Allegations swirl around El Dorado County judge candidate

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The case of a fugitive jailed in Sacramento on federal fraud charges this week may have ramifications in the June 5 race for El Dorado Superior Court judge.

Daniel Chartraw, now held without bail on the fraud charges, was once represented by candidate Joseph A. Hoffman in another matter, and some observers question whether Hoffman acted properly on Chartraw's behalf.

Hoffman's supporters, including prominent members of the legal community, say they've seen no indication of any wrongdoing.

Hoffman's publicist Greg Jones released a statement saying: "Judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals endorsing Joe know the law and see this for what it is: a desperate and politically motivated ploy that lacks any substance."

Much of Hoffman's connection to Chartraw comes out in a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court in February, accusing Chartraw of using interstate means to commit fraud in 2010 and 2011.

That complaint was used when Chartraw was arrested in San Ysidro in late April, after Mexican authorities detained him in Baja California.

Read the whole story

Lakeview Commons – battle rages on over lease, name

By Kathryn Reed

Does the landowner or the lessee have the right to name a piece of property?

That is the fundamental question as to what the name of Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe will permanently be called.

City officials believe the name is fine based on the decision earlier this month not to sit with county officials to discuss the name.

Ever since the county leased this land to South Lake Tahoe the two government bodies have been squabbling. Photo/Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County officials on Tuesday spent considerable time discussing the whole area, which includes both sides of

Highway 50. The entire area is loosely called the 56-acre project because that is how large the area is.

Phase one of two for the waterfront area is what is called Lakeview Commons. But at issue is how it got the name, whether it was a working name and who gets to have final say regarding the name.

Supervisor Norma Santiago gave a history about the area, which goes back to the 1920s when longtime families gave the land to the county to be used in perpetuity as open space.

South Lake Tahoe leases the land from the county. Through the years a number of agreements, leases, and memorandums of understanding have been signed between the government bodies.

South Lake Tahoe Assistant City Manager Nancy Kerry spoke on behalf of the city and for the council at the May 8 supervisors' meeting in Placerville.

"It's a false controversy about the name that has been used well over three years," Kerry said. She even pointed out how all the supervisors' documents listed the discussion item as Lakeview Commons.

Santiago, to her board said, "I ask for support for county counsel to work with our facilities group to look at the lease for clarity of what is contained in the lease in regards to any aspects of what happens on this property."

On the May 15 council agenda is an item to possibly appoint a subcommittee for review of the lease agreement at El Dorado Beach-Lakeview Commons.

Supervisor Jack Sweeney has records dating to 1968 that he cited, where the land is called South Lake Tahoe-El Dorado Recreation Area. That name was what was used on working documents as the 56-acre project got under way until it morphed into Lakeview Commons.

Supervisor Ron Briggs said, “I never once thought we approved Lakeview Commons.”

Keeping it named El Dorado Beach, as the area was known before the $6 million renovation of the site, is what the majority of the supervisors want.

Supervisors Sweeney and Santiago were appointed to the El Dorado Beach ad hoc committee to look into the lease and work with the city.

The board will have its annual Tahoe meeting June 25. At that time a report to the board about the lease would likely be made.

However, on June 20 is the dedication by the city of Lakeview Commons.

Supervisors said a plaque can always be replaced if the name on it should be changed. The city has ordered the plaque. It says Lakeview Commons at El Dorado Beach.

Kerry mentioned how every City Council member who ever had anything to do with the project has a right to their name on the plaque. Plus, state reps, including a slew from California Tahoe Conservancy – the agency that funde the renovation – will be on the plaque.

The supes want the people of El Dorado County to be on the plaque and not their names or any other electeds. There was a little discussion about the order of the words, at which time Sweeney made a homosexual slur which can be heard at the very end of the video from this agenda item.

Jockeying begins for California tax initiatives

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

The high-pressure game of signature gathering outside stores has turned into a mad dash to election offices across California as tax proponents submit their petitions for the November ballot.

Gov. Jerry Brown is pinning his budget hopes on his multibillion-dollar tax hike on sales and high-income earners. But he faces a dogged challenge from wealthy civil rights attorney Molly Munger and the California State PTA, who said Monday that they submitted 848,000 signatures for a separate tax initiative, likely more than enough to qualify for November.

Munger's initiative would raise an estimated $10 billion annually for 12 years by hiking the state income tax on all but the poorest earners along a sliding scale. Money would flow to the state's K-12 schools and early childhood programs. For the first four fiscal years, the initiative would also provide $3 billion to help the state's general fund budget.

Munger, the daughter of billionaire Charles Munger, has been the sole financier of the campaign so far with $7.2 million in contributions to date.

Read the whole story

1 person dies in head-on collision on North Shore

By News 10-KXTV

A head-on collision has killed one driver and caused major injuries to at least one other person in a second vehicle on Highway 28 in North Lake Tahoe.

The crash was near Ridgewood Drive and occurred at approximately 11:45am May 10, said California Highway Patrol Officer Tim Andrade.

Involved were a blue Toyota Tundra SUV and a gray Toyota Tacoma pickup, Andrade said.

Names of the motorists have not been released.

California lawmakers lecture Boy Scouts on discriminatory practices

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

Stressing to millions of boys the value of honesty, loyalty, honor and good deeds is not enough to win a commendation from the California Assembly – if you exclude gays and atheists.

Boy Scouts of America, one of the last major youth organizations to deny membership because of sexual or religious views, was applauded Tuesday for its good works but ripped by a legislative committee as hurtful to many families.

The Assembly dust-up comes in the wake of national headlines stemming from the ouster last month of an Ohio Cub Scout leader, Jennifer Tyrrell, 32, because she is lesbian.

Tuesday’s controversy also marks the latest jab by a Democratic-controlled Legislature against a private organization that won a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2000 ensuring its free-speech right to exclude gays and lesbians from membership.

“The continued discriminatory policy of the Scouts is deeply offensive to me,” said Assemblyman Mike Feuer, a Los Angeles Democrat who chairs the Judiciary Committee that met Tuesday.

The slap at the Boy Scouts came on the same day that the Senate’s Judiciary Committee passed a bill banning minors from participating in controversial therapy programs to change their sexual orientations, and requiring adults to sign consent forms indicating they understand potential dangers.

Friction over the Boy Scouts was sparked by a proposed commendation, Assembly Concurrent Resolution 94, to applaud the group for its commitment to train youths in responsible citizenship, character development, leadership and public service.

Read the whole story

California one of the most unfriendly states for small businesses

By Tiffany Hsu, Los Angeles Times

How do we appropriately express just how unpopular California has become with businesses? It's like Brussels sprouts to a kid, John Travolta among masseurs, the Clippers in Memphis … you get the idea.

The latest Golden State basher? A survey of more than 6,000 small businesses from Thumbtack.com and the nonprofit Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, which gave California (along with Hawaii, Vermont and Rhode Island) an F grade for friendliness.

Idaho, Texas, Oklahoma and Utah scored A-pluses. Three of the top five ranked cities are in Texas: Dallas-Fort Worth, San Antonio and Austin. Four of the five cities in California – Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco and Sacramento – have D grades or lower.

Among the 50 states, California's growth rate and current economic health was ranked 41st; the level of optimism about the future was 35th.

Read the whole story

Nevada to consolidate

workforce development boards

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY –- A state agency announced this week it plans to consolidate three boards that oversee workforce development into one, resulting in $5 million more in federal funds directed annually to helping train job seekers to find employment.

The plan, "Moving Nevada Forward: A Plan For Excellence in Workforce Development," was released by the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR).

Currently, funding is provided from the federal Department of Labor to the Governor's Workforce Investment Board and funneled to two local boards, one in Southern Nevada and the other in Northern Nevada. These boards in turn contract with public and private organizations to offer workforce training programs to youth and adult and dislocated workers.

But a recent audit of this system by the state Division of Internal Audits revealed that too many federal dollars are lost to administrative and duplicate costs.

"I have charged everyone in my administration with looking closely at the functions of their offices, boards and commissions to eliminate duplications and streamline services with the goal of leveraging resources already available and trimming unnecessary overhead," Gov. Brian Sandoval said. "This new plan calls for greater collaboration between workforce development and the newly restructured Governor's Office Economic Development, which earlier this year released its plan under the 'Moving Nevada Forward' label as well. A key area of focus for my administration is building the type of trained workforce that will support economic diversification."

Organizations currently contracted as service providers to citizens for workforce needs will continue in the same capacity, but will be managed by DETR staff instead of the northern and southern board offices. Federal funding designated for each of the local workforce investment areas will remain unchanged; no geographic area of the state gains or loses under the reorganization and existing providers can remain in place if they are delivering the appropriate level of service to the end-user.

“This new plan will result in a significant amount of funds being spent directly for much-needed services, as we are essentially removing an administrative layer of expense,” DETR Director Frank R. Woodbeck said. “Administrative functions would be moved to DETR and community service providers will continue to deliver direct services to job seekers.”

The restructuring is expected to be complete by December 2012.

The audit of the state’s two local workforce investment boards found the Southern Nevada agency spent nearly twice as much on administration and monitoring of its programs than its northern counterpart.

If the southern board cut its local expenses to mirror those of the northern Nevada board, another $1.9 million would have been available to job seekers in fiscal year 2011, the review found. The audit showed the Southern Nevada board, called Workforce Connections, spent 21 percent on administration and monitoring compared to only 11.3 percent in the north.

Ardell Galbreth, interim executive director of Workforce Connections, said that major changes have been implemented to reduce administrative and other costs. He took the position on April 5.

Galbreth said last week the 2012 budget has been revised to ensure that no more than 20 percent of the funding will go to program and administrative costs. The staff of 72 at the board is also being reduced to 34 by the end of the year if not before, he said.

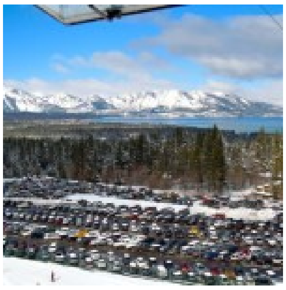
Ski industry trying to forget about 2011-12 season

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

SAN ANTONIO — In the worst ski season in 20 years, the winners stayed flat and the losers lost big.

“I think we dodged a bullet,” said Dave Riley , chief of Telluride ski area, where visitation remained steady through the 2011-12 season while nationally visits fell 16 percent to 51 million, a 20-year low.

Telluride joins a handful of Colorado ski areas — like Eldora, Wolf Creek, Echo Mountain, Durango Mountain Resort and Aspen Skiing Co.’s quiver of four hills — that saw visitation remain similar to the record season of 2010-11. Wyoming and New Mexico — home to the thriving Taos Ski Valley — were the only states to show annual increases in visitation. Overall, the Rocky Mountain region, which includes Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, bested the national 16-percent decline with a mere 7.2 percent drop to 19.4 million visits. Resorts in California were on the other end, with visits plummeting more than 20 percent in a season that saw a first-ever snowless December.



Heavenly's parking lot was full on the few powder days Tahoe witnessed. Photo/LTN

The mood at the annual National Ski Areas Association convention — a typically celebratory confab of several hundred resort operators from all snowy corners — was not the same as recent gatherings, where resorts reveled in record showings despite economic turmoil.

Recovery and resiliency reigned at this year’s rally of goggle-tanned optimists.

“We are eternally optimistic. We see an anomaly winter and we know it’s going to get better next year,” said Steve Rice , the managing director of Florida’s CNL Lifestyle Co., a real estate investment trust with 16 ski resorts and seven ski-area villages . “Still, I don’t think it’s hyperbole to say that this year’s silver lining is that it demonstrates a worst-case scenario. We know what the bottom looks like.”

Indeed, it would be hard to get any worse.

Read the whole story

Nevada among 9 swing states in presidential race

By Michael Cooper, New York Times

Since the housing bubble burst, Nevada has been plagued with record foreclosures, the nation's steepest drop in home values and its highest unemployment rate.

Iowa, on the other hand, may have missed out on some of the boom but was spared the worst of the bust: its housing prices have stayed relatively stable, and it now has the fifth-lowest unemployment rate in the country.

Ohio suffered a steeper than average loss of jobs during the recession, but it has since seen its unemployment rate fall below the national average.

All three are among the handful of swing states likely to decide who wins the presidential election — states in different stages of a slow economic recovery.

With just over six months until Election Day, an analysis of the emerging electoral map by The New York Times found that the outcome would most likely be determined by how well President Obama and Mitt Romney perform in nine tossup states.

All nine voted for Obama in 2008, only to see Republicans make big gains since then.

Now, with many of those states transformed economically and politically by the recession, they are perhaps even less predictable than they were in past close elections. The disparity in their circumstances highlights the challenges that both the Obama and the Romney campaigns face in framing arguments that will resonate across the country.

Read the whole story

Gaming revenue drops in Stateline, throughout Nevada

After four straight months of posting a gain, year-over-year revenue at Stateline casinos went in the other direction.

South Shore casinos, according to data released Thursday by the Nevada Gaming Control Board, collected $13 million in revenue in March, a decline of 14 percent from 2011.

The entire state saw revenue drop in March. The $855 million in revenue is 11 percent less than what was recorded a year ago.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report