

Washoe County cuts budget dealing with graffiti

Washoe County Sheriff Michael Haley said he is being forced to immediately eliminate graffiti investigations conducted by his office due to budget cuts instigated by the Board of Commissioners.

“This action is counter-intuitive to the philosophy of my office and staff and was made only after careful analysis of the impact of the board’s reductions on our operations,” Haley said in a press release.

Sheriff’s support specialists who had been dedicated full time to documenting graffiti incidents and violators will be re-assigned. A deputy who was dedicated to full-time investigation and enforcement of graffiti reports will move to patrol.

Allowed to continue is the graffiti abatement efforts using inmate and community service work crews.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

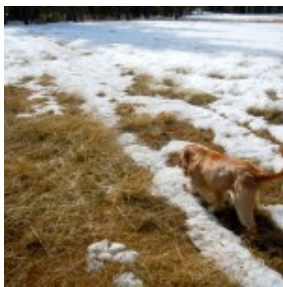
Wet week ahead for Lake Tahoe Basin

This could be the wettest week of the winter, with the first of several storms expected to arrive tonight.

With spring just nine days away and bare ground the norm in so much of the Lake Tahoe Basin, more white stuff would be

welcome. However, the storms are expected to be warm to begin with so rain will also be part of the equation.

“It’s been so dry so the ground, rivers and creeks can take on a quite a bit of water. We aren’t foreseeing any flooding,” Katherine Homman with the National Weather Service in Reno said. “It’s definitely going to be wetter than we have been most of the winter.”



More snow this week may cover trails at lake level.

Photo/LTN

More moisture is expected throughout Northern California and Northern Nevada all week. Storms are expected to roll into Tahoe Tuesday and Thursday nights, too. With the latter, the temps are expected to decrease a bit.

Wind is likely to be a factor with the storms, too, according the Weather Service

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Dugard makes first public appearance since 2009 homecoming

By Emily Christianson, Los Angeles Times

Jaycee Dugard stepped out publicly on Friday for the first time since her rescue in 2009. The kidnapping survivor was in good company at the United Nations in New York for Diane von Furstenberg's DVF Awards ceremony, where she met fellow honorees like Oprah Winfrey.

Dugard received the Inspiration Award for her JAYC Foundation, which aims to help families "recovering from abduction and the aftermath of other traumatic experiences."

People reports that, taking the microphone, Dugard told the crowd: "My name is Jaycee Dugard and I want to say that, because for a long time I wasn't able to say my name and so it feels good. I am truly honored to be here tonight with these amazing women who have done and been through so much more than me."

Despite her horrific experience, she said it was her mother's hope that helped her go on. "And I did live. I have two beautiful daughters who I love with all my heart," she said.

Dugard, 31, made headlines first when she was abducted at age 11 as she walked to bus stop from her South Lake Tahoe-area home, and again 18 years later when she was rescued with her daughters from her kidnappers, Phillip and Nancy Garrido.

Read the whole story

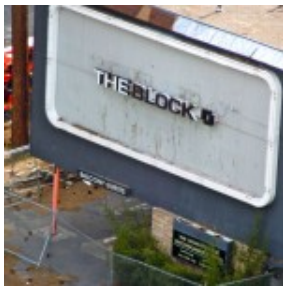
The Block hotel changes hands with plans to reopen

By Kathryn Reed

The Block, the infamous one-time snowboarder hotel near Stateline, is going to open its doors again.

The San Francisco-based owners have obtained a building permit from South Lake Tahoe to renovate the rooms, put on a new roof, and bring things up to code.

A fire damaged the roof in September when heat tape and pine needles came into contact with each other.



The Block hotel in South Lake Tahoe is being renovated.

Photo/LTN

“The lobby and a couple of the rooms will be brought up to ADA standards. Overall it is a minor fix it to get the place open,” Hilary Roverud, director of Development Services, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The owners, operating under the name 4143 SLT LLC, did not

return multiple calls. The address of the hotel is 4143 Cedar Ave.

The 50-room hotel used to be two hotels. In 2003, they were consolidated into one.

Eneliko "Sean" Smith had owned The Block and Cedar Lodge hotels, but lost both to creditors. BMR Funding LLC took over The Block and First Credit Bank owns Cedar Lodge.

Smith was in and out of court for failing to pay the city the hotel tax.

"We have not been paid the back TOT taxes," City Attorney Patrick Enright told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Smith is supposed to pay \$500 month, but hasn't paid a dime. The total he owes is \$134,000.

It is not known when the new hotel will open or if the name is staying the same.

Owners have called the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, but no one has submitted an application.

"What they would have to pay would depend on what they would propose to do at the hotel. At a minimum there would be an air quality mitigation fee," Kristi Boosman, TRPA spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She added that the owner mentioned to TRPA staff about putting in bike-pedestrian walkways or electric charging stations in order to reduce those air mitigation fees, but with no paperwork being submitted, the TRPA doesn't know what the hotel owners want to or will do.

Tropicana Entertainment loses \$13.6 million in 4th quarter

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Tropicana Entertainment Inc. of Las Vegas posted a smaller loss in the fourth quarter than the same period a year earlier, the company disclosed in its annual report this week.

The hotel-casino company controlled by investor Carl Icahn said it lost \$13.6 million on net revenue of \$146.5 million.



MontBleu's
parent company
continues to
lose money.
Photo/LTN file

That compares to a loss in the year-ago quarter of \$20.4 million on net revenue of nearly \$155 million.

The loss fell in part because the 2010 quarter included \$19.2 million in accounting entries to write down the value of assets vs. just \$5.8 million of such charges in the 2011 quarter.

Tropicana said that for all of 2011, net revenue increased for its casinos in Atlantic City and the Midwest, but it was flat

for its properties in the South and fell for its properties in Nevada.

Tropicana has two resorts in Laughlin and one in Lake Tahoe – MontBleu. The Tropicana Las Vegas is owned by another company.

Read the whole story

Nevada ready to takeover porn film industry from LA

By Joe Schoenmann, Las Vegas Sun

Angered by an ordinance requiring actors in pornographic productions to wear condoms, some in the adult industry are threatening to move their operations from the “pornucopia” of Los Angeles to Southern Nevada.

The news, first reported last month by the Los Angeles Times, has caused some to speculate on the industry’s future in Las Vegas, which is already seen by many insiders as a welcoming second home.

While these insiders say more studios are likely to move here because of the ordinance, they also note porn’s migration was under way long before the Los Angeles City Council’s January vote aimed at stopping the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Las Vegas is home to a mega-player, Brazzers, and a newcomer, Bluebird Films. Several performers live in the Las Vegas Valley. And it’s not uncommon for the Strip skyline, Lake Mead and surrounding mountains to show up in pornographic movies, insiders said.

Katie Kox, a performer and porn website operator who lives in Henderson, said she expects the ordinance to push more producers to Southern Nevada. She typically flies to Los Angeles for filming but anticipates doing more work locally as the ordinance takes effect.

“I honestly think it’s going to affect the Vegas film industry a lot,” she said. “A lot of them (performers) already live out here.”

Las Vegas and Clark County have both licensed adult motion picture studios, and within the last year, a major porn production company set up shop in Southern Nevada, according to Clyde DeWitt, an attorney who represents porn production companies and has offices in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Read the whole story

Nevada education funding study to proceed

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A panel of lawmakers is moving forward with a review of the state’s 45-year-old formula for funding public education after receiving \$125,000 from the Clark County School District to pay for a study.

The New Method for Funding Public Schools interim study was authorized by the 2011 Legislature to look at the “Nevada Plan” the current funding formula adopted in 1967.

But it was contingent upon funding from the Clark County School District, which is seeking the review. The district

wants lawmakers to consider revising the formula to assist urban districts with the costs of educating special education students, English-language learners and children in poverty, among other factors.

Lawmakers on the panel voted to hire a consultant through a request for proposals to assist in the review of the formula.

Sen. Greg Brower, R-Reno, a member of the interim study panel, also asked the Clark County School District to provide a list of those who contributed to the district to produce the \$125,000 for the study.

“Unless counsel would advise us otherwise I think it is a matter of public record so I think it is important that the committee and those who might be evaluating this study later on know exactly how it was funded and where the funds came from, so ...,” he said.

Joyce Haldeman, representing the district, said the information would be provided.

Explosion at S. Tahoe apartment lands man in jail on drug charges

By Kathryn Reed

A South Lake Tahoe man blew out the windows of his apartment when he was allegedly trying to extract THC from marijuana using butane.

Arrested the night of March 7 was Samuel Frangella, 22, on

charges of drug manufacturing, possession of drug paraphernalia, arson and felony child endangerment. The latter charge is because the couple next door has small children and the law says in a manufacturing case it's not just the room, but the whole building that is considered the drug lab.

Jeff Catchings, commander of South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team, said Frangella is lucky not to have been burned. With the window of his unit at 1223 Bonanza Ave. being blown out, casting shards of glass at least 100 feet, it kept the flame from staying inside. The interior of the residence was not damaged much either, Catchings said.

Catchings said this is the equivalent of having a meth lab in the middle of town.

"Based on the amount of butane in room, he had enough in there to blow himself up," Catchings said.

The officer also said the suspect photographed himself extracting the THC.

The end result of such extractions is called honey oil because that's what it looks like. It can be used in food or smoked.

Catchings also said his job and SLEDNET as a whole will remain intact through the end of this fiscal year with the use of drug forfeiture money. There was the threat the drug enforcement unit would have to disband starting this calendar year. It remains to be seen if SLEDNET will operate past June 30.

\$286 mil. – a record for lobbyists in California in 2011

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – State Assemblyman Warren Furutani looked out over a sea of red – protesting oil industry workers wearing scarlet T-shirts – and saw trouble for his plan to raise \$2.5 billion for universities with a tax on crude.

The Central Valley workers had packed a legislative hearing to oppose the idea. Their shirts said “Save Our Jobs” and oil companies had spent close to \$5,000 to bus them to the Capitol from Bakersfield.

The bill died, one of many victories for an industry that paid \$12 million to an army of lobbyists last year to do its bidding.

Businesses, unions and other interests set a record in 2011 for money spent lobbying the state: \$286.6 million, a 6.8% increase from the year before, according to recent filings. That surprised even veteran Capitol watchers, who refer to the lobbying corps as the “Third House” because its power rivals that of the two houses of the Legislature.

Amid the state’s lingering economic slump and Sacramento’s persistent budget crisis, a record 2,768 entities hired lobbyists last year, many of them to fight for a slice of the shrinking public pie. Corporations sought an edge with a Democratic governor after seven years when a business-friendly Republican was in charge.

Read the whole story

Retired El Dorado County sheriff's sergeant arrested

By Kathryn Reed

A retired El Dorado County sheriff's sergeant who worked in the South Lake Tahoe substation is behind bars.

Donald Philip Atkinson, 50, was arrested March 8 on 44 felony charges. He is accused of embezzling more than \$300,000 from the El Dorado County Deputy Sheriff's Association, of which he was president. Grand theft, perjury and forgery are among the other charges.

The 11-page complaint filed by the state Attorney General's Office in El Dorado County Superior Court says the crimes occurred between Jan. 1, 2005, and June 30, 2011. The alleged thefts started when he lived in the Carson Valley and continued to when he moved to El Dorado Hills, where he was most recently living.



Donald
Atkinson

Atkinson is the detective who in 2006 handled teacher Karsten Gronwald's child pornography case. In 2007, he was widely quoted admonishing then Sheriff Jeff Neves for shuffling

assignments that put search and rescue responsibilities in the hands of Placerville deputies. He was vocal with the Board of Supervisors when it came to budget cuts.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Daniel B. Proud set Atkinson's bail at \$1 million.

This is the same judge who in March 2007 ruled against the deputy sheriff's association and in favor of Neves in regards to the labor suit.

When a scam in June 2007 was gaining traction soliciting money for the deputy sheriff's association it was Atkinson who warned people not to donate the money.

A joint press release from Attorney General Kamala D. Harris and El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson says, "An investigation by the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office with assistance from the Attorney General's Office showed that Atkinson falsified official documents, including Fair Political Practice Commission forms, submitted forged documents to DSA and claimed checks were written for charitable purposes but pocketed the money. The investigation was conducted after a request from the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office."

Atkinson allegedly used the money to open accounts in his name.

He is accused of taking \$100,000 from a 72-year-old woman and \$20,000 designated for the families of Sgts. Mark Dunakin, Ervin Romans, and Daniel Sakai and Officer John Hege, the four Oakland police officers killed by a parolee in March 2009.

