Reports of human trafficking from Tahoe to El Dorado Hills

By Vicki Gonzalez, KCRA-TV

El Dorado County has completed three human trafficking stings this year – in South Lake Tahoe, Placerville and El Dorado Hills, according to the district attorney's office.

"We have young victims as well as older victims that are at risk so we are targeting all areas of the county," Deputy District Attorney Lisette Suder said. "What we are learning is that this is very prevalent and there are a lot of people that are stuck in routines and being trafficked that don't have ways to get out."

The recent sting rescued a 17-year-old trafficking victim Thursday, as well as produced 14 arrests or citations, in a release sent out by the El Dorado Sheriff's Department.

Read the whole story

Rise in school bullying in Nev. attributed to awareness, enforcement

By Meghin Delaneym, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Reports of bullying in Nevada's schools nearly doubled during the 2015-16 school year before dipping last year, a byproduct of stronger reporting and better investigations, according to

a state official.

The state passed an anti-bullying law during the 2015 legislative session, a few months before the 2015-16 school year began. New measures were added in 2017.

“As schools become aware of the process, they’ll see more bullying,” Christy McGill, the head of the state Department of Education’s safe and respectful learning environment office, said of the increase. “As kids, students and families see that schools are serious about bullying and they’re going to be stopped, the incidents of bullying start to recede.”

Read the whole story

Sheriff Pierini calling it a career after 40+ years

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Violence on New Year’s Eve at Stateline used to be the norm. People were struck by flying Champagne bottles. One year someone was shot. Disobedience ruled. At the peak about 100,000 people filled the casino corridor – many of them underage.

Closing Highway 50 at the bewitching hour and then long enough to clear the throng of revelers was Ron Pierini’s idea – and that was when there were just a couple thousand revelers.

This is just one of many ideas Pierini has had through the years that has helped the men and women who work for Douglas County Sheriff’s Office.

Today New Year’s Eve at Stateline is nothing to write home about – which is fine for law enforcement. Still, they prepare for the worst – especially with terrorism now always being a real possibility.

“There’s been many New Year’s Eve nights where the sheriff and I were out of doors at observation posts watching the crowd and I’m thinking to myself, here is a dedicated elected official being out in the cold after being so many years as sheriff,” South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler said of Pierini.

It’s that kind of dedication to the job, really to the community, that has made him so electable by the people of Douglas County and respected by those outside the agency who work with him.

Pierini has had an incredible career, with the bulk of it spent at DCSO.

A year from now Pierini will retire as sheriff of DCSO, a position he has had since 1997 when he was appointed to replace Sheriff Jerry Maple. He is finishing his fifth elected term.



Douglas County Sheriff Ron Pierini is retiring when his term expires in 2018. Photo/Kathryn Reed

A storied career

Pierini grew up in Northern Nevada, graduated from UNR and started his career with the Carson City Sheriff's Office. He came to Douglas in July 1976 as a deputy at the Lake Tahoe substation, which at the time was on Warrior Way. He worked there for 18 years, rising to the rank of captain. Then he went to the Carson Valley for three years where he was undersheriff for Maple.

"The community up here was very strong," Pierini said of Tahoe.

Things have changed in his 40-plus years as an officer. Back in the day, Tahoe was responsible for 80 percent of the county's crime. Now it's 20 percent.

Traffic was worse then. Before the loop road it could take two hours to get from the old substation through the casino corridor. There was more of a permanent population at the

lake.

Pierini is proud to claim that Douglas has the lowest crime rate of any county in the state. Instituting programs and providing officers with the appropriate tools are how that's been achieved.

Gang activity and drugs are issues Pierini has no tolerance for. In the 1990s when he started to see some unsavory types try to stake their territory here, he set up a gang task force. It stopped the problem.

"I've lived in Nevada my whole life. I don't understand why we've legalized marijuana," Pierini told *Lake Tahoe News* during a wide-ranging conversation. He believes it will just escalate the use of harder drugs. "We say it's OK and it's not OK.

"As time goes on we will see traffic accidents and people will die."

Fatal car accidents in the county are already an issue, with eight people having lost their lives this year.

Pierini is all about early drug education. He goes to every DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) graduation. This is a program for grade school students.

"They go home and I wonder if their parents are using drugs," he said.

Pierini is known for his blunt talk, which depending on who's on the receiving end may not be welcome.

"The characteristic that I will always attribute to the sheriff is his unfailing straightforwardness. You never get a couched answer from Ron, you get the facts, whether pleasant or otherwise," Bill Chernock with the Carson Valley Chamber of Commerce told *Lake Tahoe News*. Those two have a history that goes back to when they both worked at the lake.

Memorable cases

Like most in law enforcement, Pierini finds crimes involving children to be some of the most difficult to comprehend. Krystal Steadman is one of those cases.

“It hit me so hard and all of Lake Tahoe,” Pierini said of the 9-year-old who was raped and murdered in 2000 by a father and son duo. She was a fourth-grader at Meyers Elementary School when the pair abducted her. “It’s one of the worst things that ever happened.”

Then there was the shootout in 1982, with shots being fired as officers and the bad guys sped along Highway 50; glass was falling on Pierini.

The suspects drove into a garage in Round Hill. When they came out they continued to lead officers on a pursuit up Spooner Summit, all the while shots are being fired. The suspects drove off the side of the road and then came out with their hands up.

The woman from the house in Round Hill – an innocent victim in the melee – was in the car. Officers didn’t know that until she stepped out of the vehicle. She had been on the floor during the shootings and was lucky to not have been struck.

In 1980, Pierini was the captain at the Tahoe substation when Harveys was bombed. It was the largest bomb to go off in the United States until the World Trade Center bombing in 1993.

“It was a big deal. We saved 600 people,” Pierini said.

Sonny Bono’s death in 1998 at Heavenly ski resort gave him a taste of mass media. As sheriff, he is who people wanted to talk to.

“Every media truck from around the world was at Heavenly,” Pierini recalled. Journalists wanted to know if this was an assassination or if drugs were involved. “It was just that he

hit a tree."

Bono was a congressman at the time, but was still widely known as the other half of Sonny and Cher.

Oftentimes the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District is part of the drama that is unfolding. Pierini and now retired Fire Chief Ben Sharit had very different jobs, but often were involved in the same altercation.

"I always had access to him which was amazing with how busy he was," Sharit told *LTN*. "He was apolitical in a political position. I value his commitment to public safety."

Moving on

While those are a few of the big cases Pierini has been involved with, it's more administrative work that he does today. It's dealing with the budget. It's making sure the state-mandated body camera program for officers is carried out. This means figuring out how to store all that data – and paying for the equipment, and dealing with the fact the recordings will be a public record.

At 65, Pierini looks like he could still tangle with any bad guy he encountered. And while that's not necessarily what he wants to do in his last year, he also hasn't started counting down the days to December 2018.

"I'm not looking forward to retiring," he said. Still, he knows now is the time go. It may give others in the department a chance to do new things. Undersheriff Paul Howell will also be retiring next year.

And it means he can spend more time traveling with his wife, seeing their kids and grandchildren. And Pierini's 91-year-old mother lives in Carson City, so now he'll have more time for her as well when he no longer has a job that is essentially 24 hours, seven days a week.

Thomas Fire now the second largest in Calif. history

By Hailey Branson-Potts and Nicole Santa Cruz, Los Angeles Times

After a brief respite from the relentless gusts that have driven the deadly Thomas Fire for more than two weeks, powerful winds are expected to return, adding to the challenges facing firefighters working to contain the mammoth blaze.

The fire, which began near Santa Paula in the foothills above Thomas Aquinas College on Dec. 4, has burned through 272,000 acres as of Tuesday evening, making it the second-largest wildfire in modern California history.

On Tuesday, the Thomas Fire surpassed the lightning-sparked Rush Fire, which burned 271,911 acres in Lassen County in 2012.

Read the whole story

Dry Christmas trees can spell disaster

By Kathryn Reed

CARSON CITY – Less than a minute. That's how fast a dry

Christmas tree can be reduced to charred pine needles.

Most people will start to dismantle their tree in a week or so. Now is when trees start drying out, potentially creating a disastrous scene that could ruin the holiday in so many ways.

The Reno and Carson City fire departments last week demonstrated what happens when a dry tree catches fire and what happens to a healthy tree where there are sprinklers. The difference was dramatic.

The dry tree that had not been watered in days was a ball of fire in seconds. Think if there were presents under it, and anything flammable nearby. It wouldn't just be Christmas that went up in smoke.



Charred remains of what was a decorated Christmas tree. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Stats from the National Fire Protection Association:

· Between 2011-15, there were an average of 200 home fires that started with Christmas trees in the United States. On average, annually these fires caused six deaths, 16 injuries, and $14.8 million in direct property damage.

· On average, one of every 32 reported home fires that began with a Christmas tree resulted in a death, compared to an average of one death per 143 total reported home fires.
· Electrical distribution or lighting equipment was involved in two of every five home Christmas tree fires.

Bart Chambers, fire marshal for the state of Nevada, stressed how important it is to check the water level for trees on a daily basis.

“You need to make sure your tree is maintained,” Chambers said. If needles are falling, that’s a bad sign.

It’s also important to cut off a couple inches from the base once the tree is at home so it will be able to absorb that water. That’s because once a tree is cut pitch covers the base, forming a scab of sorts that prevents it from taking in water.

Chambers told *Lake Tahoe News* the number of Christmas tree fires across the country is holding steady, but fire officials would like to reduce that number because most are preventable.

Another issue with a fire with a dry tree is that it is going to produce thick, dark smoke. That could create evacuation difficulties for people. A healthy tree is going to give off a gray smoke that is less dense.

In the demonstration the dry tree was fully engulfed within 30 seconds. The smoke alarm sounded at 4 seconds. The walls of the structure it was in were blackened. This could have been someone’s family room – a total loss.

For the healthy tree, it had some damage to the back after 90 seconds. The smoke alarm sounded after 15 seconds. The sprinklers kept it in fairly good condition.

Former Stateline school back on the market

The Douglas County School District board at a special meeting on Dec. 18 voted to put the former Kingsbury Middle School site back on the market for $3.4 million.

This is the midpoint between two appraisals the district has for the Stateline parcel. The most recent appraisal was done this fall and came in at $3.75 million, while and earlier one listed it as $3.15 million.

If someone comes forward soon, the bid could be discussed at the board's Jan. 9 meeting.

More than a year ago the board entered an agreement with Patrick Taylor to purchase the site. He was never able to come up with the money so it fell out of escrow. His intent was to build affordable housing.

The 22-plus acre site with 36,000-square-feet of space had an original price tag of $4 million and has been as low as $3.15 million.

KMS has been dormant since the end of the 2007-08 school year. It was closed because of declining enrollment.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Firefighter’s Dec. death underscores CalFire’s ‘new normal’

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

Last week’s death of a state firefighter battling a December blaze in Ventura County underscored a stark message from this year’s devastating fires: There is no end to fire season in California anymore.

Since 2004, no CalFire firefighter had died on duty after October in a calendar year. That changed when the so-called Thomas Fire on Thursday overtook San Diego-based engineer Cory Iverson, a 32-year-old firefighter who left behind a pregnant wife and a 2-year-old daughter.

His death stunned the department not only because it lost a veteran firefighter, but also because it occurred so late in the year.

Read the whole story

Stranger saves dog that fell through ice in SLT



Ice at lake level is seldom strong enough to hold a person. Photo/SLTFD

A good Samaritan had to be taken to Barton Memorial Hospital on Monday for mild hypothermia after rescuing a dog in the Tahoe Keys.

“A pregnant lady was walking her dog. The dog got loose or ended up on the ice and fell through the ice,” South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News*. “A passer-by came by and jumped in to rescue dog, which she did.”

Ice has formed along part of the Upper Truckee River, in the canal by Cove East and on the edge of Lake Tahoe in various places.

“When it’s cold and the Keys freeze you should never go out on it. It’s not thick enough to walk or skate on,” Meston warned.

Clearly, not everyone is heeding that warning. On the same day, Dec. 18, a man was seen ice skating on the canal by 15th Street. And a family regularly places hockey on a canal behind Tahoe Valley Elementary School.

Meston said a recent training video put out by Reno Fire Department said 3- to 4-inch thick ice is only solid enough to hold 200 pounds.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

STPUD impersonator tries to enter house

South Tahoe Public Utility District was notified of an individual posing as a district staff member last weekend. The incident occurred off North Upper Truckee.

A customer received a knock at the door and the man asked to be let into the house to shut-off the water because the customer did not pay their bill on time. The customer said no.

South Tahoe Public Utility District will never contact people after hours regarding payment and will never shut-off water for non-payment on the weekend. District staff will only come to your house after hours if called out for an emergency. District staff will never ask to come into your home as the main water shut-off valve is at the street.

District staff will always be in uniform and driving a district vehicle.

District staff is available at all times to answer calls at 530.544.6474.

Calif. regulators back fire safety rules following lethal infernos

By George Avalos, Bay Area News Group

State regulators last week approved new rules aimed at improving fire safety in multiple areas of California, a move taken after an array of deadly infernos in the North Bay and Southern California.

PG&E and other utilities in the fire-prone Golden State would be required to increase the minimum clearances between trees and other vegetation and electrical equipment such as power and transmission lines, under wide-ranging rules adopted by the Public Utilities Commission.

“This decision adopts new regulations to enhance the fire safety of overhead electric power lines and communication lines located in high fire-threat areas,” PUC staffers wrote in a proposal that was approved by the PUC.

Read the whole story