

UNR quake lab tests bridge design for Caltrans



Three 27-ton, 14 x 14-foot table platens are lifted into place by the lab's 30-ton cranes as the lab crew continues installing equipment in the earthquake engineering facility at UNR. Photo/Mike Wolterbeek/UNR

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO — Scientists at a Nevada earthquake lab on Wednesday tested new bridge designs with connectors they say are innovative and created to better withstand violent temblors and speed reconstruction efforts after major quake damage.

UNR engineers performed the experiments on a giant “shake table” to simulate violent motions of an earthquake to rattle a 100-ton, 70 foot bridge model to determine how well it would hold up.

UNR's Earthquake Engineering Lab is the largest of its kind in the United States.

The latest project is funded by Caltrans, which currently is developing plans for 10 pilot projects based on the developing bridge connector technology.

Read the whole story

Van Sickle park evolving as popularity grows



The mural on the old barn at Van Sickle Bi-state Park was recently refurbished by Angie's Signs in Meyers. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

It's a park even for those who don't especially like the

woods, or prefer to explore the outdoors in heels or flip flops. It's also a park for those wanting to hike the 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail, or wanting a short trek to incredible views of Lake Tahoe.

Van Sickle Bi-state Park is proving to have a little something for a lot of people.

It's one of the few state parks anywhere that so many people can walk to from their hotel room.

Well more than sixty thousand people have visited the park this year. About 25,000 walked in, while another 30,000 drove. Those figures are from May 1 to Sept. 20. (The counters don't work in the winter.) And while the road is closed when it snows, plenty of people walk in – some to snowshoe. The shoulder seasons are busy as well.

This park that opened in 2011 under adverse economic times has blossomed. Money is still an issue, but the two states continue to work for the greater good. The operating agreement is being revised, with partnerships expanded. The Van Sickle Foundation and Tahoe Rim Trail Association are key partners.

On Sept. 21 the California Tahoe Conservancy board members went on a little trek to this park that encompasses California and Nevada. It was the CTC that essentially bailed out California State Parks and came forward with funding, and continues to do so. Nevada State Parks, though, is the bigger player.



All the tools and materials to build the bridge were brought in by people or horses. Photo/LTN file

Starting Oct. 2 a ranger will be patrolling the park – the first time this has happened. Mike Shipman is a graduate of South Tahoe High School who now works for Nevada State Parks. He is who will be responsible for keeping an eye on things.

Homeless issues – notably fires in summer 2016 – were a huge issue, and continue to be a threat. Vandalism, graffiti and general misbehaving are all things Shipman will be handling – or hoping to prevent.

Frank Bosch and Linda Cook, who have been the onsite caretakers, are moving on – someplace out of the snow. Praise was given to them for the job they have done.

“We want to provide some level of visitor services. And we want to make sure the facilities stay clean,” Eric Johnson, administrator for Nevada State Parks, told *Lake Tahoe News* as to why a ranger has been hired.

A big change for the park will be the 20-site campground that is planned for the southern section of the Nevada side. It

will have full hookups. The design is still a couple years out.



Views from hiking trails in Van Sickle Bi-State Park are stunning. Photo/LTN file

When the main road was built by Nevada Parks, the necessary infrastructure for the campground was installed.

The newest change was a fiberglass bridge that was installed last summer across the waterfall. It's the first of its kind in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The Tahoe Rim Trail Association, Clay Grubb in particular, gets the kudos for this endeavor.

The TRTA has been an incredible partner to this park, having built a connector trail to its main trail. The agency also often leads hikes along the various trails, and does trainings there.

Land managers, though, are worried about outside impacts to the park. Near the old barn the Gondola Vista condo project can be seen. Per the CTC's insistence a fence will go up to block direct access from this development.

The CTC is also worried if the parcel on the west side of the entrance were to ever be developed by owner Randy Lane. A super-sized house could be built there. CTC staff would like

the agency to purchase that land if the owner is willing and the state ever has the money.

The proposed loop road could be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it will likely bring a huge influx of people to Van Sickle because Highway 50 would go directly in front of the park. This could be a strain on limited and fragile resources.

The entrance will have to be configured to accommodate the highway.

To make it so pedestrians and cyclists don't have to cross a four-lane highway to get to the park, an overpass is proposed closer to Harrah's Lake Tahoe. This, too, could provide for more traffic.

The park is here foremost because of Jack Van Sickle who in 1988 donated the 542 acres to Nevada in honor of his grandfather Henry Van Sickle. The younger Van Sickle died eight years before it opened.

Summer home sales spike in El Dorado County

By Hudson Sangree, Sacramento Bee

More homes were sold across the four-county Sacramento region this summer than in any similar period since the peak of the housing bubble in 2005, CoreLogic reported Wednesday.

In the Sacramento suburbs, El Dorado County's median sale price for new and existing homes in August was \$483,000, up 16 percent from the same time last year and the highest it's been in a decade, CoreLogic said. The high median price for new

homes there, more than \$600,000, helped boost that figure.

El Dorado County had by far the highest price for new homes in the four-county region this summer.

Read the whole story

Protesters walk out of McClintock's town hall

By Angela Hart, Sacramento Bee

A group of about 40 protesters quietly and abruptly walked out of Republican Rep. Tom McClintock's town hall in the city of Angels Camp Wednesday night.

"We're going to take our district back," said Kate Hege, 38, of nearby Amador City. "We have been to a half dozen town halls, we have made thousands of calls, we have talked with his staffers...to be heard. The only response that he has is to slander us as the radical left. We are his constituents, and he owes us representation...yet he doesn't do anything for this district. This is about switching gears."

Many outside the meeting said they don't feel heard by McClintock, a conservative Republican who has represented California's deep-red, largely rural 4th Congressional District, which includes Lake Tahoe, since 2009.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe Airport may become solar site



The executive hangar at Lake Tahoe Airport and others could have solar panels as soon as next summer. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe could save about \$1.28 million in electric bills over the course of 25 years if solar panels were installed at Lake Tahoe Airport.

That is the projection by Bay Area-based Staten Solar. Representatives from the company gave the City Council an overview on Sept. 19 of what a solar field at the airport would mean.

The firm would install all of the equipment and maintain it for the life of the contract, and would secure all the permits.

Scott DuBois with Staten Solar said of the sun here “it’s

raining free energy on us” and now is the time to take advantage of it.

Solar systems have been installed in other mountain regions, so snow load factors as well as the time it takes for the snow to melt on panels have all been studied. Panels have also been installed at airports, so this is something the FAA is familiar with signing off on.

There would be no outlay of cash from the city. The only expense might be if more insurance is required on the hangars.

The use of solar is part of the recently adopted airport master plan. Going forward with this would also help the city attain its goal of using 100 percent renewable energy by 2032.

The local system is proposed to be a 300 kilowatt unit.

Instead of the city buying power from Liberty it would be buying it from Staten.

The savings stated are projected by Staten and have not been independently analyzed by city staff. The company used the city’s current bill, which is about \$50,000 a year at the airport, with projected rate increases from Liberty and then what it projects the cost of its service will be.

So, there is no guarantee of these cost savings.

The estimate is 90 percent of the airport’s electrical needs could be provided by the solar.

City Councilman Tom Davis was concerned about having equipment for so long when technology is always changing. DuBois said the most substantive changes lately are to software, which will be updated as needed.

DuBois said his firm has had positive conversations with Liberty Utilities.

Liberty Utilities did not respond to *Lake Tahoe News'* questions about this proposal.

Staten wants to work with South Lake Tahoe to potentially put solar in on other city owned buildings, like the fire stations. It is talking to other businesses in town, like Heavenly Mountain Resort and Tahoe Mountain Lab.

Tuesday's presentation was just that and not an action item. However, the council members expressed interest in having more serious talks with Staten to put solar on the airport hangars.

Calif. pensioners: Your COLAs are safe, for now

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

The state's largest pension fund on Tuesday shot down a pitch from a Republican lawmaker who wants it to study how much money it could save by cutting benefits for retired public workers.

Sen. John Moorlach of Orange County in July wrote letters to CalPERS board members – Richard Costigan and Dana Hollinger – making two touchy requests for the pension fund.

In one, Moorlach wanted CalPERS to estimate how much money it could save by temporarily suspending cost-of-living adjustments for retirees. CalPERS has different retirement plans that allow cost-of-living adjustments of 2 to 5 percent for its pensioners.

In the other, Moorlach asked CalPERS to look at reducing benefits for current workers and retirees by moving them into

the less generous plans public agencies began offering in 2013, after Gov. Jerry Brown signed a pension reform law.

Read the whole story

International tourism to U.S. declined in early 2017

By Elaine Glusac, New York Times

Fewer international travelers came to the United States during the first few months of this year than over the same period last year, confirming concerns of some in the travel industry.

Figures released by the U.S. Department of Commerce show a drop in international visitors to the United States by close to 700,000 in the first quarter of 2017 compared to the previous year. European countries were down 10.1 percent, and Mexico was off 7.1 percent in the quarter. The largest drops were from the Middle East and Africa, though they represent a much smaller percentage of overall travel to the United States.

Overall, 697,791 fewer foreigners visited the United States in the first three months of the year, down 4.2 percent to 15.8 million. According to Tourism Economics, a branch of Oxford Economics based in Wayne, Pa., that analyzes travel data, the drop represents a loss of nearly \$2.7 billion in spending.

Read the whole story

Poll: Housing a reason for Californians to move

By Angela Hart, Sacramento Bee

More than half of California voters say the state's housing affordability crisis is so bad that they've considered moving, and 60 percent of the electorate supports rent control, according to a statewide poll.

The findings from UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies reflect broad concerns Californians have over the soaring cost of living. Amid an unprecedented housing shortage, rents have skyrocketed and tenants have faced mass evictions, especially in desirable areas.

Of the 56 percent of voters who said they've considered moving, 1 in 4 said they'd relocate out of state if they did.

[Read the whole story](#)

SLT wants help getting VHRs to comply

By Kathryn Reed

If your vacation rental in South Lake Tahoe – full house or just a room – is not permitted, get ready to be fined.

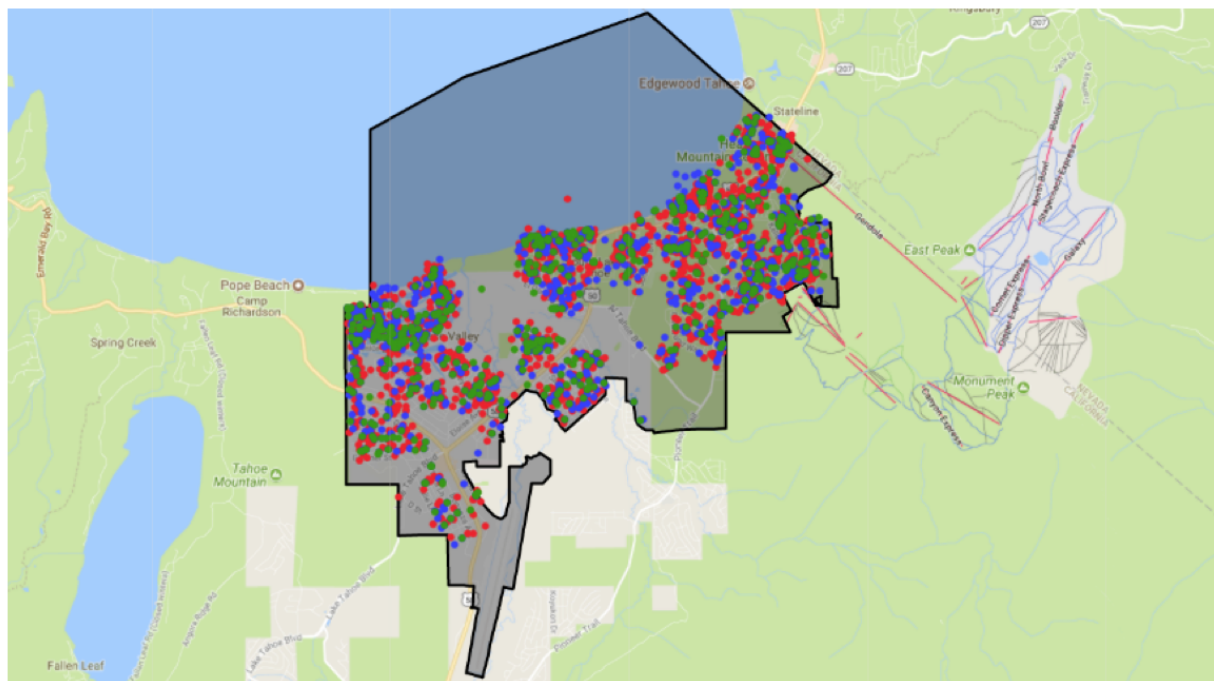
The City Council is contemplating hiring a firm to clamp down on those who are operating without a permit and therefore presumably not paying transient occupancy tax.

The electeds on Sept. 19 heard a presentation from Ulrik Binzer, co-founder and CEO of Host Compliance. The Bay Area firm has a suite of services designed to essentially manage the vacation home rental business for cities and counties.

At the end of the discussion the council members said they were interested in a software-based business like Host Compliance, wants staff to bring back a proposal for what services Host Compliance would provide, and wants to know if it's necessary to go out for bid.

There are currently 3,398 VHR listings, representing 2,067 unique vacation rental properties in SLT

vacation home rentals in South Lake Tahoe as of September, 2017



Sources: Host Compliance proprietary data

Services available include:

- Address identification

- Compliance monitoring
- Tax collection and audit support
- Permitting solutions
- 24/7 hot line
- Short-term rental ordinance consulting
- Rental data and analytics.

Contracts are usually on an annual basis. The cost to the city would be determined on the services requested. It's based on the number of listings that would need to be monitored. A benefit is that when the contract ends, the city would retain the rights to information obtained by Host Compliance.

Binzer's data about the city shows how the number of vacation rentals has changed over the last year – how it is a fluid industry with listings coming and going. This is why it takes time to analyze – it's not a static situation. For instance, in the last year 1,832 VHRs have been added to the market in South Lake Tahoe, with 1,488 being deactivated. Fifty-four percent of the listings are new in the last 11 months.

Plus, there are renters who try to skirt the law. Binzer said his team is able to ferret out those offenders.

Host Compliance uses letterhead from the jurisdiction it represents to send correspondence to out-of-compliant property owners. This way the owner never knows a third party is involved.

Binzer said about 4 percent of the letters are returned because of bad address information. Another 1 percent of the identified properties are not actually out of compliance.

Vacation rentals have been a divisive topic in town. Enforcement is a constant refrain, with a loud chorus saying

whatever ordinance is in effect has never been enforced. Another complaint is that for years the city has been leaving money on the table. That comes in the form of not making people be compliant via permits or tax collection.

With the around-the-clock hot line Host Compliance staffs, the complaining party is asked to provide a photo, video or other evidence of a violation. Assuming the property is registered, a Host Compliance rep calls the host. The database is able to easily identify repeat offenders.

TOT represents 22 percent of the city's General Fund budget in the 2017-18 budget that was approved Tuesday. While it keeps going up, it is leveling off. Of note, though, was that the TOT from hotels dipped in July. This could be because Knights Inn no longer exists, and/or because more people are in vacation rentals. After all, TOT was up more than \$60,000 in July compared to 2016.

Placer County and Truckee use Host Compliance. In the first nine months, Placer saw a four times ROI with \$780,000 in TOT collected. Its annual fee is \$196,000. Truckee in the first two months of using Host Compliance had an ROI of 1½ times, with \$111,289 collected at an annual cost of \$72,600. In other words, at least at the start the service is more than paying for itself.

The company said its clients – there are 70 throughout the United States, with 30 in California – see three to five times return on investment.

Expedia, which is the parent company of 18 vacation rental sites (representing 38 percent of the local online sites), TripAdvisor – owner of seven sites (19 percent of market), and Airbnb (43 percent of listings) are the primary entities scrutinized.

South Lake Tahoe a few years ago hired an employee with the purpose of cracking down on VHR violators. Her job includes

managing VHR permits, auditing non-reporting TOT, and being the point person for citations and appeals. Her work is time consuming.

Host Compliance has software that would be more time efficient, as well as provide more services than what the one staff member can currently do.

The rise and fall of Reno's quickie divorce industry

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Long before she became Nevada's first woman in Congress, Barbara Vucanovich boarded a train in New York and headed west on a six-week journey to a fresh start.

There was already a nickname for such a trip. People called it "the Reno cure," but Vucanovich's daughter, Patty Cafferata, doesn't remember her mom ever using that phrase.

Vucanovich, then Barbara Bugden, was one of the hundreds of thousands of people who traveled to Nevada from across the country to take advantage of the state's liberal divorce laws. From 1931 to 1970, the height of the so-called "migratory divorce" trade, more than 325,000 marriages came to an end in the Silver State.

Mella Harmon is a researcher and historical consultant who has been studying divorce in Nevada for almost 20 years.

By 1940, the Silver State accounted for less than one-tenth of a percent of the nation's population but roughly 5 percent of its divorces.

Read the whole story