being outside and enjoying our snow sports. We have carried on a tradition of paying homage to our heritage," said Jaime Souza, director of trail use for the Tahoe Rim Trail Association. She was pointing to the Washoe Tribe's use of Tahoe trails. The same could be said for the early settlers such as John Fremont, the cartographer.

The TRTA is organizing a few free, guided snowshoe walks Saturday. On the North Shore it starts at 10am at Tahoe Meadows at the south side of the Mount Rose Highway where the American Red Cross will provide a presentation on winter safety. Tahoe Mountain Sports will bring out its demonstration gear. Interested parties are asked to call Tom at (775) 298.0238.

The association is also partnering with Explore Tahoe on the South Shore at 9am where modern-day explorers will head to Castle Rock from the Kingsbury North trailhead near Heavenly Mountain Resort. To participate and discover where to pick up snowshoes, call Lauren Thomaselli at the Explore Tahoe visitors center adjacent to Heavenly Village at (530) 542.4637.

The hikes are intended to introduce the trail that circumvents Lake Tahoe in a winter wonderland backdrop.

"This is a way to inspire people to get outdoors and share this with family and friends," said Thomaselli, who's glad to have the South Shore taking part. The Rim Trail Association has staged events the last handful of years on the North Shore. Thomaselli sees more of a role from South Lake Tahoe in the future – especially given the nation's first bi-state park named after the Van Sickle family is set to open behind the South Shore casino corridor within the year.

A winter safety talk will touch on knowing when to fuel your body with food to the importance of hydrating.

In addition, tips will be given for how to blaze snow-covered trails in the winter. For example, the Rim Trail has a baseball-sized, easily identifiable logo on trees and posts. For some, freshly limbed trees allow for easy navigation. Others like to put out “hunters” tape on tree limbs, with the idea of removing the pieces upon the return.

Three guides will be on hand.

“I hope we look back at this National Winter Trails Day as a great event when we broke ground for having the South Shore make the national scene. I foresee this event getting bigger and better,” Thomaselli said.

The guided walks will join Kirkwood Cross Country Ski Area and Snowshoe Center’s annual event from 10am to 3pm, in coordination with REI of Sacramento and the El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol.

“I think it’s a great way for people to get out into snow sports,” said Debi Waldear, who runs the ski center located on Highway 88 between Pickett’s Junction and Silver Lake. If pre-arranged by calling (209) 258.7248, one can sign up to get a beginning lesson on methods of snow travel with Waldear – a guru of winter sports in these parts.

Talks, tips, free demos and discounted trail passes will be offered at Kirkwood as one of 80 sanctioned locations for National Winter Trails Day, which is co-organized by the American Hiking Society and Snowsports Industry of America.

Waldear said she’s surprised by how many people – even locals – don’t venture out in nature in winter.

Expanding the market and reach of winter human travel is the precise aim of the snow sports industry.

“If you can walk, you can snowshoe,” Snowsports Industry spokesman Reese Brown said from his home in Woodstock, Vt. The

trade organization created the day 15 years ago to introduce the activities to people with barriers to snow sports. More than 11,000 people take part each year.

“This is a free opportunity to try it,” he said. “So many people in so many climates don’t like winter.”

And there’s a reason for that. They either don’t know what clothes to wear or what footwear to bring. They have no idea how many calories they can burn while cross country skiing or snowshoeing, Brown mentioned. For example, a 190-pound adult has the opportunity to burn 690 calories an hour while snowshoeing. As Americans recover from their holiday food coma, this activity may prove to be another option to the gym.

For more information, go online.

Increase in childhood diabetes puts strain on school nurses

By Jessie Marchesseau

In any given hour at Sierra House Elementary School in South Lake Tahoe, half a dozen kids are in and out of the nurse’s office. Illnesses, injuries, bloody noses and burns are among the ailments.

A young girl wearing purple jeans and a bright orange bow in her hair wanders into the office looking right at home. She pulls out a lunch menu and starts perusing the choices for the day. This is Maritza Torres. She is 10 years old and she has diabetes.

Torres, happily sucking on a candy cane, explains how she thinks having diabetes is easy, but she still does not like it.

“I have to get a shot all the time and if I want to play soccer or something, I have to check my blood sugar all the time,” she says.

Everyday Torres and the school nurse decide what she is going to eat for lunch, calculate the carbohydrates, test her blood sugar and administer the proper amount of insulin.



Kelsey
Buckley, 8,
Makenzie
McMillen, 10,
and McKenna
Brewer, 10,
are used to
having medical
kits with them
at all times.
Photos/Jessie
Marchesseau

This might not seem to take up a great deal of time in the school nurse's day, but Torres is not alone in this battle. Nine other students in the four other schools within Lake Tahoe Unified School District also suffer from diabetes, and all vie for the nurses' time.

Having 10 diabetic students in LTUSD is a significant increase

from a decade ago when Rand Norberg was the only one.

His mother, Loreen, a second-grade teacher for LTUSD, remembers being “scared to death” when she found out her son had Type I diabetes. He was in third grade.

“At that time, I had so much faith in our school nurses, and just kept saying, ‘they know more than I do,’” she said.

Loreen Norberg refers to the nurses as “a god-send” and credits Margaret McKean, a school nurse for LTUSD, with teaching her some of the most important aspects of helping her son deal with diabetes.

Without the school nurses and staff available to help Rand manage his blood sugar and administer insulin daily, Norberg said she would likely have had to quit her job in order to monitor her son. This is a consequence not uncommon among families with a diabetic child.

Rand, like Maritza Torres, received an insulin injection everyday at lunch and any other time he ate.

“A lot of times it fell in the hands of the school secretary,” Norberg said. “I was fine with that. As long as he got his shot, I didn’t care who did it.”

However, administering insulin shots is now restricted to the school nurse, the child or a relative. This means LTUSD nurses need to be available to assist all 10 diabetic students every day.

McKean says there are too many students with diabetes in different places, and she cannot be in two places at once. The additional care needed for these students prompted the district to hire two additional part-time nurses this fall, bringing the total to two full-time and three part-time nurses.

“I think the school district is really going above and beyond

in the budget crunch," McKean said.

The number of students needing and using school medical services may make it somewhat hard to believe that having a school nurse in California is not all that common. The state does not provide funding for nurses, so it is up to individual districts to decide to have a nurse on staff.

"We've made it our priority in our district: our kids with diabetes and our kids with food allergies," McKean said. "It's a life or death situation."

McKean has been a school nurse for 28 years and has seen the number of diabetic students increase greatly in recent years. More and more children are being diagnosed with Type I diabetes, and the medical community has not yet figured out why.

She explained how what is usually in the news is Type II diabetes. It is often caused by being overweight and can be reversed over time. Type I, however, is not a result of weight issues. Type I is what most of the LTUSD students suffer from. It can never be eliminated. They will live with it for the rest of their lives, and it can be deadly if not properly managed.

Susie Brumbach, school nurse for the Douglas County schools at the lake, said she has not seen the same increase LTUSD has. Brumbach said she is aware of one student with Type I diabetes at her schools and has not had a diabetic student at the elementary level in more than 10 years.

LTUSD, however, has not been so fortunate. Seven of the 10 diabetic students are at the elementary or middle school level. Many of them are relatively independent and either wear insulin pumps or administer their own injections, but they still require a nurse's supervision.

Each of these students has their own manual of sorts in the

nurse's office with all relevant information regarding their condition. There are also diabetes protocols and insulin calculation formulas posted on the walls.

Even though 10-year-old Maritza Torres says having diabetes is easy, Loreen Norberg has a different opinion. She knows the seriousness of the disease and says she wishes the school district would have shown greater concern and hired more nurses before the school year started. She felt so strongly about it that she appeared before the school board at the beginning of the school year to tell them why.

"When somebody has a disability, it needs to be taken care of from day one," she said. "They hired extra nurses, but not soon enough."

Her son Rand is 20 now. He graduated from the LTUSD system and went away to college. Norberg said she still worries about him being on his own and dealing with diabetes. But tears come to her eyes when she says how proud she is of him mentoring children who are newly diagnosed with diabetes.

This mix of emotions about being the parent of a diabetic child does not appear to be unique to Loreen Norberg.

When asked how her mom feels about her having diabetes, Maritza responded: "She's happy that I'm OK, and sad that I have it."

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Northstar C00 not planning

major changes in initial season

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Driving into Northstar-at-Tahoe and schussing down the slopes it doesn't seem like anything is different. For now, the experience is the same.

But with Vail Resorts buying the North Shore resort in October and Bill Rock coming on board in December as chief operating officer, change is inevitable.

The first noticeable change will be this month when Northstar starts serving the Epic Burger – which sounds like a Big Mac based on the description on Vail's website as “two fresh Angus quarter pound patties, lettuce, tomato, onion, pickle, organic white cheddar cheese, and a special sauce.”



Bill Rock has been at the helm of Northstar-at-Tahoe for a month.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Other dining changes will be assessed as all the players become more familiar with one another.

All the employees have been retained, with some of the mountain hosts becoming full-time workers.

Jessica Van Pernis, communications manager for Northstar, said, "The Vail team was surprised how lean we were."

In regards to staffing, Rock said, "There may be structural changes down the road."

Vail also owns Heavenly Mountain Resort on the South Shore, so it's possible some blending of resources in Tahoe may occur besides the extra help that is in Colorado.

The man in charge

Rock, who with his wife and twin 5-year-old son and daughter moved to Truckee in early December, is in observation mode at the resort.

His kids are eager to ski in Lake Tahoe. Each got in 25 days of skiing last season.

Rock said his daughter was ecstatic to be moving to California – already having a sense of style at a young age. And only after a couple laps around the outdoor ice rink in the village she apparently is a natural on skates.

Until moving here from West Virginia the only Tahoe area resort Rock had skied was Kirkwood. He had been to Squaw in the summer.

He quickly went all over Mount Pluto – Northstar's mountain with its summit of 8,600 feet.

"This mountain is laid out well. My first day it was easy to figure out," Rock said during a wide-ranging interview with *Lake Tahoe News*.

Dressed in his gray Northstar jacket Rock doesn't look like a corporate executive. With a radiant smile, he jokes about

probably not needing another cup of coffee, but he opts for java instead of the alcohol that is being poured at the bar in the pub at the Northstar Village.

He seems energized by the prospect of taking over a mountain much larger than where he came from in West Virginia or in Durango.

But similarities abound between the resorts he's worked at – one being experience with homeowners.

The first month he spent mostly getting to know the mountain and employees. With the holidays behind him, Rock plans to reach out to the community this month.

Addressing issues

It's Dec. 27 and the parking lot is full. Parking is one of the problems skiers and riders have with Northstar. Rock said recent surveys of guests show less frustration with parking, but he said there is room for more improvement.

"We know where we fall short. There are days like today where people will not get the experience of a lifetime," Rock said. "Sometimes it's hard to find a place to park and sometimes it's hard to find a place to eat. We will address it for next year."

There was a time when Northstar restricted the number of skiers allowed on the mountain. That has not happened for at least five years. Rock isn't sure quotas would be reintroduced.

For now, Rock said, "We are dedicated to providing the experience of a lifetime for guests."

LTN asked how that is possible when Northstar seems to be struggling with its identity because it used to be a laid back family-friendly resort before it tried transforming itself with a village like other resorts, and eventually had a Ritz-

Carlton open mid-mountain in December 2009.

“We are going to be a place for people to connect,” Rock said. “They create their own memories.”

He said Northstar caters to everyone. With lodging that runs the gamut from hotel-like offerings to studios to the Ritz, he said it’s possible to be all things to all people.

It’s also possible on the mountain, Rock said, with what he described as a world-class terrain park, and a variety of skiable acreage for all levels.

Besides being a ski resort, Northstar has a well-known mountain bike park that for the last few years has been host to the national collegiate championships.

In May, the resort is the end point for the first stage of the Amgen Tour de California road bike race that starts in South Lake Tahoe.

Rock is looking forward to getting out on his bike. The 42-year-old used to do some racing – including as a triathlete.

Making and keeping resolutions for '11 that matter

A new day, a new month, a new year, a new decade. Welcome to 2011.

Resolutions so often fall flat. Either the conviction to make them happen wanes or their unrealistic nature renders them

unachievable.

What if we started small with our resolutions for the coming year? Whether you call it paying it forward or random acts of kindness or following the golden rule – let's start by first being more focused on family and friends.



What would your home life be like if you turned off the television a little more often and played a game or talked to each other? Start with doing it once a month. Fond memories are not created in front of the TV.

Look at how you define family. It doesn't have to involve blood relations. Families come in many forms.

What would your street or neighborhood be like if you helped each other shovel or blow the driveway? Maybe you would learn that person's name instead of just waving. Maybe it would all get done faster because of the camaraderie involved instead of the drudgery of doing it alone.

What about a neighborhood block party when it warms up?

What about a few households bonding over a barter club where you do work for each other? Think of the skill set involved with a group compared to doing it solo or as a couple.

Slowly, that sense of community begins to build at the most local of all levels – in your home, on your street.

Imagine this spreading.

What if you take this sense of togetherness and bring it to work? Would the phrase "hostile work environment" disappear? It's time for bosses to spare an employee to leave his or her desk to shovel the sidewalk or go do it themselves. It's time to take pride in what buildings look like, what the landscaping looks like, the cleanliness of the parking lot.

It's time to have a sense of pride in your community. Government is not the answer. People are the answer.

It's time to look in the mirror to see who is responsible for making South Lake Tahoe, the South Shore, the Lake Tahoe Basin, California, Nevada and the United States of America all better places to live, work and play.

Lake Tahoe News would like to publish your stories in 2011 about how you are making your slice of the world a better place. Maybe what you are doing will trigger others to do the same or come up with a different idea. Send your stories, with your name (yes, it will be published), and phone number (it will not be published) to info@LakeTahoeNews.net.

Happy New Year from *Lake Tahoe News*.

Pensions prove it pays to be a retired government employee

By Kathryn Reed

There comes a time when it doesn't pay to work. That time is when government workers are tapped out in the Public Employment Retirement System and it makes more sense to start withdrawing from that account.



Former El Dorado County Sheriff Jeff Neves a year ago said he was leaving office a year early to spend time with his family. He might be. He certainly has the cash to do so.

Neves, 56, is collecting \$15,202 a month. He is not the only person in the county making more than \$100,000 year off the taxpayer funded retirement system. Though he is the highest “paid” ex-county employee at \$182,424.84 a year.

Here is what other former El Dorado County employees are collecting annually in retirement:

- Robert Altmeyer, \$139,006.20
- Robert Brown, \$118,633.68
- Steven Davis, \$132,624.12
- Marty Hackett, \$117,003.48
- Michael Hanford, \$120,500.76
- Keith Harvey, \$106,491.36
- David Koupal, \$101,294.52
- John Litwinovich, \$134,142.72
- Doug Nowka, \$102,240.72
- William Whealton, \$134,209.56.

Gayle Erbe-Hamlin, who retired earlier this month as the county’s chief administrative officer, doesn’t register on the list – but she will.

CalPERS recipients receive 60 percent of their highest annual salary.

Even though Erbe-Hamlin’s base pay was \$185,661 per year, she actually got paid \$307,141.23 in 2010, according to county Auditor-Controller Joe Harn. The larger dollar amount includes longevity pay, management or administrative leave pay, buyout of sick pay and vacation time.

A letter from Harn this month to the Board of Supervisors

warns the county's unfunded pension liability is \$264 million and growing. It doubled from June 2008 to June 2009.

That figure is part of the estimated \$1 trillion in unfunded retirement and health care packages nationwide. It's one of the reasons state, county and city budgets keep running a deficit.

South Lake Tahoe has initiated a two-tier pension system so new hires will get less when they retire. The county has not enacted such a policy.

But the city also has former employees who are collecting more than \$100,000 a year through their pensions.

Former South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Terry Daniels, 52, is the top money collector at \$123,630.84 a year, or \$10,302.57 a month. He retired a year ago.

Current Police Chief Brian Uhler makes \$145,000 a year – to work.

Two former South Lake Tahoe fire chiefs are also in the \$100,000 club:

- Mike Chandler, \$101,670.48
- Jim Plake, \$101,145.24.

Placer County has 21 ex-employees with pensions of more than \$100,000 a year. Truckee has three people in that category.

All of this data is accessible to the public via this website.

Statewide, there are 9,111 retired government workers with pensions of more than \$100,000 a year.

California has 59 city or county public employee retirement systems. Collectively there are 2,330,929 members – of that figure, 1,779,811 are active. There are 1,032,360 people receiving periodic payments.

Nevada has two PERS accounts with 117,794 members. Of those, 106,168 are active and 38,197 receive payments.

Below are two charts from the U.S. Census Bureau regarding PERS.

The 2008 survey covered fiscal years that ended between July 1, 2007, and June 30, 2008, and does not reflect revenue data for the entire calendar year of 2008.

State and level of government	Total receipts	Government contributions				Earnings on investments
		Employee contributions	Total	From state government	From local government	
United States	79,649,581	36,929,944	81,996,539	36,261,593	45,734,946	(39,276,902)
State	56,419,735	31,639,290	63,869,874	35,755,522	28,114,352	(39,089,429)
Local	23,229,846	5,290,654	18,126,665	506,071	17,620,594	(187,473)
California	(3,740,451)	7,784,280	15,767,098	4,705,733	11,061,365	(27,291,829)
State	(6,204,256)	6,039,098	11,371,374	4,691,795	6,679,579	(23,614,728)
Local	2,463,805	1,745,182	4,395,724	13,938	4,381,786	(3,677,101)
Nevada	739,892	131,333	1,167,578	174,655	992,923	(559,019)
State	739,892	131,333	1,167,578	174,655	992,923	(559,019)

Expenditures of state and local public employee retirement systems for fiscal year 2008 in thousands of dollars.

State and level of government	Total payments	Benefits	Withdrawals	Other payments
United States	193,808,914	175,423,416	4,634,335	13,751,163
State	157,410,232	143,453,487	3,211,317	10,745,428
Local	36,398,682	31,969,929	1,423,018	3,005,735
California	30,195,419	28,019,958	606,055	1,569,406
State	21,397,173	20,194,042	482,035	721,096
Local	8,798,246	7,825,916	124,020	848,310
Nevada	1,243,467	1,033,622	16,830	193,015

State	1,243,467	1,033,622	16,830	193,015
Local	—	—	—	—

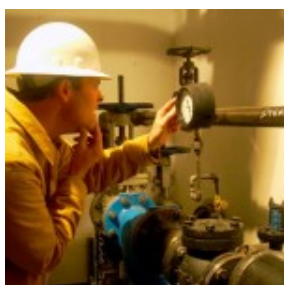
Building industry faces new fire regulations, green codes

By Jessie Marchesseau

California mandates new building codes every three years. 2011 is one of those years.

Beginning Jan. 1, South Lake Tahoe, Truckee and most of the rest of the state will be implementing some new standards.

“There’s gonna be grumbling with the mandated issues,” said Dave Walker, building official for South Lake Tahoe. “There’s gonna be a learning curve, but our contractors are good. They will adapt.”



Contractor Joe Stewart checks on the boiler at STHS's TADA building that

is under
construction.
Photos/Jessie
Marchesseau

Truckee has already hosted classes to bring local building professionals up-to-date on the new codes. South Lake Tahoe plans to offer some after the first of the year, as does the Sierra Green Building Association.

The most notable on this year's list of building code changes are the ones having to do with fire sprinklers and the new California Green Building Standards Code, known as CALGreen.

Sprinkler systems

Fire sprinkler systems in homes are nothing new. They have been required in all new homes over 5,000 square feet since the last building code was implemented three years ago. But the state has decided to expand the code to include all new residential structures, regardless of square footage.

"It should provide for a safer community because sprinklers save lives," said Gareth Harris, fire marshal for Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, nearly 3,000 U.S. residents die in home fires every year. Harris said not one of those was in a home with functioning sprinklers and smoke alarms.

Contrary to common myths, he said, sprinklers do nowhere near the damage to a home that fire, smoke and water from a fire hose do. They can often detect and extinguish a fire when it is relatively small, and only the sprinkler in close proximity to the actual fire will activate, leaving the rest of the house dry. In fact, the NFPA reports that fire sprinklers reduce the average property loss from a fire by 71 percent.

Even though sprinklers can help significantly reduce property damage from a fire, Harris said the new regulations are “based on saving lives, not saving homes.”

For this reason, he is wholeheartedly behind the new regulation, but admits the added cost to building will make it tougher for builders. Contractor Tod Williamson of TW Construction in Meyers is well aware of this. He fears fewer people will want to build homes because of the additional financial burden.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to tell you the truth,” Williamson said. “I think it’s a step in the wrong direction, considering the significant cost to the entire project, and they don’t offer significant protection for the money.”

Walker from his city office admitted it is definitely going to add to the cost of building. Even though prices have gone down in recent years, a sprinkler system will still add approximately \$15,000 to the cost of building a home.

“The way I see it is anything that they come up with that makes it harder to build makes it harder for me to survive,” Williamson said.

Despite the increased cost, not all contractors are against the new regulations. Joe Stewart of SMC Contracting has been installing sprinkler systems in commercial and residential structures for years.

“They are really, really good. Sprinklers save lives,” he said. “When you’re living in wood houses, wood burns.”

He does note, however, that cold temperatures add to the difficulty of installing fire sprinkler systems in the Lake Tahoe area. If water is sitting in the lines, it could freeze, and the pipe could burst.

For this reason, a mix of 50 percent glycerin and 50 percent

water is used in the lines. Harris said this glycerin is food-safe and nontoxic, so Tahoe residents do not have to worry about it leaching into the soil or contaminating the lake.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is aware of the new code, but has chosen not to get involved. They do not generally review interior home issues and refer to the Environmental Protection Agency to make decisions on toxic chemicals inside homes.

Green building

Something TRPA does get involved with, however, is the environmental impact of structures and building. In fact, some of the things TRPA has been mandating for years are addressed in the new CALGreen code such as best management practices, or BMPs.

In addition to BMPs and storm water management, the new green building codes demand reduced water consumption, greater energy efficiency, material conservation and improved indoor air quality.

Walker said the air inside homes can be more toxic than the smog in downtown Los Angeles. The new code forces homeowners and contractors to acknowledge the amount of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, released by building products.

"People are going to have to pay a little more attention to what they put in the interior of their homes because they want better indoor air," he said.

Walker estimates the CALGreen codes will have less of a financial impact on the building process than the fire sprinkler mandate. But as a contractor, Stewart sees it differently.

"For us as a contractor, that's going to have a larger impact," he said. "There will be substantial upfront costs

we're forced to pay."

Many of these costs will come from the added insulation and energy efficient windows, doors and heating systems. Construction waste management could also potentially add costs for contractors. The new code requires 50 percent of all waste on a construction site be recycled.

However, with a little planning ahead, the waste recycling could end up being one of the least intrusive aspects of the new CALGreen code, at least for local builders. South Tahoe Refuse already offers recycling services to all of its customers at no extra charge. The company will even track the percentage of waste recycled and provide evidence to the contractor, if they are notified and accounts are properly set up ahead of time.

California is the first state in the nation to mandate green building practices. With local entities such as TRPA and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board already requiring many of these practices, adopting the CALGreen code may be easier for builders in the Lake Tahoe area than elsewhere in California.

"I believe Tahoe is going to feel less of a shock factor," Stewart said, "simply because we're already dealing with portions of it simply by building in Tahoe."

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Storm downs trees, power

lines; shelter open in S. Tahoe

Updated 6:45pm: In anticipation of the low temperatures this evening and people still without power, South Lake Tahoe officials in conjunction with the American Red Cross has opened a warming shelter at the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Center located at 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Power is still off in the Al Tahoe neighborhood of South Lake Tahoe, with the power company not saying when lights will be on. Sierra Pacific Power said they are still looking for the cause as of 6:06pm. Between 2,500-3,000 customers on the South Shore are still without power. Traffic lights are flashing red and some are completely out in that area. Power is back on in Meyers and on the North Shore. Left turn lanes are the big issue on Highway 50 tonight through South Tahoe because they are not plowed and it's causing a back up in travel lanes. Spooner Summit is slow going, but navigable.

By Kathryn Reed

Chain saws were buzzing in the predawn hours of this normally quiet South Shore neighborhood. A tree had gone through a house.

The wet, heavy snow that fell overnight is wreaking havoc with power lines and tree branches throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

South Lake Tahoe firefighters ran more than 20 calls between 2-8am. Battalion Chief Ray Zachau said four trees went through houses in that time. A secondary power line was across five driveways on South Shore Drive.



Keith Cooney
looks at the
tree leaning
on and in his
South Lake
Tahoe home.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

“Then the primary came down right after that. It’s a mess with power lines,” Zachau said. “The wet snow is breaking trees.”

Keith Cooney, who lives in the Tahoe Island area of South Lake Tahoe, was abruptly awoken at 3:45am by a loud crash that shook the entire house.

“I knew what it was when it happened,” Cooney said looking at the tree branch coming through the ceiling of his garage.

The entire Jeffery pine in his back yard is uprooted and leaning against the house, taking out part of the chimney, creating a 9-foot gash in the kitchen ceiling and holes in the garage.

Firefighters cleared his driveway of the debris in the dark of the early morning so he could get his vehicle out.

Cooney and his black Lab were not hurt in the ordeal – just shaken up a bit. Cooney is a survivor – his house burned in the 2007 Angora Fire, he was laid off from his job and is still out of work, and his family barely survived Hurricane Katrina.

"I'm just very grateful to have a guardian angel," Cooney said of surviving the latest trauma without a scratch.

He had planned to go to his friend's restaurant in Meyers, but the power is out.

Sierra Pacific Power crews came up Tuesday night to start working on getting power back on. Three lines remained out at the Meyers substation, affecting close to 10,000 customers. The company does not have an estimate when the power will be back on.

Power started going out at 11pm Dec. 28 in the Stateline and Ski Run areas. That was back online quickly.

On the North Shore, initially three lines were down between Kings Beach and Tahoe City. Half of the 3,300 customers had power back by 8am, with the rest expected later this morning.

There is no estimated time when the power for the 1,500 customers in the dark on the West Shore south of Tahoe City will have lights again.

The roads are a mess. Zachau said a five-car crash on Lake Tahoe Boulevard at Park Avenue this morning sent one person to the hospital.

"The roads are in horrible shape. They are really slippery," Zachau said.

The Nevada Highway Patrol cleared a two-vehicle accident at the Bourne Curve on the South Shore this morning that resulted in minor injuries. A non-injury accident was being worked on the Mount Rose Highway as well.

"Slow down and don't go out if you don't have to," is the recommendation of Trooper Chuck Allen.

The ride into Carson City from South Tahoe was a bit treacherous this morning.

“A few people couldn’t get out of connecting streets and are stuck in snow banks,” commuter Sue Wood said. “It’s pretty bad. It is the blowing wind that makes it bad.”

About a foot of snow on the South Shore at lake level fell overnight, with 2 feet being reported on Tahoe Mountain with no plows in sight at 9:30am.

The National Weather Service in Reno has reports of 2 to 3 feet in the higher elevations.

Most of the day will be sunny, but snow showers are expected to return this afternoon.

“The air is dropping down from Alaska so that will keep the high temperature for Thursday and Friday below freezing, probably in the 20s for a high,” meteorologist Brian Brong with the Weather Service said.

Overnight lows may be below zero. Brong doesn’t anticipate any records to break, but it may come close the record of 5 below for South Lake Tahoe.

For the entire Lake Tahoe Basin, Brong said the snowpack is 220 percent of normal for this time of year.

The next chance of significant snow for Lake Tahoe may come New Year’s Day.

All El Dorado County offices South Lake Tahoe opened late – 10 today. For additional information, call the snow closure hotline at (530) 573.3050.

The Tahoe Queen and M.S. Dixie II cruises are canceled today. Zephyr Cove snowmobiling is sold out.

South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Department suggests people think about using the pool and gym as things to do once the shoveling is done.

The ice rink is closed because it doesn't have power. In the Al Tahoe area of South Tahoe the senior center is also without power, flashlights were used at the main post office to sort mail, and visiting hours at the jail were canceled because it is being run on by generators.

Snowpack water content near Tahoe 158% of normal

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – With snow coming down in a flurry, the water content was likely changing Tuesday during the first snow survey of the year near Echo Summit.

What a difference a year makes. In 2009 the water content was 9 inches at Phillips Station, whereas this December it came in at 19 inches. Water content, not snow depth, is what matters.



Frank Gehrke and Maureen Stapleton measure the water content Dec. 28 near Sierra.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

For this location at the base of Sierra-at-Tahoe off Highway 50 the water content is 158 percent of normal. Statewide, the mountain water content is 198 percent of normal.

“What is kind of surprising is having this much snow on the ground given the fact it’s a La Nina year,” said Frank Gehrke, chief of the California Cooperative Snow Survey Program. La Nina years tend to be drier, which Gehrke said could be the case in January and February.

But it’s also true Lake Tahoe sits on the cusp of these weather phenomena, so no matter how much people forecast El Nino and La Nina years, Tahoe may do its own thing.

The abundance of moisture this fall and early winter has reservoirs downstream filling up – with some already releasing water to make room for more wet stuff. That is not the case with Lake Oroville, which is the main body of water for the State Water Project. It was last full at 3.5 million acre-feet in summer 2003.

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	62.4 inches	18.4 inches	140
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	55.9 inches	19 inches	158
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	61.2 inches	22.3 inches	189

Source: Department of Water Resources

Before Tuesday’s readings the state Department of Water Resources estimated it would deliver 50 percent of requested State Water Project water in 2011. Officials expect that percentage to rise. The last 100 percent allocation year was

1996 for 25 million residents and nearly 1 million acres of farmland that depend on the canals to bring them water.

Agencies and farmers dependent on the SWP received 40 percent of allocations in 2009, 35 percent in 2008, and 60 percent in 2007.

Gehrke said it's like reading tea leaves to figure out what the season will end like. Last year it started off relatively dry and finished wet.

He said the rain earlier this month did not affect the water content, it just compacted the snow. So instead of the 55.9 inches at the site on Dec. 28, there may have been 70 inches had it not rained.

The snow content surveys are taken once a month for five months starting in December.

Usually Gehrke and whoever is helping him take seven readings in the snowfield near Sierra. With the creek about 50 feet into the meadow, only six could be taken on Tuesday.

Maureen Stapleton, general manager of the San Diego County Water Authority, was helping Gehrke on Tuesday. This was her first survey.

"I'm here to see the snow survey because of the runoff. Forecasts are so important to everyone in California," Stapleton said.

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Christmas trees will be turned into compost in Carson Valley

By Kathryn Reed

Fertile Mulch. That's what recycled Christmas trees are turned into at Full Circle Compost in Minden.

Craig Witt, who runs the compost operation in the Carson Valley, hasn't promoted this product much in the past because he hasn't been able to make enough of it to keep up with demand. He's hoping that is about to change.



One thing that could make Fertile Mulch even more popular is a study from UNR that is supposed to come out in January that rates various mulches for their fire resistance. According to Witt, this is the top product.

The mulch's ability to retain water is a key factor to why it is fire resistant, Witt said.

It is recycled trees from South Tahoe Refuse, ones Wal-Mart could not sell and other sources that Witt uses to create the various mulches.

"When we get the trees from South Tahoe Refuse we will process them, put them through a tub grinder, then size sort the material to create Fertile Mulch," Witt said. "We expose it to 150-degree intense heat cycle."

His recipe for this material takes a matter of weeks, whereas Mother Nature would take years to breakdown the pines.

STR starts its tree recycling today and continues through Jan. 7. Customers need to remove all decorations, have trees no

longer than 6-feet, and set them at the end of the driveway next to the rest of the trash.

“A lot used to be chipped and used locally. Now most go to composting,” Jeanne Lear of STR said of the nearly 3,000 trees the company recycles each holiday season.

Along most routes, the trees are picked up in the regular cycle and then separated at the refuse company. However, when drivers see a slew of trees in a neighborhood a special truck may be sent to handle them. Trees are picked up on normal garbage days.

Witt’s retail operation is not open this time of year, but the mulch will be ready in the spring.

“There is nothing wrong with raw mulch, but it’s like feeding raw food to an infant. It needs to be more refined,” Witt said.

When raw wood is put into the ground it throws off the nitrogen-carbon ratio, which slows down plant growth.

Witt says his composting process creates a mulch that when mixed with soil has the end result of more robust plants.

For more information about South Tahoe Refuse tree recycling, call (530) 541.5105 and for more information about Full Circle Compost go online.

Skiers unwrap gifts at Sierra

– short lines, plenty of snow

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Sometimes the best celebrations are spent with thousands of other people. Such was the case for the skiers and boarders schussing down the slopes of Sierra-at-Tahoe on Christmas.

One rider started taking her clothes off in the early afternoon at West Bowl saying how hot she was after starting the day at 9am. Another woman was in spaghetti straps. It was warm to start with, but the wind began to cool things down as the sun disappeared behind the clouds when the storm started to blow into the region.

Karina Kauffman, 13, didn't mind the bulk of her gifts were not going to be opened until Christmas night.



Sierra-at-Tahoe employees in the Christmas spirit.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

"This is the best time ever," the Placerville teen said. Fewer people on the runs made her feel safer than a typical Saturday on the slopes.

Kauffman was on the mountain with her brother, dad and grandpa.

Tons of families spent the day at Sierra. Plenty of people were milling about the base lodge – seeming to be there to watch their loved ones enjoy the snow. Holiday tunes echoed through the sound system. Several people with Santa hats whizzed down the slopes, while at least one fully dressed Santa flew down on skis.

Plenty of snow covers all the slopes in and around Lake Tahoe. Sierra as of Christmas Day had received 71 inches in the last week and 240 inches since Thanksgiving.

Crews are still working on what will be the South Shore's only super pipe.

With snow in the forecast for the better part of the week, powder days will be the norm.

Jaideep Neboori, 25, found a stash of powder under the West Bowl lift on Saturday. So much so that he got stuck for a bit, which meant his family kept on going.

He tries to get in a few days of boarding each season, but that's more difficult now that he lives in New Jersey instead of Pleasanton, where he grew up.

For Tom Matteson, 28, and his buddy they thought visiting friends in South Lake Tahoe would be the best bet for the holidays. His family is spread out across the country so the Santa Barbara resident decided to make a shorter road trip.

"It's always good to have fun on Christmas," Matteson said.

Yun Mou and her husband brought their 4-year-old daughter to Sierra for her first time on skis. The San Jose couple has not been on skis for years, but said they were having fun. With limited time off from work, they said this time of year is when they can make it to the mountains.

Being from China, they said Christmas isn't that big of a deal so it was just another ski day.

Many would say the best present was it being a Saturday without the usual crowds.

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