

Washoe County educator named U.S. superintendent of the year

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Heath Morrison, superintendent of the Washoe County School District, on Thursday was named the 2012 National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators.

The announcement was made at the AASA national conference in Houston.



Heath Morrison

In announcing the selection, Daniel Domenech, AASA executive director, had high praise for Morrison.

“Despite the fact that Nevada’s once-booming economy has been in steep decline, Heath has led his community in the development of a districtwide five-year strategic plan to ensure that every child receives a high-quality education and graduates from high school ready for college or a career,” Domenech said. “Already, the district is seeing results. We can learn from his success.”

Morrison has been superintendent of the district since 2009. The district is the second largest school district in Nevada with approximately 63,000 students enrolled in 93 schools.

Between 2009 and 2011, the district's graduation rate jumped from 56 percent to 70 percent with increases in every student subgroup. The district also has achieved significant test score gains and has narrowed the achievement gap in many subject areas.

As the 2012 National Superintendent of the Year honoree, Morrison is entitled to present a \$10,000 college scholarship to a student at the high school from which he graduated or to a student from a high school in his current district.

A national blue ribbon panel of educators, business leaders and government officials selected Morrison from four national finalists.

The national Superintendent of the Year finalists are measured against the following criteria:

- Leadership for learning – creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication – strength in personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism – constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community involvement – active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national and international issues.

The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the U.S. and throughout the world.

International Olympic Committee president in U.S., but relations still prickly

By Asher Feldman, Daily Trojan

In the midst of the athletic department's yearlong celebration of USC's Olympic successes, International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge spoke Wednesday at Town & Gown as part of Annenberg's Sports and Social Change Speaker Series.

The discussion, hosted by Alan Abrahamson, a professor of journalism, covered a variety of topics, including the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and focused on the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

"The 1984 Olympics left a tremendous legacy for this city," Rogge said.

Because Italian Premier Mario Monti had ended Rome's bid for the 2020 Summer Games because of financial concerns on Tuesday, the conversation turned quickly to the sustainability of the Olympic ideal and the impact of real-world incidents on the Games.

"Sport is not in a vacuum," Rogge said. "Sport is part of society."

Scott Blackmun, CEO of the United States Olympic Committee, also spoke at the event and highlighted the financial and logistical difficulty of hosting the Olympic Games on U.S. soil, stating the USOC was hesitant to submit a bid for the 2022 Winter Games.

Tahoe-Reno wants to host those Games, as does Denver and Park City. But with the U.S. Olympic Committee and the IOC still unable to reach a financial deal, the chance of the U.S. as a

host city in 2022 is dimming.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe bank robbery suspect in custody

The man suspected of robbing the Wells Fargo Bank inside Raley's near Stateline on Jan. 30 has been arrested in Sacramento.

Michael Johnson, 52, was arrested by Sacramento police Feb. 15 after he alleged robbed the River City Bank in the capital city.



Michael
Johnson

He is accused of robbing that bank twice, the South Lake Tahoe bank and two banks in San Francisco.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Snow not stopping education process; more on the way

Schools in the Lake Tahoe Basin are open, but some are starting later than normal because of the several inches of snow that fell overnight.

All Douglas County schools will start one hour later. This also means buses are running an hour later.



Storm clouds
will be over
Lake Tahoe for
several day.
Photo/LTN

All Washoe County schools are on a two-hour delay.

Lake Tahoe and Truckee unified school districts are on a normal schedule.

A winter weather advisory is in effect until 10 this morning for the Lake Tahoe Basin, Truckee, Reno, and Carson City areas. About 2 more inches are expected through Wednesday.

Chain controls are in effect for most California and Nevada highways in and around the basin. Find out specific road conditions by clicking on the state icons at the top of *Lake*

Tahoe News' home page.

The white stuff is expected to return again Saturday. This means the three-day Presidents Day weekend should cover the slopes for riders, sledders and snowmobilers.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

LTUSD, teachers begin contract discussions

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District teachers are willing to negotiate, but they want a contract. The last one expired in June 2010.



Carla Zezula and Jodi Dayberry with the South Tahoe Educators Association spoke at the Feb. 14 board meeting about wanting the board to be more engaged with negotiations.

“We want you to understand the process,” Zezula said.

She said with the state deciding not to take away midyear transportation money that it frees up the \$735,000 in the Ed-Job fund to be used elsewhere. The teachers intend to negotiate for those dollars.

Dayberry focused her comments on the rumors at schools that cuts to professional development are a done deal. That would be a violation of signed agreements.

“Staff development is a negotiable item,” she said.

While this was a public hearing, no one else spoke. The board is expected to vote on a contract at the March 27 meeting.

More information about what the teachers’ union is asking for is online.

In other action:

- The board agreed to an early retirement incentive for teachers to leave at the end of this school year.
- The five voted to support Gov. Jerry Brown’s education initiative. Board member Larry Green said not passing the bill “will affect children in a terrible way.”

Survey: Residents less than enamoured with South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

While the number of people who believe South Lake Tahoe is going in the correct direction increased by 50 percent in the most recent survey compared to the prior year, the majority of survey takers said the city is off track.



Partial results from the December citizen survey were just released. Twenty-two percent believe the city is on the right path. While that is a dismal percentage, the 2010 survey had 15 percent believing in what the city was doing.

This was the largest percentage increase in all the questions asked.

The goal of the annual survey that was started in 2010 is to ask residents and business owners a series of questions to find out how the city is doing in a number of areas. From there it is up to staff and the City Council to figure out how to improve on those numbers.

“We have to do a better job in the services we are delivering,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We need to focus less on ourselves and more on the public.”

This was in response to 29 percent of respondents believing they get value for their tax dollars. That dropped two percentage points from 2010.

Forty-one percent of the people who were sent a survey filled it out – or 444 people. The 2010 survey had a 35 percent response rate. On things like this response rates usually range between 25 percent and 40 percent.

Twenty-two questions were about the city, though many were multi-part. For example, under the question about the quality of services in South Lake Tahoe, 38 areas needed to be graded either excellent, good, fair, poor or don’t know.

The highest rated city department was fire at 88 percent believing these men and women do a good job. However, garbage collection was at 92 percent – the top ranked entity. But garbage isn’t even a city business; South Tahoe Refuse is a private company that contracts with the city.

"I'm going to make it a point to have these garbage guys visit our staff," O'Rourke said. "That is the type of customer service we want to obtain."

The worst area in the city is streets – with an approval rating of 14 percent. That is the same number from 2010.

Besides comparing the results from year-to-year, the city also puts itself up against other cities in the United States.

Out of 339 cities, garbage service in South Lake Tahoe is ranked eighth best. This compares to street repair that is No. 391 out of 400. That means people in nine other cities have a bumpier, more unpleasant experience than people here.

Snow removal, which is considered a core service, received a 63 percent good-excellent rating. Compared to other cities, South Tahoe is 108 out of 255.

O'Rourke wants to do what he can to make the number go higher. It's impossible to know if all the news about cutbacks to the department as well as last year's heavy snowfall that was not always plowed to residents' satisfaction contributed to the rating.

But it was up 3 percentage points from the previous year.

O'Rourke said he was alarmed with only 30 percent saying business service is good or excellent.

"We are ranked 156 out of 170 and we are a tourist destination where service should be our hallmark. That is a horrible story," O'Rourke said. "I think the public is critical, but not in an overly negative way. They call it like they see it."

Staff, as was done a year ago as well, was also surveyed. All those results will not be made public until employees hear the news first. However, O'Rourke said overall feelings "went from neutral to slightly negative."

“It seems like employees feel picked upon. But we have to be fiscally solvent before we are mother hens,” O’Rourke said. “There is a nexus to what we do today and how it affects us down the road.”

In coalescing all of this information the city also sought data from neighboring counties with the main goals to find out the percentage of employees who were let go in the last year, change to the pension and health care plans, and what the significant impacts were. South Lake Tahoe officials in this chart provide that information.

The citizen survey will most likely be discussed in full at the March 6 City Council meeting. It is slated to be released at that time as well. The council could make changes to the strategic and business plans that were adopted last year to incorporate any information from the survey.

Whittemore, Seeno lawsuits’ impact may ripple through Nevada

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

Some might say it’s just a legal battle between rich, powerful

men.

But the court fight ensuing between one of Nevada's most high-profile lobbyists, Harvey Whittemore, and the owners of the Bay Area's largest home-building company, Tom Seeno and Albert Seeno Jr., could threaten the network of business, philanthropy and influence that both have worked their entire lives to create.

Competing lawsuits between Whittemore and the Seenos make accusations that could ultimately land someone in prison. They include claims of embezzlement, racketeering and threats of murder and physical violence. If any of the claims prove true, they also could result in the loss of several valuable and coveted licenses – including the gaming license for the casinos run by the Peppermill. The Seenos are minority partners in the gaming empire and are listed on the gaming license.

The Seenos claim Whittemore stole funds from their shared business, the Wingfield Nevada Group. If that claim is true, it could cost Whittemore his license to practice law and curtail his ability to raise funds for philanthropy and political candidates – something he is known for throughout the state, giving big contributions to some of the state's most politically connected candidates.

Sam McMullen, a Las Vegas lawyer and lobbyist who has known Whittemore for decades, said Whittemore has always been willing to step up and organize political fundraisers. And he has done it across party lines, he said.

"As long as I've known him, Harvey has been a force in Nevada politics," McMullen said. "It will be a loss if he was no longer active. He has done a great deal for Nevada."

Read the whole story

Competing casinos coordinate advertising efforts

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Peppermill and Atlantis resorts, competing anchors on south Reno's gaming front, have united in the battle for Northern California's drive-up market.

Their billboards across Sacramento-region highways brag about Reno's "Loosest Slots in the USA" designation, awarded last year by Casino Player magazine.

The mission is two-pronged, say the resorts: Tell motorists there's value in making the trek over the Sierra and, in the same glance, show the Peppermill and Atlantis names and their hotel profiles against a mountain backdrop.

Whether it has worked since the billboards went up last summer, officials say, is hard to quantify. They insist the \$310,000 investment by Reno's top two hotel-casinos as measured in taxable value is more an image booster for the region's struggling gaming sector.

"There's no specific call to action, so it's difficult to measure results," said Kimberlee Tolkien, executive director of administration at the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa. "It's designed to send the message that your best gaming experience is Reno with the loosest slots."

But it's also clear the properties, which together have spent more than \$500 million on expansion in recent years and focus much of their attention on the local market, see a way to tap out-of-area gamblers to south Reno.

“It’s nothing different than what downtown does,” Tolkien said. “It’s getting a message that there’s more to Reno than downtown. Visitors don’t necessarily have a clear picture of what’s available. There’s a lot more in Reno than just downtown.

Read the whole story

Hunt for human bones continues in San Joaquin Valley

Publisher’s note: Families are hoping the uncovering of remains in the San Joaquin Valley will lead to the solving of other murders. The killing of Henry Howell, 45, in Hope Valley in 1984 is still not completely resolved. Loren Herzog was convicted of being an accessory to Howell’s murder, but his conviction was overturned after an appellate court ruled his confession had been coerced.

By Kim Minugh and Melody Gutierrez, Sacramento Bee

Should the rains hold off, investigators are expected to return to rural San Joaquin County today to pull aside their tarps, descend 45 feet into the earth and resume their painstaking search for human remains.

Already, their tedious archaeological digs have unearthed more than 300 bones or bone fragments at three sites in Calaveras and San Joaquin counties, the most fruitful of which was an abandoned well east of Linden.

The discoveries could confirm what many have long suspected:

The carnage left in the wake of notorious “Speed Freak Killers” Loren Herzog and Wesley Shermantine far exceeds those victims known to date.

It could be weeks or even months before authorities know how many more deaths can be attributed to the boyhood friends whose methamphetamine-fueled crime spree over two decades landed both in prison.

In the meantime, authorities have vowed that the digging will not stop until the bones stop appearing.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe budget hole would grow without parking meters

By Kathryn Reed

For people to say they didn’t know South Lake Tahoe intended to charge for parking near beaches, makes one wonder if they had their head in the sand for the past year.

“The other new source of revenue is via metered parking, especially near beaches.” That’s from a March 2, 2011, *Lake Tahoe News* story.

The city in its budget for 2011-12 – that would be this year – is counting on more than \$300,000 from parking revenue in the form of citations and meters.



Venice Drive
in South Lake
Tahoe is
slated to have
parking meters
this summer.
Photo/LTN

On Feb. 7 the City Council was expected to approve an amendment to a city ordinance that would have expanded parking meter zones to Regan Beach, Stateline Beach, Venice Drive between Tahoe Keys Boulevard and Tahoe Keys Marina, and Saddle Road between Ski Run Boulevard and Wildwood Avenue. Instead, the four (Angela Swanson was absent) caved to pressure from marina interests.

“We did have 200 people at both budget hearings, so it is not like this is news,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke said.

Jay Kniep with Lakeside Park Association; Bob Hassett who operates the marinas at Camp Richardson, Tahoe Keys and Lakeside; and Zan Barker the president of the Lakeside Park Association said at the council meeting last week that they found out about the parking issue this month.

This, despite the fact the parking issue has been discussed at multiple public meetings for nearly a year, has been written about multiple times, is included in the current budget year which started Oct. 1, and that meters already were erected near Heavenly Village.

“It’s chilling to have this announcement and no input,” Barker

said. "Everyone I've talked to is concerned. I beg you to step back."

Step back the council did.

A special meeting just to accommodate these three men and their special interests has been scheduled for Feb. 22.

These men think paid parking will hurt their businesses. After all, they won't be making a dime off the fee. It will go into the city's coffers.

But paid parking is not new on the South Shore. Even Hassett charges for parking every summer to get to the Beacon restaurant and adjacent marina. But he gets to keep those dollars.

The Ski Run Marina owner charges in the summer and the U.S. Forest Service has a fee at some locations.

If the council doesn't move forward, it's possible the summer paid parking season will be cut short. Originally the council was expected to have on its Feb. 21 agenda an item to approve buying the parking meter kiosks. Clearly that won't happen because the special interest meeting will be the day after the next council meeting.

Police Chief Brian Uhler, whose department handles the bulk of the parking issue, said each week and month that decisions are delayed means that much longer for the equipment to be purchased, put into the ground and to become operational. Which in turn could mean less money collected that would necessitate mid-year changes to the budget.

O'Rourke pointed out the council can do whatever it wants as long as the electeds remember they adopted a budget that banks on parking revenue. If they want to back away from meters, then another revenue source needs to be found or the council can keep making cuts.

Meeting info:

Date: Feb. 22

Time: 6-7:30pm

Location: Parks & Recreation Complex, Cedar Room, 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe

More info: (530) 542.6136.