

Hwy. 50 reopened after boulder lands in travel lane

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A huge boulder that was blocking westbound Highway 50 in the mountains has been cleared from the roadway without dynamiting.

About 5am today the huge rock fell onto the single westbound lane of Highway 50 east of Twin Bridges.

A California Highway Patrol officer initially said that road crews will have to dynamite around daybreak to break up the boulder in small enough pieces for removal to get it off the pavement. However, the roadway has now been cleared, according to the CHP.

Dynamiting of the rock along the shoulder is expected to occur later today.

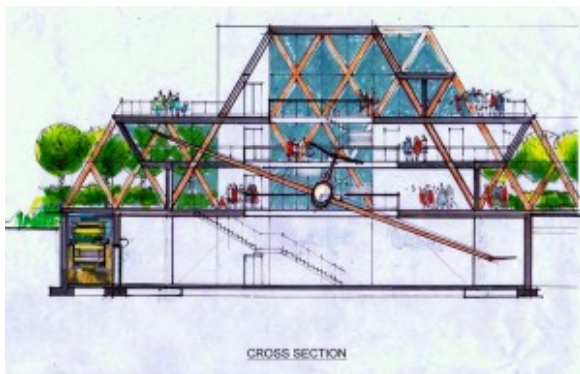
Minden airport becoming a sports aviation center

By Anne Knowles

When Douglas County developed a plan to revitalize its economy, it's no wonder planners looked to the Minden-Tahoe Airport, which already brings an estimated \$30 million into the region annually.

“The airport is one of the major economic engines in the community,” said Linda Mae Draper-Hivert, a member of the Minden-Tahoe Airport Advisory Committee and economic vitality champion for Sports Aviation.

Draper-Hivert and a team of seven are working to capitalize on the airport and the region’s well-known soaring conditions – the Sierra Wave, caused by the mountain range, helps gliders soar higher – to boost tourism and add jobs.



A rendering of what the museum may look like.

Sports Aviation is one of 12 components of the county’s 2-year-old economic vitality plan, which also includes efforts to rejuvenate the South Shore and the downtowns of Gardnerville and Genoa as well as build an extensive network of hiking trails throughout the county.

The airport team’s goals include building a flying museum and learning center on the east side on the airport as well as hosting a series of aviation events designed to draw visitors from all over the world.

“It’s a big, big project,” said Draper-Hivert, a pilot who has been operating at the airport since 1979.

To accomplish it, the nonprofit Sports Aviation Foundation was established four months ago, and \$5,000 has been raised so far to pay a grants writer to procure grants for funding much of

the work.

The group has already launched the Aviation Roundup Air Show & Fly-in, an event first held last August and scheduled this year on June 30 and July 1 at the airport. Last year's event, said Draper-Hivert, had something for everyone, including aerobatic performances, glider rides and exhibits such as the Zoo, a display of planes – named the Beaver, Mustang, Bronco and Husky – for children to view and explore.

The goal, said Draper-Hivert, is to emulate the Oshkosh Air Venture, a 60-year-old event that attracts half a million visitors and infuses \$180 million into the Wisconsin economy.

"There's nothing quite like that on the West Coast," she said.

Another event, the U.S. Open Class Nationals, an annual gliding competition that hasn't been hosted in Minden since 1997, is June 10-21 at the airport. In March, SoaringNV, a gliding business located at the airport, sponsored a Wave Camp, a weeklong clinic to learn how to fly the Sierra Wave.

Draper-Hivert said plans are to build facilities at the airport to better accommodate future events, including an RV park and tie downs for participants.

The biggest piece of the Sports Aviation project is what Draper-Hivert called the Aviation Heritage Museum and Challenger Learning Center. Renderings of the museum were drawn up by Eissmann-Pence Architects in Minden, an in-kind donation of \$30,000.

The museum will house aviation displays and informational kiosks while the Challenger Learning Center will join a network of 47 such centers around the world. The nonprofit learning centers were established by the families of the astronauts lost during the last flight of the Challenger space shuttle in 1986.

The centers provide simulators and mock-ups of mission control and an orbiting space station. An inflatable dome owned by the Challenger Learning Center of Northern Nevada, planned in Sparks, has already traveled to Douglas County schools. Draper-Hivert said it features 13 programs for kids including trips to the moon, under the sea and on the Titanic, all as 3D projections inside the dome.

Draper-Hivert said the county hopes to build and open the museum and learning center by 2016 or 2018.

The other members of the Sports Aviation team led by Draper-Hivert are Terry Lalonde, Mike Bradford, Ed Hayes, Laurie Harden, Rick Walters, Bobbi Thompson and Chris Johnson.

AFL-CIO wants business tax on Nevada ballot

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY — State AFL-CIO leader Danny Thompson said his labor group is moving forward with a broad-based business profits tax ballot measure to raise money for education.

Thompson, interviewed on the Nevada NewsMakers television program this week, said the proposal will go forward as a petition to amend state law, which would first be considered by the Legislature in 2013. If the Legislature did not approve the measure within 40 days, it would go to the voters in 2014.

Thompson said the tax, which would be assessed on net business profits in excess of \$500,000 at a rate of 2 percent, has been

projected by some analysts to bring in about \$1 billion a year to the state general fund. The money would go to fund public and higher education.

Supporters of the proposal would have until Nov. 13 to gather 72,352 signatures from registered voters, which Thompson said is more than enough time to ensure they would be successful. The measure has not yet been filed with the Secretary of State's office because a final legal review is still under way, he said.

In a subsequent telephone interview, Thompson said there is no question that the proposal will be challenged in court so it is important to make sure it can withstand such a review.

"We qualified the minimum wage initiative in a period of a couple of months," Thompson said. "And so we just want to make sure everything is correct. Because you still have to get over a court challenge, which inevitably we know will be coming."

Thompson, executive secretary-treasurer of the Nevada State AFL-CIO, said too many of Nevada's students are failing in large part because of inadequate funding. A better educated workforce is needed to diversify the state's economy as well, he said.

In anticipation of such a tax proposal, Las Vegas businessman Monte Miller has filed two ballot measures, one seeking to give the Legislature the authority to raise the mining tax, and a second that would increase the gaming tax on the state's largest casinos.

He has called Thompson's proposal, based on a Texas margin tax, "a destructive, terribly complex tax."

Gov. Brian Sandoval has said he opposes the various ballot measures, arguing tax discussions belong at the Legislature. Partly in response to the different proposed ballot measures, Sandoval last month said he would extend a collection of taxes

set to expire on June 30, 2013, into the next two-year budget to avoid any further cuts to public education.

Thompson said he has had no discussions with Miller about his business profits tax proposal, adding that Nevada has relied for far too long on gaming and mining to fund the state budget and public education.

Nevada will be the last state to recover from the recession because the state depends on discretionary income spent on the state's gaming industry, Thompson said.

"I don't know what it's going to look like if we continue down the road we are going," he said.

Community college uses tiered tuition to balance budget

By Jennifer Medina, New York Times

SANTA MONICA – For years now, administrators at the community college here have been inundated with woeful tales from students unable to register for the courses they need. Classes they want for essential job training or to fulfill requirements to transfer to four-year universities fill up within hours. Hundreds of students resort to crying and begging to enroll in a class, lining up at the doors of instructors and academic counselors.

Now, though, Santa Monica College is about to try something novel. This summer it will offer some courses for a higher price, so that students who are eager to get into a particular class can do so if they pay more.

The plan may be the first of its kind in the country, college officials and other higher education experts say, and if the college succeeds in implementing it, many other community colleges are likely to follow. Since 2009, enrollment in California community colleges has fallen by 300,000 students, to 2.6 million, and many believe the difficulty of registering for classes is the most important deterrent.

For generations, community colleges have been seen as a social equalizer, providing a relatively inexpensive education for poor students, immigrants and others without the skills, grades or money to attend a four-year institution.

So the two-tiered tuition structure being proposed here is raising eyebrows, and fundamental questions, about the role and obligations of community colleges. Will the policy essentially block some of the people it is designed to benefit? Many students believe the new policy – if the state does not block its implementation, which it could yet do – will unfairly exclude the poorest students and create a kind of upper and lower class of students.

Read the whole story

Salaries prove Nevada public employees can't cry poor

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nearly 1,000 state and local government workers, many of them firefighters and police, make more than \$200,000 a year when all pay and benefits are counted, according to a 2011 pay analysis published by the Nevada Policy Research

Institute.

The number of public employees earning \$200,000 or more could be even higher, but the conservative think tank said some government entities, including the cities of Reno and Henderson, the Washoe County School District and the state of Nevada, did not provide information on the cost of benefits.

There were 932 public employees who hit the \$200,000 mark in 2009, 1,174 in 2010 and 995 in the most recent data now available at Transparent Nevada.

The top salary spot in Nevada is held by William Zamboni with the Nevada System of Higher Education's School of Medicine at \$1.3 million in 2011, although much of his earnings are the result of income from his medical practice.

Las Vegas Assistant Sheriff Michael McClary earned nearly \$545,000 in total compensation, according to the data provided to NPRI, while Chris Ault, football coach at the UNR earned \$521,000.

Andy Matthews, president of NPRI, said that giving the public and policymakers access to the salary information helps ensure that critical data needed to make spending decisions is available for review by everyone.

Taxpayers can use the data to determine on their own if government officials are being responsible with public money, he said.

Despite claims that government budgets are already stretched thin, the salary data suggests otherwise, Matthews said.

"There are still a lot of instances of overspending, and abnormally high government salaries at various levels of government here in our state, and this at a time when so many of us in the private sector are hurting, and Nevada's families and business owners and individuals are really struggling," he

said. "I think it's really a reminder that we have a ways to go still in terms of reigning in excessive government spending."

A lot of the high salaries are at the local government level. Examples include a Clark County fire captain who brought in more than \$525,000 in total compensation in 2011 and a UNLV English professor who received more than \$326,000 in total compensation.

There are 145 Las Vegas police employees who earned more than \$200,000 last year, and another 59 police and correction officers in North Las Vegas who exceeded \$200,000 for the year.

A lot of the salaries need to be scrutinized, Matthews said.

"For example the base pay of the city clerk in North Las Vegas is more than \$145,000," he said. "Well, the base pay for Gov. (Bryan) Sandoval is just a little more than \$143,000."

Matthews said there is some good news in the 2011 data that suggests elected officials are responding to concerns about public salaries, particularly with firefighter salaries.

The number of firefighters earning more than \$200,000 declined in 2011 compared to 2010, he said. For example, the number of Clark County fire fighters in that salary level came down from 199 in 2010 to 140 in 2011.

"I would say these numbers are still too high but at least represents some steps in the right direction," Matthews said. "And I think that the fact that we at NPRI have started to publicize this information and make this known; I think that that certainly has played a role."

El Dorado County judge faces 2 challengers

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

As a rule, Superior Court judge elections are, well, sober as a judge.

Incumbents frequently return to the bench without facing a substantial challenge at the polls.

The race for Office 7 in El Dorado Superior Court is different, with two challengers – Joseph Hoffman and Stephen W. Valentine – taking on incumbent Judge Warren Stracener.

None of the candidates will directly criticize his opponents on the record, but it appears clear the challengers consider Stracener vulnerable.

Stracener was appointed in late 2010 as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger prepared to leave office.

He worked in the Department of Personnel Administration for two decades and had a role in the furlough fights under Schwarzenegger. That has marked him as something of an outsider, he said.

“People assume because you’ve been appointed by someone from Sacramento, you must be lock step with those values,” he said.

Read the whole story

Skiers forced to rappel from Kirkwood chairlift

By Kathryn Reed

For the second week in a row Kirkwood Mountain Resort ski patrollers were tested. Saturday skiers had to evacuate Cornice chairlift because it derailed.

No one was injured in the afternoon incident that took nearly two hours for everyone to rappel from the lift to the slope.

Resort spokesman Michael Dalzell said no one was injured when the lift, which goes to the top of the mountain, came to an abrupt stop at 1:30pm April 7.

Last Sunday it was an inbound avalanche that caused the entire resort to close for the day.

Dalzell said crews on Saturday night were still inspecting the cable.

"We're not likely to spin the chairlift (Sunday)," Dalzell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Ski patrol simultaneously worked both ends of the chairlift to bring people down. Dalzell said everyone was calm during the evacuation.

He did not know what the highest point was for someone to rappel down, but this is an advanced lift that in places is at least 50 feet off the ground in places. Dalzell also didn't know how many people had to be evacuated.

The cause of the derailment was the air bag from the terrain park being launched by a gust of wind into the cable of Chair 6. The air bag is something people can jump into as they learn tricks in the park. This is the first season it has been used

at the resort.

TRPA ready to engage public in Regional Plan update

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has scheduled a series of public meetings and workshops to gather input on the Regional Plan update draft and environmental documents being released later this month.



The plan update includes five draft documents which will be released at TRPA's Governing Board meetings on April 25 at The Chateau in Incline Village and April 26. The draft documents include the updated plan and corresponding environmental impact statement along with TRPA's code of ordinances documents, and the Regional Transportation Plan and related environmental impact statement. The 2011 Threshold Evaluation Report, Lake Tahoe's environmental report card, is also being released at this time.

At the April meeting the board will decide on the length of time for public comment on the draft environmental impact statement – 60, 75, or 90 days.

The public meeting and workshop are as follows:

April 25, 9am: TRPA Governing Board meeting, The Chateau, 955 Fairway Blvd., Incline Village.

April 26, 9:30am: TRPA Governing Board meeting, TRPA office, 128 Market St., Stateline, NV.

May 21, 5-8pm: Public workshops on the Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Plan, The Chateau, 955 Fairway Blvd., Incline Village.

May 22, 5-8pm: Public workshops on the Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Plan, TRPA office, 128 Market St., Stateline.

May 23, 9:30am: TRPA Governing Board meeting public hearings, North Tahoe Events Center, 8318 North Lake Blvd., Kings Beach.

May 24, 9:30am: TRPA Governing Board meeting public hearings, TRPA office, 128 Market St., Stateline.

Members of the public can also send their comments on the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan Update to regionalplancomments@trpa.org or on the Regional Transportation Plan to mobility2035comments@trpa.org.

For additional information, call Kristi Boosman at (775) 589.5230 or send an email to kboosman@trpa.org.

Artist Thomas Kinkade dead at age 54

By Mike Rosenberg, San Jose Mercury News

Thomas Kinkade, the "Painter of Light" and one of the most popular artists in America, died suddenly Friday at his Los Gatos home. He was 54.

His family said in a statement that his death appeared to be

from natural causes.



Thomas Kinkadee

“Thom provided a wonderful life for his family,” his wife, Nanette, said in a statement. “We are shocked and saddened by his death.”

His paintings are hanging in an estimated one of every 20 homes in the United States. Fans cite the warm, familiar feeling of his mass-produced works of art, while it has become fashionable for art critics to dismiss his pieces as tacky. In any event, his prints of idyllic cottages and bucolic garden gates helped establish a brand – famed for their painted highlights – not commonly seen in the art world.

“I’m a warrior for light,” Kinkadee told the Mercury News in 2002, alluding not just to his technical skill at creating light on canvas but to the medieval practice of using light to symbolize the divine. “With whatever talent and resources I have, I’m trying to bring light to penetrate the darkness many people feel.”

His Media Arts Group company surged to success, taking in \$32 million per quarter from 4,500 dealers across the country 10 years ago, before it went private in the middle of the past decade. The cost of his paintings range from hundreds of dollars to more than \$10,000.

The Placerville native, who also leaves behind a brother and sister, was known to dress up like Santa Claus on Christmas, ride a Harley-Davidson and go on painting trips around the

world. He would visit studio executives but also got to know all the homeless people in Los Gatos. He read classic books but also enjoyed shooting and blowing up things on his ranch.

Read the whole story

Placer, El Dorado two of the healthiest counties in California

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

In Northern California and across the nation, wealth seems to translate into good health, a comprehensive new report affirms.

But the factors behind that trend are complicated, public health experts said following the release of the report Tuesday by the University of Wisconsin and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The report ranks counties across the nation based on a wide variety of factors including premature death, smoking and drinking, and access to healthy foods and medical care. In California, Marin tops the list of healthiest counties, followed by Santa Clara, San Benito, Placer and San Mateo.

What do the counties have in common? A relatively high mean household income, according to U.S. census figures.

The five counties ranked as having the poorest health are relatively rural and poorer: Trinity, Del Norte, Siskiyou, Tehama and Lake. Sacramento County ranked 31st of 56 counties.

(Two of California's smallest counties were not included in the study because no data were available.)

Read the whole story