

Yosemite hantavirus deaths at 3; more people at risk

By BBC

An additional 12,000 people who stayed at a remote campsite in California's Yosemite National Park are at risk from the deadly hantavirus, officials warn.

The warning comes as a West Virginian who visited the park in June became the third person to die from the virus.

Eight cases have been confirmed so far. There is no known cure for the virus, spread by infected rodent droppings.

Symptoms can take up to six weeks to show and one third of cases are fatal.

Yosemite National Park said it was getting about 1,000 calls per day to its hantavirus hotline from frightened visitors.

The hantavirus virus is carried in rodent faeces, urine and saliva. When it dries out and mixes with dust, it can be inhaled by humans, especially in small spaces.

The disease can also spread if people touch or eat contaminated substances, or are bitten by an infected animal.

Read the whole story

STHS grad dies in Bay Area

car accident

Publisher's note: *Sherwin Manalo and his brother, Ariel, and sister, Noreen, were all raised in South Lake Tahoe and graduated from South Tahoe High School. Sherwin Manalo was valedictorian of the class of 1993.*

By Bay City News Service

A 37-year-old man who was killed in a crash on Highway 92 in Hayward on Monday has been identified as Sherwin Manalo of San Mateo, the Alameda County coroner's bureau said.

According to the California Highway Patrol, Manalo was driving a 2001 BMW in the left lane of Highway 92 near Clawiter Road at about 11:30am when he abruptly turned right and crossed all four lanes of traffic.

Manalo's vehicle struck a 2001 Acura in the slow lane, causing both cars to veer off the roadway.

The Acura driver, a 25-year-old Fremont man, crashed his car into a fence and suffered minor injuries, the CHP said.

Manalo's car struck a tree and he was pronounced dead at the scene.

The crash remains under investigation by the CHP.

Name of man who died walking

along Hwy. 50 released

South Lake Tahoe police have released the name of the person killed Aug. 14 after he was hit by a vehicle.

Paul Plasencia, 49, of South Lake Tahoe died when he walking along Highway 50.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County wants to restructure library tax

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County voters on Nov. 6 will be asked if they want a countywide assessment that would tax people equally.

The library system is divided into five zones, with all but one having passed a tax. That area is in the middle of the county, which includes Placerville, Pollock Pines and Cameron Park.



The taxes that are currently collected stay in the zone where the money comes from, with the general fund filling in a substantial part of the library budget. The countywide tax is estimated to bring in an additional \$180,000 to the library system. That is a small amount based on what the overall library budget is.

How the additional money would be distributed would be up to the Board of Supervisors. However, library Director Jeanne

Amos will come up with recommendations for the board.

The goal isn't so much to raise more money, but instead make funding of libraries fair and equitable, as well as have a more solid base.

"The library funding is literally all over the map. It makes it difficult to run an effective library system because the funding is uncertain," Mike Applegarth, principal analyst in the county's Chief Administrative Office, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The proposed tax rate would be the same as what single-family residences in the Tahoe basin pay today – \$17.58 a year, with a potential increase of 3 percent based on the Consumer Price Index. County supervisors picked the lowest fee that was being collected and opted to put that amount on the ballot. So, for some areas their library fee would be decreased if this passes in two months.

If two-thirds of the voters agree to the tax, it would replace any library tax currently in place. It would be good for 15 years.

If it does not pass, the South Shore and Georgetown taxes are set to expire in 2015. However, it is likely voters would be asked to renew those initiatives down the road.

Total library operations are \$3,334,010 for the 2012-13 fiscal year. Most of that money is from library taxes, with about 45 percent – or nearly \$1.5 million – coming from the general fund.

Branches also have "friends of the library" groups that help put on all the programs that are outside of a book being loaned.

Library usage in El Dorado County has increased through the years. In 2007-08, there were 85,000 library cards – 91,000 in

2011-12; there were 745,000 checkouts in 07-08 and 880,000 in 11-12; and in 07-08 there were 697 children's programs and 1,027 in 11-12.

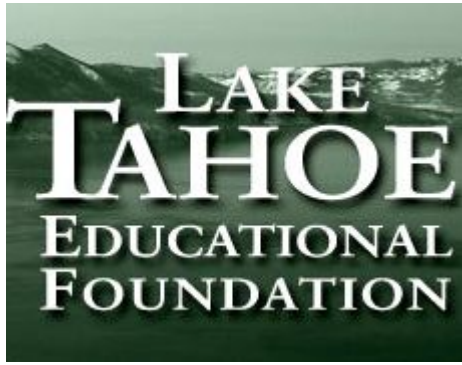
The county operates six libraries – in South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado Hills, Cameron Park, Placerville, Georgetown and Pollock Pines – and a bookmobile.

Donation to education group tainted by link to South Lake Tahoe bribery, drug case

Updated: Sept. 6, 2012, 9:30pm.

By Kathryn Reed

The Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation appears to be helping South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman Angela Swanson cover up a donation from Gino DiMatteo.



Nancy Rollston, president of the nonprofit foundation, Swanson and DiMatteo met this summer at least once to discuss a donation by DiMatteo to the group.

At that time DiMatteo operated the medical marijuana collective called City of Angels II. It was also known that the U.S. Attorney General's Office was cracking down on collectives in California. Medical marijuana dispensaries at various times have been a closed session item on City Council agendas, so Swanson has privileged information and more knowledge than the average citizen in South Lake Tahoe about that segment of the community.

It was well-known that the dispensaries were all under the radar of law enforcement for potential illegal drug activity. Why an education group that helps students in Lake Tahoe Unified School District, that has an FBI agent on its board, would accept his money is not known because their president is withholding information from the media.

And according to Chris Campion, the FBI agent who is on the board and is past president of the foundation, Rollston is the spokesperson for the group.

"The bottom line right now is we are not going to be talking about it. If that changes in the next few days, we will get back in contact with you," Campion told *Lake Tahoe News*.

DiMatteo is now behind bars in Placerville on charges of bribing a public official (Swanson), possession of marijuana for sale, possession of a controlled substance and possession of ammunition.

A bail hearing the afternoon of Sept. 7 could determine if he

will be released as his case goes through the court system.

Swanson has not been charged with any crime, but her name has been used in documents by the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, the lead agency in the case, stating she is the one who DiMatteo allegedly bribed.

Lake Tahoe News has been told by sources that Swanson had secured one or two \$5,000 donations from DiMatteo for the Ed Foundation. Swanson is on the Ed Foundation's board.

KRNV-TV in Reno reports having a letter from Ed Foundation President Rollston thanking DiMatteo for his donation of \$1,128, with a handwritten addendum saying, "Your donation was extremely generous and is greatly appreciated."

Other officers on the Ed Foundation board are Pradip Patel-vice president, Jerry Bindel-treasurer (he could not be reached at his office after 5pm Sept. 6), Debra McHugh-secretary, and Campion-past president.

The other board members are Tyler Cannon, Greg Bergner, Paige Cefalu, Jana DiGrande, Bill Kingman, Jen David, Lee Anne Stigers-Genasci, Christina Proctor, Joe Marzocco, Brain Hogan, Coleen Shade, Diane Rosner, Julie Lucksinger, Cookie Rork, and Tom Davis.

Campion said he would not comment on whether the donation from DiMatteo raised red flags because who made the donation or how it was handled.

City Councilman Davis said, "I have not been active in the Ed Foundation for some time. I have no knowledge of [any] donation whatsoever. Period."

Rollston said, "I have no response or comment to any of your questions."

There is question whether information about the foundation's donors are public record.

Swanson said at this time she is not commenting further about anything related to the case.

Even if all of the money DiMatteo gave the Ed Foundation ended up in the appropriate bank account, Swanson had a duty to report the transaction to the California Fair Political Practices Commission. She also had an obligation to report it to the City Council to disclose an entity she was involved with was benefiting from someone who the city was doing business with. Neither of these things occurred.

It is not known if she consulted City Attorney Patrick Enright.

Lake Tahoe News asked Enright if he gave Swanson any advice about anything involving the case. He said, "I can't comment at this time while the investigation is going on."

However, *Lake Tahoe News* has learned Enright is the one who recommended Swanson hire the attorney she has retained out of Sacramento.

Study touts new measures for

teacher effectiveness

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – As Nevada policymakers work to ensure that ineffective teachers are removed from classrooms around the state, a report released this week provides evidence to support the use of test scores to measure how much individual teachers contribute to pupil achievement.

Using quantitative measures to evaluate teachers, known as value-added modeling (VAM), remains controversial, said Marcus Winters, a senior fellow with the Manhattan Institute's Center for State and Local Leadership.

But in his report called Transforming Tenure: Using Value-Added Modeling to Identify Ineffective Teachers, Winters said his analysis using data from Florida public schools shows that a VAM score in a teacher's third year in the classroom is a good predictor of that teacher's success in the fifth year of teaching after receiving tenure.

"VAM is not a perfect measure of teacher quality because, like any statistical test, it is subject to random measurement errors," Winters said in his report. "So it should not be regarded as the 'magic bullet' solution to the problem of evaluating teacher performance.

"However, the method is reliable enough to be part of a sensible policy of tenure reform – one that replaces 'automatic' tenure with rigorous evaluation of new candidates and periodic reexamination of those who have already received tenure," he said.

Winters, an assistant professor at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, discussed his report in a telephone conference Wednesday with the news media.

"The idea is by looking at student test scores and by matching students to their teachers, we can identify which are the effective teachers – which are the teachers that are having a positive effect on student learning as measured by their test score growth – and which teachers are just not doing as well," he said.

The findings show that the value-added analysis is a good predictor of future teacher performance, Winters said.

"What this means is that value-added is potentially a useful tool for identifying a teacher's future performance, which is what we really want out of an evaluation system," he said. "And on top of that, I show that value-added is actually a far better predictor of a teacher's future performance than is a measure that is commonly used by the current system, which is obtainment of a master's degree."

The analysis comes as Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval is pushing for improved teacher accountability as a way to improve student achievement. Sandoval was successful in getting a number of reforms passed in the 2011 legislative session, including a requirement that student achievement data must be at least half of, but not the sole factor, in evaluating teachers.

Lawmakers also supported the creation of the Teachers and Leaders Council of Nevada, which is charged with making recommendations by December of this year to the state Board of Education for the creation of a statewide performance evaluation system for teachers and administrators.

The Board of Education has until June 1, 2013, to adopt regulations establishing the performance evaluation system, which then must be implemented in the state's 17 school districts by the 2013-14 school year.

Overall teacher performance will be ranked as highly effective, effective, minimally effective or ineffective.

The 2011 legislative changes also require an additional probationary period for teachers and administrators who receive unsatisfactory evaluations.

Sandoval is expected to pursue further education reforms in the upcoming legislative session, including ending social promotion of students.

Tennessee was the first state to develop and use value-added models, according to the Data Quality Campaign.

Yosemite hantavirus warning affects travelers outside U.S.

By Laura Bly, USA Today

U.S. officials have warned travelers from 39 other countries, most in the European Union, that those who stayed in certain Yosemite National Park tent cabins earlier this summer may have been exposed to a rare but deadly mouse-borne hantavirus, a park service epidemiologist told *Reuters* Tuesday.

Of the 10,000 people thought to be at risk of contracting hantavirus pulmonary syndrome from their stays in Yosemite between June and August, some 2,500 live outside the United States, Dr. David Wong told *Reuters* in an interview.

Wong said U.S. Department of Health and Human Services officials notified 39 countries over the weekend, most of them in the European Union, that their residents may have been exposed to the deadly virus.

The lung disease has so far killed two men and sickened four other people, all U.S. citizens, prompting the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to issue a health alert.

Officials are concerned that more Yosemite visitors could develop the lung disease in the next month or so. Most of the victims identified so far were believed to have been infected while staying in one of 91 "Signature" tent-style cabins in the park's popular Curry Village camping area.

There is no cure for the disease, but early detection through blood tests greatly increases survival rates.

"I want people to know about this so they take it seriously," Wong said. "We're doing our due diligence to share the information."

Last week, park officials shut down the insulated "Signature" tent cabins after finding deer mice, which carry the disease and can burrow through holes the size of pencil erasers, infesting the double walls.

Officials are continuing to investigate additional possible cases of the disease, which has killed 64 Californians and about 590 Americans since it was identified in 1993, Wong said.

Early symptoms include headache, fever, muscle aches, shortness of breath and coughing. The virus may incubate for up to six weeks after exposure and can lead to severe breathing difficulties and death.

Experts say hantavirus, which kills 36 percent of those it infects, has never been known to be transmitted between humans.

Four of those known to be infected at Yosemite this summer slept in the insulated tent cabins. One slept elsewhere in Curry Village, located in a valley beneath the iconic Half

Dome rock formation, and the sixth case remains under investigation.

One man from Northern California and another from Pennsylvania died, while three victims have recovered and a fourth remains hospitalized, the state Department of Public Health said.

Nearly 4 million people visit Yosemite each year, attracted to the park's dramatic scenery and hiking trails. Roughly 70 percent of those visitors congregate in Yosemite Valley, where Curry Village is located.

Hantavirus is carried in viral particles inhaled from rodent feces and urine. People also can be infected by eating contaminated food, touching contaminated surfaces or being bitten by infected rodents.

Hantavirus previously infected two Yosemite visitors, one in 2000 and another in 2010, but at higher elevations. U.S. officials have warned travelers from 39 other countries, most in the European Union, that those who stayed in certain Yosemite National Park tent cabins earlier this summer may have been exposed to a rare but deadly mouse-borne hantavirus, a park service epidemiologist told Reuters Tuesday.

Of the 10,000 people the federal Centers for Disease Control estimate could be at risk of contracting hantavirus pulmonary syndrome from their stays in Yosemite between June 10 and August 24, some 2,500 live outside the USA, said Dr. David Wong.

Britain's Health Protection Agency said in a statement Monday that officials were "providing health advice and information ... about the ongoing situation in the U.S." to about 100 people believed to have traveled to the national park between June 10 and Aug. 24.

Yosemite officials have sent emails and letters to 3,100 people who reserved any of the 91 signature tent cabins during

that timeframe, urging them or anyone in their party to seek immediate medical attention if they start to show the initial flu-like symptoms of the disease, *Associated Press* reports.

Read the whole story

Truckee biomass unit would curtail the number of U.S. Forest Service control burns

By Kathryn Reed

TAHOE CITY – If the biomass facility that is proposed to be built between Truckee and Tahoe City comes to fruition, it will mean the U.S. Forest Service would be burning less material that is left over from fuel reduction projects.

It also means energy will be created and put into the state's grid.

What makes this system different than most biomass facilities is that it would be a gasification unit.



This is what the proposed biomass facility would look like. Rendering/Wood Rodgers

“It heats the wood without burning it. You don’t have the smoke,” Gerry Haas with the Placer County planning division told planning commissioners last week. He said the plant would create a thermo-chemical reaction.

The two people who spoke at the public hearing at Granlibakken conference center had mixed things to say about the Cabin Creek Biomass Facility project. The public has until Sept. 10 at 5pm to submit comments on the draft environmental impact report.

One person who spoke would like the plant to make biodiesel and do more than what is proposed. A spokeswoman for the Sierra Business Council said her group is worried federal air quality standards will not be met and would like a baseline established before the facility is built.

Placer County supervisors in 2007 adopted a plan to deal with excess wood materials.

Originally, Kings Beach had been targeted as the site for the biomass facility. However, vocal opposition nixed that idea. That is when the Eastern Regional Landfill and Materials Recovery Facility entered the discussion. It is two miles south of Truckee off Highway 89.

What is being proposed is an 11,000-square-foot, two-story

structure to convert the wood waste into energy. It would be a 2-megawatt facility.

The infrastructure is in place to carry the energy that would be generated. It would go along a transmission line crossing the Truckee River to the main line.

“The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit supports the development of a biomass facility close to Lake Tahoe. We’ve worked closely with Placer County to find ways to increase biomass utilization,” USFS spokeswoman Cheva Heck told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Over the next 10 years, we will be implementing an aggressive hazardous forest fuels reduction program on national forest system lands around the lake, and a biomass facility located nearby increases our options for eliminating these fuels, while helping to address energy needs.”

If the Cabin Creek facility is built, it would be considered a pilot project, according to Haas. He said it’s possible another one could be built at Forest Hill.

The draft EIR is online.

Report: More Americans struggling to put food on table

By NPR

An estimated 14.9 percent of U.S. households – 17.9 million in

total – “had difficulty” at some point last year getting food because they just didn’t have enough money or other resources, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported this morning.

In 2010, 14.5 percent of households were similarly “food insecure” at some point, USDA says.

Even worse: “In 2011, 5.7 percent of U.S. households (6.8 million households and one-third of all food-insecure households) had very low food security. In these households, the food intake of some household members was reduced and normal eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year due to limited resources.”

In other words, people went hungry.

An estimated 5.4 percent of households suffered such “very low food security” in 2010.

Earlier, NPR’s Pam Fessler reported for our Newscast Desk that the food security report “comes a day after the agriculture department reported that food stamp usage hit an all-time high in June. In June, 46.7 million people received what are now called supplemental nutrition assistance program, or SNAP, benefits.”

Californians debate merits of death penalty before November vote

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Sharron Mankins, McGregor Scott and Bill Babbitt each have

watched a man die inside the death chamber at San Quentin State Prison, and each has a strong view on whether voters should end California's death penalty in November.

Even after 20 years, Mankins has no regrets about watching Robert Alton Harris die by cyanide gas for the 1978 murders of her 16-year-old son, Michael Baker, and his friend John Mayeski.

"We saw justice served," the 69-year-old Southern California woman said in an interview last month. "It took a long time, but it helped us all.

"I think it helped the whole family."

Scott, who witnessed the lethal-injection execution of Darrell Rich in March 2000 as the Shasta County district attorney, remembers the event with almost clinical precision.

"I do not want to minimize or downplay the fact that the man's life was taken that night," Scott said of the so-called "Hilltop Rapist," who killed four young women in a 1978 crime spree.

"But what I observed that evening could not in any way be described as cruel or unusual punishment. It was a very calm process in which he appeared to go to sleep. And that was it."

To Mankins and Scott, the death penalty is an important tool for prosecutors and victims, one that they both believe should be retained.

For Babbitt, it is a costly waste and a reminder of the night in 1999 that he watched his brother, Manuel Babbitt, die by injection for the murder of 78-year-old Leah Schendel of Sacramento.

"Why don't we take the money and fix people like Manny Babbitt ..., take that money and try to solve crimes?" asked Babbitt, who turned his brother in to police after Schendel's slaying.

These are the opposing viewpoints that will play out in the coming weeks over Proposition 34, which asks voters to end the death penalty in California and allow death row inmates to be resentenced to life in prison without any chance of parole.

Read the whole story