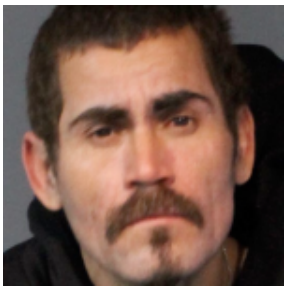
Man detained in Stateline casino murder



Jose Rodiguez-Quezada

An ex-felon has been arrested in connection with the Oct. 3 murder at the Hard Rock Lake Tahoe in Stateline.

Jose DeJesus Rodiguez-Quezada was contacted by UNR police officers on Nov. 22 when they found him sleeping on a sidewalk near the UNR Agricultural Ranch area on East McCarran Boulevard.

They determined Rodriguez-Quezada, a previously deported ex-felon, was in possession of a concealed weapon. He was arrested on charges of an ex-felon in possession of a firearm, carrying a concealed weapon without a permit and obstructing a public officer, as on an outstanding warrant from Washington. A hold from Immigration and Customs Enforcement was placed on him.

He is a person of interest in the murder of Kevin LeRoy Edwards. Rodriguez-Quezada has not been charged with anything related to that crime.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Gaming Policy panel to look at recreational marijuana

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The state Gaming Policy Committee is going to pot this week as top gaming policymakers, including Gov. Brian Sandoval, will discuss whether there's a possible point of entry for recreational marijuana among Nevada's tourism assets.

It's going to be a tough sell, given Nevada regulators' stance on marijuana in the past.

On one hand, you have supporters who see Nevada's new legalization of pot use as another draw. On the other side are those who point to the federal government view that marijuana use is still illegal by statute.

Read the whole story

Squaw-Alpine gondola could be transformative



Troy Caldwell, left, listens to Squaw Valley CEO Andy Wirth talk about the proposed California Express gondola. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – Eighty years after Wayne Paulson envisioned linking Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts, his dream may become a reality.

The founder of Squaw thought he could realize it in his lifetime. Not so. But those falling in his footsteps are now the closest to bringing this to fruition.

The U.S. Forest Service and Placer County are in the throes of the environmental review process. All of the scientists have done their field work. The draft environmental impact statement and draft environmental impact report are being written. They should be released for a 30-day comment period in the first quarter of 2018.

Various routes are being studied, though the exact number has not been released.

The earliest the gondola could be in the ground would be for the 2019-20 season. It will take about 10 months to build.

For years Troy Caldwell has been one of the hurdles that could never be jumped. Now he is on board. He owns the swath of land between the resorts where stanchions for the gondola would have to be placed. He also owns the land KT-22 is on.

Why the change of heart?

He told *Lake Tahoe News* the ownership changes in the resorts with both now being under the KSL umbrella gave him the confidence it would work in all respects.

“I make a rent check on the gondola going through,” Caldwell added.



Olympian Jonny Moseley, an ambassador for Squaw Valley, on Nov. 25 talked about how the gondola will be a good thing for both resorts. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Caldwell, along with Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows CEO Andy Wirth, spoke Nov. 25 to a group of about 50 people at Squaw. Based on the questions most seemed to support the concept.

Some were concerned about bringing more people to both mountains. Increased skier visits is not the goal of the $25 million gondola.

“It’s to stay competitive,” Wirth said. This type of infrastructure is becoming the norm in other parts of North America.

The gondola would be similar to what has been done in Utah linking Park City to the Canyons area, as well as at Whistler-Blackcomb in British Columbia.

That is also why a peak-to-peak gondola is not being talked about. That would not solve congestion on the highway or get people to where they really want to go.

A significant number of skiers ride Squaw and Alpine in a single day. To do so requires driving or being bused between them. The gondola would make it so car keys are not part of the equation.

“About 20 percent on a Saturday ski both,” Wirth said, explaining that number is in large part ski team members/parents going back and forth. Getting them and others off the road would remove 18 tons of carbon a year, he said.

The gondola would take 1,400 riders per hour. This compares to a high-speed chairlift that maxes out at about 2,300 riders, and the funitel at Squaw that loads 4,000 people an hour.

“It’s probably one of the single most iconic lifts in California’s history,” Wirth said. That’s why the eight-seat gondola (maybe 10) is going to be called the California Express. It will take people from the base of one resort to the other in about 13 minutes.



Dozens of people get an update Nov. 25 on the Squaw-Alpine gondola proposal. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

One of the biggest concerns people have had since the gondola resurfaced as a viable entity is how it might impact Granite Chief Wilderness Area. Wilderness areas by federal law cannot have any mechanized contraptions (not even a bicycle) in them.

Wirth said everyone involved is cognizant of not wanting to impact the area, and are aware the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog has habitat in the region. The gondola cannot and will not be in the wilderness area.

This land is most often used by the public in the summer. That is one reason resort officials and Caldwell are essentially putting it in indelible ink that the gondola will only operate when the resorts are open for skiing – never in the summer.

Creating more skiable terrain is also not an incentive to build the gondola. However, depending on the route that is selected it may be possible to let people out mid-mountain to ski at one or both resorts. This slowing of a gondola would be similar to what Heavenly Mountain Resort has where people can get off at the mid-station to sightsee before going up to the actual mountain.

Another significant issue is wind. Monitors have been placed at varying locations to clock speeds. This will play into what eventually is decided as the preferred alternative.

Admittedly the base of Squaw is already congested. One of the options being talked about would remove Red Dog and put the new gondola there. Wirth said the Squaw terminus will be at or between Red Dog and Cushing Meadow. Wirth said to expect Red Dog to be replaced in the next two years.

At Alpine, the gondola is likely to go between Hot Wheels and Summit chairlifts.

An issue at Alpine is that there is a 22-foot incline to most of the lifts. The goal is to have the gondola on grade so it’s not cumbersome to get to.

Improvements beyond the gondola are slated for Alpine, too. This includes replacing Hot Wheels next summer, most likely with a six-speed lift with a possible angled station that would go to the top of Sherwood.

The EIR/EIS will give the public the opportunity to weigh-in on the gondola – positively or negatively, or just raise questions. It will ultimately be up to the feds and county to approve the project.

Brown: Reduce public employees' pension benefits

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown got most of what he wanted when he carried a proposal to shore up the state's underfunded public employee pension plans by trimming benefits for new workers.

Five years later, he's in court making an expansive case that government agencies should be able to adjust pension benefits for current workers, too.

A new brief his office filed in a union-backed challenge to Brown's 2012 pension reform law argues that faith in government hinges in part on responsible management of retirement plans for public workers.

"At stake was the public's trust in the government's prudent use of limited taxpayer funds," the brief reads, referring to the period when he advocated for pension changes during the recession.

Read the whole story

Thieves rob, ransack EDC Christmas tree farm

By KPIX-TV

The search is on for a gang of grinches who robbed and ransacked a family-run Christmas tree farm in El Dorado

County.

“They clearly busted in the door, they broke off the steal bar, and huge padlock that was on here,” says Gary Schoennauer.

Gary and Erik Schoennauer are father and son, stunned crooks would target their family’s fourth generation Christmas tree farm. This would have been a milestone a 40th year in business.

Read the whole story

Multi-car accident temporarily closes Hwy. 50

By Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

Bill Steacy was driving west on Highway 50 near Shingle Springs Saturday evening with his wife and two young children. Suddenly, up ahead it looked like fireworks erupted over the freeway. Power lines were blocking the path of the Monterey family’s Toyota Tacoma pickup.

“These things were bouncing up and down, and it looked like tentacles on a giant monster,” Steacy said. “There was just no way to slow down in time to miss them.”

The front of Steacy’s pickup was badly damaged, but no one in the Tacoma was hurt in the chaotic 7pm traffic accident that lead to the closure of both directions of Highway 50 for nearly two hours. Nearly 4,000 Pacific Gas & Electric customers in the Shingle Springs area lost power.

Read the whole story

EDC trying to keep drivers out of neighborhoods

By Lake Tahoe News

As soon as it really starts to snow and the tourists come to the South Shore for winter fun, they are going to realize driving on residential streets is no longer a great option.

This is because El Dorado County Board of Supervisors adopted what's called a Traction Ordinance. It all came about after last winter when visitors to the basin were driving through neighborhoods to get out of town. While that would not have been welcomed under the best of circumstances, they were doing so in snowy/icy conditions without appropriate tires, chains or four-wheel drive.

Phone navigation apps were directing drivers to what technology said would be a short cut, but what in reality became a bit of a nightmare for all involved.

Locals became trapped in their houses, unable to get out because their once quiet street had become gridlock with cars spun out. That short cut for tourists became an ice rink they didn't bargain for.

The ordinance mandates drivers have traction control devices when necessary. Warning signs have been installed in the Meyers area. They tell motorists that if they lose traction, impede traffic or contribute to an accident, the driver could be liable or cited for towing costs or other California

Vehicle Code violations and fines.

What the county hasn't figured out is how to keep the tourists on the main roads and out of neighborhoods when the roads are dry.

Calif. lawmakers operate under separate set of rules

By Laurel Rosenhall, CalMatters

With a declaration that "public servants best serve the citizenry when they can be candid and honest without reservation in conducting the people's business," lawmakers passed the California Whistleblower Protection Act in 1999.

The idea was to protect workers who report misconduct, so that they can blow the whistle on bad actors without losing their jobs. The bill at that time covered workers at state agencies and California's two public university systems. Lawmakers expanded it in 2010 to cover employees of the state's courts.

But one group of California government workers has never had whistleblower protection under the law: those who work for the lawmakers themselves. It's an example of how the Legislature sometimes imposes laws on other people that it doesn't adhere to itself.

"Lawmakers make laws that affect all of us, including them, and they are softening the blow of regulations for themselves," said Jessica Levinson, a professor at Loyola Law School who chairs the Los Angeles Ethics Commission.

"It feels like double talk."

The Legislature’s exemption from the Whistleblower Protection Act has garnered attention in recent weeks, as a groundswell of women complaining of pervasive sexual harassment in the state Capitol publicly call for such protections for legislative employees.

But the whistleblower act isn’t the only area of the law in which the Legislature has demonstrated a “do as I say, not as I do” mentality:

Public records

Want to know whom government officials are meeting with, talking to or emailing? Or how officials were disciplined after an investigation found them culpable of wrongdoing?

State agencies and local governments must release such information—calendars, emails and disciplinary records—under the California Public Records Act, which the Legislature created in 1968. But the same information is nearly impossible to get from state lawmakers because the Public Records Act does not apply to the Legislature.

Instead, lawmakers are covered by the Legislative Open Records Act, which they passed in 1975 in the wake of the Watergate scandal. The act that applies to them is riddled with exceptions, effectively keeping secret many documents that other branches of government must disclose.

“The Legislature has created in many areas a black box where the public can’t see records it would be entitled to see if the public officials at issue weren’t in the Legislature,” said David Snyder, executive director of the First Amendment Coalition, a nonprofit organization advocating government transparency.

The Legislature’s open-records law allows it to withhold investigations of wrongdoing, even when they led to disciplinary action. It also keeps secret correspondence by

lawmakers and their staff, as well as officials' calendars. The Legislature even refused to give reporters the calendars of two senators undergoing federal prosecution on corruption charges, until media companies sued and won a court order compelling their release.

Another difference: As more government agencies began storing information electronically, the Legislature updated the Public Records Act in 2000 to compel disclosure of digital records. Now state agencies and local governments must provide public records in any format in which they exist. That gives the public access to electronic records, such as databases, in their original digital format.

But the Legislature has never made the same update to its own open-records act. "It was a non-starter," former Assemblyman Kevin Shelley told the *Sacramento Bee* in 2015.

Open meetings

The idea that government meetings should be open to the public, and designed to welcome public input, has been enshrined in California law for more than 60 years. In 1953 the Legislature passed the open-meeting law that applies to local governments, and in 1967 it passed a similar one for state agencies.

Yet the 1973 law it passed requiring open meetings of the Legislature does not follow the same rules. One major difference: It allows legislators to gather secretly in partisan caucuses.

When contentious issues hit the floor of the Assembly or the Senate, it's common for one political party or the other to pause proceedings and call for a caucus. Legislators file out of the chamber and into two private meeting rooms where Democrats and Republicans separately gather for conversations that exclude the public and the press. They can hash out disagreements or craft strategy behind closed doors, then

return to the chamber to publicly cast their votes.

Local governments, such as city councils, cannot do this. With a few limited exceptions, state law forbids a majority of a local board from gathering privately precisely because it shuts the public out of the decision-making process.

“I always remember county supervisors being rankled,” said Peter Detwiler, a retired long-time staffer to the state Senate’s local government committee. “‘You guys put these rules on us and you don’t ever put rules like that on yourself.’”

The same laws also slow down decision-making by local governments and state agencies so that the public can weigh in. Local governments must give at least three days’ notice before taking action, while state agencies have to post agendas 10 days in advance.

Legislators, until this year, did not have the same constraints. Though most bills go through a months-long process of public deliberations, a handful of bills each session were written just hours before lawmakers cast votes on them, leaving the public no time to offer their input. Democrats who control the Legislature said the last-minute lawmaking allowed them to put together sensitive compromises that could have blown up with more public scrutiny.

But voters grew frustrated with the secrecy. A Republican donor worked with non-partisan good-government groups to put Proposition 54 on last year’s ballot, requiring that bills be written and posted online for at least three days before lawmakers can vote on them. The result: voters put a rule on legislators that the politicians wouldn’t put on themselves.

Out of state travel

With culture wars raging nationally over transgender rights, California’s liberal Legislature last year passed a law

banning state-funded travel to states with laws that discriminate against gay or transgender people. Eight states are now on California's no-go list. Some have laws that could forbid LGBT people from adopting children or exclude gay students from some school clubs; others have banned anti-discrimination policies that would allow transgender people to use the bathroom that matches their identity.

Yet while legislators have banned state-sponsored travel to Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee and Texas, they haven't stopped traveling to those places themselves. In June, Democratic Sen. Ricardo Lara traveled to Texas for a conference of Latino government officials. Soon after, Democratic Sen. Bob Hertzberg went to Kentucky to study the state's bail system.

Hertzberg was working on legislation to overhaul bail in California, and "felt it critical to observe first-hand the impact of bail reform in (Kentucky), which has a very well-established system of pretrial release," his chief of staff Diane Griffiths wrote in an email.

The travel-ban bill does not exempt lawmakers—a late amendment actually specifies that it also applies to the Legislature—so how are these trips taking place? Lawmakers are getting around the law by using campaign funds (not tax-dollars) to pay for them.

The Legislature's leaders declined to defend the exemptions, but in the past lawmakers have contended that they are justified because of the unique role of a law-making body and the need to protect legislators' security. As far as critics are concerned, legislators get away with making exceptions for themselves because their hypocrisy doesn't attract enough notice to generate mass outrage.

Right now there's plenty of attention on the Legislature over its policies for dealing with sexual harassment—and some

debate about whether extending the whistleblower act would help remedy the problem.

As is, the Legislature has internal personnel policies that forbid retaliation, and legislative employees are also covered by a different state law that prohibits retaliation for complaining about discrimination or harassment. But the whistleblower act goes even further, laying out a process for workers to confidentially file complaints to the independent state auditor.

Lawmakers will yet again consider a bill giving whistleblower protection to legislative staff when they return to Sacramento next year. GOP Assemblywoman Melissa Melendez of Lake Elsinore plans to re-introduce a measure that has stalled in the past. And—in a nod to some who have say that her bill wouldn't apply to employees reporting sexual harassment—she said she'll add language explicitly stating that it does.

Utility fire safety rules took 10 years

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

For 10 days in October 2007, wildfires riding hot Santa Ana winds swept across Southern California, forcing nearly 1 million people to flee and killing 10. When the ashes cooled, investigators found that many of the blazes had been caused by electrical lines swaying or falling in the wind.

So state regulators resolved to tighten fire safety rules for electric utilities. They quickly passed new regulations for Southern California and began developing rules for the rest of

the state.

It would take 10 years.

On Nov. 8 of this year, exactly a month after the most destructive wildfire event in California history began sweeping across the Wine Country, the California Public Utilities Commission finally released its proposal.

Read the whole story

Lakeside employee confesses to embezzling



Brandon J. Probert

A former Lakeside casino employee is likely headed to prison after admitting he stole from his employer.

Brandon J. Probert of Stateline at his arraignment this week in Minden pleaded guilty to embezzling. When he is sentenced in January he could get a maximum of five years in prison.

Probert was using a player tracking card that was only supposed to be used for training and test. Company policy is for any wins during a test to be turned into a casino cashier.

Probert was not doing that, and instead kept the credits on the card.

Probert told Douglas County sheriff’s investigators that he collected about $2,000 in slot winnings with the company card.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report