

Fire safety comes before fun at Festival of Trees and Lights

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Feathers. Cross them off the list of decorations to go on the Christmas tree. No matter how “in” they are this year, they combust rapidly.

This was evident Wednesday as Eric Guevin set fire to decorations from trees assembled at MontBleu for the Festival of Trees and Lights that starts today.



A marshmallow becomes toasty on a school tree and needs treating to remain.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Guevin is the acting fire marshal for Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District. It's his job to make sure this event with its 14 designer trees and assorted holiday decorations don't go up in flames if they were to catch fire.

Snipping pieces of fabric he assembles a handful to take to

the back loading dock to set on fire.

A feather becomes unrecognizable charred debris in seconds.

“Maybe you should tell them no feathers,” Guevin says to Denise Earls with Barton Foundation and Anna Vopalensky with MontBleu.

Earls says they’ll try treating it one more time with a fire retardant spray. If it burns again, that tree won’t be lighted.

Last year two trees didn’t pass muster and therefore could not have the lights on.

“Someone flocked their own tree last year. It was scary when he tested it,” Earls said.

Barton Foundation, sponsors of the event, order the trees so they come treated. They can even get flocked trees that are flame resistant. It’s the stuff people use themselves that can spark to make it be like a Fourth of July celebration.

Guevin says many of the things he inspects for in a commercial setting apply to homes. Artificial trees need to be fire resistant. Fresh trees need to have water – and the needles should be hard to pull from the branches.

A non-grounded extension cord is a no-no and not allowed to be used at the festival. Guevin advises following the same policy at home.

One tree is being backlighted with a floodlight. Guevin shakes his head. Vopalensky finds a casino employee to replace it with something they have that won’t set the place on fire.



Eric Guevin
with Tahoe
Douglas fire
watches
material go up
in flames.

“This could be a good ignition source,” Guevin says of the light. It’s almost like a heat lamp.

At home, lights on trees should not have damaged strands, no more than three strands per extension cord, and all lights should be off and/or unplugged when going to bed or leaving the house.

To pass the fire marshal’s test the item cannot burn for more than 12 seconds, will extinguish itself, and if it drips, the matter goes out and does not continue to burn.

“Some designers come to us ahead of time to be preapproved,” Guevin said. “We’ve done training for designers so they know what products are acceptable to use.”

Barton Foundation has two people patrolling the premise at all times who are called fire watchers – just in case.

Public viewing of the trees is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children and seniors. Both Raley’s in South Lake Tahoe have discounted tickets for \$3 for all ages. Those prices are good Dec. 2-4 from 10am-2pm. Special events associated with the Festival of Trees and Lights are throughout the three days, with

information online.

Holidays can be a tempting time for problem gamblers

By Margaret Williams

The holidays are a time of celebration and joy for many people. However, for individuals who are struggling with problem gambling, the holidays may be especially challenging.

“People with gambling issues may use the season’s demands for extra cash as a reason to increase gambling,” said Christy White, supervising health education coordinator with the Public Health Division of the El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency. “Family-related stress over the holidays can also act as a trigger and send problem gamblers to bars, bingo parlors and racetracks to escape.”

According to White, problem gambling is sometimes called a “hidden” addiction because the gamblers themselves often don’t realize they have a problem. Problem gambling can lead to other problems such as substance abuse and depression. Some warning signs of problem gambling include:

- Losing time from work due to gambling
- Repeatedly promising to stop gambling, yet returning to it again and again
- Borrowing money to gamble or to pay gambling debts

- Lying to cover up gambling activity
- Suffering from feelings of remorse or depression due to gambling
- Gambling until the last dollar is gone.

White says that help is available for people who are struggling with problem gambling. The California Office of Problem Gambling Helpline offers free, confidential help over the phone at 800.426.2537. The helpline is open 24 hours a day, including weekends and holidays. Callers to the helpline can receive over-the-phone counseling, referral to a treatment therapist, and information about resources such as Gamblers Anonymous, and other help. The Office of Problem Gambling has additional information regarding gambling online.

Margaret Williams is the health program manager/communications officer for the El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency.

Rene Smania – 1964-2011

Rene Ernest Smania, 47, passed from this world way too soon on Nov. 29, 2011, after a courageous three-year battle with cancer.

Born in San Francisco to Swiss parents, his family returned to Switzerland when he was 3. He attended chef and butcher schools in Switzerland before serving two years in the Swiss army.



Rene Smania

He returned to the United States in 1985, learned to speak English and found success in a number of professions, including chef, managing hardware and retail stores, and most recently as manager of the Happy Homestead Cemetery in South Lake Tahoe.

In 1992, he met his wife of 18 years, Celine. The two moved from Maui to South Lake Tahoe where they were married and built a wonderful life together with their four-legged children, Zephyr, Bentley and Sammy.

Besides being the jokester that he was, Rene was a man of many talents. The longer he and Celine were married the more she said she kept discovering his hidden talents.

Cooking was his passion, along with motorcycles, skiing, painting, yodeling and just about anything else.

Most of all he loved sitting around the kitchen table after a good meal with family and friends talking about everything and anything.

"Thank you Rene for 18 wonderful years. I'll love you forever and a day," Celine said.

His father, Ernest, and Aunt Rita preceded Rene in death.

He is survived by his wife, Celine; mother Vera; brother Michael; sister Esther and her husband Richard; Uncle Paul; cousins Michelle and Susy; in-law Doris Hamann and Gerard Thibeault and their children Linda and Dennis; other relatives

and numerous friends.

Bookstore pops up in South Lake Tahoe as a bit of a test

By Kathryn Reed

From environmental planner to book publisher to book distributor to bookstore owner. That has been the career path of South Lake Tahoe's Michael Scialfa.

How long he will have the title of bookstore owner remains to be seen. For now, Lake Tahoe Books and Art is what's called a pop-up bookstore. It opened Thanksgiving weekend down the stairs from Sports Ltd. in the Village Center. The lease expires at the end of December, with an option to keep going through February.



South Lake Tahoe has a bookstore again -- for now. Photo/LTN

The last store devoted to selling new books in South Tahoe –

Neighbors Bookstore – went out of business in January 2008. That was before the economy totally tanked and ebooks became mainstream.

Three main things led Scialfa to open the store: believing it would be a worthy community endeavor, a desire to make money, and a way to get feedback on book buying trends that would be useful in his wholesale business.

It was two weeks from the day he pulled the trigger to launch Lake Tahoe Books and Art to the day the open sign was put in the window.

Prior to that mid-November decision, a survey had been sent to a slew of people with about 100 people responding. It gauged reading interests, book buying patterns and shopping interests as related to books.

“One result of the survey strongly indicated there may be local support for a bookstore,” Scialfa said. “The real shock and disappointment was they would not patronize a store two to three miles from their home.”

Considering it is five miles from the Y to Stateline and four miles from Zephyr Cove to Stateline, time will quickly reveal if people will drive for a new book.

Prior to ever sending the survey were numerous conversations between Scialfa, his friends, colleagues and others about whether the South Shore could sustain a bookstore.

Despite the doubt that persists if the right demographic exists to keep a bookstore open, Scialfa is willing to take the gamble for the short term.

What the survey revealed is there are voracious readers in the area. A couple people said their households buy more than 100 books a year. Most buy the real tangible item, as opposed to the digital variety. And several buy both.

Ninety percent of the respondents are year-round Tahoe residents, with the median age being 52, and women outnumbering men 2 to 1.

Background in books

Scialfa has been along for the ride though the ever-changing book business since the mid-1990s. He started as an environmental consultant with a focus on recreation and interpretive planning. Projects included early signage on the Tahoe Rim Trail, work on the Shasta-Trinity Forest, and interpretive planning near Mount Rose.

He was putting together brochures and other promotional material. These were the days before desktop publishing.

What was missing was a book about day hikes in Lake Tahoe. Scialfa and Lyn Barnett partnered to create "Trail Guide to the Lake Tahoe Basin and Vicinity". More than 3,000 copies sold the first year.

People told them they should do more guides – on fishing, biking and other topics. But Scialfa knew they existed already and told storeowners how to get them. But they ignored his advice.

That's what led Scialfa to go from micro-publisher to distributor. He knew he could figure out a way to get those books into stores. And so, Crystal Range Associates – Outdoor Books and Maps was born. To this day it is his main job.

In the late 1990s he was dealing with a handful of publishing lines. Today he works with more than 300 publishers who represent about 10,000 titles. Most of his accounts are in Northern California, though he goes east to the Rockies.

"We bring to people content knowledge about books and what is appropriate for a geographical location and customer base," Scialfa said.

One change through the years is growing niche markets and where people are buying books.

People traveling like to read about the area (fiction or non-fiction) or they want something by a local author. They are picking up books in visitor centers and gift shops.

Scialfa isn't worried Kindles and other ereaders will wipe out the printed book. His fear is much deeper.

"I think the Internet and Twitter and Facebook are a greater risk than Kindle because people don't know how to read," Scialfa. He fears people are all becoming e.e. cummings – without the prose, without the ability to wordsmith.

Lake Tahoe Books and Art

Selections include fiction, non-fiction, contemporary bestsellers, literary classics, outdoor and nature guides, travel guides, maps, history, food and cooking, gardening and landscaping, humor, gift books, young adult, children's titles, posters and note cards, plus selected titles in Spanish, and a miscellaneous assortment of other genres.

To ensure the store has the title you want before the end of the month, call (530.542.3245) or email (LakeTahoeBooksandArt@yahoo.com) before Dec. 3.

The store will be increasing its hours after Dec. 10. For now they are Sunday-Monday 11am-6pm, closed Tuesday-Wednesday, Thursday noon-6pm, and Friday-Saturday 11am-7pm.

Special events are planned. All of those details will be posted on the store's Facebook page.

LTVA receives \$10,000 from Nevada tourism officials

By Reno Gazette-Journal

A \$10,000 grant to help the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority develop its sports tourism initiative was among nearly a half-million dollars in rural tourism grants announced Tuesday.

The Nevada Commission on Tourism doled out a total of \$492,711 to 72 applicants for projects that include a smartphone application, a website aimed at attracting geo-cachers and training to promote tourism to Indian tribes. The money, awarded twice a year, is paid to rural nonprofit entities out of state room tax revenues. Applicants are required to provide a 50-50 match in funds or volunteer hours.

Read the whole story

Markleeville welcomes holiday season with one-day fair

Markleeville will come alive with all the lights and decorations of Christmas on Dec. 4 from 11am-4pm.

There will be handcrafted gift items, jewelry, pottery, wreaths, pillows, coloring books, and much more, available all over town, in businesses, event on a porch or two.

There will be carolers gathering around the Christmas Tree at the Court House at 1pm for a performance before they stroll around town.

Santa and Mrs. Santa will be in the Wolf Creek Restaurant by the fireplace at 11am.

The General Store has tree cutting permits for \$10. There will be cobbler prepared by Little Antelope Pack Station in front of Intero Real Estate.

The Markleeville Art Gallery will have glass ornaments, wool hats, soaps, and jewelry.

The museum will be open and free for the day.

If there is enough snow, there will be a snowshoe tour and people may make a snowman in the park.

At 2pm the library will have story time, cookie decorating and Santa promises to visit.

For more information, go online.

3 docs blaze community health care trail in S. Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

No white coats, no stethoscopes around their necks. One could easily mistake this threesome for just an ordinary group of friends.

But they aren't.

Paul Rork, Greg Bergner and Brooks Martin are the reason the Barton Community Clinic exists. In 1989, they were the doctors who made up Tahoe Family Physicians. That year they opened what was called the El Dorado Community Clinic. For six years the doors stayed open under their care despite the red ink getting brighter and more voluminous.



Paul Rork,
Greg Bergner,
Brooks Martin
-- circa 1980s

Today the clinic is still thriving. More people are using it than ever before (about 1,900 a month) and it has outgrown its current location. Proceeds from the annual Festival of Trees and Lights (Dec. 2-4 at MontBleu) will go toward renovation of the clinic, which will begin next year.

Permits are in hand. Moving into the new facility is slated for between Thanksgiving and Christmas 2012; then renovation of the older section begins.

"It will be more efficient," Martin said.

The clinic is the original Tahoe Fracture office. What was the X-ray room is in the middle of the clinic, which makes it a bit dysfunctional when it comes to the flow.

Recognizing hard work



Paul Rork,
Greg Bergner,
Brooks Martin
-- circa 2011

But it was their vision, their generosity and their commitment to their profession that has earned them the Spirit of Philanthropy Award that will be presented at the annual Barton Gala on Dec. 3. (The event is sold-out.) The award recognizes a person or people who have demonstrated extraordinary dedication to the health of the South Lake Tahoe community in general and to Barton Health in particular.

Rork, Bergner and Martin sat down with *Lake Tahoe News* this month to talk about life 22 years ago and what is in store for 2012. All have been practicing medicine on the South Shore since at least 1981.

While they remain steadfast friends and doctors within the Barton Health Care system, only Martin is an integral part of the clinic. He manages it.

Barton Hospital took over the clinic from them in 1995 and a year later moved it to what is the old part of the hospital – where the emergency room used to be. In 2002, it was officially designated a rural health clinic.

The clinic has had a few homes, including in the building where Sprouts restaurant is. Those were the days of brown walls and orange carpet.

The docs were the only primary care physicians at the time taking Medi-Cal patients. That's what led them to start the

clinic. It was better to break that segment off from their main practice. Midlevels were brought in to provide much of the care – which is the same today.

Today, like when things started, the clinic is overseen by doctors, with one going to the facility each day.

But it was a Catch-22. Two midlevels (which are nurse practitioners or physicians assistants) were seeing 25 patients a day, five days week. That pace could not be maintained, nor could the financial loss be sustained.

That's when Barton took over.

Time brings change

The three pioneers have seen many changes over the years.

"You could work in the casinos in the '80s at a low level job and have insurance. Then the casinos laid people off and rehired them at part time," Rork said. "There are a lot more unbenefitted patients."

In the 1980s and 1990s the county public health clinic was more vibrant, too. Now the services it provides are few and far between.

"The community clinic has become more and more important," Bergner said.

None of the doctors foresees the day when the clinic won't be needed.

"As long as the American health care system has a work related health system, not everyone will be offered it," Martin said. "And private is not affordable, so the clinic is clearly needed."

He says clinic patients involve more psychosocial issues because usually there is more than just the medical issue to

deal with. Loss of job, financial problems, possible language barriers – this all contributes to what Martin says becomes some of the most difficult patients to care for because of the complexities of the whole patient.

Evolution of care

Changes since they started the clinic include specialists going to the clinic, telemedicine and psychiatric care.

“There is so much more chronic care involved in primary care,” Bergner said.

They pointed to how just a couple decades ago a cancer or HIV diagnosis would be a death sentence – that’s not the case now.

But all the changes are not welcome.

“Only one country in the world allows television prescription ads,” Rork said.

Martin said with the number of studies funded by drug companies there is “corporate pressure to increase the use of medications.”

More than doctors

All three have been chief of staff. Rork and Bergner are on the board of directors, while Martin has been chairman of the physician advisory committee at Barton Hospital for more than 17 years.

They have participated in and coached local sports teams. They helped the local library when it needed funds, and have regularly donated to fundraisers for community organizations.

Their families grew up together.

The night before the interview they had dinner together.

While one day they will retire, they envision a more tapering

off approach instead of all or nothing.

One thing won't change no matter how many hours they devote to medicine – that's their friendship.

"We've been best friends forever. That will never change," Rork said.

Miss Marcia dance students on stage at Harrah's

"'Twas the Night Before Christmas" is a special holiday production by Lake Tahoe's Shining Stars of the Marcia Sarosik Dance Studio.

It returns to Harrah's Lake Tahoe on Dec. 4 at 1pm and 4pm.

The production, based on the classic holiday poem, made its debut in 2006. The dancers range in age from 2½ to 18.



Mellisa Jo
Marsh is part
of Miss
Marcia's dance
group.
Photo/Tara
Pielat

"Jingle Bell Rock", "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" and "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" are some of the favorite holiday songs performed by the dancers.

Excerpts from Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" include the Sugarplum Fairy danced by Melissa Jo Marsh, who recently attended the Boston Ballet's summer intensive. The Snowflakes and the Waltz of the Flowers will be presented by the middle school and advanced ballet students, with younger ballet students performing as angels in the "Magic Toy Shop".

A Rockettes style kick line in addition to contemporary, lyrical hip hop and tap dances to songs that follow the story are included in the show. Some of the dancers making their stage debut at this event are part of the Shining Stars' outreach program, which sponsors dance education for students who would otherwise not be able to participate in dance classes and performances.

The high school couples class brings some of South Tahoe High School's athletes to the stage and the dance class and glee chorus from the high school will also perform.

The proceeds from this year's productions will benefit

organizations that support needy children on the South Shore.

Ticket prices are \$12 general admission and \$6 for seniors and students. Tickets are available online until Friday afternoon and will be also be available at the door 30 minutes prior to each show.

Early Walt Disney drawing to be auctioned off in Reno

By Hollywood Reporter

An original, autographed drawing by Walt Disney, believed to have been made around 1920, will go up for auction this week in Reno.

The whimsical drawing of a cigar-chomping man wearing a derby hat will be among 1,400 items up for sale at the two-day auction set to begin Tuesday at the Atlantis Casino Resort.

Titled "Fill Up My Can," the illustration has an estimated value of \$35,000 to \$50,000. It was made before Disney hit it big in the entertainment world and is believed to predate his Mickey Mouse, which made its cartoon debut in 1928.

"Real pieces signed by him (Disney) are really rare," Fred Holabird of Reno-based Holabird-Kagin Americana, which is staging the auction, told the Associated Press. "This is one of the earliest known signed Disney pieces, if not the earliest."

The drawing was once owned by Disney's sister, Ruth Disney.

Truckee recovery center pays it forward

By Jill Oberly, Reno Gazette-Journal

TRUCKEE – On April 10, 2008, Steve Wallace broke his back skiing at Squaw Valley. He was paralyzed from his T-9 vertebrae, in his lower spine, down.

He was left with the possibility of never being able to walk again, let alone ski.

With the assistance of the Truckee-based High Fives Foundation, Wallace was skiing in the spring of 2009. Today, the 30-year-old walks, skis and practices yoga as part of his continued recovery.

“I do all these things to get better because somebody along the way – Roy Tuscany – told me that I was going to walk again,” Wallace said. “That provided me with hope to take those steps needed to get on track to a full recovery.”

Tuscany is the co-founder and president of High Fives Foundation, a nonprofit he started in 2009. It is dedicated to raising money and awareness for winter sports athletes who have suffered a life-altering injury.

The organization has grown quickly. It now has two full-time employees, one part-time employee, an intern and a new facility, the CR Johnson Healing Center. It was named 2011 nonprofit of the year by the Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce.

Read the whole story