

Retailers don't use traditional calendar for pushing holiday goods

By McClatchy Newspapers

September had barely started, but that didn't stop retailers from talking Christmas: Wal-Mart said it would begin its holiday-layaway promotion just two weeks after Labor Day – a full month early. A few days later, Toys R Us and Kmart said they'd do away with layaway fees altogether.

One might say they were late to the holiday party. A Neiman Marcus in Oak Brook, Ill., debuted a decked-out display of Christmas trees, collectibles and holiday decor in August.

Fretting that an upcoming presidential election, rising energy and food costs as well as ongoing job fears could cause skittish consumers to tighten their purse strings, retailers are drumming up ways to persuade them to shop early and often.

They'll spend the next few months vying for shoppers' attention and dollars, aiming to drive all-important holiday sales, which make up roughly 25 percent of their yearly profits, according to the International Council of Shopping Centers.

By starting promotions while it's still hot outside, retailers are making a calculated move to stay in front of consumers and lock in their loyalty early, say retail experts. Early estimates from ShopperTrak predict a 3.3 percent gain this year from last. Foot traffic in stores, which was down last year, is expected to pick up 2.8 percent.

That's a brighter forecast than the 3 percent gain predicted for the last year's holiday-shopping season, which ended up as

a mixed bag for retailers. Many scratched out sales gains of 3.4 percent year-over-year, according to Thomson Reuters, but that was bolstered by deep discounts. By comparison, in 2010, retailers realized same-store sales gains of 4 percent.

If consumers start spending earlier, they're more likely to spend more and buy more if they aren't rushed by a holiday deadline, added Edward Fox, associate professor of marketing at Southern Methodist University's Cox School of Business in Dallas.

But that's one big if.

Overall, retail sales this year have been bumpy. Consumer confidence has been low and employment gains uneven. Robust back-to-school sales, however, gave a number of retailers a boost, with a nearly 6 percent gain in August, according to research firm Retail Metrics.

Working in retailers' favor is that they'll have more time this year to complete sales. This year, the calendar dictates that the holiday-shopping season will last five weeks, instead of the typical four.

Analysts also are betting on an uptick in online shopping this year, namely in electronics and appliances, as shoppers continue "showrooming" – browsing retailers' brick-and-mortar stores for items and then searching online for the best deal.

Valley fire consumes 1,500

acres; Round Hill fire out quickly

Updated Sept. 21 10:45pm:

The Carter Springs Fire in Douglas County had burned more than 1,500 acres as of late Friday night. It is estimated to be 5 percent contained.

Highway 395 is expected to remain closed from Riverview on the north and at Kingsbury Grade on the south through the night.

Fire officials said the threat to the 30 residences has decreased, but if the fire were to jump the highway it would be a different story.

Power lines are down in the area, which is impacting some customers in the area.

Two fires are burning in Douglas County Friday afternoon. One is burning near Elks Point Road and Highway 50 and is all but contained as of 5:30pm.

Fire crews for Tahoe Douglas Fire and the U.S. Forest Service jumped on the 3-acre blaze quickly. The fire started at 3:30pm. No structures were threatened. It's believed to be human caused and is under investigation.

The other Douglas County fire is located near Highway 395 between Pine Valley Road and Ray May Way. As of 5:30 pm, this blaze is burning "pretty aggressively" according to the Tahoe Douglas Fire spokesman Eric Guevin. This 12:20pm blaze is also believed to be human caused and may be due to a discarded cigarette, Guevin added. This fire is also under investigation.

Nevada welfare agencies sent checks to dead people

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Since 2007, Nevada state agencies have continued to pay welfare and food stamp benefits to a small number of recipients who had died, according to a legislative audit released Wednesday.

The report found the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services sent benefits to 27 of the 50 dead recipients analyzed by legislative auditors. The loss to the state was \$6,000.

More than \$500 million was distributed to food stamp and welfare recipients during fiscal 2011.

Assemblywoman Maggie Carlton, D-Las Vegas, said she doesn't condone the benefits being sent after the person's death. But she called it a small problem.

Since 2007, the number of Nevadans receiving food stamps grew 172 percent to 153,934 recipients. And those in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program increased 64 percent to 11,982 families.

Legislative Auditor Paul Townsend agreed it was not a "huge problem" but the division should keep a closer watch on sending electronic benefit transfer cards to dead recipients.

Steve Fisher, acting administrator of the welfare division,

called it a “small problem” considering the amount of benefits paid. But he said steps have been taken to better check when a client dies.

Women more likely to die at hands of a man in Nev. than any other state

By Samantha Boatman, KOL0-TV

A study released by the Violence Policy Center ranks Nevada as No. 1 for the third year in a row for the number of women killed by men.

Nevada has topped the list five out of the last six years.

The study says the rate of women killed by men is 2.62 per 100,000. This rate is more than double the national average.

According to the study, 35 women were killed by men back in 2010.

These murders don't seem to be all random acts of violence against women. Actually, 91 percent of the female victims knew their killer, and more than half of the killers were ex-boyfriends, boyfriends, ex-husbands or husbands.

The executive director of the Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence, Sue Meuschke, says, “Reducing domestic violence homicide is the responsibility of all Nevada's communities. As this report points out, women in Nevada are at a higher risk of being victims of homicide perpetrated by people they know and love. Much more must be done in our state to change this

outcome.”

The study is released around the same time every year. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Incline experiencing rash of residential burglaries

Incline Village residents have been reporting people entering their homes while they are at home.

Washoe County sheriff's deputies have put out an alert to residents about a series of residential burglaries that started Sept. 1. They are usually during the early morning hours.

The suspects are entering through unlocked doors and window.

Anyone with information or who sees suspicious activity is asked to call (775) 785.9276.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Hwy. 395 in south Douglas

County closed because of fire

Updated 1:55 pm:

The fire has grown to approximately 30 acres and is threatening structures in the the area.

A unified command has been established with East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts and Bureau of Land Management.

One helicopter is on scene providing water drops. Others have been ordered.

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East Fork Fire and Paramedic District is working a nearly 5-acre wildland fire in the hillside east of the Spring Valley area just south of Leviathan Mine Road.

The fire is close to Highway 395, and reportedly moving toward homes in the area.

Highway 395 is temporarily closed at Ray May Way in the north, and Pine Valley Road in the south, to allow East Fork Fire units to access the area.

**Nevada public education
funding options remain**

elusive

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

RENO – Northern Nevada state lawmakers and candidates in the November general election identified a number of public education priorities at a forum here Monday, from ending social promotion to paying the best performing teachers more to making much-needed capital improvements to older Washoe County schools.

But those participating in the event at Reno High School at the invitation of the nonpartisan group Parent Leaders for Education had few specifics about where funding to implement the ideas will come from when the Legislature convenes next February.

Those participating included Sen. Greg Brower, R-Reno, and former Sen. Sheila Leslie, a Democrat challenging Brower for the new District 15 seat. Sen. Ben Kieckhefer, R-Reno, who is not up for re-election, also participated, as did Assemblyman Pat Hickey, R-Reno, who is running unopposed for another term in District 25.

The panel was rounded out with two Assembly Democrats running for new terms and their Republican opponents. David Bobzien faces Heidi Waterman in District 24 and Teresa Benitez-Thompson faces Tom Taber in District 27.

Several of the participants identified the need to find revenue to repair and renovate the Washoe County School District's older schools as the top priority for the delegation next year.

Kieckhefer said those studying the issue are seeking about \$15 million to \$20 million annually in revenue that could be used to make repairs to more than half of the district's schools that are more than 30 years old and are in need of major

repairs.

Brower said Washoe County lawmakers are working toward a solution to repair the county's schools and sell the proposal to Southern Nevada lawmakers who will ultimately have to support any funding option.

"It will be the best investment I think we can make in our schools in Washoe County for decades to come," he said.

Leslie issued a note of caution to those attending the forum, saying past experience has shown that even bipartisan priorities, such as finding revenue to repair older schools, can be derailed in a legislative session.

"And I don't want to sound like a cynic, but I've been through it several times," Leslie said. "And so I think meetings like this where you put people on the spot, and I'm willing to be put on the spot and tell you that I will vote for just about any revenue source I can think of right now, to improve our schools. But you need to put the pressure on all of us to make sure that we find a solution and we don't get to the end of the session and say oops, sorry, can't do that."

Brower said he agrees with Gov. Brian Sandoval, who announced earlier this year that he will propose to extend a package of taxes now set to sunset on June 30, 2013, into the next two-year budget to ensure that there are no further budget reductions for public schools or higher education.

But Leslie said the Legislature needs to do more than maintain the status quo and instead find a way to restore the \$123 million cut from Washoe County schools over the past five years. Nevada ranks poorly in many national rankings, including ranking 50th in the number of children who attend preschool, she said.

"So obviously we can't cut any more but what we really need to do is find a way to put that money back," she said.

Hickey said he does not believe that raising taxes to find more revenue for education is likely to see any serious consideration at the next session. An option he favors is to look at shifting money that now goes to corrections and health and human services to public education.

Spending more on public education now so that money doesn't have to be spent later on prisons is a better investment in the long term, Hickey said. Even so, several neighboring states, including Utah and Arizona, spend less per pupil but perform better than Nevada, he said.

"It's wiser to educate than incarcerate," Hickey said. "So we do need to spend more, we do need to spend wisely, but money is not the entire answer."

Bobzien, who served as chairman of the Assembly Education Committee in 2011, said a number of major reforms were passed in a bipartisan show of support. But those reforms won't turn Nevada's schools around over the long term without adequate financial support, he said.

Waterman said the findings of the Sage Commission, established by former Gov. Jim Gibbons to find ways to make state government more efficient, need to be considered by lawmakers. Eliminating duplicative programs could help find money for public education, she said.

Benitez-Thompson said specific policy proposals are fine, but lawmakers need to look at the overall funding challenges facing public education. Ending social promotion from the third to the fourth grade is fine, but there are costs involved when children are held back, she said. Those children will need additional assistance so they can succeed, Benitez-Thompson said.

Taber said teachers need to be given more control over their classrooms to help their students achieve. Funding also needs to be allocated with a business-oriented approach to ensure it

is spent wisely, he said.

“Business sense is important,” Taber said.

South Tahoe working on disabled plan – 20 years late

By Kathryn Reed

Twenty years after the federal government mandated accessibility to public buildings for the disabled, South Lake Tahoe has adopted a plan to make this a reality.



While the city believes it would take \$3.5 million to bring all of its facilities into compliance, the Tahoe Area Coordination Council for the Disabled believes that figure is closer to \$5 million.

The City Council this month approved a plan to get the city's facilities into compliance. It's not that the city has not done anything, it's that it needs to do more.

“Our newer buildings have been built to the code requirements enforced at that time, but the codes keep changing so upgrades are required as time passes,” Dave Walker, city building official, wrote in his Sept. 4 staff report.

Compliance goes beyond the obvious accessibility for those with wheelchairs. It involves providing access to people with hearing, sight and other disabilities.

Besides wanting to accommodate locals and visitors with

disabilities, the city also wants to protect itself against what many consider frivolous lawsuits.

Gov. Jerry Brown this week by signing Senate Bill 1186 is helping the city and small business owners in that regard. Even Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has weighed-in on this issue. She wrote a letter to Brown urging him to sign the legislation.

“Numerous small businesses and chambers of commerce in California have expressed to me their concern about the increasing number of predatory lawsuits and coercive demand letters that have been filed against small business owners for technical noncompliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As you know, I proudly support the ADA, but after learning of the alarming rate of demand letters sent to “mom and pop shops” requesting settlements that ranged from \$5,000 to \$90,000, it became clear to me that reform in this area of the law is necessary,” Feinstein wrote.

The bill bans attorneys from sending demand letters for money, reduces statutory damages from \$4,000 to \$2,000 for defendants who correct violations within 30 days of being served the complaint and prevent stacking of multiple claims used to increase statutory damages.

South Lake Tahoe businesses are not immune to these types of lawsuits and will be aided by the state legislation.

The city will be educating all staff about their responsibility to the disabled. Barriers to the disabled will be removed through the capital improvement program.

The first course of action is accessible parking at all public facilities.

“Over the course of eight years we hope to have path of travel to our building, meeting rooms, restrooms, recreational features and sidewalks made compliant,” Walker wrote in his

report.

LTCC students learning the impact of gender bias in ads

By Susan Wood

While politicians declare war on women's issues, the battleground actually started long ago in the media world.

This is what longtime Lake Tahoe Community College sociology Professor Scott Lukas has discovered.

A decade ago, Lukas focused on gender bias in advertising for one of his sociology classes. His students became so widely interested they asked him for the PowerPoint presentation. The topic became so intriguing, Lukas took the 50 images he gathered depicting women in compromising, denigrating positions and installed them with analysis into a website.



The exploitation of women in ads is the subject of a class at LTCC. Photo/Provided

The site has grown to more than 3,000 images. Lukas still calls it “a work in progress” despite having worldwide readership.

The topic that now features television shows has morphed into its own class – and started this week at LTCC called Gender. (It’s under the Sociology Department.)

Lukas, who has made presentations on the project, including one before the LTCC board, went on a sabbatical from teaching last year to complete the project. This enabled him to delve deeply into how simple images may spur sexism, violence, child abuse, homophobia and even torture.

Noting a curious situation, the project’s report asks: “Why should we accept the association of a product, such as a stereo system or a table and a sexualized woman?”

So why should we care and why can’t we tune out what we don’t want to hear or see?

“Everyone is impacted by gender issues because the effects can

be tragic," Lukas told *Lake Tahoe News*, further citing the Jerry Sandusky case as an example. The former Penn State assistant football coach was convicted of severe child abuse charges, including rape.

A major concern is in a society where the population picks up a barrage of images that show women and children being abused, objectified or sexualized (even in the mildest form) desensitizing effects take place. One exhibit on the website highlighted a television show called "Toddlers and Tiaras" in which a young girl is dressed up as the prostitute character in the hit movie "Pretty Women". And in an episode of "America's Top Model," models were asked to pose as crime victims.

These images are prevalent in "Big Daddy" ads with professional racecar driver Danica Patrick breaking the mold for women in the workplace resorts to her looks to sell the product.

"In a sense, ads have gone backward," Lukas said of the pendulum swinging for women's equality.

"We laugh at it all the time," South Shore veteran ad man Bruce Rettig said of the times he and his wife watch ads on television.

In the big picture, Rettig called objectifying women as the "Barbie syndrome" in which girls want to obtain the body of a perfect model and that if you look at the demographic the ad is reaching, one might find that "maybe a large segment" looks to the images to tell them who to look up to or aspire to be. Then, there's the obvious – sex sells.

"It seems that way as a part of human nature. It's a shame," Rettig said.

Even a small town like South Lake Tahoe cannot escape stereotypes that perpetuate the images – no matter how

innocent they seem. Take the casino ads that show women in tight-fitting outfits wildly dancing and partying. Sure, they look fun. But they represent something larger going on at a societal level.



"Everyone is impacted by gender issues because the effects can be tragic."

– Scott Lukas

"We have nothing to the level of Las Vegas or Los Angeles, but it's still there," Lukas said, referring to male-dominated sexism. "Awareness is key. We should be aware we're under the influence of these ads."

When Lukas first brought the topic to his classroom, he encountered a mixed reaction from students.

"The men felt more threatened. They learned the material, but they thought of it as propaganda," he said. Their behavioral theory was: "If you have differences in the sexes, men are perceived as weaker. That's part of their resistance," Lukas added.

The professor especially witnessed resistance when the class

discussed how former President George W. Bush brought back the “macho president” after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The subject of machismo hit close to home for one of Lukas’ male students, Jose Pena.

The origin of “machismo” comes from Spain, however its influence as an exaggerated display of male dominance over women spans many nations.

The conversation struck a chord with Pena because of his Hispanic background. Although he said he didn’t witness these types of relationships in his family, Pena has seen the behavior in some of his male friends when it comes to how they view their mates.

“This kind of goes hand-in-hand with the aspect of treating women as second-class citizens,” Pena said, citing the lack of equal pay for women and few breaking the glass ceiling. “I guess this would be the American equivalent of machismo.”

Nonetheless, Pena said he’s optimistic about what the future brings, but agrees it’s “an uphill battle” for society to accept the notion of “all totally equal in this land of opportunity.”

Progress may start with one person.

“I am a male that will forever recognize the hardships that females face on a daily basis. Like my mom always said: ‘For every bad person out there, let’s just hope that there (are) two more good ones to replace the bad one.’”

Nevadans to decide if legislators can call special session

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada voters will determine the fate of only one statewide measure in the Nov. 6 general election, but the proposal put on the ballot by the Legislature is somewhat controversial.

Question 1 on the ballot asks Nevada voters if the state Constitution should be amended to allow the Legislature, on extraordinary occasions and only with two-thirds support of lawmakers in each house, to call itself into special session. Sessions would be limited to 20 days, but could be convened on a continuous basis if the extraordinary occasion requirement was met and with two-thirds support from lawmakers.



The term “extraordinary occasions” is not defined in the proposed constitutional amendment.

The Constitution now says that only the governor can call a special session of the Legislature.

Currently, legislatures in 34 states are authorized to call a special session.

Nevada voters have rejected this concept once before, in 2006, by a margin of 52 percent to 48 percent.

The measure is on the ballot after Assembly Joint Resolution 5 was approved by the Legislature in both 2009 and 2011. In

2011, the proposal passed both houses only by a party line vote with all Republicans opposed.

Opponents of the proposal are concerned the change could move the Legislature away from its tradition of meeting on a part-time basis.

In a discussion of the ballot language for the question by the Legislative Commission in June, Senate Minority Leader Michael Roberson, R-Las Vegas, said the ability of lawmakers to continue special sessions indefinitely was a concern.

Assemblyman William Horne, D-Las Vegas, said at the commission meeting that giving lawmakers the authority to call themselves into special session could be important if a situation like that in Illinois arose with impeached Gov. Rod Blagojevich. It is unlikely that a governor facing impeachment would call a special session to allow for his removal from office, he said.

Sen. Mo Denis, D-Las Vegas, said in an interview this week that with the state getting bigger and issues sometimes requiring immediate attention, there are times the Legislature may need to convene itself into special session.

"I think it is closer to the people if the Legislature has the ability to do that," he said.

But Sen. Ben Kieckhefer, R-Reno, said this week he likes the way the system works now.

"I like the fact that we have a strong chief executive state," he said. "That the Legislature can't call itself into session for whatever purpose it chooses. I think the system that we have is functional for our state.

"And the idea that the Legislature can start calling itself into session whenever it wants just doesn't really fly with me," Kieckhefer said.

Special sessions of the Nevada Legislature have become more

frequent in recent years, in part because of the state's ongoing budget problems. But they have all been called by the sitting governor at the time. Gov. Brian Sandoval has not yet called for a special session in his 21 months in office.

The last special session was called in February 2010 by then Gov. Jim Gibbons to deal with a shortfall in the state budget. It lasted seven days.

There have been 10 special sessions of the Legislature since 2001. They were called for a variety of reasons, including tort reform for the medical industry and the impeachment of the late state Controller Kathy Augustine. Many were called because the Legislature could not finish its work by the constitutionally-mandated 120 days, a limit approved by voters in 1998 and taking effect for the first time in 1999.

Previously there had not been a special session since 1989.