

SnowGlobe angst, praise keep reverberating in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Balancing the needs of the environment, the economy and the residents was the overriding message delivered by seven people who spoke at the Lake Tahoe Community College board meeting Tuesday night about SnowGlobe.

The three-day music festival during New Year's Eve weekend continues to be cursed by those who endured the loud music inside their homes and blessed by businesses that otherwise would have had little income without the influx of tourists.

These young professionals are a different crowd than the people who gather at Stateline New Year's Eve. SnowGlobers have money to spend. The casino crowd is a lot of college students with little money.



SnowGlobe is making noise more than a week after the musicians left town.

Photo/LTN

Jacob Hurd, president of LTCC's Associated Student Council, rattled off a list of foreign passports he saw representing

the diverse group at SnowGlobe.

"We brought a new group of tourists up here," Hurd told the board.

The ASC plans to present the board or staff with recommendations for how to get students more involved and to make the event better if it were to return.

While the college could reap about \$13,000 in cash – that goes to the general fund and not to Sacramento – this was a city event. The college made money by leasing the gym as the green room for performers and the student center/kitchen for meals to be prepared for concert workers.

The field's ownership wasn't uncovered until all the paperwork was being put together between the promoters and South Lake Tahoe. The California Tahoe Conservancy still has title to the multiuse ball field. The deed was never filed for the city to take possession of the property. That should be rectified soon.

The CTC did turn over operations of the field to the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority because it was money from Measure S that paid for the ball field. The JPA then turned over operations and maintenance of the field to South Lake Tahoe.

The city has controlled use of that field since it opened a few years ago. That is why the city is the one who had the permit with the promoters.

While the promoters would like to come back, no one has come to the city or college asking to do so. As of today, there is no August concert on the calendar – nor any other concert planned in the city for 2012 by anyone, according to city spokeswoman Nancy Kerry.

College President Kindred Murillo told the board if SnowGlobe

or something like it were to come back to the field, she would like LTCC to be more of a partner. But she also said because the college doesn't own the property, the city could do whatever it wants.

"When you are a partner in the process, you have more control," Murillo said. "I feel we need more of a say in things."

The three key things Murillo wants to be part of are transportation, noise and trash.

The latter two issues are what most of the people who spoke Jan. 10 complained about. Six people who live in the area mostly gave the board an earful about the noise they experienced, the vibrating walls and inability to escape the thumping bass.

Catherine Whelan let the board know people are talking with an attorney with the intent of filing a class action lawsuit against the city and college to cover damages from items that were broken when they fell off shelves or walls because of reverberation from the music produced at SnowGlobe.

"The entire inside of my house was vibrating," Whelan said.

Murillo after the meeting told *Lake Tahoe News* this was the first she had heard of a lawsuit.

Kerry said, "SnowGlobe producers took out an insurance policy protecting the city, county, the college, CTC, and JPA. If there is any damage or problem, they would have to take it up with SnowGlobe."

The college board members were a bit restrained in their comments about SnowGlobe at the end of the meeting. Fritz Wenck said the the closest he got was driving by. Others, though, praised the college staff for a job well done.

Murillo said if the city is going to do this again, she hopes

they come asking for assistance soon so appropriate planning can begin.

Kerry said the council is not likely to have anything about SnowGlobe on a future agenda. When someone proposes an event, that's when the ball gets rolling.

But the city is not waiting for the next event to even reach the idea stage before it makes changes. Staff met Tuesday to discuss amending its special use permit for events like SnowGlobe. Revisions would have to be approved by the City Council, which is likely to occur in March or April.

Noise and time elements, with specified penalties/fines will be part of that revised permit.

"The other thing is there will be an agreement between the city and producer, not just a permit," Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. It will be a binding contract.

The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce took a survey with the results showing SnowGlobe being a moneymaker as the overwhelming sentiment of business owners.

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce this week put up a survey on its site that anyone may take.

"The positive impacts to businesses are indisputable," Kerry said.

However, Tom Wendell told the LTCC board, "The short-term benefits do not outweigh the long-term detriments."

Canadian freestyle skier seriously hurt on superpipe

By Sheena McFarland and Michael C. Lewis, Salt Lake Tribune

A pioneer in women's freestyle skiing has been seriously injured in Park City.

Sarah Burke, a Canadian freestyle skier who's a four-time gold medalist in ski superpipe at the Winter X Games, sustained "serious" injuries while training in the Eagle Superpipe at Park City Mountain Resort Tuesday, said Andy Miller, communications director for the resort.

The Park City Mountain Resort mountain patrol stabilized her at the scene before transporting her to Base Patrol, where she was airlifted to the University of Utah hospital in Salt Lake City.

Further details were not immediately available.

The U.S. Ski & Snowboard Association is "wishing her a speedy and full recovery," according to Margo Christiansen, the communications director for USSA.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe real estate market starting to stabilize

Year-end home sales at Lake Tahoe are holding steady compared to 2010 with some indicators on the rise, according to a

quarterly report released by Lake Tahoe-based real estate firm Chase International, which notes a 1 percent increase in units sold around the lake.



The National Association of Realtors recently reported that existing home sales rose again in November and remain above a year ago, and the latest Tahoe housing market sales figures concur with this national trend.

While real estate sales and prices took a slight dip around the lake overall, the East Shore market segment saw a 1 percent increase in median home price (\$575,000) and a 35-percent jump in average price (\$1,286,924). Volume sold on the East Shore was up 26 percent, while the number of units was down 7 percent.

Although the number of units sold is up slightly, the median price of a home in Lake Tahoe is down 13 percent to \$365,000 from 2010's year-end numbers. The average home price fell 14 percent to \$607,683.

"It definitely is still a buyers' market as average and median prices have continued to fall but with units sold rising we believe the market is strengthening," Sue Lowe, corporate vice president for Chase International, said in a statement.

Deb Howard of South Lake Tahoe-based Deb Howard & Co. expects a "new normal" market to appear this year.

"I'm cautiously optimistic to report that the industry leaders at (California Association of Realtors) and (National Association of Realtors) are predicting that during the next year we will experience modest increases in median home price with continued increases in home sales as well," Howard said. "In the forecast for the Lake Tahoe South Shore: Stabilization of median home prices; steady increase in home sales; and improving consumer confidence will be felt in response to the

‘bottom of the market’ data.”

Truckee saw a 2 percent increase in units sold and a 17 percent rise in units sold for less than a million. The median price of a home in Truckee is \$438,166 (down 10 percent) and the average price is \$562,811 (also down 10 percent).

The condominium market around Lake Tahoe experienced a 6 percent decline over 2010 in units sold. However, for units sold for more than \$500,000, a notable 29 percent jump occurred. Tahoe City experienced the most pronounced increase in sales over 2010 sales figures, with a 3 percent rise in units sold and up 50 percent in units sold for over \$500,000. South Lake Tahoe saw a 21 percent increase in overall volume sold, with median and average prices rising 14 and 69 percent, respectively. The median price of a condo in Lake Tahoe is \$262,000 (down 8 percent) and the average price is \$348,868 (down 12 percent).

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

June trial date set for former Placerville mayor

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Placerville’s former Mayor David Machado is scheduled to go on trial June 5 on charges relating to his property dealings in the city.

The date was set Friday by El Dorado Superior Court Judge James Wagoner after the defense suggested a date after May and the prosecutor requested something on or before June 4.

“Stop, everybody,” Wagoner told prosecutor Michael Pizzuti and Machado’s defense attorney, James S. Clark. “We have to be realistic in our estimations.”

The attorneys agreed to June 5.

Machado has been accused of performing unpermitted work on several properties and covering up ownership of one property.

Read the whole story

Placer County spending \$30,000 to analyze traffic safety

Placer County Public Works Department has been awarded a \$30,000 grant to improve its high-tech tools for analyzing traffic safety on county roads.

The grant from the state Office of Traffic Safety will allow Public Works to develop computer software that will identify segments of rural roads with high concentrations of traffic collisions more precisely than is possible now.

The issue is a high priority because approximately 50 percent of the 3,152 collisions on county-maintained roads from 2007-09 occurred along stretches of roadway away from intersections. During that period, 82 percent of collisions with fatalities and 64 percent that involved severe injuries took place on roadway segments outside of intersections.

The county maintains more than 1,000 miles of roads, including many rural roadways with long distances between intersections.

Since 2009, Public Works has used a computer-based Traffic Accident Analysis Program to review county-maintained roadways and intersections and identify stretches with high concentrations of traffic collisions. The program stores, analyzes and reports traffic-collision data similar to the reporting system used by Caltrans.

The grant will allow the county to address a key problem with the current program: the software analyzes the number of collisions on roadway segments, lengths of road between intersections, to draw comparisons, regardless of how long each segment is. Thus, two segments are treated identically by the software if they have the same number of collisions even if one segment is significantly longer than the other.

That problem is particularly pronounced on rural areas, where distances between intersections vary substantially.

Nevada in jeopardy of losing federal highway money

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY — Nevada is one of several states that will not make a Jan. 30 federal deadline to implement a newly mandated safety rule to ensure truck drivers have proof they are medically safe to drive, potentially putting federal highway dollars at risk.

The new rule from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety

Administration (FMCS) requires state motor vehicle departments across the country to create a new database that will be linked nationally to keep track of the proof truck drivers need to show they are safe to drive.

Failure to meet the deadline could potentially put 5 percent of a state's federal highway funding at risk in the first year, and 10 percent thereafter. But states that move forward with a plan for implementation are expected to avoid any penalties if they complete the project by 2014.

Nevada Department of Transportation spokesman Scott Magruder said the state would be at risk for about \$10 million in lost federal road funds if a 5 percent penalty was imposed.

Tom Jacobs, a spokesman for the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles, said the agency is working to meet the new mandate but is not expected to do so until the end of 2013.

"We estimate this massive project will take an additional 2,500 computer programming hours to complete," he said.

A spokeswoman for FMCS who spoke on background said penalties are not expected to be imposed right away. States not in compliance by Jan. 30 will get a letter informing them of their status, after which they will have through Sept. 30, 2013, to get their databases operational, she said.

After that point, penalties could be imposed, the spokeswoman said.

The FMCS plans to continue a current card-carrying requirement for truck drivers through Jan. 30, 2014.

The new rule was finalized on Jan. 30, 2009. Three states currently have their databases operational.

Nevada truck drivers are now required to carry medical cards on their persons to show proof of medical health to drive. The new database rule imposed by the federal government will

replace the need for truck drivers to carry the cards.

While it may be a challenge for the Nevada DMV to implement, Paul Enos, chief executive officer of the Nevada Motor Transport Association, said the requirement is not viewed by the industry as an example of excessive regulation.

“Our guys are already required to carry medical cards,” he said. “They are required to have them with them all the time. Really I think where the hardship would be would be more with DMV and their programming and implementing it.

“They want to make sure that when you are driving an 80,000-pound vehicle that you are physically fit and able to do so,” Enos said. “So the thought would be, if they have this in a database, then everybody’s getting checked, it’s not just a spot check on the road or during a compliance review. And that would then eliminate the need for a driver to carry that card with them when they are on the road.”

Jacobs said the agency plans to use a federal grant worth a little more than \$400,000 to hire contract programmers to re-customize its database to comply with the new requirement. The grant is expected to cover the cost of the project but that remains undetermined at this point, he said.

Jacobs said the agency has every intention of making the extended deadline: “We can’t take the risk of losing federal dollars. Not at this point.”

Seniors, mental health

clients to share building in S. Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Seniors and some mental health patients are likely going to share the same building this spring in South Lake Tahoe. This co-mingling of usually different populations has some people concerned.

Erik Olsen, one of the seniors who spoke against the proposal on Thursday, told *Lake Tahoe News* seniors should have their own place to socialize and that's it is not up to him to find a solution, it's government's problem.



Community
Development
Director Stan
Sherer
explains to
seniors Jan. 5
how the city
and county
need to save
money,
pointing to
how a year ago
the city's rec
staff had
seven

employees and
now it has
one.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

The problem governments have – specifically the city of South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County – is the lack of money to keep operating as they have been. That is why they are consolidating resources. In this case the main resource is a building.

The county owns the senior center building, while the city runs the programs for the seniors. With the county no longer able to pay to lease some of the buildings it has been within the city limits that it uses to serve Lake Tahoe Basin residents, it is moving some operations to the county-owned senior building to lessen its financial burden.

Closing the county office at 1900 Lake Tahoe Blvd. and other changes is a savings of about \$190,000 a year for the county.

The county operating out of the senior center means the city has help with utility and maintenance costs. It also will allow an “official” to be on site at all hours when the building is open.

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to discuss and vote on the changes at the Jan. 24 meeting. The City Council is likely to take up the issue Feb. 7.

Olsen, who is a former national president of AARP, questions how the center can change what it is used for when some of the funding to upgrade the facility was from the Older Americans Act and other grants.

George Regan thinks mental health should look at using the library’s reading room.

City and county officials have been meeting with seniors for months. The latest gathering was Jan. 5 with Community Development Director Stan Sherer explaining the city's point-of-view and answering questions. The week before it was Supervisor Norma Santiago addressing the lunch crowd.

"This is purely a fiscal crisis we are trying to address in our community," Sherer said Thursday. "Change is difficult. We didn't do this on a whim."

The main change is the county will take over the room being used for senior exercise classes for one-on-one sessions with mental health clients. The room has a separate entrance so the newcomers don't have to access the main senior center.

Sherer reiterated services for seniors are not being cut. Figuring out a solution to keep the exercise classes going is still being worked out.

The proposal is mental health workers will be in that room Monday-Thursday, 1-4pm.

Ann Snyder, a senior, has been acting as a liaison to get information to seniors. She addressed her peers first.

"The clientele is characterized as functional," Snyder said of the mental health patients who will have sessions at the senior center. "The clients will mostly be bused to the center so it will not impact parking."

Sherer also said employees will be parking at the recreation center and more disabled parking will be marked at the senior center to help with congestion.

Also sharing the site will be the county Veterans Administration. These people will use the Annex Meeting Room, which is to the left of the dining area. This should mean expanded services for veterans on the South Shore.

Changes could happen in February, but March is a more likely

scenario.

Fewer schools keeping librarians on staff

By Eleanor Yang Yu, California Watch

Fewer than 1 out of 4 schools in California is staffed with a credentialed librarian, according to the state Department of Education.

Recent figures compiled by the department show there are about 900 school librarians in the state – that's down from more than 1,100 two years ago.

From Los Angeles to San Mateo and Fullerton, school districts have cut librarian positions this year to cope with state budget cuts. Increasing numbers of schools are splitting one librarian between multiple campuses or relying on clerical aids or parent volunteers to keep the doors open.

Library advocates say students are the ones harmed when they don't have trained librarians who can teach research techniques and turn them on to a love of reading. Others question whether technological advances and the ease of conducting research online have made librarians less essential.

Diane Alexander took early retirement last year because she thought she would have been spread too thin as the sole

librarian for three high schools.

"If you have that many students to serve, you're not really serving them," said Alexander, who also is president of the California School Library Association. Her district, the Liberty Union High School District in Contra Costa County, cut positions to one librarian and three clerks to manage three high school libraries. "They expected me to be that person, but I didn't feel like I could do an adequate job. It was so disturbing."

But in this austere period, some wonder whether schools can afford to retain librarians as teachers and nurses are laid off.

"You have to make choices sometimes, and the importance of librarians is a bit less than it used to be," said Ze'ev Wurman, a Silicon Valley executive who participated in the development of California education standards and served as a policy adviser for the U.S. Department of Education. "In the elementary grades especially, librarians are essentially teachers' aides, doing a variety of things that have little to do with books or literacy, per se."

Teachers, not librarians, are the ones who have to respond to research questions that arise in class, Wurman argued in a recent New York Times opinion piece. He believes that access to books is not a problem, citing a 2009 report [PDF] by the U.S. Department of Education that showed schools that received grants for their libraries showed almost no increase in the amount of materials checked out.

In California, school librarians are called teacher-librarians because they must earn both credentials. Alexander said she helped develop lessons with teachers and hosted classes in the library virtually every class period. Sometimes, she'd host two classes at once.

When teaching an English class about research projects, she'd

often pull contemporary books with common themes, show students how to use databases, and explain copyright issues and source citing. When she had a spare minute, she would suggest good books to challenge a voracious reader or reach out to a struggling student.

"We're the ones who know the current books," Alexander said. "It can make a huge difference if you can hook a kid onto reading."

The benefits of a trained librarian go beyond helping with reading and research, said Barbara Jeffus, the state Department of Education's school librarian consultant.

"There is a body of research growing every day that if you have a teacher-librarian working with classroom teachers, student achievement is higher," she said.

Jeffus pointed to a paper published in 2008 by a University of North Texas researcher who found a correlation between California schools with devoted librarians and students with higher test scores. The study controlled for some income-related factors, including the level of education of the students' parents and the proportion of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch. The strongest pattern was found in high school students, where higher test scores correlated with the extent of the library services offered.

Some districts have been able to maintain funding for libraries, typically by passing flat-rate parcel taxes. But as a whole, California ranks last in the country for its student-to-librarian ratio, according to the state Department of Education.

So will it get to the point that California school libraries will shut their doors? Jeffus doesn't think so.

"If they evolve, they'll survive," she said. "Some librarians are using every possible technological device with students. ...

These are pretty exciting times in school libraries and public libraries.”

Federal money to help counties administer health care to low-income residents

By Darrell Smith, Sacramento Bee

Thousands of the north state’s rural poor, including residents of the greater Sacramento area, will be able to access medical care in 2012 after more than 30 counties received federal approval and funding to expand their indigent health coverage.

The County Medical Services Program, or CMSP, a group of 34 mostly north state counties, received the green light to cover an additional 30,000 uninsured, low-income adults through Path2Health, a new indigent care program that launched Jan. 1.

Created as a prelude to federal health reform, Path2Health provides free health coverage for medically necessary services to uninsured adults in the 34-county network who are at or below 100 percent of the poverty line – about \$10,890 for a single person – and who do not qualify for Medi-Cal. It is one of a number of low-income health programs, or LIHPs, across the state that will “build a foundation for when health reform takes over” in 2014, said Lee Kemper, executive director of CMSP’s governing board.

“We’re starting to make it possible to make people eligible now,” Kemper said. “This is basically a network that will be a bridge leading to new coverage. This will make it possible for

counties to implement health reform early.”

The federal government will match each dollar the 34 counties spend on Path2Health, but officials did not know how much that would be. CMSP will serve 90,000 low-income adults by the end of 2013, Kemper said.

Under the Affordable Care Act, low-income adults covered by LIHPs such as Path2Health will transition to either Medi-Cal or the state’s Health Benefit Exchange in 2014.

The LIHPs go further than the indigent care programs that counties have long run under Medi-Cal. The LIHPs are managed-care plans with established health benefits and guidelines on coverage and access to basic and specialty care.

Rural administrators in CMSP say the federal matching dollars will help their counties – El Dorado, Nevada, Sutter and Yuba among them – to extend care to more of their neediest residents.

Read the whole story

Nevada officials studying feds’ ruling on online poker

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Nevada Attorney General’s office has begun studying the U.S. Department of Justice’s surprising new interpretation of online gambling to determine what effects it might have on the state.

What’s certain is that the race to offer online poker play has

begun among several states and that Nevada has a lead, thanks to last month's approval of new regulations.

But even more states are likely to jump in as well, leading to the prospect of different states providing games with different legal and regulatory standards and tax rates – exactly what the gaming industry didn't want.

The Justice Department since the George W. Bush administration had concluded that the federal Wire Act prohibited gambling over the Internet across state lines, and many industry leaders have lobbied for federal lawmakers to approve legislation legalizing, regulating and taxing online poker play.

But on Dec. 23, in response to inquiries from Illinois and New York on whether they could sell lottery tickets to out-of-state residents over the Internet, the department issued a letter saying the Wire Act applied “solely to sport-related gambling activities in interstate and foreign commerce,” leading most in the industry to conclude that online poker was allowable.

Now, many industry leaders are renewing their call for lawmakers to pass legislation regulating poker play to head off an expected rush of offshore companies introducing poker websites.

Read the whole story