

Website geared to teaching about dangers of drugs

South Lake Tahoe web developer Hanna Bernard created BeDrugSafe.com to help educate local parents and teens about the imminent threat of drugs in the area..

After hearing a presentation by Officer Rebecca Inman about drug use among Lake Tahoe teens, Bernard was inspired to create the site.

“The presentation was such an eye-opener that I felt I had to do something to spread this very important information to other parents,” Bernard said in a statement. “What do we need to know to protect our children? How do we identify the signs of drug use? What does these drugs look like and smell like? and What clues should we not miss?”

Bernard put the answers on the website. She worked with South Tahoe police officers as well as Lake Tahoe Unified and South Tahoe High officials on the site.

Sandoval: Extend taxes to spare education

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Gov. Brian Sandoval said today he will propose

to extend a package of taxes now set to expire in June 2013 into the next budget to avoid further cuts to education, which he said cannot withstand further reductions.

To maintain a basically flat spending plan for the two-year budget that will begin on July 1, 2013, Sandoval said the modified business tax that was maintained at a higher rate for large businesses in the 2011 legislative session, along with a small increase in the sales tax, must be continued.

The 2011 tax package also eliminated the business tax for 115,000 small Nevada businesses which would continue into the next budget as well.



Nevada Gov.
Brian
Sandoval

"We're going to keep them," Sandoval said of the sunseting taxes. "Again, my baseline is this: I'm not going to cut education, and that includes K-12 and higher ed. I am not going to reduce services for the most vulnerable people in our society.

"I'm not going to pit kindergartners against senior citizens," he said. "I'm not going to pit higher ed students against people that need essential services."

This preliminary recommendation for beginning the budget process for the 2013 legislative session could be modified as the state's fiscal picture becomes clearer in the coming months, Sandoval said.

"We're going to be having many conversations between now and when the final budget is presented to the Legislature," he said. "I believe at this point in time, which is very early, it is the responsible thing to do for the future of the state of Nevada."

Sandoval said an expanding Medicaid caseload, along with costs associated with the expansion of the program under the federal health care law, will consume any revenue increases. Because of this, failing to include the sunseting taxes for budget planning purposes would mean cuts to education.

"In addition to avoiding further cuts to education, this decision means there will be no need for tax increases in the next session," Sandoval said. "Nevadans will pay no more than they are in the current biennium. The budget building process remains ongoing, but we must begin today."

Efforts are under way to circulate petitions to put possible tax increases before the voters, including measures that could lead to hikes in both mining and gaming taxes. A gross margin tax on business is also being considered by labor groups and teachers but no ballot measure has been filed yet.

Sandoval made the announcement to the capitol press corps after a meeting of the Board of Examiners. He said his intention with the announcement is to be transparent.

Sandoval strongly opposed continuing the tax increases approved by the 2009 legislature in the 2011 session, but ultimately agreed to do so after a Nevada Supreme Court ruling threw his proposed budget into financial disarray.

The 2013-15 budget planning process begins Thursday with a briefing by state Budget Director Jeff Mohlenkamp to state agencies and representatives of public and higher education.

Today's announcement was immediately welcomed by some Republican lawmakers.

Sen. Michael Roberson, R-Las Vegas, who is expected to lead the Republican Senate caucus in the 2013 legislative session, said he supports Sandoval's preliminary budget instructions.

"I support Gov. Sandoval and his budget instructions that will not impose new taxes on the people of Nevada," Roberson said. "I will continue to lead the fight against new tax increases while working with Gov. Sandoval to improve public education. I will not support additional cuts to public education."

Roberson opposed extending the sunseting taxes in the 2011 session, arguing that the Nevada Supreme Court ruling did not create the huge financial hole in the budget that others had suggested.

"Gov. Sandoval has outlined a prudent and fiscally responsible preliminary budget framework," Roberson said. "I am grateful for his tremendous leadership. I will stand with him and support him."

Sen. Ben Kieckhefer, R-Reno, announced his support for Sandoval's proposal via Twitter.

"I applaud the decision by Gov. Sandoval to do what is necessary to protect education from cuts," he said, adding that what that means in the 2013 session is yet to be determined.

Sandoval said the spending will also be prepared using the new approach of performance-based budgeting.

Conservation Corps looking

for military vets for crews

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The California Conservation Corps seeks military veterans interested in forestry work to join veterans crews based in Northern California.

Members of the residential crews will live and work from CCC centers in Auburn and South Lake Tahoe, and receive paid training from the U.S. Forest Service in wildland firefighting and chain saw use, according to a California Conservation Corps news release. The crews will work on fuel reduction and other forestry-related projects. Some work may require 10-day camping and work stints away from the veterans' base center.

Veterans selected for the crew will receive a living stipend, room and board, and basic health insurance. Uniforms, safety gear and tools are provided.

To qualify, veterans must be between the ages of 18 and 25, have an honorable discharge or general discharge under honorable conditions, and not be on probation or parole. Those interested in applying for the program should contact the CCC by April 2.

[Read the whole story](#)

Ski companies survive with diverse locations, activities

By Susan Wood

Even the Easter Bunny wouldn't put all his eggs in one basket this spring. So why would a smart ski resort company do the same in winter?

That's the question major U.S. ski resort companies such as Vail Resorts and Powdr Corp. ponder every year with their mix of assets, investments and planned capital improvements – much like an investor evaluates and reevaluates the diversity of a financial portfolio.

Ski resort companies are no longer satisfied with one area and one activity in an industry that's constantly evolving.



When Northstar
on Dec. 20,
2011, didn't
have enough
snow to cover
its slopes,
Vail Resorts'
Colorado
resorts did.
Photo/LTN file

Take Vail, for example. The Broomfield, Colo.-based corporation is often seeking good investment opportunities – including China, which would introduce a mass population and completely novice market to the industry.

According to the China Ski Association, the number of skiers and boarders who graced the slopes in places as untouched as inner Mongolia and the Altai Mountains featured in the 2009

Warren Miller film "Dynasty" has soared. Records show the numbers jumped from 200,000 in 2000 to 5 million five years later. If the right opportunity arises, this discovery would spell mega dollars for a company that already owns four ski areas in Colorado and soon will have three in Northern California with the finalization of the Kirkwood Mountain Resort deal which is expected this week.

Along with Boreal Mountain Resort in the Lake Tahoe region, Powdr Corp. out of Park City claims holdings in Utah, Colorado, Oregon and Vermont. The names are synonymous with landmark skiing –Park City, Mt. Bachelor and Killington.

Mother Nature bestows her will differently from one area of the United States to another. This means the region that gets the snow in one year may carry the weight of the balance sheet in revenue and vice versa.

"It certainly helps to have resorts located in different regions across the entire country. It can help us balance out the weather pitfalls," Powdr Corp. Chief Development Officer Tim Brennwald told *Lake Tahoe News*. He called it "common sense" and "not a grand scheme" because the snowfall "can vary all the time."

Proving their point

This year made for a prime example in January. Snow was expected to hit Boreal in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. Instead, the storms split and dumped nearly 5 feet of snow in Bend, Ore., where Mt. Bachelor was only too happy to advertise to a snow-hungry California market. Whistler in Canada jumped on the same marketing bandwagon.

Brennwald said his company has passed on the Asian market to instead keep an eye on possibilities in Europe and New Zealand.

Snowmaking has in many ways changed the game a bit, and

sometimes it doesn't even take snow to tout amenities at a resort. The corporation plans to turn Boreal into a year-round resort this summer by building Woodward Tahoe, a 33,000-square-foot facility geared toward action sports such as skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding, BMX riding and gymnastics.

"Obviously, we won't need a lot of natural snowfall to make this work and is another way we diversify our properties," Brennwald said.

Importance of more than one location

Snow – where to make it (in the cold) and where to get it (in the storm track) – is the key to success for most ski resort companies.

But even the downward slope of snowpack levels – (well below normal in Lake Tahoe this season) – didn't hurt lodging reservations in February according to a recent report from Mountain Travel Research. One could say the market itches for the sport – especially following a record, blockbuster winter like 2010-11 that builds positive snow equity.

"It's true the weather is the driving force behind ski resorts diversifying. There isn't necessarily a consistency (in weather) from coast to coast. There's lots of experience in defense of this notion, and it serves these (resort executives) well to believe that. They've done well in the last 10 years," said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association.

Future ski resort holdings will expand beyond the typical boundaries of North America for companies such as Vail, Berry predicts.

"They'd love to see China open up," he said. The novelty would make any ski equipment manufacturer salivate. Outside North America and Western Europe, enthusiasts ski and board with

primitive gear.

Berry notes one of the biggest benefits to the diversification of ski resorts is the multi-state season pass. Vail's Epic pass provides a Tahoe rider with an invitation to hop a plane to Denver and experience Vail resorts with varying personalities – from the high altitude Breckenridge and quieter cousin Keystone to the luxurious Beaver Creek and massive flagship Vail resort.

The company has become so much about skiing that a recent quarterly report to investors indicated less of a focus on building its RockResorts beachy hospitality brand at the expense of its ski properties.

"Our real strategy is a geographic strategy," Blaise Carrig, co-president of Vail's mountain division, told *Lake Tahoe News* in a recent conversation.

Diversity in properties makes for one major consideration in ski area companies investing in properties.

Carrig, with a long background running Heavenly Mountain Resort, explained how the South Lake Tahoe ski area is quite different than Northstar in Truckee. Both resorts must have something special to bring to the table. The former has expanded its offerings in other amenities such as snowshoeing and cross country ski trails and equipment in the winter, and an adventure park with dry inner tubing in the summer. The latter, on the other end of Tahoe, has long been the destination visitors' delight with amenities as diverse as golfing and tennis to stargazing and hiking off the gondola.

Access to transportation and a solid bed base are other considerations in terms of buying properties.

From there, investments that pay off in the long haul like snowmaking can always be added, Carrig said. Being a "tough year," he took much solace in a corporate report that showed a

15 percent drop in skier visits compared to last year.

“This means that 85 percent of our customers are still coming to ski and spend money. Sure, we’re off, but I’m going to look at the point where the glass is full,” he said. “I don’t see (the weather) as a pattern. I guess our plan B is investment in our resorts.”

It’s been said, “You have to spend money to make money.” The big ski companies are doing just that.

California’s February revenues fall short

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

California revenues missed the mark in February by 3.2 percent, or \$146.3 million, state Controller John Chiang said Monday.

Chiang, who manages the state's cash, said the shortfall was likely due to a spike in tax refunds going out earlier than expected in February. Income tax receipts were 5.7 percent, or \$99.9 million, below the Department of Finance's projection.

Gov. Jerry Brown and state lawmakers are anxiously awaiting tax receipts from March and April, two significant revenue months as taxpayers file their returns. The Democratic governor has proposed a budget to close a \$9.2 billion deficit, but the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office has suggested that Brown's estimates are overly optimistic and that the deficit is likely higher than that figure.

[Read the whole story](#)

Surgeon general shocked by amount of teen smoking

By USA Today

ROCKVILLE, Md. — Many of America's teens smoke cigarettes as well as use smokeless tobacco, and the tobacco industry's marketing fuels their addiction, says the first U.S. surgeon general's report on youth tobacco use since 1994.

"The numbers are really shocking," Surgeon General Regina Benjamin said in an interview, citing data in Thursday's report that nearly one in four high school seniors and one in

three young adults under age 26 smoke despite a half-century of federal warnings about tobacco.

“It’s a problem we have to solve,” Benjamin said, calling it a “pediatric epidemic” in need of greater public action. She said one of every three young smokers will quit and one of the others will die from tobacco-related causes. She said adolescents, because their bodies are developing, are more susceptible than adults to nicotine’s addictiveness and tobacco’s damage to hearts and lungs.

The voluminous report finds that progress in reducing youth cigarette smoking – quite dramatic from 1997 to 2003 – has slowed in recent years. It says more high school students are using smokeless tobacco and many (at least half of white and Hispanic male tobacco users and nearly half of Hispanic female users) both smoke and chew tobacco.

The report concludes that the tobacco industry’s \$10 billion in annual marketing, some of it in promotions to reduce prices, encourages young people to begin and continue their tobacco use.

Read the whole story

STPUD ratepayer info may become public information

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe Public Utility District board members are expected to vote March 15 whether to release ratepayer contact

information to the Citizens Alliance for Responsible Government.

John Runnels, a member of that group, made a presentation to the board Jan. 19. Because all five members were not in attendance the vote was pushed back to this Thursday when all are expected at the meeting.



Runnels said his group wants to be able to send direct mailings to ratepayers – in particular about Proposition 218 notifications.

State law requires the utility district to notify people by mail of potential increases in sewer or water rates. People must be told of the pending vote 50 days before the board is scheduled to take action.

Runnels told the board at the January meeting that the district's "PR is limiting." He contends people don't believe it's the truth; that the district puts a spin on the information.

"We say what rate increase we are proposing, what it means to various customer classes, what the current rate is and what it would be with the increase," Dennis Cocking, South Tahoe PUD spokesman, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting. "You have 45 days if you want to protest. You don't have to give a reason."

The district sends its Proposition 218 notifications to all 17,000 ratepayers even though some are only sewer customers.

"We have always met the letter of the law," Cocking said.

Once the paperwork is sent the board cannot increase the rate beyond what people have been alerted to. However, they may

reduce the increase like they did last year when the proposal was to up sewer rates 2.5 percent and the board chose to increase rates by 2 percent.

Notifications will go out this spring because of proposed changes to metered water customers. Right now people on meters have a bill that is based on a 55 percent fixed rate, 45 percent variable based on usage. It may go to a 65-35 split. The eventual goal of the district is for it to be 70 percent fixed, 30 percent variable.

Other rate increases are possible.

At the January meeting the board, with President Eric Schafer absent, was all over the place with the thought of releasing ratepayer information. Part of the problem was setting such precedent. Part was not knowing who else the Alliance might give the addresses to and the potential ratepayers would be inundated with junk mail. Some liked the idea of being transparent.

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Meeting info:

March 15 at 2pm, 1275 Meadow Crest Drive, South Lake Tahoe.

Building demolition would add beach access in S. Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Providing more public access to Lake Tahoe as well as increasing the views for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists would be achieved if the Alta Mira building changed hands and then was leveled.

This nondescript building at 3339 Lake Tahoe Blvd. in South Lake Tahoe is on the March 15 California Tahoe Conservancy agenda. Staff is asking the board to enter an 18-month option at a cost of \$10,000. This is essentially a down payment so the owner – called the Alta Mira Partnership – won't sell to someone else in that time frame.



The Alta Mira building in South Lake Tahoe that sits above the lake may be torn down.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

“In our 27-year history we have tried to enhance opportunities to lake access,” CTC Deputy Director Ray Lacey told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This building would be the end point of Lakeview Commons when it is totally developed. Getting rid of the building would visually improve the area as well as provide another 190 feet of beach access for the public. A little more than 2,000 linear feet of sand exists from El Dorado Beach to the Alta

Mira building.

"This would provide a proverbial anchor to the edge of El Dorado Beach," Lacey said.

It was a grant of more than \$6 million from the Conservancy to South Lake Tahoe that made Lakeview Commons a reality. This project overhauled the land at El Dorado Beach at the corner of Highway 50 and Lakeview Avenue.

Another \$4 million to \$5 million is needed to complete the project that would end at the Alta Mira building. That money, though, is not in anyone's budget.

Also unknown is where the \$2.5 million would come from to buy the 0.55-acre Alta Mira parcel.

Bruce Eisner, CTC program manager, said his agency has about \$1.5 million that could go toward buying the Alta Mira building, but the rest would have to come from other sources.

The Tahoe Fund is one group that may be able to help.

While the board of this nonprofit has not voted on this particular topic, some members have expressed an interest in exploring acquiring the land.

"This is a key piece of property. We don't have any definite commitments to it," Cindy Gustafson, chairwoman of the Tahoe Fund board of directors, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We are not in a position where we could singularly acquire it, but we would work with partner agencies."

Eisner said if the Conservancy in the next 1½ years decides to buy the property, the agency would stipulate the current owners demolish the existing building before title would be transferred.

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Meeting info: California Tahoe Conservancy board meets March 15, 9:30am at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe.

Snow expected from series of upcoming storms

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

A series of storms will bring snow and high winds to the Sierra Nevada and drenching rains and winds to parts of Northern California this week, the National Weather Service said today.

The first wave arriving today in the Sacramento area today isn't expected to drop much in the way of precipitation, said NWS forecaster Karl Swanberg. Showers will be mainly light and intermittent.

But Swanberg said today's storm front will clear the way for a heavier system expected to reach the valley area Monday afternoon. That storm is forecast to deliver about 0.75 of an inch of rain in the Sacramento Valley through Monday night and Tuesday, with winds gusting to 25 mph. Valley winds should strengthen on Tuesday, gusting to 40 mph.

In the mountains, snow levels will range from the 5,000 feet to 5,500 feet Monday night and Tuesday, Swanberg said, and

winds are forecast at 25 mph to 45 mph. At ridge tops, look for winds gusting to 50 mph Monday afternoon and up to 75 mph late Tuesday.

Another storm system should arrive on Wednesday, dropping another 0.75 of an inch to 1 inch in the Sacramento area. To the north, in Redding, a heavier downpour is forecast of between 2 inches and 3 inches through midweek.

[Read the whole story](#)

Red Hawk Casino receives reprieve from court ruling

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The Indian tribe that owns Red Hawk Casino said it won a key court ruling Friday that staves off a looming financial disaster, at least for the time being.

A judge said the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians doesn't have to post a multimillion-dollar bond while it pursues an appeal of a \$30 million jury verdict against the tribe.

The tribe had argued that it didn't have enough cash or other liquid assets to post the bond. If not for the judge's ruling, the tribe said it couldn't have appealed the \$30 million verdict – and the casino was in danger of closing.

“Any efforts to presently execute on the judgment would likely have catastrophic consequences for the tribe and all who depend on the casino for their livelihood,” a tribal attorney wrote in a filing recently in El Dorado County Superior Court. The three-year-old casino off Highway 50 in Shingle Springs

employs 1,350 workers.

The tribe said it was pleased with the ruling.

“We have moved forward with our appeal,” tribal chairman Nicholas Fonseca said in a prepared statement.

[Read the whole story](#)