

CVS in old Bill's casino to open in May; other tenants set for summer move-in

By Anne Knowles

The Stateline site known as Bill's Casino, named for Harrah's founder Bill Harrah and purchased two years ago by Mike Laub, will reopen its doors next month.

After a remodel costing more than \$3 million and employing 80 workers, the 40,000-square-foot site is being reborn as a mall.

"Everything is new," said Laub, who bought the property in March 2010 for \$5.22 million. "New parking lot, new landscaping, new windows, new heating system. The only thing left is the foundation and the steel."



A portion of the old Bill's casino will open in May, with the remaining tenants who have signed leases moving in during the summer.

Photo/LTN

"It's looking more and more high-end," said Sam Dufour, owner

of Teaz N Pleaz, an adult lingerie shop and one of eight tenants in the new mall. "It will change the face of the area."

The unnamed mall – Laub told *Lake Tahoe News* he might have a contest to name it – will launch on May 6 with the opening of a CVS store without a pharmacy. According to the Douglas County building permit, the store will be 11,102 square feet.

Michael DeAngelis, a spokesman for the Woonsocket, R.I.-based drugstore chain, said CVS decided to forgo a pharmacy because the Stateline store is expected to attract more tourists and visitors than residents.

Laub said he expects the CVS to employ about 20 people, and for the remaining mall tenants to employ another 60. He said one tenant, the Lucky Beaver Bar & Burger, soon would be having a job fair.

During June, most of the remaining occupants are expected to debut, including Dotty's Casino, Tahoe Diamond District, Lucky Beaver Bar & Burger, Tahoe Ink, Teaz N Pleaz, and Pilates Studio Lake Tahoe. An eighth tenant, The Raw Bar, a bar and seafood restaurant, is expected to open in August, according to Laub.

Teaz N Pleaz is adding to its stores in Fair Oaks and South Lake Tahoe with a 1,500-square-foot store in the new mall, which Dufour hopes to open June 1. He characterizes the store as a competitor to Victoria's Secret, but its website also sells sex toys and adult games, along with apparel.

Pilates Studio Lake Tahoe is opening in late June in a 3,000-square-foot space on the third floor of the mall, said Tara Farrah, the studio's owner. Farrah plans to offer private and group classes taught by four Pilates instructors and three yoga teachers. She may also add Zumba, a Latin-inspired dance aerobic program, and hopes eventually to offer outdoor classes on the mall's rooftop.

"I wholeheartedly believe in Pilates," Farrah said. "I had a ski accident years ago, and it saved my life."

Farrah's husband, Pat, will be opening the Lucky Beaver Bar & Burger, a 24-hour gaming bar serving gourmet burgers, on June 15. The county building permit lists it as 3,105 square feet. It feature video-table top gambling, a mini sports book, a grill inside and a fire pit in the back with outdoor seating.

Farrah said there is considerable parking in the back. "It will be a great location for locals and out of towners."

He co-founded Home Depot. On this project Farrah has two partners – Mike Leeper, who ran Bar 24 at Bill's Casino, and Kevin Lane ,who owned the Cedar Room in Round Hill.

Tahoe Diamond District, a jewelry store listed as 1,266 square feet on its building permit, and Tahoe Ink, a tattoo parlor with thousands of square feet, according to its permit, are expected to open in early June, according to Laub.

Finally, a 6,500-square-foot Dotty's Casino is scheduled to open in early June, too. The casino will have 100 slot machines, a bar and a restaurant, said Laub.

Dotty's, which caters to locals and women who don't typically like casinos, was the focus of a push by the Nevada Resorts Association to impose stricter guidelines on slots parlors. In August 2011, the Nevada Gaming Commission amended its regulations to require Dotty's and similar establishments to offer bars seating at least nine patrons and restaurants of at least 2,000 square feet seating for at least 20 customers.

Calls for comment to Nevada Restaurant Service, the corporate name for Las Vegas-based Dotty's, were not returned.

Three storefronts remain vacant in the mall, said Laub: a 4,500-square-foot spot on the first floor that Laub is now negotiating with several potential tenants and two spaces on

the second floor that can be flexibly configured for between 1,000 and 3,000 square feet.

"The second floor would be a perfect location for a salon," said Laub.

Originally, Laub planned to build a strip club at the site, but the Douglas County Commissioners nixed the plan.

The site is also known for a safe discovered in its walls during the remodeling. Some believe the safe may be connected to the unsolved murder of Richard Chartand, the original owner of the casino, when it was known as Barney's Casino. He was killed in 1968 by a car bomb, believed to have been planted by the mob.

The Oprah Winfrey Network acquired the rights to reveal the contents of the safe on an upcoming series, but has decided not to use the safe in any show, a spokesman for the TV network told *Lake Tahoe News*.

LTCC hires VP from the K-12 sector

Lake Tahoe Community College has one less vacancy in the front office.

Beginning June 29, Jeff DeFranco will be vice president of Administrative Services.

The board of trustees on April 24 voted on his hiring.



Jeff DeFranco

The title, while new to the South Lake Tahoe college, better reflects what DeFranco will do. This position replaces that of VP of Business Services. That job has been vacant for more than a year. The renaming was done by the board last fall, with a reorg spurred by LTCC President Kindred Murillo earlier this year..

Since July 2008, DeFranco has been director of communications and facilities at Springfield Public Schools in Oregon.

The district, which is near Eugene, has a staff of 1,300 staff, nearly 11,000 students, and an annual budget of nearly \$100 million.

DeFranco believes his experience in difficult fiscal times will help him do his job at LTCC.

"I have been dealing with a very similar reduction environment here in Springfield. I believe community colleges have the capacity to be a real economic driver. When you are dealing with declining state revenue you must be as entrepreneurial as possible and use the power of partnerships to grow the revenue pie," DeFranco said in a statement.

Murillo said in a statement, "Jeff brings an incredible skill set and energy to our college and community."

DeFranco has a master's in educational leadership with an emphasis in higher education administration from the University of Oregon. He earned his undergraduate degree from CSU Chico.

He has also been the sole proprietor of True North Consulting & Leadership for nearly 10 years.

DeFranco, who will be moving to Lake Tahoe with his wife and two children, is familiar with area. His grandfather built a cabin in Meyers in the 1960s, and he would visit every year.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

SEC sues Stateline man involved in CalPERS scandal

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The U.S. government sued the two key figures in the CalPERS bribery scandal Monday, targeting the pension fund's former chief executive and a businessman who earned millions in finder's fees from CalPERS investment deals.

The Securities and Exchange Commission's lawsuit steps up the pressure on former CalPERS CEO Fred Buenrostro and his longtime friend, Stateline businessman Alfred Villalobos. It also contains new details about how the alleged fraud was carried out.

According to the suit, the pair cobbled together a series of phony letters bearing the pension fund's logo. The SEC said the letters were used to dupe Villalobos' top client, Wall Street powerhouse Apollo Global Management, into paying him fees totaling \$20 million.

It's the latest major legal action against Buenrostro and Villalobos. State officials have already sued the two men, saying Villalobos bribed Buenrostro and others at CalPERS to influence investment decisions. Both have denied any wrongdoing.

The SEC's lawsuit was welcomed by CalPERS, even though it creates fresh momentum for a scandal that has dogged the California Public Employees' Retirement System for more than two years.

"We believe the SEC's action ... brings us one step closer to closing this chapter in our history," said Anne Stausboll, who replaced Buenrostro as CEO of CalPERS after he left in 2008.

Buenrostro, 62, was married at Villalobos' Lake Tahoe mansion. He joined Villalobos' firm, Arvco, the day after leaving CalPERS, and state officials said Villalobos, 68, bought him a condo at Tahoe.

Besides damaging the pension fund's image, the Villalobos affair has been costly financially. An investigator hired by CalPERS said last year that some of the pension fund's investment partners probably inflated the fees they charged CalPERS in order to pay Villalobos' commissions.

The SEC suit "is another impressive action by law enforcement authorities and I expect more from them to come," said the CalPERS investigator, Philip Khinda, a lawyer in Washington, D.C.

What comes next is unclear. CalPERS officials have said a criminal investigation into Villalobos and Buenrostro's actions has been under way for more than a year. Stausboll refused to speculate on whether any charges would be filed.

The SEC's lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Nevada, where Villalobos and Buenrostro live. It demands they "disgorge all ill-gotten gains from their illegal conduct,"

plus interest.

Read the whole story

‘No party preference’ growing in popularity

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

Congressional candidate Linda Parks isn't one for conventional choices.



As she tells voters in a recent television ad, her favorite ice cream flavor is not chocolate or vanilla, but the nuts-and-marshmallow-loaded Rocky Road.

And her chosen party preference on the June 5 ballot?

“None.”

“I’ve had longtime supporters tell me, ‘I don’t even know what party you are.’ And I like that,” said Parks, a Ventura County supervisor who has been both a member and, more recently, a punching bag of both the Republican and the Democratic parties. “I like the fact that they can’t peg me as one party or the other.”

Parks is one of 36 candidates with “no party preference” running for state and federal office in California this year, the first time the option is available for primary candidates.

Her candidacy for the 26th Congressional District is getting attention because of the chance she'll succeed in becoming the first independent elected to the House of Representatives since 2004.

No-party-preference candidates make up just a fraction of the more than 500 people running for state and federal office on the June ballot. But some observers say a win – or even a good show – by Parks or other no-party-preference candidates could pave the way for more independents to run for elected office in California.

“In this climate with the tea party and the Occupy movement and the anti-incumbent sentiment, if it turns out that that does translate into ‘no-party-preference’ candidates winning, we can expect to see all sorts of people shedding their party affiliation in the future,” said Kimberly Nalder, an associate professor in the CSU Sacramento, Department of Government.

The emergence of no-party-preference candidates is a direct result in a voter-approved overhaul of the state's election system. Under the old system, independents eyeing elected office would have to collect voter signatures after the primary for November ballot access. Now, under the top-two primary, independent candidates, described as “party preference: none,” run alongside Democrats, Republicans and candidates from minor parties for one of two spots in the November runoff.

Read the whole story

Truck driver killed on Mount Rose Highway from Carson Valley

The driver of the truck who died using the runaway truck ramp on Monday has been identified as Eric S. Holton, 31, of Gardnerville.

Holton was descending the Mount Rose Highway in Incline Village on April 23 at approximately 2:48pm when he used the ramp. Investigators still don't know why Holton used the ramp.

The vehicle was a 2006 gray Freightliner truck tractor pulling a 1989 flat bed trailer transporting composite decking materials traveling west on the two-lane highway



Crews look over the mangled truck near the intersection of highways 431 and 28.

Photo/NHP

The truck and trailer stopped near the termination point of the ramp; however, the entire load of building materials shifted forward, crushing the entire cab and killing Holton.

The park is being built by Edgewood Companies. The Nevada-based company is doing this project in exchange for the right to transfer the use of the tourist accommodation units from

South Lake Tahoe to Stateline. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in its desire to control development in the Lake Tahoe Basin has made TAUs a commodity.

TRPA also limits free market by not allowing the owner of the TAU to use them where he wants. It's up to the powers that be in the jurisdiction where the TAU resides to decide if they can be transferred.

Edgewood will use those TAUs as it goes forward with building the Edgewood Lodge near the lakefront of the Stateline golf course by the same name.

The draft environment impact statement for the lodge project is in circulation, with comments being taken until June 18.

The project will be before the TRPA Advisory Planning Commission on May 9 and on the Governing Board agenda on May 30.

For more information about the lodge and how to comment, contact Theresa Avance at the TRPA – (775) 589.5224.

As for the park, it will include a children's play area, grass play area, picnic pods, basketball court, and a horseshoe toss. It will also include solar lighting, recycling containers, low flow irrigation and a native demonstration landscape planting material.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Crews making emergency repairs to bridge in Truckee

Cold Stream Road is closed for emergency repairs at the bridge over Donner Creek in Truckee.

This closure is located on Cold Stream Road between Donner Pass Road and Deerfield Drive. Business affected by the closure include: Chevron Fuel Station; Sierra Sun, Taco Bell, Tahoe Truckee Rental Management, Truckee Donner Lodge, Union 76 Station, and Unwind Salon.

Officials are urging motorists to avoid travel in this area if possible. Construction crews will be working overnight in the area to assess the extent of the damage.

To access updates on the road closure check the town's website.

AT&T wields enormous power in Sacramento

By Shane Goldmacher and Anthony York, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO — As the sun set behind Monterey Bay on a cool night last year, dozens of the state's top lawmakers and lobbyists ambled onto the 17th fairway at Pebble Beach for a round of glow-in-the-dark golf.

With luminescent balls soaring into the sky, the annual fundraiser known as the Speaker's Cup was in full swing.

Lawmakers, labor-union champions and lobbyists gather each year at the storied course to schmooze, show their skill on the links and rejuvenate at a 22,000-square-foot spa. The affair, which typically raises more than \$1 million for California Democrats, has been sponsored for more than a decade by telecommunications giant AT&T.

At the 2010 event, AT&T's president and the state Assembly speaker toured Pebble Beach together in a golf cart, shaking hands with every lawmaker, lobbyist and other VIP in attendance.

The Speaker's Cup is the centerpiece of a corporate lobbying strategy so comprehensive and successful that it has rewritten the special-interest playbook in Sacramento. When it comes to state government, AT&T spends more money, in more places, than any other company.

It forges relationships on the putting green, in luxury suites and in Capitol hallways. It gives officials free tickets to Lady Gaga concerts. It takes lawmakers on trips around the globe and all-expenses-paid retreats in wine country. It dispenses millions in political donations and employs an army of lobbyists. It has spent more than \$14,000 a day on political advocacy since 2005, when it merged with SBC into its current form.

A handful of labor unions and trade groups have spent more on a combination of lobbying and direct political giving, but state records show that in the last seven years, no single corporation has spent as much trying to influence lawmakers as AT&T. At the same time, a tide of consumer protections has ebbed and the company has been unshackled from the watchful eye of state regulators.

Efforts to force phone companies to be more transparent about

fees on cellphone bills died; so did an attempt to end monthly charges to unlist a phone number. The charge for that kind of privacy rose sixfold in a three-year period, and those fees generate \$50 million annually for AT&T, according to a 2009 legislative analysis.

Read the whole story

Nevada officials holding on to Whittemore-related money

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

Members of Nevada's congressional delegation and one candidate quickly announced that they would get rid of or give to charity all donations given by Harvey Whittemore after an FBI investigation into his campaign contributions surfaced in February.

But a review of their first-quarter campaign finance reports reveals that that's not exactly the case, though some money was donated to charities and a small sum went to the U.S. Treasury.

Some of the recipients now say they'll hold onto the money until the investigation is complete. If the funds are found to be legal, they'll keep them.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., has given a portion back, but about \$100,000 of Whittemore-related funds remain in his coffers, according to a Reno Gazette-Journal analysis of his federal campaign spending reports.

In early February, FBI agents visited the homes and businesses

of about 30 Whittemore associates and served subpoenas to testify before a federal grand jury. Several secret meetings have been held with the grand jury in Reno, but the U.S. Attorney's office in Las Vegas has yet to announce an indictment or cleared Whittemore.

Of special interest was more than \$120,000 given to Reid by a list of Whittemore friends, colleagues and family on a single day in 2007. Skirting campaign finance laws by using "conduits" is a felony that potentially carries some serious prison time.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe officials: SnowGlobe did not damage ball field

By Kathryn Reed

Jessie Jorgensen is running all around the soccer field by Lake Tahoe Community College. She does this weekly.

Right after the New Year's weekend SnowGlobe music festival the toddler enjoyed finding trinkets like piercings and necklaces. Now it's mostly leftover confetti that she scampers over.

Jessie and her dad, Pete Jorgensen, come out to the community ball fields so the little one can run around. They live on the other side of Al Tahoe Boulevard.

The elder Jorgensen on Sunday points to how the sides of the field are a brighter shade of green than the playing area. After nearly a decade of wear-and-tear, this would be

expected. But Jorgensen and others say SnowGlobe substantially added to the fading of the artificial turf.

Bob Aaron, another South Lake Tahoe resident, calls the damage done to the fields by SnowGlobe as “unrepairable” and wants to know who is going to pay for it.

South Lake Tahoe, which owns the field, acknowledges confetti is still embedded in the turf.

“The confetti was the worst. That was an ill-conceived idea,” Stan Sherer, community services director, told *Lake Tahoe News*. He added that the promoters were told not to use confetti, but did so anyway.

Aaron told *Lake Tahoe News* the field is riddled with cigarette butts and burns.

On April 22, *Lake Tahoe News* saw one butt in the field – though not every inch was scoured.

Sherer, who was inspecting the field Monday, said he sees adult soccer players smoking on the field and sidelines all the time.

“The biggest problem from SnowGlobe was the gum,” Sherer said.

A few globs are visible, as are remnants from stickers that got stuck to the artificial grass.

Sherer said a substance would be applied to those spots by hand. Inmates from the nearby jail will be working on the field – so it’s free labor for the city.

The other foreign object *Lake Tahoe News* found was what looked like a round battery.

The city’s belief is the music festival did not do irreparable harm, nor did it affect the playability of the field. Already the infill has been screened and reraked. It’s time to play

ball, according to Sherer.

This field is used nearly every day or night when snow is not covering it.

“The field is aging. It already exceeded its life expectancy,” Sherer said. “The only thing that helps is that it is shaded so much. The UV breaks down that field. And it’s more pronounced at altitude.”



Remnants of stickers are still stuck in the artificial turf at the community ball fields.



The colored specs are confetti from SnowGlobe.

Photos/Kathryn Reed



What looks like a camera battery is on the field. The black is part of the field.