

Child averts being taken by stranger

By Kathryn Reed



Law enforcement has beefed-up its presence at Lake Tahoe Unified schools after a stranger tried to lure a 6-year-old from the Environmental Magnet School in Meyers on Tuesday.

The mother of the child did not report the incident to authorities until Wednesday.

El Dorado County sheriff's officials distributed a flyer that all kids were to take home on Thursday.

"This little girl did great for her age," sheriff's Sgt. Matt Underhill said.

When the woman approached her, saying her mom said to go with her, the child said no, that she was waiting for her 8-year-old brother. Her brother walked up about that time and the woman left.

Underhill said the woman drove off in a small green car headed toward San Bernardino Street.

The suspect is described as white, with black curly bushy hair, blue eyes, pierced ears, approximately 5-foot-5, with a medium build. She was wearing a white tank top, brown shorts and white tennis shoes.

"We encourage parents to report things as soon as possible because if they think something is wrong, there probably is."

It allows us to act sooner,” Lt. Les Lovell said. “If we don’t get the information quickly, it handcuffs us.”

The school district is advising students not to walk alone or to leave campus with a stranger.

For many, this brings back the horror of Jacycee Lee Dugard being plucked from a bus stop in June 1991 as she waited to go to the Meyers elementary school. Dugard was found alive in August in Antioch. Her suspected abductors are behind bars in Placerville.

Anyone with information pertaining to this week’s incident should call the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Department at (530) 573.3002 or (530) 573.3300.

SLT convention center in bankruptcy



By Kathryn Reed

Randy Lane’s Lake Tahoe Development Company filed for bankruptcy Monday in regards to the largest development project ever to break ground in South Lake Tahoe.

The more than \$400 million convention center near Stateline sits idle – concrete and rebar now slightly dusted with snow.

Lane on Tuesday said this is just the next chapter of the saga

that has plagued the project when financing could not be secured. He owes creditors about \$54 million.

He said he opted for Chapter 11 because this means the court will have to approve a restructuring plan with the consent of creditors. Chapter 7 would have meant the sale of assets.

With the 11-plus acre site being appraised at \$105 million in April, Lane said equity remains in the project and he is confident one day it will be a profitable endeavor.

"It's just a way for us to come up with a plan. We have a couple of new concepts we are exploring. We need the time to do that," Lane said of the months it is likely to take to settle things in federal bankruptcy court. "There are some sources of capital out there that are non-traditional. Some of them are a byproduct of the of the stimuli programs."

With the news just reaching city officials this week, they are not sure what their course of action will.

The contract doesn't have a caveat in it if the developer files for bankruptcy.

City Manager Dave Jinkens said City Attorney Patrick Enright, who was hired to specialize in redevelopment matters, will take a look at the issue and get back to staff and the council.

Mayor Jerry Birdwell did not want to comment on the bankruptcy.

Bette – From ‘Beaches’ to desert



By Susan Wood

LAS VEGAS – She still has it.

Most women can only hope to have their act together in their 60s like the graceful, energetic Divine Miss M.

“Las Vegas, you look divine,” Bette Midler belts out to another near sold-out show on a hot Vegas night. She could have been looking in a mirror.

Her voice is almost as rich as it was in her prime. Her enthusiasm has not diminished from the first time I saw her in 1990 in San Diego – in a much smaller venue.

The superstar singer and actress with four Grammy’s and an Academy Award nomination is at it again at Caesars Palace’s Colosseum in “The Showgirl Must Go On”. She will have put on 400 shows by the time her two-year contract expires in February.

This 4,300-seat mega showroom originally built for Canadian singer Celine Dion is a tribute to what a world-class stage ought to look like.

Midler’s show is part Vaudeville, part concert and a little bit of her trademark raunchy humor. For those who have followed Midler through they years, this show is vintage Midler and never disappoints – except for it only being 90

minutes.

It opens with a video of a tornado blowing through a mountain of Louis Vuitton luggage weighing about 2,200 pounds. She is a storm to be reckoned with.

"I'm exhausted. That's what happens when you do your own singing," Midler admits while sprawled on the floor.

"Thirty years ago, the audiences were on drugs. Now I'm on medication. Twitter, twatter. Everything's going so fast Midler muses.

Midler has been at this song-dance-comedy routine for about four decades. She started her career in a New York bathhouse with pianist-singer Barry Manilow accompanying her. The two teamed up again years later for a collection of songs as a tribute to jazz singer Rosemary Clooney. Ironically, he was playing across the street at the Las Vegas Hilton.

Midler has never forgotten her roots, asking the audience where the gays are. They weren't shy about letting her know they were in the house.

The Hawaii native illustrated her upbringing by pulling out a ukulele during one of her encore performances to sing her trademark number "Friends."

Devoted fans could recite more than one signature song from Midler, who blanketed the 1980s and '90s with hits from her depiction of Janis Joplin in "The Rose" to "Wing Beneath My Wings," a song about friendship from the tear-jerker film "Beaches" with Barbara Hershey.

But the true sense of Midler's distinguishable traits comes out in her onstage characters that have survived an industry prone to an insatiable desire for stars to reinvent themselves. Sophie Tucker, the infamous star of her middle-aged trailer trash jokes, lives beyond campy backyard parties

to take center stage at Caesars Palace.

Not many performers would have the cajones to roll out in a wheelchair or come in on a crane hook dressed like the mermaid Delores Delago.

Midler may be aging, but she's still hip and trendy, making occasional references to current events. Amid 132 costume changes (with Midler in six of them), she compares the demise of Fannie Mae to the temptations of the Las Vegas Strip.

Only as Midler could deliver, it was a no-holds-barred evening filled with the "Caesar salad" showgirls, for whom Midler can't resist remarking on their 100 percent natural breasts. In full mermaid fins, the showgirls join Midler in a New York Rockettes-style leg extension.

Midler is able to transcend the times, her characters and the surroundings.

Her philanthropic work extends from a garden in New York to South Lake Tahoe, where she and Bill Harrah financed the first alternative birthing room at Barton Memorial Hospital in the early 1980s. Within the first few years, hospital admissions surpassed 4,000 with 500 babies born annually.

How fitting the showgirl returns to a Harrah's property.

Other things to know:

"The Showgirl Must Go On" plays until February 2010 at the Colosseum at Caesars Palace, Las Vegas. Midler et al are scheduled Oct. 14-Nov. 15 and Dec. 30-Jan. 31. Cher and Elton John fill most breaks.

Tickets range from \$117-\$272.

Caesars Palace's Garden of the Gods pools and gardens were remodeled in late summer. The 5-acre project now features a swim-up blackjack table, 18-foot waterfall and added cabanas.

The recently renovated 540-room Forum Tower has already hosted dignitaries and became the inspiration for the 2009 movie "The Hangover," which was set in Las Vegas.

www.bettemidler.com

â€¢ www.caesarspalace.com

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Novice Harley rider overcomes jitters in the mountains



Riding through the Eastern Sierra.

Photo/Barbara Knox

By Brenda Knox

EASTERN SIERRA NEVADA – As we came to the sign that said five miles to go, I just kept thinking “keep it steady, we’re almost there.”

I never felt so much relief as when we exited. The rain had let up a bit as we got off the highway.

I took the lead since I knew where the Westin was. My dad and Roni later told me they thought we were never going to actually get to the hotel, since it's about another three miles before you are actually in the town of Mammoth.

We had made it and now we had one of those stories. You know the kind that every time you're with the people who went through it with you, you say "remember the time?"

Getting started

Lake Tahoe has been my recreational base for many years. It's where I like to spend my time biking, hiking, skiing and kayaking. Early this summer it became our jumping off point for our new hobby – riding our Harleys.

We'd planned the trip with my parents in the beginning of the summer. We were excited to hit the road for our first motorcycle road trip. My parents are in their late 60s and just started riding again in 2008 after a long hiatus.

My dad is an expert at handling his 2008 Screaming Eagle Anniversary Edition Ultra Glide. He's been riding motorcycles since he was a teenager and introduced me to dirt bike riding when I was a teenager. He also was a motorcycle cop for several years.

My dad had coached Roni and me all summer. We put in some miles on our Harleys to get comfortable on the road. Our bikes are 2008 and 2009 Harley Sportsters 1200Cs. Roni's has the upgraded Screaming Eagle package, which means her pipes are louder than mine. Both are black with upgraded pegs, handgrips, windshields and engine guards.

I never took to the street as a teenager, so riding this cruiser is a new and challenging experience. Roni was also exposed to motorcycles and dirt bike riding as a teenager, and she spent a few years on a street bike in her 20s.

When we completed the motorcycle class in March to get our licenses, it was the first time either one of us had been on a motorcycle in 30 years. Needless to say, weâ€™re hooked and weâ€™re looking forward to this adventure.

Ready to ride

We packed up our bikes and headed out on an August Saturday about 9am under fairly cloudy skies from the usually sunny Lake Tahoe. Mistakenly we decided not to take our leather jackets, figuring we could layer appropriately with our mesh. How cold could it possibly get? Well, it was cold.

We stopped for breakfast in Markleeville. I love that ride with its beautiful, sweeping curves, though Iâ€™m always keeping an eye out for wild turkeys along Highway 89 into Markleeville.

The Wolf Creek caf  served up excellent ham and eggs for breakfast. After eating and warming up we headed over Monitor Pass to Highway 395. Monitor has many curves, making you feel like you are riding to the top of the world.

The clouds continued to gather as we weaved down 395. Itâ€™s a beautiful ride through a canyon with the Walker River on the left.

A few drops of rain fell on us, but nothing serious. We stopped in Bridgeport to gas up, stretch our legs and take a restroom break. We also spent a significant amount of time wondering about the ominous clouds gathering over the Sierra.

The plan was to take the June Lake scenic route if the weather held.

The ride from Bridgeport to the June Lakes Loop includes a sweeping downhill that feels like you will end up in Mono Lake. Itâ€™s beautiful beyond words and pictures.

The wind picked up. My dad left us in the dust. His bike

weighs about 1,000-plus pounds fully loaded and the wind does not affect him as much.

We decided to take the June Lake Loop. The sun was shining and it took us out of the more forceful wind of Highway 395. The loop is a gorgeous 14-mile stretch of two-lane road that takes you around Grant, Silver and June lakes.

Imagine steep granite walls to your right and the lakes on the left, mixed with beautiful pine trees and aspens. This was a great little side trip. Did I mention a bright sunny spot?

Mother Nature rules

We got back to Highway 395 heading south to Mammoth Lakes, with only 15 miles left. As we pull onto 395, three large bolts of lightning strike out to the southwest, the direction we are heading.

I remain optimistic for a couple of miles as I can see bright sunny holes in the clouds; it's the dark, rainy ones that I'm in denial about. Unfortunately, we were traveling faster than the storm and with 10 miles until the Mammoth turnoff, the skies opened up and we were in a driving rainstorm.

Being new riders, this was a nightmare for Roni and me. It was so bad, we could not see through our windshields. My face shield was completely covered with raindrops. I had on my fingerless gloves and the rain was pelting my exposed fingers felt like a really bad acupuncture session.

I know the best thing to do is to keep it steady, no sudden movements, no heavy shifting or breaking, and stay away from the painted lines on the highway. Knowing all this actually caused me to feel like I was cemented to the motorcycle, paralyzed in the exact position I was when it started pouring. This would not have been bad, except I could not see and needed to do something.

I slowly pried my left hand from around my grip and opened my face shield. Ah, yes, I can see (sort of) now.

Out of the rain

We rode up, looking like a bunch of drowned rats. Thankfully, they let us temporarily park the motorcycles under the entrance to get out of the rain. I could only laugh hysterically in relief.

Hot showers and baths all around and we felt like new people. We walked to dinner, and ate at the Base Camp Café. As usual for the Sierra, the weather improved tremendously, skies cleared. It felt good to stretch our legs.

At the Base Camp Café we sat outside and enjoyed a really good dinner. My parents had the French onion soup, touted as “made from scratch” on the menu and it was indeed yummy; a good portion with lots of cheese. My mom supplemented her soup with half a Mammoth veggie sandwich. It was at least 4-inches tall, full of fresh tasty peppers, cucumbers, sprouts, onion, tomatoes and lettuce. My dad ordered the special, the Rueben sandwich. It looked fantastic although I did not get a chance to taste it, but dad enjoyed it. Roni had the kosher chili dog and I had a bowl of the three bean and turkey chili; both tasty and hot after that cold rainy ride.

Oh, and I can’t forget the local micro brew served at the Base Camp Café. I had the Amber Ale and Roni had the Hefeweizen; both excellent. After dinner, my dad and I walked the mile back to the Westin, and Roni and my mom took the free Mammoth shuttle.

After dinner, we were obsessed about the weather for Sunday. All Saturday eve, we watched the news, the Weather Channel, and I repeatedly checked my iPhone for the latest weather. Our plan was to go to Yosemite Village on Sunday, about 100 miles from Mammoth Lake.

Back in the saddle

None of us was up for a repeat rainstorm. We finally decided to go to bed and weâ€™d see how things looked in the morning. Morning dawned with clear blue skies, and we headed off to Yosemite. Temperature was about 50 degrees and was not expected to be much above 60 for the day, so we bundled up under our light mesh jackets.

After a delicious breakfast of bagels, oatmeal and fresh fruit in the hotel at the Whitebark, we rode off about 9am, back north along 395 to the Highway 120 (Tioga Pass) turnoff. Before heading up the pass we stopped at the Mobile Gas Station where the famous Whoa Nellie Deli is located at the bottom of Tioga Pass. We did not eat here as we had just had breakfast, but Iâ€™ve been here a couple of times in the summer and highly recommend the fish tacos.

After getting fuel, taking a restroom break, and adding another layer of clothing, we fired up the bikes and headed out.

Tioga Pass is the most beautiful and dramatic entrance into Yosemite. Itâ€™s also an incredible climb – climbing up what feels like the side of a cliff. At least going up we are riding on the inside, not on the non-guard rail outside (that would be at the end of the day); 12 miles up and weâ€™re at the entrance to Yosemite.

My parents buy a lifetime pass for \$10, which also gets in four motorcycles.

I think one of the best ways to see Yosemite is by motorcycle. You become a part of the vastness, the beauty, you feel small in a way that is only accomplished when you are exposed to the elements.

Earlier in the summer I enjoyed the drive through Yosemite a couple of times in my SUV, but it is so much better on the

motorcycle. We cruised through Tuolumne Meadows and then stopped at Tenaya Lake to stretch our legs and take pictures.

We watched the climbers go up the rock faces; all exclaiming thatâ€™s something we never want to do.

As we headed out along 120 toward Yosemite Village, Half Dome came into view. We decided not to stop at Olmstead Point as we still had a ways to go to the village.

It was imperative to keep my eyes on the road during this section, but I could not get enough of Half Dome and the surrounding peaks of Yosemite. Thank goodness the terrain becomes a little more mundane along Highway 120 after that and I was able to just ride and concentrate on all the curves.

At this point I need to mention that I was the slow poke. My dad being a very experienced rider just sailed around all the curves. I was more tentative and just could not seem to find my groove, especially around the right-handed corners. But I persevered and rode on, probably driving Roni crazy, as she was riding behind me. Although Roni seems to abhor our recreational activities that require us to perform under our own power, she rides her iron horse with a confidence and agility that I envy.

The final 15 miles into Yosemite are steep, full of curves and spectacular views. At the top before the big descent is also where the recent fire burned up to the road. The smell of smoke is prevalent and invasive. It felt like a punch in the gut and brought back memories of South Lake Tahoeâ€™s Angora Fire of 2007.

We waved to a crew of firefighters still tending to some of the hotspots.

Down we went in to the valley. I took the 25pmh speed signs at face value; although my dad insists you can go at least 40-45 around those curves. I obviously saw more of the gorgeous

scenery than he did.

There is a tunnel that is quite long on this stretch of road. It was a little scary. The motorcycle headlight does not throw off a huge amount of light. With my full helmet and sunglasses on, I could barely see as I went through the middle of the tunnel. I just kept looking toward that small bit of light at the end hoping the tunnel did not have any of those 25mph curves.

Out on the other side we continued to descend into Yosemite Valley.

After finding parking, we ordered lunch at the outside grill, the food was fresh, pretty good and quite fast. I enjoyed the sweet potato fries served with my veggie burger. We had wanted to go to the Ahwahnee, but it was crowded and we could not find parking. The temperature was warm and mild on the valley floor, we were able to shed our multiple layers, and jackets during lunch. Shirtsleeves would have been my preferred outfit all weekend, but it was not to be.

After lunch, we decided we better head back to Mammoth, we had a 100-mile return trip and it was getting late. You don't necessarily get to places fast on the motorcycle, but it sure is scenic and fun. We geared up – multiple layers, multiple gloves for me, and off we rode, up out of the valley into the cool temperatures of Tuolumne Meadows. We took our last break of the day here.

We boosted our energy level by sharing a couple of bags of peanut M&M's between the four of us. I was glad for the restroom break before the ride down Tioga Pass. I had been a little apprehensive about that all day. My riding had improved on the way out of Yosemite Valley and across 120 I was getting more comfortable in the curves and increasing my speed, and actually enjoying it, which is the reason you ride in the first place.

Headed home

As Tioga Pass loomed ahead, we saddled up and drove out of Yosemite. If you have never driven in and out of Yosemite via Tioga Pass, you are truly missing some of the most spectacular scenery Yosemite has to offer. It is my preferred way to access the park. I anticipate its opening each year. That having been said, I was also terrified of riding my motorcycle down the pass; I had driven down it in my SUV three times earlier this year, but still my blood ran colder than the outside temps at the thought of descending the pass on my Harley.

But what goes up must come down and so it was to be.

Roni usually rides behind me and she will attest that I did well coming down until I got to the spot where it looks like the road just runs off the cliff. You look out and it looks like a serpent and I thought I might just slither off its back. I slowed way down. Roni put on her flashers so the cars behind her would slow down.

But I made it through, took a deep breath, up shifted two gears and rode the rest of the way down at the speed limit. Now I want to do it again.

The ride into Mammoth was thankfully dry and uneventful. We rolled into the Westin about 5:30pm, satisfied with a great day of superb riding and stunning vistas.

Monday we left Mammoth about 9am and had an uneventful, lovely ride back up Highway 395 into Tahoe. After four days and 660 miles on the motorcycle odometers I was still ready to ride the next day.

We had an enjoyable trip and being able to share the experience with my parents made it even more special. It is nice to see them living life to the fullest. We have another two or three trips planned before it's time to hang up the

motorcycle helmet for the season, and pull out the ski helmet.

Brenda Knox is a biker chick who lives in South Lake Tahoe.



Markleeville resort could transform tiny town



By Susan Wood

Sometimes professional development is all about the personal path one takes in life.

A project that makes this philosophical theory evident is Markleeville Village.

The proposed LEED-certified development features a 38,000-square-foot lodge and spa named Mahalee â€” which means acorn in Washoe. The 49 alpine-style cabins and town center will be built off Highway 89 on 38 prime acres overlooking Alpine Countyâ€™s hub.

South Lake Tahoe developer Tom Abdoo, who owns close to half the town in California's least populated county, dreamed up the more than \$80 million project in the early 1980s as he was undergoing a private nightmare. His wife, Joan, was dying of cancer and in a great deal of stress.

"She got obsessed with the idea of being under stress," he said in the serene setting of his Christmas Valley backyard.

An inventor of sorts, he developed a biofeedback capsule in which she could decompress. After dedicating his life to making her as comfortable as possible, he made it his mission in life to honor her struggle with an alternative to stress. He designed a project that would not only occupy him for almost 30 years, but would provide wellness practitioners in the retail center set just off Montgomery Street, the road leading to Grover Hot Springs.

"This is my passion now," he said.

He is relieved to have passed the major milestone of the Alpine County Board of Supervisors a month ago approving a tentative map for his ambitious project. But the little victory seemed bittersweet at having to recall his wife's suffering. His eyes welled up with tears at the thought of how in their 15 years together, he and his wife so often enjoyed visiting Markleeville.

The project has come a long way. In 1994, he introduced a draft of a larger project that has since been scaled down. Four years ago, the Friends of Markleeville filed a legal challenge against the county alleging environmental violations related to the project. A settlement has since been reached, county counsel Martin Fine reports.

Abdoo incorporated an advanced public water system and onsite wastewater treatment plant as part of 98 conditions of approval mandated by the county Community Development Department. One such provision includes permits from the

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and California Department of Public Health. The latter measures must be met before a final map may advance, planner Zach Wood cited.

Abdoo, who transformed the Cutthroat biker bar into a fine-dining restaurant a few years ago, said he wasn't surprised there would be hurdles to overcome. He also realizes the turtle-like pace of government.

He's convinced the economic slump will end by the time the project is completed in 10 years. Abdoo also believes there's still a demand for fractional ownership units based on the advice of Global Resorts of Las Vegas. President John Sweeney, who worked on The Ridge Tahoe, said the fractional concept has "proven to be a desirable vacation home alternative" in the \$8 billion vacation ownership industry.

The luxury cabins encompassing more than 1,600 square feet will be offered in five- to 10-week intervals starting at \$160,000. The lodge will operate like a hotel.

The entire project is intended to use Sierra green standards featuring a progressive stormwater collection system, solar insulation and a sod-based living roof. Abdoo hopes to create a website touting the latest advances in green technology because "by the time this gets built there will be thousands of new products and ideas," Abdoo said.

With Markleeville businesses coming and going, the Alpine County Chamber of Commerce welcomes the idea of the project, chamber officials say.

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Female impersonators rival real stars



Carnival
Cabaret is
nightly at the
Horizon casino
at Stateline.
Photo/Provided
by Dan Gore

By Kathryn Reed

The face of Carnival Cabaret lives on even though his voice has been silenced.

Hunter – his legal and stage name – did such an incredible rendition of Cher that it was hard to know it wasn't her, let alone it was a man in those outrageous costumes. Hunter's image was initially used to advertise Carnival Cabaret when it returned to the Horizon on Labor Day weekend 2008. Hunter died in 2005 from a head injury after a fall during a rehearsal in Southern California.

"Hunter was a special act, a special person," said Dan Gore, producer of the female impersonation show

Carnival Cabaret returned to the Horizon hotel-casino after

going dark in 2004. The first nearly four-year stint at Stateline still makes it the longest running show on the South Shore. The casino has extended the current gig indefinitely.

Many people also associate this show with Gypsy (aka James Haake) the 77-year-old grandfather who emcees the event all but Fridays. Even if you don't want to hear the music of Reba McEntire, Dolly Parton, Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand, or Bette Midler, Gypsy is worth the \$26.95.

His routine is part drag queen, part comedy, part interaction with the audience.

Anyone who has seen Cher live will agree Gypsy rivals her in the number of wardrobe changes. His attire is full of Versace gowns and Jimmy Choo shoes. (That's the same footwear the "Sex and the City" gals wore.) He credits Barbara Parina at Side Street Boutique for keeping him so well attired.

His humor crosses the line a bit, so best to leave the kids at home. Talking about how the seam in nylons hits male body parts is just an example.

Self-deprecation is the norm – such as needing to shop at Home Depot for makeup and saying, "The only reason to dress like this as an old man is for the money."

Gypsy's humor is timely, with some political jokes. In between each of the musical acts Gypsy converses with the audience. Insecure men should not sit near the stage.

"There are endless possibilities. We are always working on something else," Gore said. "We'll be constantly changing."

A recent change is going to seven days a week. Show time is 8pm. To allow cast members to have a night off, the show is always different.

Patrick Ross, who is Streisand and Midler, was in the original cast. He is the guest host on Fridays. Frankie Kein transforms

into Liza Minnelli and Marilyn Monroe; Andrew Raymer does Cher and Celine Dion; and Kevin Wiley is McEntire, Parton and Judy Garland.

Gore said his contract with the current management at Horizon gives him more control over the show. Last go-around one of the performers was in transition – that's something Gore won't allow now that he calls all the shots.

With the diversity of impersonations, the show provides a little bit of something for everyone, as evident by a table of four locals who all had different favorites. Some liked Parton strutting in from the back of the room with a buxom out to there, another liked Midler – why pay Vegas prices to see her for real?

The finale will make you think twice about gay men dressing as women, but more important, about accepting each others differences.

For more information, go to www.carnivalcabaret.com.

SLT budget banks on more tourists, furlough days



South
Tahoe is
banking on

more
tourists
in its
proposed
budget.

By Kathryn Reed

Interim City Attorney Patrick Enright is investigating whether South Lake Tahoe could force its employees to take furlough days even if the unions say no to the proposal that is being negotiated.

To come up with a balanced budget for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1, the city needs to close a nearly \$3.5 million gap in a \$72 million budget. Having city employees take 24 furlough days in the next fiscal year would save about \$1.4 million. This equates to a salary reduction of 9.23 percent.

Positions are being frozen and departments reduced as well.

"The biggest line item we have is personnel costs," said Councilman Hal Cole, who with Mayor Jerry Birdwell make up the city's finance committee. Cole described the deficit situation as the city "hemorrhaging."

Police and fire personnel are not expected to endure traditional furlough days. Crews clearing snow are also exempt in the proposal.

Councilman Bill Crawford brought up the fact that the budget calls for two city attorneys. Resolution on the Jacqueline Mittelstadt issue was not reached Tuesday even though it was an item on closed session.

City Finance Directory Christine Vuletich on Tuesday explained the numbers to the council during a special budget hearing. The council could approve the budget as soon as Oct. 6.

To compensate for projected expenses being greater than revenues, the 2009-10 proposed budget calls for using \$1.5 million in reserves. It's anticipated another \$1.6 million from reserves would be used across the next three years.

Property taxes, hotel tax and sales tax account for the largest sources of income for South Lake Tahoe, at 23, 16 and 12 percent, respectively.

Just like in the 2008-09 budget, the city is projecting an increase in the transient occupancy tax. That backfired the first time, with TOT being down by 26 percent in 2008-09 or about \$1 million from projections.

Still, Vuletich said after the meeting that budgeting for a \$400,000 increase for total of \$4.5 million in TOT is reasonable.

"We looked at data from the hotel industry forecasts nationwide," Vuletich said. She said unemployment figures for the drive-up market (Bay Area-Sacramento) are lower than the state average, which is a good indicator people have money to spend on trips to Tahoe.

Her department also looked at the average TOT take for the city in the last seven years – \$5.4 million – when coming up with projected revenue.

Sales and property taxes are projected to be flat in the next fiscal year.

"Tourism is our No. 1 industry," Vuletich said during meeting. "TOT and sales tax are extremely volatile."

The bright spot is city campgrounds generated \$90,000 more income than anticipated.

"They aren't staying in lodging facilities, that's for sure," said Birdwell, who owns the Black Bear Inn.

Mardi Gras of motorcycling



Bikers stake out their territory in Virginia City. Photo/Brenda Knox

By Brenda Knox

RENO – There is nothing like the rumble of loud pipes and the smell of leather to let you know you're in motorcycle heaven.

Ever since getting my Harley in May, I've been looking forward to Street Vibrations Reno 2009. Since it's in my backyard, it was an event I did not want to miss. Street Vibrations ran Wednesday through Sunday, but I couldn't get away that long so settled for Saturday and Sunday with an overnight in Reno.

We headed over to the Carson City Harley Davidson dealership about 9:30am Saturday. It was a bit chilly leaving from Lake Tahoe so we donned full gloves and jackets. By the time we reached Carson City it was in the high 70s and off came the jackets.

The dealership was filled with bikes; traffic monitors

effectively got us into a great parking area. Vendors, food, and music were all going strong, even at 10:30 in the morning. We stayed long enough to walk the parking lot, check out all the bikes, shop for and buy a communications system, and share a Hawaiian shaved ice.

Onward to Virginia City. It seemed to be where all of us were headed. Virginia City on the Saturday of Street Vibrations is the Motorcycle Mardi Gras. The streets are lined with hundreds upon hundreds of motorcycles. Harleys were the brand of choice, but there was a fair share of Hondas and other brands, too.

We snagged the first parking slot we saw; near the top of town. Before venturing down into town we stopped at the Cafe del Rio for lunch.

I have been to Virginia City many times and have always eaten in town at one of those diner type places – never again. Cafe del Rio has the best food in town. Roni had steak tacos; I had the Mahi Mahi tacos. Both were served with rice and black beans and very yummy. We'll be going back.

The windows of the Cafe del Rio open up onto the street so we could watch all the motorcycles and the characters ride by. One woman was dressed all in pink, several of the guys had adorned their bikes with scantily clad women, and the Mardi Gras beads started to fly.

Virginia City really welcomes all of us bikers, and by all of us I mean all ages, all sizes, all origins, all kinds of bikes. The only criteria seemed to be you must have fun.

The hot dogs, pulled pork sandwiches, beer and Bloody Marys were all following freely. This is a party and if you are a biker, a party not to be missed.

Not only are the streets lined with the most beautiful bikes you have seen, but there is a continuous parade of motorcycles

riding up and down the main street. The streets are lined with partygoers trying to get women to expose themselves for those infamous beads – and many oblige.

Roni and I decide to walk back up to our bikes and ride through town on our way in to Reno. It's a slow, clutch hand is getting stiff, kind of ride through the center of town; but so much fun and so loud you can't help but get swept up in the party atmosphere.

We finally make it through town, said goodbye to the good times of Virginia City, vowing to be back next year and rode into Reno. In Reno, we pulled in to the Siena, where they appropriately had preferred parking for us motorcyclists right up front. We grabbed our stuff, checked in and headed up for showers. It was about 95 degrees and we were sweating in our chaps and leather vests.

The Street Vibrations party continues in the streets of Reno. The Siena is just outside of the main downtown area, so we were able to walk over to Virginia Street and check things out.

Wow, vendors and more vendors. Leather merchandise, any kind of accessory you could imagine for your bike. My favorite was the Hanes & Vine pipes; those pipes are awesome; but might be a bit much for my Sporty.

Street Vibrations closes South Virginia Street for blocks in downtown Reno and puts on a great party. Lots of food, music, and plenty of motorcycle accessories. We walked around and shopped for several hours. Finally decided on long sleeve souvenir T-shirts and then walked back to the Siena.

Can't wait for next year.

Brenda Knox is a biker chick who lives in South Lake Tahoe.

Residents likely to feel financial burden of water meters



Sprinklers may be a thing of the past if water bills go up with meters.

By Kathryn Reed

The 163 water meters to be installed this year is a drop in the bucket considering South Tahoe Public Utility District needs to put in 10,000 in the next 16 years.

Federal stimulus money (\$4.5 million) is paying for 1,500 meters. Based on the strings attached to the cash, the district had to show progress on the project by this fall. That is why STPUD is seeking bids until 2pm Sept. 29.

Another component of the grant is that it's for low income segments of the community – all but the Tahoe Keys qualifies. The district is going to put in meters where it is doing water

line work – Ski Run, Al Tahoe and parts of Gardner Mountain are targeted in the first round.

Metered water systems are in the future for all Californians because of legislation passed in 2004. By 2025 every urban water supplier, which is defined as a district with more than 3,000 connections, must have meters installed.

“We are still seeking through the state Legislature a little bit of flexibility with the 2025 deadline because there is only X number of dollars we can raise from 14,000 customers,” said Dennis Cocking, STPUD spokesman. “Our challenge is we don’t disagree meters are important. We said the primary threat in the basin is fire and we are not going to take money away from replacing water lines to put in meters. That is not responsible to our community.”

The board formed an ad hoc committee at its Aug. 20 meeting. Their job is to figure out how to pay for the meters. Grants are being sought, but ratepayers are likely to foot part of the bill.

South Tahoe PUD tried to get out of the regulations altogether by explaining to Sacramento that the district is not part of the California watershed – it is part of Nevada’s. This is because Lake Tahoe flows into the Truckee River toward Nevada, which flows into Pyramid Lake in the Silver State.

California denied STPUD that exemption. The district is still waiting to see if the 2025 deadline can be extended.

“What is driving this is water is becoming a more and more contentious issue in this state,” Cocking said.

That’s why desalinization projects are being talked about again, as well as conservation and recycled water.

Recycled water is not allowed in the Lake Tahoe Basin because of the Porter Cologne Water Quality Control Act. It wasn’t

until this year that California had a formal recycled water policy.

“I think the fact of the matter is at some point in time recycled water within certain parameters might be acceptable in the Tahoe basin. It might be a decade or more. It will have to be tightly monitored,” Cocking said.

Of the nearly 650 commercial connections STPUD has, all have been metered for a couple decades. About 3,000 of the 14,000 residential customers are metered. However, the residential ones have not been read – instead customers are charged a flat rate like everyone else.

Starting in 2011 those metered customers along with the ones being put in via the federal stimulus money, will be billed based on the meter reading.

“The trick is to try to develop a rate so the average customer on metered rate or flat is very similar. That will be the real challenge,” Cocking said.

The district is using 2010 to gather information from the meters to gauge water use; and to educate those with meters.

The cost of water is in the infrastructure – extracting water, purifying it, delivering it. That accounts for about 85 percent of a bill, while the other 15 percent is consumption, according to Cocking.

The impetus behind meters is when people have control over how much they spend on a commodity; they’ll do what they can to reduce the cost – in this case, using less water.

With second homeowners currently paying what full-time residents pay, they are in affect subsidizing those who live here. It would seem inevitable that water bills will spike dramatically when the metered system is in place.

The district hopes to install 600-800 meters a year. The total

cost is estimated at \$20 million.

Meters are read by driving down a street using a radio signal that emits information. This beats the old days of having to locate the meter through mounds of snow or overgrown brush. Technology is being developed where in the future water use might be transmitted electronically to a computer without anyone driving by a house.

Most likely residents in the city limits of South Lake Tahoe will have meters first. This is because that is where the oldest water lines are – some as small as 2 inches. Much of El Dorado County has 6-inch lines or larger.

This is the third construction season that STPUD has put in meter vaults as it replaces water lines.

Many of the water line projects have been funded through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which is expected to be introduced this session for re-authorization by Congress.

Luther Pass improvements a boon for cyclists



By Kathryn Reed

Four-foot wide shoulders “at a minimum” is what will be installed along Highway 89 starting at the intersection of

Highway 50 in El Dorado County and extending to the Alpine County line.

“It will provide safety for cyclists. It will give them more room. Part of this project is to encourage cycling,” said Rochelle Jenkins, Caltrans spokeswoman.

The \$25 million undertaking is the only Caltrans project in the Lake Tahoe Basin to receive federal stimulus money.

Preliminary work started this month. The bulk of the construction will be between April 2010 and fall 2011.

It is considered an environmental improvement project – meaning reducing the amount of sediment and runoff from the highway that reaches tributaries of Lake Tahoe. Caltrans did not have projections for how much sediment is likely to be contained.

Curb and gutter systems will be installed throughout the roadway to help divert the runoff.

“We are going to rehabilitate and construct a new drainage facility. We are going to put in traps and drains. Those are cleaned every year,” Jenkins explained.

Rock energy dissipaters, which help to prevent ruts in the road from developing, are part of the equation, too.

The other project in El Dorado County to garner federal dollars is Highway 49 improvements. The \$7.5 million project that is under way should be completed next fall. It goes from Highway 50 in Placerville toward Amador County.