

Tahoe City's Fanny Bridge in need of rehab

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

After 83 years of service, Tahoe City's landmark – but crumbling – Fanny Bridge may soon be relieved of major duty.

Transportation officials have drawn up several alternatives for replacing or supplementing the historic concrete bridge over the Truckee River with a new span a few hundred feet to the north. The new span, possibly four lanes, could help relieve congestion where Highway 89 crosses the river in Tahoe City and improve safety in emergency situations when more vehicles may be trying to get to or from west shore communities.

Read the whole story

Ross Stores thrive as buyers look for discounts

By Ashley Lutz and Jeran Wittenstein, Bloomberg News

Ross Stores Inc. is outperforming rival chains in a sluggish economy, luring budget-conscious shoppers with 60 percent discounts on Calvin Klein shirts and Nike sneakers.

At a market value of \$8.7 billion, Ross is now less than \$100 million away from overtaking Gap Inc., despite having a third as many stores and no e-commerce site. Ross' stock has climbed 18 percent this year, while Gap has dropped 28 percent.

Ross CEO Michael Balmuth keeps promotions and fashion displays minimal to maintain low prices, while placing buyers in New York and Los Angeles to guarantee the Pleasanton company gets hip merchandise.

In a time of high unemployment and falling consumer confidence, the strategy has paid off. Sales gained 9.3 percent last quarter, and the company has raised its forecast for profit this year.

“Consumers haven’t ever fully recovered from 2008, and trade-downs to cheaper merchandise aren’t embarrassing for people anymore,” said Pamela Quintiliano, an analyst with Oppenheimer & Co. “As department stores continue to restrain orders, factories in China are willing to sell to Ross to stay in business.”

Ross got its start in 1957 as a full-priced department store in San Bruno. The chain shifted to discounting in 1982, when the store was still limited to the Bay Area. Business has boomed steadily since the start of the most recent recession, with sales rising 41 percent since 2007 to \$7.87 billion in the company’s last fiscal year.

Ross now has about 1,000 locations, compared with 3,300 for San Francisco’s Gap, including its Banana Republic, Old Navy, Piperlime and Athleta brands.

First Reno Air Races crash to involve spectators; 3 dead

By Reno Gazette-Journal

10:06pm update: A spectacular air race that drew tens of thousands of spectators Friday transformed into a horrific war scene after a veteran pilot crashed his vintage plane on the tarmac just feet away from VIP box seats, forcing officials to cancel the remaining two days of the event.

Early estimates were that three people, including pilot Jimmy Leeward, 74, of Ocala Fla., died in the crash at the National Championship Air Races. But that number was likely to increase, based on witnesses who described the scene as "carnage." At least 54 were injured, 12 in critical condition.



The plane as it crashed in Reno on Sept. 16. Photo/Ward Hughes courtesy of Reno Gazette-Journal

The National Transportation Safety Board took over the investigation Friday evening. A three-person team was already at the Reno Stead Airport, where the air races take place, in case of a crash. This was the first fatal crash at the Air Races since 2007, when three pilots during the event. This was the first crash in the event's history to involve spectators.

Witnesses said the pilot appeared to lose control of his P-51 Mustang called the Galloping Ghost due to a mechanical malfunction, and he put it into the ground instead of keeping

it on the path into the stands, potentially saving hundreds of lives.

“He was a very experienced, talented and qualified pilot,” said Mike Houghton, executive director of the Air Races, which have been in Reno since 1964.

Leeward had been flying since he was 14 and had competed in the air races since 1975. His medical records were up to date and his flying history was clean, Houghton said.

The plane disintegrated on impact, sending shrapnel into the crowd and tearing limbs off bodies, while the blast from the explosion ripped clothes off some spectators, witnesses said.

Read the whole story

Zephyr Cove family escapes injury at Reno Air Races

By Kathryn Reed

A ticket seller recommended the Dauschers not buy box seats for today's Reno Air Races. It may have saved the Zephyr Cove family's lives.

“We were sitting in the stands, maybe a half football field away. It was close ... a little too close for comfort,” Ellen Dauscher told *Lake Tahoe News* minutes after returning home tonight with daughter Jillian and husband Andy. “It was the last race of the day. All of a sudden one plane pulled from the pack. It went straight up and then was nose-diving. They also had aerobatics in the day. I thought he was going to pull out.”

The pilot of the P-51 Mustang Galloping Ghost died on impact. The death toll from the Sept. 16 crash at the Reno Stead Airport was at three as of 7:30pm, with it expected to climb. Dozens were injured.

The plane landed at the VIP, handicapped area, with shrapnel scattering into the box seats, according to the South Shore witnesses. Had they bought the box seats, it could have been a different outcome for these three.

Jillian Dauscher, 17-year-old senior at Whittell High School, said, "We were leaving and then heard a guy behind us talking. He was closer. It was terrible. He saw arms and legs in different places and didn't see a full attached body."

Dauscher is on her way to obtaining her pilot's license. She was supposed to take her cross-country flight Saturday. That has been postponed. But she called her instructor and will be in the air with him instead. (She flies out of Lake Tahoe Airport.)

"I know I can do it, but it will be hard to get right back out tomorrow after witnessing this today," the young pilot said.

Her mom grew up in a flying family, having gone to hundreds of air shows without witnessing an accident.

"I'm just so sad for the people who were injured and killed today. All I can think about is we were very lucky," Ellen Dauscher said.

South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Tom Davis left the Reno Air Races minutes before the plane crashed.

He had been there the better part of the day, but wanted to beat traffic so he left.

But he had seen the P-51 Mustang Galloping Ghost in the pit earlier in the day.

When countless ambulances, police and fire trucks went by, he knew it had to be a crash, but looking back didn't see any smoke. While the plane did not catch fire, it left a sea of destruction.

Davis has been going to the show for close to three decades, and was there in 1999 when Gary Levitz's P-51 split apart.

"I saw Levitz's plane disintegrate in front of me," Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Prior to Sept. 16, 16 people had died in the races, which first started in 1964.

Census: Education plays a role in income levels

According to a U.S. Census Bureau study, education levels had more effect on earnings during a 40-year span in the workforce than any other demographic factor, such as gender, race and Hispanic origin. For example, a worker with a professional degree is expected to make more than a worker with a eighth grade education or lower.

Some groups, such as non-Hispanic white males, Asian males and Asian females, benefit more from higher levels of education than other groups over a 40-year career for those with a professional degree. White males with a professional degree make more than double (about \$2.4 million more) than that of Hispanic females with the same level of education.

Many factors, such as race and Hispanic origin, gender, citizenship, English-speaking ability and geographic location

do influence work-life earnings but none had as much impact as education. The estimated impact on annual earnings between a professional degree and an eighth grade education was about \$72,000 a year, roughly five times the impact of gender, which was \$13,000.

These findings come from the report Education and Synthetic Work-Life Earnings, which looks at the economic value of educational attainment by estimating the amount of money that people might earn over the course of a 40-year work-life given their level of education. The report also looks at the effect of other factors, such as race and gender groups and other characteristics with regard to this relationship.

Other highlights:

Overall, white males had higher earnings than any other group at every education level, with the exception of those with a master's degree, which was topped by Asian males, and those with a professional degree, where Asian males were not significantly different from white males.

In general, women in the most economically advantaged race groups usually earn less than men in the most disadvantaged race groups. For example, a white female with master's degree is expected to earn \$2.4 million over a 40-year work-life. In comparison, a Hispanic male with a master's degree is expected to earn \$2.8 million.

For Asian, black and Hispanic groups whose highest education completed is high school, the difference between each group's work-life earnings was not large compared with the differences between these groups when they had higher levels of education.

Asian men and women with a bachelor's degree or higher had greater returns on higher education than blacks or Hispanics of either gender. For example, an Asian female with a professional degree made \$3.7 million in work-life earnings compared with \$2.3 million for a Hispanic female with a

professional degree.

Geography impacted earnings, showing higher earnings in the Pacific states and in New England and lowest earnings in East South Central states.

Data for this research comes from the 2006-08 American Community Survey.

Washoe Meadow State Park EIR up for certification

Certification of the environmental impact report that will alter Lake Tahoe Golf Course and Washoe Meadow State Park in Meyers is scheduled for Oct. 21 at 9am.

The public meeting is at the golf course at 2500 Emerald Bay Road.

The main issue is restoration of the Upper Truckee River. In order to do the work desired by landowners and environmentalists, some of the land from the state park and Lake Valley State Recreation Area (where the golf course sits) needs to be swapped. The theory is restoring each section of the river to its natural meander will reduce fine sediment from reaching Lake Tahoe.

The Upper Truckee River is the main tributary into Lake Tahoe.

The public will have a chance to comment at the meeting.

The EIR is available for review at the Sugar Pine Point State Park in Tahoma, the State Parks office in Sacramento and at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office in Stateline. It is also

online.

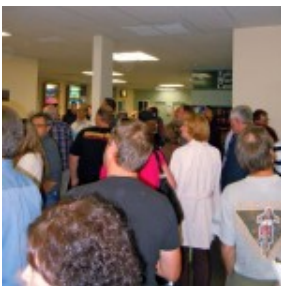
– Lake Tahoe News staff report

S. Tahoe council asks for help if workers want to keep jobs

By Kathryn Reed

After nearly three hours, the South Lake Tahoe City Council turned the budget discussion on the nearly 200 people who attended the special meeting Thursday night.

Councilman Bruce Grego led the charge, with his colleagues falling in behind, when he asked where those in attendance have been before last night. Then asking them to suggest solutions for closing the \$5.2 million gap. Asking them to do more than say they are good workers or retirees, and that they should keep their jobs, salaries and benefits. The offer was put to the community at-large as well.



The overflow crowd at the Sept. 15 council

meeting is
directed to
the TV in the
lobby.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

With the 2011-12 budget taking effect Oct. 1, the council unanimously agreed to meet again Sept. 27 at 6pm, with a vote expected that night. Between now and then council members want ideas for how to solve the problem, not reasons why not to do something. However, it would be a serious violation for a represented employee to engage a councilperson in a discussion about salaries, benefits or work conditions.

This extension also allows the city to continue negotiating with its seven bargaining units and come up with solutions that would alter the budget proposal as presented. While the council met in closed session before the budget meeting started at 7:15pm, no reportable action on the labor negotiations was taken.

Revenue discussion

Grego, showing his frustration, said the council put a measure on the ballot two years ago to raise the business license fee, which would have mostly increased the rate on larger businesses, and the town voted it down.

With the hotel occupancy rate at 23 percent, City Manager Tony O'Rourke said now is not the time to raise the transient occupancy tax when rooms already are empty.

One person who spoke to *Lake Tahoe News* said she tried to offer O'Rourke ideas but was shunned. She's going to take her thoughts to the council in private.

At the meeting, Robert Stiles with Tahoe Real Estate Services, suggested raising the vacation rental home fee from \$144 a

year to \$250 to raise about \$130,000.

Steve Crouch, who represents the General-Public Works association, said lower the reserves to less than 25 percent, don't spend money on frivolous items like \$9,000 to decorate a Christmas tree or \$50,000 on GPS tracking devices for snowplow drivers.

Rob Swain, who runs the senior center, said, "There are lots of assets. Things could be explored. We could get creative and have lots better results."

This longtime employee ran the ice rink before it was turned over to a private operation last month.

He did not present any ideas at the Sept. 15 meeting, but instead spoke in platitudes.

Councilman Tom Davis is most concerned about the projected revenue in the budget. He echoed Stiles' comment that forecasting an increase in property taxes of about 1.5 percent could backfire. Property taxes are the city's largest source of income.

What's on the table

The elimination of 22 jobs is likely if concessions are not made by the employee groups regarding benefits. Who exactly they are is not definitive until either a labor contract is renegotiated or the deadline arrives for the council to pass a budget – which must be balanced per state law. Even then, employee bumping rights make for the fallout to be a bit prolonged.



City Manager
Tony O'Rourke
outlines the
budget.

Cuts are expected in nearly every department. The three division chiefs in the fire department have been given notice. They are at-will employees.

At the meeting Thursday, O'Rourke said the city is "proposing alternative delivery contracts" for the rec center, senior center and pool. He said this would not affect the quality or quantity of services.

Sources have told *Lake Tahoe News* the rec center is likely to have a greater partnership with the local Boys & Girls Club because it is running similar programs, plus the two buildings are walking distance from each other.

El Dorado County is expected to take over a larger roll in how the senior center is operated. Most counties run these types of programs – not a city.

Changes to the pool are expected, but it will not be operated by a private entity.

O'Rourke admitted the golf course, airport, campground and other city run operations could be turned over to a private operator if the numbers make it more advantageous to do so and the council agrees to it.

Temporary snowplow operators are expected to go from seven to 15. O'Rourke said this will provide for an initial savings of

\$256,000 a year, with long-term benefits of a half million dollars a year.

Maintenance of roads beyond pothole repair will be contracted out.

Furloughs for just about everyone are going away – which equates to 18,000 hours of additional service.

Lease purchase agreements for police vehicles will become the new norm.

Who's saying what

Many of the 29 people who spoke, along with a few shouts from the audience (many of whom were watching on the television monitor in the lobby because of space constraints), voiced frustration with what they perceive as cuts only at the bottom.

However, it was in March that three director jobs and the assistant city manager position were eliminated. O'Rourke on Thursday said the consolidation of jobs resulted in 10 percent raises for the finance director, police-fire chief, and community services director because of increased duties.

He failed to mention how the human resources director and public information officer also are making more.

Employees say this is unfair. When they are asked to do more with fewer people they are not given raises. While this is true, they have a contract per their bargaining unit and the upper management positions are at-will and not represented.

But two of their own got 10 percent raises as well – the capital improvement manager and payroll specialist.

Non-exempt types will also be paying their share of PERS, while the only employee group to agree to do so is the fire association.

O'Rourke emphatically stated he had not received a single bonus nor a nickel raise since he has been here. (Although he came on board in August 2010, the council has yet to review him as is normal each year.)

Crouch, the union rep, said it's frustrating to negotiate with the numbers continually changing. City staff said property taxes and state take-aways legitimately altered the figures.

Judy Crawford, former parks and rec employee, lamented how sad it is there are more places to buy pot in town than there are places to buy shoes.

Thirteen-year-old Garrett Harley spoke of the great job the rec staff does.

Vivian Gonterman, who has lived in town since Pioneer Trail was a dirt road, equated the city contracting out services to how well the United States has prospered by having other countries make everything. Her husband is a retired city employee.

Joe McKenna, retired fire captain, said, "We've always dealt with financial crisis. I was on the bargaining team. We gave up a lot for our health care." (Retirees get the same health care benefits employees get.)

Jerry Copeland, representing the Admin-Confidential employee group, said no one told him there would be a reward to come to the table first. (The fire association is getting a 2 percent raise because they made concessions.) He also said the perception is the employees are the ones who caused the financial problems.

A recurring sentiment expressed confidentially to *Lake Tahoe News* is that management, and therefore the council, don't really care and are trying to balance the budget on the back of employees who did not create the fiscal mess. In addition, the dictatorial nature of how things are run is often echoed.

Lindsey Henry, 27, a third generation South Lake Tahoe resident, said of the employees, "You need to consider the big picture of what they are doing for this community." Her dad used to work for the city.

Many people voiced concern for how well the streets would be plowed with temps and the potential liability it could create for the city.

"Temporary workers won't save our city," Vernon Lee told the council.

While the city struggles to live within its means, many who spoke said it's also critical to not lose the sense of community that still lingers.

Probation, community service for teens who set Ray May Fire

By Jaclyn O'Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

For causing an August wildland fire that cost nearly \$3 million to fight and destroyed land and structures on public, private and American Indian property, two 15-year-old boys were placed on probation and ordered to work 500 hours of community service.

Judge David Gamble of Douglas County District Court on Tuesday said he was concerned about both boys' mental health conditions and their drug and marijuana abuse. The pair was not identified because they are juveniles.

Gamble described the boys' negligence in the Ray May Fire in the mountains south of Carson City as "stupid" and something a "reasonable human" would not have done because of the high risk of danger and damage.

The judge said the incident is proof that both teenagers need a "serious intervention," adding that he hoped the incident would be an example to all how "fraught with error" even setting a fire can be.

"I want to give them the tools to make decisions so that they don't end up turning people's lives upside-down and causing the community to be burned down," Gamble said of his order of probation.

He said part of the boys' community service could be helping to build a monument to remember the fire since they would be unable to replant the thousands of acres the fire destroyed. He said the boys definitely would not be "picking up trash" and would have to work to rehabilitate what they damaged.

Read the whole story

Arsenal of weapons, ammo found at IHOP shooter's home

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

Sixteen AK-47 magazines with live rounds, a Glock 26 9mm firearm with a holster, ammunition for various weapons, gun videos and body armor were among the items Carson City Sheriff's detectives found at the home and in the car of the man who shot 11, killing four, at an IHOP last week.

The list reveals how heavily-armed Eduardo Sencion, 32, was before his attack at the restaurant on Sept. 6. A video of detectives seeking the search warrant that was released Wednesday revealed that Sencion had been diagnosed schizophrenic and was taking medication before the attack.

Sencion was armed with an AK-47-style assault weapon when he opened fire on customers inside the IHOP and businesses outside the restaurant on Sept. 6. He then fatally shot himself in the head.

Among the four dead were three Nevada National Guard members.

Read the whole story

California's poverty rate the highest since 1997

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

California's poor now outnumber the populations of 33 states and 90 nations – and counting.

The state's poverty rate last year rose to its highest level in more than a decade – 16.3 percent – as household incomes plunged by 5 percent, according to census figures released Tuesday.

The state lost ground much faster than the rest of the nation, which saw a roughly 2 percent decline in household income.

Nationally, about 15.1 percent of the population, or 46 million people, were poor last year, a higher poverty rate than in any year since 1993.

That incomes continue to decline and poverty increases didn't surprise economists. But the magnitude of the changes did. California hasn't seen a bigger year-to-year fall in household income in at least 25 years.

"We're supposedly in recovery," said Jeff Michael, an economist at the University of the Pacific in Stockton. "But we've been feeding at the bottom of the trough."

Howard Roth, the state's chief economist, noted that many of the states hit hardest by the housing bust saw the steepest income declines and largest poverty increases last year. Those states will likely continue to suffer, he said, until the housing industry recovers.

"It's pretty clear that going forward, these income numbers are going to get smaller for a while," Roth said.

In California, the median household income – the middle number in a ranked list of incomes – was \$54,459 last year, down from an inflation-adjusted \$57,061 in 2009 and the lowest level since 1997. California incomes peaked in 2006 at \$59,821.

Nationwide, the median household income stood at \$49,445 last year, down from \$50,599 in 2009.

About 6.1 million Californians lived in poverty last year, an increase of nearly a half-million residents from the previous year and the highest rate since 1997.

Read the whole story