

'Mockingjay' doesn't live up to 'Catching Fire'

By Jeremy Miller

Having destroyed the Hunger Games, Katniss must now move forward to her biggest challenge yet: bringing down the Capitol.

"Hunger Games Mockingjay Part 1" picks up right where "Catching Fire" left off. Katniss awakens in District 13, the once rebellious district that challenged the Capitol some years ago. She's given a pretty bleak tour and meets the president of the resistance, Alma Coin (Julianne Moore). Coin and Katniss' once enemy Plutarch (Philip Seymour Hoffman) are convinced that Katniss is the future of the rebellion as she's earned some serious street credit throughout the districts for shaking things up quite a bit at the games.

It takes a little convincing as Katniss is in perma-panic mode over the mystery of where on earth Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) is.

She soon discovers some colliding information. First, Peeta is being puppeted by President Snow (Donald Sutherland) at the Capitol, and that her home District 12 has been destroyed.



The Miller Meter – 3 out of 5 stars.



Katniss agrees to be the poster-child for the resistance and they start production on some promo pieces full of epic sentiment that could rival any Ridley Scott trailer. Meanwhile, President Snow has Peeta telling everyone to cease fighting, as the outcome isn't what they think it'll be. These two just can't seem to get on the same page.

That right there is essentially the plot.

Now, before I dive into my thoughts on the film I'd like to preface it with this: I did not read the books. It's not that I don't enjoy reading; the medium just doesn't do it for me. I'm a movie guy. The argument that "the book was better" simply doesn't work in the context of a conversation with me about movies.

OK, that being said, here it is. I liked the movie. I did not love it. I love the characters of the Hunger Games and I love the story. It subtly reminds me of the Matrix trilogy with less epic fight scenes and more comfortable love scenes.

What I don't understand is how I spent two hours in the theater and don't really know why. "Catching Fire" was awesome, as far as sequels go. The middle movie in a trilogy always catches the heat. It's building the story for the epic third chapter that we all selfishly want to skip to. "Catching Fire" achieved that purpose so why then do we need a third chapter split into two parts?

On my drive home I planned it all out in my head and we could have done part one in 40 minutes. Add that to a 2.5 hour run time and we could have had part one and part two in one action

packed epic third installment.



I did love the acting, as always, minus of course Liam Hemsworth who serves a purpose but doesn't put forth a whole lot of passion. The story, script and acting were all on point; my only other beef other than its seemingly unnecessary existence was the visual experience. There were several instances that somewhat sloppy camera work took away from the power of a scene.

My 3/5 rating is based on the fact that it was a good movie, but I didn't need it. I want the war. I want action and emotion and epic loss and conflict. I didn't get any of that from part one, but I admittedly still had fun.

Here's my closing thought: The "Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" had a massive run time of 3 hours and 21 minutes. Why? Because that's all they needed to give us an amazing climax and closure to the trilogy. Guess what, we all sat through it, we all loved it, and the Academy gave it 11 Oscars. Why then must they split a single movie's plot into two when one would have sufficed? Maybe it had something to do with the \$121 million opening weekend. Clever studio execs.

Go see the movie, you'll like it, it'll be fun, but don't expect anything but filler story and tidbits of action with a little bit of confused teenage hormones sprinkled on top.

South Lake Tahoe resident Jeremy Miller has more movie reviews [online](#).

Restaurants getting people to put phones away

By Katy Hall, *Huffington Post*

Most Americans say phones don't belong at the table during meals, though the vast majority of millennials admit to checking their phones during dinner.

Concern over the practice has sparked some restaurants to encourage customers to put away their phones – with mixed results, depending on the tactic.

Each Wednesday night at Sneaky's Chicken in Sioux City, Iowa, servers ask guests if they'd like to put their phones in a special box during the meal. If they do, they get a 10 percent discount on their dinner. Christy Wright, who co-owns Sneaky's with her parents and sister, said the policy took shape after her family members took a look at their own smartphone habits.

"We noticed that within our own family we were way too connected to our phones and thought maybe we could get others to join us [in disconnecting] for just a bit," Wright told the *Huffington Post*.

Research has shown that having your smartphone within reach probably won't make you a better dinner companion. Even if you're not checking your email or Instagramming your brunch, the mere presence of a smartphone can reduce empathy and diminish a conversation between two people, according to a study published earlier this year in the journal *Environment and Behavior*.

Read the whole story

Author to read Tahoe children's book

"Gertrude's Tahoe Adventures in Time" is a new children's book about the natural history of Lake Tahoe.

With colorful and dramatic illustrations the book tells the story of Gertrude, a Tahoe girl who meets a magic maiden who takes her on a fast motion adventure through the history of Lake Tahoe. They watch glaciers march, volcanoes erupt and exotic animals graze while becoming forever friends. Children will be entertained as they learn.

Author Tim Hauserman will read the story and have books available for purchase and signing on Dec. 20 at 10:30am at the South Lake Tahoe Library, 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Friends create memorial for McConkey in Italy

By Karin Carrasco, Moonshine Ink

More than five years has passed since Tahoe and the skiing world lost the legendary Shane McConkey to a BASE jumping accident in the Italian Alps.

Friends of McConkey recently made a trip to the bottom of the cliff to set up a permanent memorial for the fallen skier.

On March 26, 2009, McConkey, 39, was attempting a wingsuit ski BASE jump off a 2,000-foot cliff in the Dolomite Alps while filming for Matchstick Productions. Reports show that after doing a double backflip, McConkey was unable to release one of his skis. By the time it released, it was too late to open his parachute.

Paul Arthur, McConkey's first ski coach at Squaw Valley, worked with the National Parks of Italy for permission to officially memorialize McConkey and his legacy by naming a rock on the trail to the fatal cliff-jumping site as Shane's Rock.

Read the whole story

Adult siblings may be secret to happy life

By Robin Marantz Henig, NPR

Somehow we're squeezing 16 people into our apartment for Thanksgiving this year, with relatives ranging in age from my 30-year-old nephew to my 90-year-old mother. I love them all, but in a way the one I know best is the middle-aged man across the table whose blue eyes look just like mine: my younger brother Paul.

Paul and I kind of irritated each other when we were kids; I would take bites out of his precisely-made sandwiches in just the spot I knew he didn't want me to, and he would hang around the living room telling jokes when he knew I wanted to be alone with the boy on the couch.

“Most sibling relationships are close – two-thirds of people in one large study said a brother or sister was one of their best friends.

But as adults, we’ve always had each other’s backs, especially when it comes to dealing with our mother’s health crises, which have become more frequent in the past few years. Paul is the first person I want to talk to when there’s something that worries me about Mom; I know he’ll be worried, too.

There’s probably a biological explanation for the intensity of the sibling bond. Siblings share half their genes, which evolutionary biologists say should be motivation enough for mutual devotion. (“I would lay down my life,” British biologist J.B.S. Haldane once said, applying the arithmetic of kin selection, “for two brothers or eight cousins.”) Siblings are a crucial part of a child’s development, too, teaching one another socialization skills and the rules of dominance and hierarchy, all part of the eternal struggle for parental resources.

Read the whole story

Add sparkle to your holiday décor

By Melinda Myers

Liven up your holiday décor with lights, a bit of glitz and some colorful blossoms this season.

Start by gathering greenery from your landscape. Use needled evergreens like pines and firs, broadleaf evergreens like boxwood, holly and evergreen magnolia as well as junipers and

arborvitaes to create wreaths, swags, centerpieces and garland. And don't forget to include cones, holly berries, crabapples and the bluish-colored fruit of junipers.

Be selective as you prune your trees and shrubs when collecting these materials. Use sharp bypass pruners that have two sharp blades and will make a clean cut that closes more quickly. Make your cuts above a healthy bud, where the branches join another branch, or back to the main trunk. Take only a few branches from each tree or shrub to maintain the plants' beauty.

Place freshly cut greens in a cool location away from heaters, fireplaces and open flames. Set them on colorful fabric or paper to catch the sap and avoid damaging your woodwork and furnishings.



Greenery combined with decorative LED lights can brighten holiday displays. Photo/Gardener's Supply Company

Check your greenery for freshness every few days. The needles, leaves and stems should bend, but not break. Replace dried greens with fresh materials.

Then brighten up the display with some cool burning LED lights. Create a mantle display or centerpiece with the help of LED pillar lights. Or add a string of LEDs to your garland.

Look for something unusual like pinecone string lights to add sparkle and charm to your display.

If you have artificial greens that could use a facelift, add fresh berries, cones and seedpods for a more natural look. Increase the glitz with the help of silver and gold metallic paint or glitter. Paint milkweed, lotus and other pods and then tuck them into the greens. Painting allium seedheads white will add the appearance of flowery snowflakes in your indoor arrangements and outdoor container gardens.

And don't forget the fresh flowers and flowering plants. Poinsettias are a long-time favorite, but you may want to change things up with Amaryllis, spring flowering bulbs and lily of the valley. Look for unusual varieties or combinations to increase your enjoyment. Combine large flowered amaryllis with small flowering bulbs like star of Bethlehem. Or go for a unique size shape or flower color like that of the Honeybee Amaryllis with its beautiful yellow flowers that are sure to brighten your days.

Add a few flowers to your greenery and houseplants for some instant color. Stick your greenery and flowers in dampened floral foam to create a long-lasting holiday centerpiece. Or place cut flowers in floral picks and set them in dish gardens and houseplants to brighten things up. Then swap out the flowers as they fade.

And consider making a few extra planters or centerpieces to give as holiday and hostess gifts this year.

Now is the time to put on your gardening shoes, grab the pruners and get started decorating for the holiday season ahead.

Melinda Myers has a master's degree in horticulture and has written more than 20 gardening books.

Why it's not OK to have second refrigerator

By Chris Mooney, Washington Post

Maybe this scene sounds familiar: It's Thanksgiving, you're sitting and watching the football game, and you want a beer. So what do you do? If you're like many Americans, you won't go over to the kitchen fridge, which is now crammed with leftovers. Rather, you'll trek down to the basement or out to the garage to the second refrigerator (aka, the "beer fridge").

Sure, it's convenient. But the growing trend of having second refrigerators is a major national energy blight – not only wasting a lot of energy, but also potentially costing you hundreds of dollars.

From an energy standpoint, second refrigerators are bad news. The simple reason? They tend to be ancient. In fact, nearly 15 percent of U.S. homes have a second refrigerator that is at least 20 years old, which means it is virtually certain to be an energy hog when compared with today's models.

Refrigerators are an appliance category that has seen very dramatic strides in energy efficiency in recent years, thanks to an ever tougher set of state and national energy standards, most recently tightened by the Department of Energy in September. "A fridge that just meets the new standards will use \$215 to \$270 less per year in electricity than a comparable unit that met the first state standards set in 1978," writes Marianne DiMascio of the Appliance Standards Awareness Project (ASAP).

Read the whole story

Road beat: Mitsubishi a responsive AWD



Mitsubishi's Lancer SE AWC is worth the money. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Mitsubishi isn't the biggest player in the automobile market, but that doesn't mean it doesn't deserve a hard look when choosing a small car or an SUV. The Lancer SE AWC is a solid reason why. AWC is another way of saying all wheel drive as

AWC means all wheel control.

It's an electronic system meaning it is fully selectable from economical front two-wheel drive, automatic all wheel drive and a locking system as well – all at the push of a button. Trick, sophisticated stuff. Only the small rear badge lets you know this Lancer has AWC.

Outside Lancer uses the same Concept-X shark nose design concept which is still fresh, sporty and edgy. The lines are clean and purposeful except for the rear window line hump which looks out of context in this otherwise outstanding design. While compact cars have been injected with growth hormones, Mitsu has maintained its compact industry standard of a 180 inch overall length on a 104-inch wheelbase. An original BMW 5 series sedan had an inch shorter wheelbase and was only an inch longer. Now the current 5 Series rides on a 117-inch wheelbase and is 193-inches long.

Width is an average 69.4 inches and height is a somewhat tall 58 inches.

Power is by a world class 2.4L DOHC, 16 valve inline four cylinder engine that was jointly developed by Chrysler, Hyundai and Mitsubishi sometimes known as the Global Engine Alliance. It is still used in various forms by all three companies. In Mitsu form, it develops 168 hp at a low 6,000 rpm and 167 pounds of twist at an even lower 4,100 rpm. While it may not develop the highest peak hp of the family, it probably is the most flexible with a broad flat torque band actually making it feel



Specifications:

Engine

2.4L DOHC, 16 valve
inline four cylinder 168
hp @ 6,000 rpm
167 ft.-lbs. of torque @
4,100 rpm

Transmission

CVT

Configuration

Transverse mounted front

peppier. Who drives around at 6,500 rpm anyway, unless you are racing SCCA. Most people will find their engines operating between 2,000 and 4,000 rpm and 4,100 is where the Mitsu operates at peak volumetric efficiency.

Performance is a bit behind the Lancer GT as the GT operates in front-wheel drive only and therefore weighs in at about 125 pounds less, but the times are very close. Zero to 60 mph stopped the watch at 7.61 seconds with commensurate passing times of 4.61 and 7.27 seconds in 50 to 70 mph simulated passing times on level ground and up a 6 percent grade. The Lancer GT times were 7.54, 4.37 and 6.12 seconds, respectively.

But fuel economy, which by the EPA ratings says that the AWC model will pay a 1 mpg penalty, did not materialize. EPA rates the Lancer AWC at 22/25/29 MPG city/highway/combined. Overall in varied driving the Lancer averaged between 26-29 mpg with almost no time on the highway. But once on a level highway at 70 mph it averaged between 34 and 35 mpg, about 1 mpg better than the GT. Fuel capacity is a large 14.5 gallons for a compact.

engine/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 103.7 inches
Length 180 inches
Width 69.4 inches
Height 58.7 inches
Track (f/r) 60.2/60.2 inches
Ground clearance 5.8 inches
Weight 3,142 pounds
Weight distribution (f/r) 59/41percent
Fuel tank 14.5 gallons
Trunk capacity 12.3 cubic feet
Wheels 16x7 inch alloys
Tires 205/60x16 all season
Steering lock to lock 3.16 turns
Turning circle 32.8 feet

Performance

0-60 mph 7.61 seconds
50-70 mph 4.61 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 7.27 seconds
Top speed: Don't even consider finding out unless on a race track.
Fuel economy EPA rated at 22/29/25 mpg city/highway combined. Expect 34-35 mpg on the highway at legal speeds and about 27-28 mpg overall.

As with the GT, the Lancer makes enough power to induce torque steer at low speeds, but with the AWC in AWD, there is none. The hydraulic power steering rack is reasonably quick at 3.16 turns lock to lock, close to the 3.0 or less that I look for. The rest of the Lancer underpinnings are a fairly standard MacPherson struts up front with a multilink fully independent system out back. This is an upgrade over most compacts that use a semi-independent torsion beam out back. Wheels are stylish 16 inch alloys with 205/60 series tires. Not exactly racetrack rubber, but still quick sticky. Consequently the handling with the AWD engaged is fairly benign and powerful. It has no vices, just the ability to go where it's pointed with good feedback. Turn-in is crisp in spite of the tall 60 series rubber and off and on center feel is very good. It is an easy car to drive aggressively. And as a bonus the turning circle is less than 33 feet.

Ride quality is firm, but still quite compliant. Those taller tires certainly help. About the only issue is road noise from coarse roads, otherwise its ride compares well to other compacts but it is preferable to this writer. Engine speed is a low 2,250 rpm at 70 mph and it is inaudible. With the tranny being a CVT , it only improves the overall smoothness of the Lancer experience.

Braking is done by four-wheel disc brakes, something that is not standard on all compact cars with ABD, EBD and BA. The system had a strong pedal and arrested forward progress from 40 mph in 43-44 feet. Other features enhance safety like stability and traction control, TPMS, seven airbags plus the Mitsu RISE body system in case of collision.

Inside the Lancer is a quality interior done with cloth seats that are surprisingly comfortable and manually adjustable in three axis. Instrumentation is routine with a large tach and speedo flanking a center information center with a trip computer and graphic ancillary gauges. A touch screen is used to control the excellent standard sound system. While not the

biggest compact car with 93 cubic feet of interior volume and a 12 cubic foot trunk, it still has ample room for a couple of 6 footers in the rear. Three big guys would be doable as long as I am riding shotgun in front.

Pricing for this nicely equipped Lancer SE AWC with the CVT and 2.4L engine starts at \$20,995 plus \$810 for the boat from Kurashiki, Japan. The only option on my tester was Premium package for \$1,700 that added a moon roof, an upgraded 710-watt Rockford Fosgate sound system, fast key entry system (nice feature) and some leather on the steering wheel and shift knob. If you want or need a responsive AWD small car, this is it. As an added bonus, all Mitsubishis come with substantial piece of mind in a 5 year/60,000 mile bumper to bumper warranty plus a 10 year/100,000 mile power train warranty.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.

Rebates available to replace wood stoves

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and partner jurisdictions are offering rebates to people who replace older, heavily polluting wood burning stoves and fireplaces.

According to the TRPA, inefficient wood stoves and open fireplaces are a substantial source of air pollution in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Their incomplete combustion of fuels results in elevated emissions of particulate matter, greenhouse gases,

carbon monoxide, nitrogen, and other pollutants.

Cleaner burning models of gas, pellet, and wood stoves and fireplace inserts certified by the Environmental Protection Agency can burn one-third less fuel and cut emissions of pollutants by up to 50 percent.

The rebate program is anticipated to replace about 200 home heating appliances and reduce particulate matter emissions by an estimated 5 tons. Rebates range from \$400 to \$1,400. They are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Homeowners interested in the rebate programs are encouraged to contact their local office of air quality to find out if they are eligible prior to the purchase or installation of any new wood stove. El Dorado County and South Lake Tahoe residents may contact Adam Baughman at 530.621.7571, adam.baughman@edcgov.us. Placer County residents may go online and click on the link for the "New Wood Stove Replacement Program – Lake Tahoe". Nevada residents in the Lake Tahoe Basin should contact John Handzo at 775.834.3674, jhandzo@unr.edu.

Novasel not waiting to be sworn in as supervisor to be a leader in El Dorado County



Sue Novasel is working to help District 5 even before being sworn in as the next El Dorado County supervisor. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – A half eaten muffin and near empty coffee cup sit in front her. She pauses to excuse herself to take a phone call. She steps into the cold where others can't hear her.

This is Sue Novasel's life. She is transitioning from candidate to supervisor of El Dorado County. On this particular day Freel Perk in Meyers is her de facto office.

Before *Lake Tahoe News* arrives she was consulting with a board member of the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District.

Helping to resolve their problems is a top priority of Novasel's after she is sworn in the first week of January. But already she is listening, gathering information and getting further acquainted with this and a variety of other issues.

"I study every night. I've called every supervisor. I'm

meeting with as many electeds and department heads to get up to speed,” Novasel tells *Lake Tahoe News*.

Tahoe Paradise Park is near and dear to her. Her daughters played there. Her husband is a former board member. Novasel knows it could be a real community asset if some structure, direction and vision could be brought to the board and park.

With having lived in the area for 38 years, she brings a history of Meyers and the entire South Shore to the Board of Supervisors.

Setting priorities

Another major task for her is to get the Board of Supervisors to be a more cohesive unit.

“There’s some dysfunction and a lot of distractions with a supervisor being ousted and the fact the board has two new members,” Novasel said. (Michael Ranalli was elected to District 4. Shiva Frentzen is also new, having replaced Ray Nutting in September.) “I will try to get our board to act like a board. The board needs to develop strategies, policies and plans for the future.”

What she doesn’t know is if the current board or the one taking office in 41 days will be hiring the next chief administrative officer.

“They have every right to hire (someone) before the new board is sworn in,” Novasel said.

It would be a bit of an expedited process, especially with the holidays, if that were to occur. Terri Daly resigned this fall as CAO and Assistant CAO Kim Kerr is leaving at the end of December.

Novasel has experience in hiring a top official, having been on the LTUSD board when Jim Tarwater was selected.

Novasel's other initial focus will be on economic growth – which was her mantra during the campaign.

“They should set a policy regarding business development,” Novasel said of the supervisors. “The permit process in Tahoe can always be improved.”

She said it's all about growing the tax base.

Public safety and public health are other concerns of hers. She believes her 12 years on the school board will help her bring child centered issues to the table.

Being accessible

During the interview a couple Meyers residents approach Novasel.

Constantly being interrupted is likely something she will have to get used to. If she thought getting stopped in the grocery store to be asked about Lake Tahoe Unified School District issues was distracting, she will now have a much broader constituency to be held accountable to. Besides a larger geographic area that stretches to Pollock Pines, the District 5 supervisor is usually on the board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Tahoe Transportation District, California Tahoe Conservancy, Waste Management JPA, Recreation JPA and others.

While Novasel is bound to be busy once she takes office, she is going to be taking a few things off of her plate. She is resigning from several boards including Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce and Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.

She hopes to have regular office hours in Placerville and Lake Tahoe.

But being a supervisor isn't just representing a specific district. The West Slope has its own issues, which Novasel has been brushing up on. This includes having read the General

Plan more than once.

She realizes there is a disconnect between Tahoe and Placerville. But she also said Tahoma, Pollock Pines and El Dorado Hills don't always feel well represented.

Novasel would like to have more combined meetings with entities like her new board and the South Lake Tahoe City Council. She also wants various city-county employees to be meeting more so people are working together better.

"We all need to understand the issues," Novasel said. "The Board of Supervisors needs to make sure the lines of communication are open. We need to know the needs of different communities."

One thing that should make Novasel's job easier is that Judi McCallum has decided to stay on as the District 5 assistant.