Youth in hospital after falling off chairlift at Sugar Bowl

By Reno Gazette-Journal

A 7-year-old boy is in critical condition at Renown Regional Medical Center after falling 60 feet from a chairlift at Sugar Bowl Ski Area on Sunday afternoon.

According to John Monson, director of sales and marketing at Sugar Bowl, the boy, whose name has not been released, is a member of the Sugar Bowl Ski Team. He was riding on the Mt. Lincoln Chair Lift with two other skiers when he fell from the lift onto a hard-packed surface. Some of the area below the lift was not covered in snow.

The youngster was transported to Renown Regional Medical Center with traumatic injuries. He was wearing a helmet, Monson said.

Investigators are still attempting to determine whether or not the safety bar on the chair lift was down, Monson said.

Reno man fined after admitting he baited bear

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Reno man who killed the first bear in Nevada’s controversial black bear hunt pleaded guilty today to charges he illegally baited the animal.

Avoiding a scheduled trial in Reno Justice Court, Timothy Kawelmacher was ordered to pay $730 in fines, fees and civil penalties and to surrender the meat of the bear he killed in the foothills west of Reno Aug. 20.

Kawelmacher said his misunderstood the law and thought baiting prior to the hunt’s Aug. 20 startup was legal, said Mike McCusker, a game warden with the Nevada Department of Wildlife. Kawelmacher’s cooperation with authorities warranted less-than-maximum penalties, said Chris Hicks, deputy district attorney.

“I genuinely believe he misunderstood the law,” Hicks told Judge Jack Schroeder.

Kawelmacher could have faced total penalties of up to $3,000 and up to six months in jail for each of two counts of illegally baiting a big-game mammal for the purposes of hunting.

Read the whole story

Nevada’s health ranking improves, but obesity, smoking remain concerns

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada’s overall health improved five spots this year compared to the rest of the nation, but still ranks in the bottom 10, according to the 22nd edition of America’s

Health Rankings.

Nevada’s health improved from 47th in 2010 to 42nd in the new report.

The good news: Nevada has a lower prevalence of obesity than other states, ranking fourth with 23.1 percent of the adult population identified as overweight.

Smoking has also decreased significantly in Nevada, from 29 percent to 21.3 percent of the adult population in the last 10 years.

But these positive developments mask just how serious these health issues continue to be, said Steven Evans, chief medical officer for UnitedHealthcare of Nevada.

While Nevada’s obesity rate may be lower when compared with other states, the reality is that in the past 10 years, obesity has increased from 17.9 percent to 23.1 percent of the adult population. There are now 470,000 obese adults in the state.

And while Nevada’s smoking rate has declined due in large part to voter approval of tough smoking restrictions in 2006, there are still 434,000 adults who smoke.

“Obesity has actually increased in the past 10 years,” Evans said. “So although we, compared to the rest of the country, have done better, there is still a significant portion of our population that is obese.

“We definitely have not turned the corner on that health issue and it has probably become our No. 1 health issue we need to start worrying about,” he said.

“I almost don’t even want to celebrate the fact that we are less obese than the rest of the United States because we still have significant issues with that,” Evans said.

The report was released earlier this month by the United Health Foundation in collaboration with the American Public Health Association and Partnership for Prevention.

“America’s health rankings from United Health Foundation is an incredibly valuable tool for us to clearly understand health trends facing us as a nation and here in Nevada,” Evans said. “By identifying the key opportunities we face as a state we can pursue innovative solutions to those opportunities.”

The report shows a few other positives for Nevada.

The state has a low incidence of infectious disease, ranking fourth with 4.8 cases per 100,000 of population. Nevada also has a low rate of preventable hospitalizations, ranking 15th at 58.6 per 1,000 Medicare enrollees.

But there is more bad news as well.

Nevada has a low high school graduation rate, ranking 50th with only 56.3 percent of incoming ninth graders graduating within four years. Evans said those with higher education levels tend to have access to health insurance and take better care of their health overall.

Nevada also has a high violent crime rate, again ranking 50th with 661 offenses per 100,000 population, and a low immunization rate, ranking 49th with 84.6 percent of children aged 19 to 35 months covered with the appropriate inoculations.

In the past year, the percentage of children in poverty increased from 17.9 percent to 23.6 percent of persons under age 18. And in the past five years, diabetes increased from 7.1 percent to 8.5 percent of the adult population. There are now 173,000 Nevada adults with diabetes.

The report shows that for the fifth year in a row, Vermont was the nation’s healthiest state. States that showed the most substantial improvement include New York and New Jersey, both moving up six places. Idaho and Alaska showed the most downward movement. Idaho dropped 10 spots, from number nine to 19 in this year's rankings, and Alaska dropped five places.

It also shows that the nation's overall health did not improve from 2010 to 2011 because gains in one area were offset by worsening conditions in another.

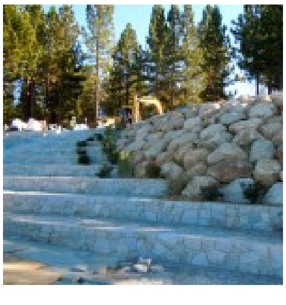
One example of this stagnation is improvements in the number of smokers being off-set by worsening rates of obesity. The rankings found that, for every person who quit smoking in 2011, another person became obese.

Lakeview Commons about to open to the public

By Kathryn Reed

Fencing at Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe is expected to come down before Christmas.

While interior work continues on the boathouse this winter, that section of the waterfront project on Highway 50 will be cordoned off. The whole project has taken longer than expected.



Lakeview Commons should be open to the public this week. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The last touches on the multimillion-dollar project will come in late spring.

South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Tom Davis last week said he would like the city to arrange for a summer concert to kick off events at the renovated site that sits across from Campground by the Lake.

Norma Santiago, who as El Dorado County's supervisor sits on the California Tahoe Conservancy board, asked at the Dec. 16 CTC meeting about getting the parties together to talk about completing the second half of phase one.

CTC Deputy Director Ray Lacey said even though the Conservancy was the funding agency, it is a city and county project and they need to coordinate reconvening the steering committee.

Santiago said she wants to discuss the name of the project. When the Board of Supervisors met in Tahoe in November 2009, the name Lakeview Commons did not sit well with them.

The land the project is on is leased by the city from the county.

It will take another $4 million to $5 million to complete the first phase. The rest of what was once called the 56-acre project is on the other side of Highway 50. Ideas have been bounced around for what to do there, but no concrete plans are in place.

Cities cutting from bottom while adding 6-figure salaries at the top

By Phillip Reese and Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

Several local cities sliced their payrolls through layoffs last year by cutting those who made the least. And they ended up paying more employees six-figure salaries.

The 3,800 employees who earned at least $100,000 annually last year made up 10 percent of the region's city and county workers, but ate 25 percent of payroll. Their ranks increased by about 80, while the number of city and county workers earning less than $100,000 fell by almost 3,000, according to a Bee review of new data from the state controller's office.

The trend was not universal. Cities such as Davis, Rancho Cordova and Elk Grove reduced the number of their workers earning six figures.

But the city and county of Sacramento collectively increased the total amount paid to six-figure employees by $23 million, or 9 percent, while cutting 1,800 workers from their payrolls.

"Somehow that doesn't surprise me," said Tana Taylor, who was laid off from her job as an office assistant in Sacramento County's Department of Health and Human Services last year. "Higher-end people – they seem to be hanging in there."

Several city and county leaders said the trend was largely unavoidable due to labor contracts and minimum staffing requirements. Many had to lay off employees based on tenure – and give the remaining employees raises due to their contracts.

For example, the number of county of Sacramento employees under 30 – most of them low earners – fell by 50 percent, to 900, from 2007 to 2010, according to actuarial documents from the county retirement system. During the same period, the number of workers over 30 declined by just 4 percent.

"Workers that were able to stay had higher seniority and are at the higher wage scale," said Chris Andis, a spokeswoman for the county of Sacramento.

The trend also reflects politics and priorities. About 45 percent of the region's municipal six-figure earners are cops and firefighters, and several cities chose to limit public safety cuts in favor of reducing staff in parks, health care and social services, where fewer highly paid employees work.

"Instead of monitoring labor costs, pay rates, and pension costs in response to the recession, they're instead laying off the junior workers in the city who are often the most productive," said Craig Powell, president of Eye on Sacramento, a local civic watchdog organization.

Read the whole story

Property management firm wants LTVA to promote that

lodging segment

By Kathryn Reed

An owner of a vacation rental agency in South Lake Tahoe wants the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority to pursue a promotional program with PBS.

Jim Morris, who owns Lake Tahoe Accommodations, spoke before the LTVA board this month about a campaign that would cost $97,000 for a year.

When LTVA had its ad agency Duncan/Channon look into the idea when it was first brought up a year ago, one reason to not pursue the promotional campaign was not knowing what hour of the day or how many times the information would be presented.

Duncan/Channon reps at this month's LTVA meeting said they would revisit the idea because there would be hard data to analyze.

Morris said with the amount of money rental properties give to LTVA through transient occupancy tax, his segment of the lodging industry ought to be promoted, too. He requested the PBS "Getting Away Together" campaign be put on a future agenda.

In other action:

• The board will be following the Nevada open meeting law rules from now on. Changes came at the December meeting with how the agenda was written to give more information and to allow public comment after each item.

• Kimberly Kuntz is on the LTVA board representing the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce.

Conflicting info clouds South Tahoe ice rink bond sales

By Kathryn Reed

Private operators of the South Lake Tahoe Ice Rink may be frozen out of being able to make a profit any time soon.

With the need to have all agreements finalized in January so the bonds could be converted from non-taxable to taxable by March 1, questions unresolved, and the season of little government work accomplished approaching, the deal is teetering on thin ice.

Conflicting letters delivered to El Dorado County Board of Supervisors is part of the problem. That board at its meeting last week directed the chief administrative officer and auditor to craft a letter to the city for clarification.

While the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority this month agreed to change the designation of the bonds, the three member agencies must do so as well. Those agencies are South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado County and Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District.

The city and county on the same day – Dec. 13 – at their respective meetings heard a presentation by the private financial advisor hired by the JPA (Mark Northcross with Northcross-Hill-Ach) and JPA staff member John Upton.

The city wants to convert the bonds to taxable because IRS rules prevent a private entity from benefiting from non-taxable bonds while the bonds are outstanding. The ice rink was paid from Measure S funds, now called Measure R. That South Shore recreation measure will sunset in 2030.

In a letter dated Dec. 6 from Upton to the county it says, “If the refinancing results in greater debt service, the city will be obligated to pay the JPA that difference. Bond counsel will create the necessary agreement and manner for assured collection. … The cash contribution is currently at $415,000.”

In a letter dated Dec. 8 from City Manager Tony O’Rourke to the county it says, “The ice arena operator and TSE [Tahoe Sports Entertainment], will need to bear any cost obligation associated with the refinancing of the Measure S outstanding debt from tax-exempt to taxable.”

The conflicting information about what entity is responsible for the more than $400,000 is what has the county concerned. The board wants this cleared up before it is slated to vote on the refinancing in late January.

After the county meeting, Supervisor Norma Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News*, “The only motion was that the auditor work with the CAO to write a letter to the city manager asking for clarity on a statement included in this letter.” Then she quoted the conflicting message from O’Rourke.

Santiago added, “As you are well aware, during the course of our discussion at the JPA meeting, the city said that they would be bearing the costs. Obviously, things are changing and this refinancing of the bond to a taxable bond is a ‘moving’ target. Everyone, however, agrees that refinancing the tax-exempt bonds would provide additional savings to the taxpayers that then could be further invested in projects supported by both Measure S and R.”

At the City Council meeting, O’Rourke said, “We have made it crystal clear the JPA won’t pick up the cost or the city.”

Van Oleson and Chris Cefalu, who operate the rink under the business name Tahoe Sports Entertainment, were out of town and unavailable for comment. Despite the uncertainty, TSE is going forward with trying to obtain a beer and wine license.

In other action from the Dec. 13 City Council meeting:

• The council agreed to take $21,613.70 from the General Fund Undesignated Reserves to pay bills for outside legal counsel for the 2010-11 fiscal year. The bulk of that – $14,096 – went to an attorney to deal with labor negotiations.

• Agreements with the remaining city labor groups have been reached so all employees are paying their share of PERS retirement funds.

• The city will put out a request for proposal to hire a firm to monitor vacation home rentals, with the idea it would generate income.

• The council allocated up to $10,000 to be spent on a feasibility study regarding the South Shore Vision Plan.

Marriott to be headed by a non-family member

By Michael S. Rosenwald, Washington Post

J.W. Marriott Jr., who built the company his parents started as a District root beer stand into a global lodging giant, is stepping down as chief executive, ending a storied 39-year run that ushered in a new standard of dependable, middle-class hospitality for travelers around the region, the country and then the world.

The word “Marriott,” in red letters on buildings from Bethesda to China, came to signify home for weary families making their way to Disney World, for traveling salesmen careening around the Midwest and lately for weary road jockeys keeping pace with globalization.

In the process of building the 3,600-hotel empire, including two properties in South Lake Tahoe, Marriott’s family became one of the richest and best-known in the region. The family and the firm donate millions every year to philanthropic efforts, particularly for people with disabilities.

The company employs 15,000 people locally, but its influence stretches beyond its hotels and its Bethesda headquarters. Many in the industry say Marriott was critical to seeding the region’s strength in hospitality. A host of former Marriott executives have run some of the largest hotel companies, including Hilton Worldwide, RLJ Lodging Trust, Choice Hotels and Host Hotels & Resorts — all of which are based in the area.

Throughout the growth of his family’s company and the industry, there was Mr. Marriott, as his devoutly loyal employees call him, espousing his family’s simple maxim that if you take care of your employees, your employees will take care of your customers, and your customers will come back.

Read the whole story

Pollution in China altering weather in Western U.S.

By John Blackstone, CBS News

A U.N. conference on climate change ended Sunday without a major deal to cut toxic emissions. No country emits more carbon dioxide than China – a byproduct of its booming economy. And, as CBS News correspondent John Blackstone reports, those Chinese emissions are having a big impact in the U.S.

Chinese officials insist the murky air over Beijing this month is just fog. But measurements taken at the U.S. embassy there show dangerously high levels of air pollution – so bad that traffic has been disrupted and flights have been delayed or cancelled.

“It’s no longer just their problem; it’s our problem,” said Kim Prather of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Prather studies atmospheric chemistry. CBS News met her at a scientific conference in San Francisco, where she was presenting research that shows what’s in the air over China can affect the weather in America.

“The atmosphere has no walls,” she said. “So pollution on this side of the world can make it the other side of the world in about five days.”

The Chinese pollution is carried by the jet stream across the Pacific. In the atmosphere over this country, it can stop the clouds from producing rain and snow.

In general, Prather said, the equation is more pollution equals less precipitation.

The particles of air pollution from China collect moisture in the clouds. But the particles are so small and numerous they don’t get heavy enough to fall as rain or snow. So the water stays in the clouds.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County receives money for carpool lane

The California Transportation Commission this week allocated $401 million in funding to 39 projects, including one in El Dorado County.

Proposition 1B, the 2006 voter-approved transportation bond, will supply $327 million in funds to 10 projects, including $42 million toward the purchase of 42 passenger rail cars. They will be put into service on all three state-supported Amtrak California routes – the Capitol Corridor, San Joaquin and Pacific Surfliner. This supplements $168 million from other sources, including $68 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

To date, the state has allocated more than $11 billion in Proposition 1B funds for transportation purposes statewide.

El Dorado County is getting $9.5 million for the Highway 50 bus/carpool lane project. This project is will add 2.3 miles of bus/carpool lanes from Bass Lake Road to Cambridge Road.