

Red Hawk Casino ordered to pay \$30 mil. to SoCal firm

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

A jury awarded a Southern California company \$30.4 million over a severed contract to supply slot machines to Red Hawk Casino.

The casino's owner, the Single Springs Band of Miwok Indians, said it will appeal.

An El Dorado County Superior Court jury late Thursday awarded \$30.4 million to Sharp Image Gaming of Chatsworth, a slot machine maker that supplied machines to the tribe's aborted effort to operate a temporary casino called Crystal Mountain in the mid 1990s. The tribe severed its ties with Sharp Image in the late 1990s and signed a development deal with a Minnesota company to build Red Hawk.

The casino opened in 2008.

Sharp Image's president, Chris Anderson, claimed he had exclusive right to supply slots to Red Hawk. He sued for \$250 million – the amount that he says would have been his share of the slot machine profits at the casino.

Read the whole story

Navy chopper from Fallon

crashes near Bridgeport

By Michael Wolfe, KTVN-TV

Authorities are investigating what caused a Navy helicopter crash about 100 miles south of Reno on Thursday.

The Navy MH 60S is assigned to the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center at Naval Air Station Fallon.

It crashed during a training mission in a remote part of Bridgeport.

All five crew members on board survived, but were taken back to NAS Fallon for medical treatment.

All are in good condition.

Big-rig accident closes I-80 east

Interstate 80 near Lake Tahoe is expected to be closed until noon Dec. 23 as crews clean up a hazardous spill.

Eastbound I-80 between Hirshdale and the California/Nevada state line is closed because of the spill and the need to repair the guardrail following a big rig accident.

To minimize delays, Caltrans recommends motorists consider the following alternate routes to Reno and beyond:

- Highway 50 east to Highway 395 north
- Highway 70 north to Highway 395 south

- I-80 east to Highway 267 south, drive past Tahoe's North Shore to Highway 431 (Mt. Rose Highway).
-

Nevada spending on health care among the lowest of all states

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY — Nevada ranks 46th among states on spending on health care per capita, according to a report released this month by the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services.

Nevada spends \$5,735 per person on total personal health care as of 2009, the report says. The national average is \$6,815. The highest per capita spending was found in Massachusetts at \$9,278.

Larry Matheis, executive director of the Nevada State Medical Association, said Nevada's low spending on health care is a reflection of the large number of residents who don't have health insurance.

U.S. Census data released in October shows Nevada is the third most uninsured state per capita in the U.S as of 2009.

"On first blush it's good news that we're not on the high end of spending per person," Matheis said. "But a more balanced look at the data says we have a lot of warning signs in this pool of data. It renders a number that looks like we've got costs under control. It actually just means we have a big access problem."

The report found that eight of the 10 top states for total health care spending per capita, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York, are also ranked in the top third in the nation for annual personal income per capita.

“Income appears to have an important and positive relationship with health spending,” the report said.

Matheis said the study provides much-needed information as the country moves forward with full implementation of the national health care law.

“They need much better baseline information about how much they are spending and on what with every population and in every part of the country, because a big part of the reform proposals are aimed at trying to, if not reduce costs, reduce the things that lead to higher costs,” he said.

Medicare and Medicaid spending

The report shows Nevada is in the middle of the pack in terms of Medicare spending per enrollee at \$9,692, and ranks toward the bottom of the states on Medicaid spending per enrollee at \$6,003. The national averages are \$10,365 and \$6,826, respectively.

But in terms of the percentage of health care dollars spent on Medicaid, Nevada is lowest among all states at only 8.6 percent. Nevada is the only state where spending is in the single-digits. The highest is New York, where 29.2 percent of all personal health care spending is via Medicaid.

Medicaid is the health care program for low income seniors, disabled and families, the cost of which is shared by states and the federal government.

Charles Duarte, administrator of the state Division of Health Care Financing and Policy, which oversees the Medicaid program, said Nevada’s spending is low because of the policy

decision to restrict eligibility. The program also doesn't offer many optional services that can increase costs.

"We've made decisions as a state that we're not going to expand the program from an eligibility perspective," he said. "And so in other states Medicaid makes up 14, 15, 16 percent of coverage for people in the state. In some states it is as high as 30 percent.

"We don't cover as many people in our public programs, but our employers are kind of right in the middle there, slightly above the national average," Duarte said. "And what the means is the uninsured group are those that could be covered by Medicaid if our rules allowed it."

Federal health care law

This situation is expected to change as the Medicaid program expands beginning in 2014 as part of the implementation of the federal health care law, he said. As many as 100,000 new residents could be eligible for Medicaid. There are residents eligible for Medicaid now who are not participating in the program who will have to be covered as well, Duarte said.

The cost of the newly eligible residents will be covered almost entirely by the federal government, but the state will share in the cost of those who are eligible now but who have not signed up for the program, he said.

This Medicaid expansion is one reason Nevada joined with many other states in challenging the constitutionality of the health care law. The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review the law. Former Gov. Jim Gibbons in 2010 estimated the Medicaid mandate will cost Nevada \$613 million over six years beginning in 2014. Gibbons initiated Nevada's participation in the challenge to the law which is being continued by Gov. Brian Sandoval.

Matheis said there is a strong feeling in the Nevada medical

community that the state is under-spending on this population, which will have to change with the implementation of the health care law.

“Nevada is going to go from where we are now, which is a very low spending per Medicaid patient; we’re going to jump a huge amount because there are going to be so many people that will be identified for the new Medicaid expansion that is coming under the Affordable Care Act,” he said.

This rapid expansion will create budget challenges for state lawmakers, Matheis said.

Policy-makers need to seriously consider the data and build it into the state’s planning efforts, he said.

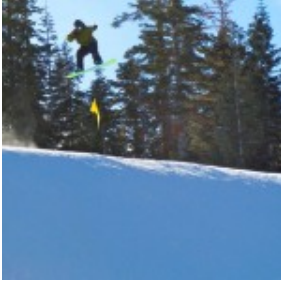
“At some point we do have to invest in a health care system that we want,” Matheis said. “Right now we’re doing that in Nevada minimally and that’s what this report really shows.”

No snow doesn't mean no skiing in Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

In 11 days, the first snow survey of the season will be conducted by the state Department of Water Resources. National Weather Service forecasters say the next two weeks will be dry and that the snowpack is 15 percent of normal.

In a normal month, South Lake Tahoe receives 1.84 inches of precipitation by Dec. 22 for the month of December. The city has received a trace this month.



Northstar's terrain park has plenty of snow to play in.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

For the entire month of December, Tahoe City averages 5.5 inches of precip. It has recorded zero this month.

Ski resorts for the 2010-11 season boasted of a record snowfall. Squaw Valley had more than 800 inches. This season resorts like Heavenly and Northstar are bragging about their snowmaking capabilities.

When will it snow?

"So many different global patterns and influences affect the weather. The main thing that needs to happen is the ridge of high pressure off the West Coast needs to shift and head south," explained Scott McGuire, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno.

The La Nina jet stream is keeping storms north of Lake Tahoe. While the basin basks in sunshine, it is also freezing with below normal temperatures. The morning low Dec. 22 was 10 degrees in South Lake Tahoe. The normal low is 16 degrees.

"There is no indication this overall pattern is going to change for the better," McGuire told *Lake Tahoe News*. "(Models) just show a couple storms trying to drop, so the southern edge of the storms may clip us. It's hard to believe

it will sit like this the entire winter, but it could.”

Drought conditions?

Last winter’s deluge has reservoirs in California and Nevada faring well so far – even better than a year ago this time. Lake Tahoe on Dec. 22 was at 6,226.85 feet, while on that date in 2010 it was at 6,224.37 feet.

It’s losing about one-hundredth of a foot a day because of evaporation – even more when it’s windy.

The Climate Prediction Center issues a “drought monitor” for the whole country. Tahoe was recently listed at the bottom rung, or “abnormally dry”. This is the first of five stages.

“If we don’t see improvement in January, they will probably worsen the outlook,” Gary Barbato, hydrologist and federal water master in Reno, said. “We typically have two good months left. We’ll see how we do.”

While there have been “March Miracles”, they are a rare occurrence. January and February need to be wet for any optimism to continue.

Barbato said with Tahoe and Lahontan Reservoir being above average, he is not alarmed yet by the lack of snow – even though the wet season usually starts in November and it’s been dry all this time.

Lake Tahoe, while it supplies water to some water purveyors in the basin, is the main water source for Reno via the Truckee River.

The Sierra snowpack is the source of water for much of California. Reservoirs in California are faring well despite a dry December.

“We are not unduly worried yet. The reservoirs are still in very good shape with carryover storage from last winter’s

storms,” Ted Thomas with the California Department of Water Resources told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This is a very dry December, obviously, one of the driest so far.”

Helping Mother Nature

There was a time when skiing at Christmas in Lake Tahoe was iffy. That was before snowmaking became the norm.

Those who skied on the manmade white stuff in the early days could not find anything positive to say about it. What comes out of the guns today is so far superior at times it’s hard to distinguish between what is real and what is fake.

Another advantage customers have today is getting the truth about conditions from other skiers and riders. Resort and personal Facebook pages tell it like it is. No longer can resorts embellish the snow report.

Skiers at Northstar on Dec. 20 may have had doubts about the conditions based on riding a chairlift over rocks, grass and logs, but at the end of the ride were perfectly groomed conditions.

That’s the other thing that has changed through the years – the groomers. Between the machine and the operators they lay out corduroy each day that makes people forget it didn’t snow the night before.

So, there isn’t tree skiing and Tahoe is waiting for its first powder day – those who like groomers or have a need to schuss are likely to be satisfied. Just don’t look at what’s at lake level to know what the slopes are all about. Plus, most of the resorts have made a concerted effort to have terrain parks open.

At Northstar this week skiers and boarders were spinning, jumping, back scratching, and twisting their way over features. The 22-foot superpipe where Shaun White will train

is expected to be finished any day.

Heavenly had its terrain park operating on opening day – last month.

While most resorts in the greater Lake Tahoe area are open at some level, Heavenly has the largest snowmaking capabilities.

Heavenly can cover 73 percent of its mountain with manmade snow. Today about 25 percent of the resort's 97 trails are open. More are opening every day, with Boulder expected to open Christmas Day and Groove potentially, as well.

Northstar is bragging of snow depths of 18 to 24 inches on 25 trails. In a 24-hour period they use 5 million gallons of water to cover 100 acres.

Squaw uses 2,000 gallons of water per minute. It has a 12-inch base on eight runs.

"We could go all season making snow, but we hope Mother Nature will kick in and help us out at some point," Russ Pecoraro, Heavenly spokesman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

3.2 quake shakes Truckee

Truckee residents were slightly jostled by at 3.2 temblor at 9:30pm Thursday.

The epicenter was located six miles northeast of Truckee.

People on the North Shore, Reno and the Bay Area felt the Dec. 22 earthquake.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Washoe County sheriff's K-9 dies

Washoe County Sheriff's Office K-9 Kraft died of health complications Saturday. Deputy Corey Solferino, his handler of two years, was by his side.

Undersheriff Todd Vinger said the passing of Kraft will be a great loss for the agency, but even a greater loss for Kraft's handler and partner.



Deputy Corey Solferino with Kraft.

Photo/Provided

“Kraft was a rising star with our agency,” Vinger said in statement of the Czech Shepherd. “Like all of our service dogs, he was a humble hero; completely dedicated to his work and was an exemplary performer.”

Kraft was acquired by the sheriff’s office through a private donation by Cal Sierra Express Trucking. Kraft was trained as a dual purpose K-9, working patrol and narcotics. He was certified in evidence and article search. Evidence search certification allows the K-9 to assist in solving or assisting in cases where a suspect has discarded or ,hidden a weapon or other articles.

Born Jan. 6, 2006 in the Czech Republic, Kraft was trained to respond to Czechoslovakian commands. In addition to tracking down a considerable amount of drugs during his years with the sheriff’s office, K-9 Kraft assisted with several missing persons investigations.

Deputy Solferino said Kraft could not wait to go to work.

Although committed to his work, Kraft was also a beloved family member.

“The second we got to the house and I took off his work collar, he knew he was home,” Solferino said.

Skier sues Heavenly nearly a year after being injured

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

A skier who was injured when a Heavenly Mountain Resort employee ran into her while on his snowboard last January is suing the resort's owners, claiming Vail Resorts Inc. is liable for its employee's alleged negligence.

Skier Kimberly Bland, on vacation from Florida, was stopped on the lower Olympic downhill run on the Nevada side of the resort, at about 3:50pm on Jan. 18, trying to decide where to ski next, when Heavenly lift operator Daniel Barreno crashed into Bland on his snowboard, the suit said.

Barreno violated several Nevada laws, the suit said, including one requiring skiers and snowboarders to stay in control and to give the right-of-way to someone on the trail ahead of him.

Read the whole story

Nevada spending millions on economic development office

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY — Efforts by Gov. Brian Sandoval and state lawmakers to encourage new business creation, relocation and expansion in Nevada took a major step forward this past week when the Legislature's Interim Finance Committee approved nearly \$3.5 million to fund an economic development office.

The funding will enable Steve Hill, executive director of the Governor's Office on Economic Development, to develop a state economic development plan and hire the staff needed to move forward on private sector job creation efforts.

The state plan, relying in part on research performed by the Brookings Institution and SRI International, is expected to be released in early February. The report identified seven economic sectors, some already in existence such as gaming and tourism, and some emerging, such as clean energy, where Nevada should focus its efforts.

Lawmakers peppered Hill with questions ranging from the measures that will be used to determine the success of his agency's efforts at job creation to the proposed salaries of the eight positions that will be filled with a portion of the funding.

Positions approved for his office include three industry specialists at a maximum salary of \$110,000 each, an industry analyst with a maximum salary of \$90,000, a communications manager with a maximum salary of \$80,000, and a technology commercialization director with a maximum salary of \$110,000. There are also two support positions with maximum salaries of \$40,000.

The new approach to economic development is the result of Assembly Bill 449, a measure sponsored by Assembly Speaker John Ocegüera, D-Las Vegas, and supported by Gov. Brian Sandoval and a bipartisan group of state lawmakers. The bill also established a \$10 million Catalyst Fund to help firms relocated or expand in Nevada. The money will be used to provide grants to local governments for economic development projects.

"I am in the process of finishing my 10th week on the job," Hill told lawmakers. "And I think I can provide very solid reasons for the request that we're making today. But we're

also learning as we're going along. We understand that resources are tight, not only throughout Nevada but through the country, and we want to spend this money in the most effective and efficient way possible."

In response to lawmaker questions, Hill said the state plan will include ways to measure the success of the new effort.

"There will be a detailed description of how we will measure progress in economic development and in the development of our economy in the state," he said.

Assemblywoman Debbie Smith, D-Sparks, chairwoman of the IFC, asked Hill if the funding request is premature since the state plan has not yet been published.

"So I think the question is, without the state plan, where is the confidence level in moving forward with all of these positions and this work without the state plan being done, kind of relying solely on the Brookings report?" she asked.

Hill said the budget request will be in alignment with the state plan.

"And finally I think we all sense, the governor and the Legislature, everybody involved in economic development throughout the state, and the citizens of Nevada, an urgency to get started on this," he said.

Nevada's unemployment rate is the highest in the nation.

Phone scammers dialing South

Tahoe numbers looking for cash

A new twist on an old telephone scam has resulted in one South Shore resident being swindled out of \$5,000.

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department says a number of these calls are coming into the community.

“The deal goes like this: Potential victim receives a call on home or cell phone from a person representing themselves as with South Lake Tahoe Police Department, El Dorado sheriff’s, a law firm or a federal law enforcement agency, like DEA or FBI. They are told, very aggressively, that they or someone dear to them will be arrested shortly if they do not pay money for some claimed debt,” El Dorado County Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe said. “If they bite, they are told to wire funds to a given location, which is typically off-shore, like the Dominican Republic.”

Uthe says if people get such a call, they should not send money, at least not without checking with local law enforcement.

“Law enforcement agencies do not arrest people for non-payment of private debt, other than perhaps child support,” Uthe said.

The calls are likely originating off shore, so not much can be done to stop them.