

South Tahoe attorney convicted in bribery case

By Stuart Pfeifer, Los Angeles Times

The lawyer son of a former top California pension fund official was convicted on charges related to a scheme to have a client lie to a federal grand jury in exchange for cash.

Alfred Nash Villalobos, 46, of South Lake Tahoe faces up to 30 years in prison after his conviction Wednesday on extortion and obstruction of justice charges.

His father, Alfred J.R. Villalobos of Stateline, a former director on the board of the California Public Employees' Retirement System, was sued by the California attorney general's office last year. The suit accused him of plying a CalPERS executive with gifts to win business for investment firms he represented. Trial in that case is pending.

The younger Villalobos was arrested in 2009 on suspicion of accepting \$50,000 cash from a lawyer whose client was the subject of a grand jury investigation into allegations of immigration visa fraud.

Villalobos represented a man scheduled to testify before the grand jury. According to prosecutors, he told the defense attorney he would have his client lie to the grand jury in exchange for cash.

The defense attorney went to the FBI, which secretly recorded conversations in which Villalobos negotiated the bribe, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph N. Akrotirianakis.

Read the whole story

Gel fuel being recalled because of flash fires

A Lake Tahoe company is one of 10 firms recalling containers of gel fuel after federal investigators said the product is responsible for two deaths and nearly three dozen serious burn injuries from flash fires.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission launched an investigation into gel fuels in mid-June. About 2 million containers of the pourable fuel that comes in quart and gallon containers are being recalled.

The gel fuel being recalled are sold by the following companies:

- Fuel Barons Inc. of Lake Tahoe, Nev.
- Bond Manufacturing, of Antioch, Calif.
- Bird Brain Inc., of Ypsilanti, Mich.
- Sunjel Company (2 Burn Inc.), of Milwaukee
- Lamplight Farms Inc, of Menomonee Falls, Wis.
- Luminosities Inc (Windflame), of St. Paul, Minn.
- Marshall Group, of Elkhart, Ind.
- Pacific Décor Ltd., of Woodinville, Wash.
- Real Flame, of Racine, Wis.
- Smart Solar USA, of Oldsmar, Fla.

If you have gel fuel from any of the above companies, contact

the manufacturer for information about a refund.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Angora thinning project gives vets chance to learn job skills

By Kathryn Reed

Chain saws hum. The thud of a tree crashing to the ground reverberates through the mountain air. Young men chatter above the noise.

A group of out of place spectators in hardhats watches the work as though this is something unique in the forest adjacent to houses in Lake Tahoe.

And in some ways it is.

On Wednesday, nine U.S. military veterans were part of the crew felling trees killed from the 2007 Angora Fire, piling them in teepee-like formations with the idea they could be burned this fall. (At times 19 veterans have been working in the burn area.)

A \$1.5 million pilot program between the U.S. Forest Service and California Conservation Corps called Veterans Green Corps is giving veterans the opportunity to learn a skill and potentially be hired by the federal agency. Vets receive priority-hiring status as long as they have the necessary skills.



Doug Glover of
the USFS cuts
a snag.

Photos/Lisa
Herron/USFS

“It’s not only a good thing to do, it’s the right thing to do,” Randy Moore, USFS Pacific Southwest regional forester, said.

He was in South Lake Tahoe on Aug. 31 to witness the work firsthand.

Besides the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, the Cleveland and Sierra national forests are part of the pilot.

A certain level of maturity not often seen in fresh CCC recruits is the noticeable difference with the military guys.

“In some ways it’s easier,” Mike Asprey with the South Shore CCC group said of the vets. “The military taught them how to follow instructions. They were already taught how to work hard.”

Their work involves thinning by hand 40 acres of the 3,000-plus acres that were burned in the Angora Fire. On this day they are working on the ridge in the Tahoe Mountain area where firefighters made a valiant stand to keep the fire from consuming homes in the Angora Highlands.

Another difference, though, is none of the military guys is from the mountains – so they need a little educating about the woods.

Only dead trees are being taken out – and none is more than 20 inches in diameter per the USFS prescription.



Gabe Foster of the USFS, left, watches veteran John Gallagher on Aug. 31 fell a tree.

Victor Uriz, a conservation supervisor with the CCC, is on hand. He talks about the hard work that is going on. He doesn't dwell on the fact that over the ridge on Mule Deer Drive is the house he rebuilt – his being one of the 254 that was lost four years ago when a smoldering campfire reignited into what is now known as the Angora Fire.

One of those working is John Gallagher, 26, of Redding. He spent 10 months with the Army in Iraq. He's appreciative of this opportunity, he says with a chain saw slung over his shoulder. He's hoping this experience will lead to being hired on as a hotshot with the Forest Service.

While on this assignment, the military crew is staying at the CCC barracks in Meyers.

Besides training in tree felling/thinning, the military guys also have gone through fire training. Some have been working prescribed burns in the basin.

Mostly it's white fir and Jeffery pine being taken out. The

project started three weeks ago, is 50 percent complete and should wrap up by the end of the month.

West Nile confirmed in El Dorado County bird

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County officials today received confirmation that a bird found in the county has tested positive for West Nile virus.

The bird, a swallow, was found Aug. 22 south of the town of El Dorado and is the first bird to test positive for the virus this year, according to a news release from the Environmental Management and Health Services departments. No human cases have been reported in the county this year.

“Confirmation of our first West Nile virus positive birds means the virus is circulating in the community and there is a heightened risk of infection in humans,” Fred Sanford, supervising environmental health specialist with the Environmental Management Department, said in a written statement.

Officials urge residents to take precautions to protect themselves against mosquito bites.

Mosquito surveillance programs in the county include trapping and testing mosquitoes, reporting neglected swimming pools and reporting and testing dead birds and tree squirrels. The Health Services Department also has instituted human surveillance activities, and physicians are encouraged to test

human cases of viral meningitis and encephalitis for West Nile virus.

Read the whole story

Complaint against Kings Beach improvement project dismissed

The Federal Highway Administration dismissed a complaint against the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project.

“The agency’s ruling is important, because it removes a cloud hanging over a project that is vital to the future of Kings Beach,” Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery said in a statement. “We knew the complaint was without merit, and were glad to see the Federal Highway Administration agree with us.”

The project’s goals include improving Lake Tahoe’s clarity by reducing stormwater runoff; providing better, safer pedestrian and bicycle access; and enhancing the character of the community’s business district. The project will revitalize a 1.1-mile section of Highway 28 through the heart of Kings Beach.

Work on the first phase of the project began this summer. The first phase is focused on the installation of traffic circles, speed humps and other neighborhood traffic-calming improvements that the community has supported strongly.

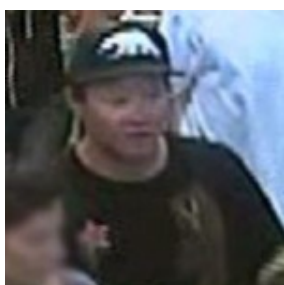
Filed by the California League of United Latin American Citizens, the complaint alleged the project would have a negative impact on the community’s Hispanic residents, particularly those who live in and near the project area.

2 sought in S. Tahoe arson seen at concert hours before fire started

The two people who police believe started last week's fire at the Bijou Center in South Lake Tahoe were caught on other surveillance tape.

The two men are on video taken at MontBleu casino in Stateline attending the Atmosphere concert on Aug. 24.

Early the next morning the fire was started at the back corner of the shopping center. Sprinklers and people working late in the center who called 911 helped keep the flames to the exterior of the building.



Officers are looking for this man.



Police want to
speak with
this man.

“It’s unknown if it was specifically targeted or a random act,” South Lake Tahoe police Detective Doug Sentell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It is also unknown if the two wanted for questioning are local or from out of town.

Regarding the suspect in the second photo, his T-shirt has a drawing of a marijuana leaf on the front and a larger marijuana leaf on the back of the shirt tail. The wording across the top front of the shirt is hard to make out but looks like it says “West Side”, according to Sentell.

The fire started when a liquid accelerant was poured into a trash can before being lighted, according to authorities.

If you recognize the people in the photos or have information on this incident, call Detective Doug Sentell at (530) 542.6100 or call Secret Witness at (530) 541-6800 to remain anonymous.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Police looking for man in S. Tahoe missing woman case

By KGW-TV

YAKIMA, Wash. – Police have a “person of interest” who they want to question in the case of a woman missing since she

attended the Rainbow Family Gathering in Skamania County last July.

Marie Hanson of South Lake Tahoe vanished after attending what she had described as a “peace rally” in the remote Washington forest on July 6.



Police are
looking for
this man.

In the latest twist in her missing person case, police on Wednesday released a sketch of a man they described as around 45-years old, with a thin build, and around 5’8” tall who carried a cane. They said he was last seen leaving the forest with Hanson on July 6, wearing a duster-type jacket, several rings, and many silver necklaces with medallions. (See police sketch above.)

At least one witness has come forward, describing the mystery man to police. Police have urged anyone with additional information to call detective Tim Garrity with the Skamania County Sheriff’s Office at (509) 427.9490.

Read the whole story

Mysterious safe at former Bill's Casino may be opened next week

Updated Sept. 1: The safe is now scheduled to be open Sept. 13.

By KCRA-TV

A hidden safe found during the remodeling of a casino in South Lake Tahoe will be opened next week.

The safe – found underneath a stairway at the old Bill's Casino – may be linked to an unsolved murder of the former owner of the casino.

The current owner of the casino, Mike Laub, said crews are scheduled to crack the safe Sept. 5.

Laub told KCRA 3 last week that he thinks the safe may have belonged to Richard Chartrand, the owner of the former Barney's Casino, which operated in the building for more than two decades.

[Read the whole story](#)

Truckee hospital partners with UC Davis School of

Medicine

Since its inception in 2009, the UC Davis School of Medicine partnership with Tahoe Forest Health System for the university's Rural-PRIME program continues to grow strong. To date, 16 UCD medical students have furthered their training at the Truckee facility with 11 students scheduled for the 2011 program.

Tahoe Forest was selected as the first clerkship-training site beyond Sacramento for this medical program in January 2010. UC Davis officially named Tahoe Forest its first Rural Center of Excellence.

Tahoe Forest Health System physicians train UC Davis medical students in the Rural-PRIME Program, which is designed to help increase health care access in California's rural areas. Tahoe Forest Hospital offers medical students the opportunity to choose from a large spectrum of exceptional health care providers who have come from all over the nation, allowing for students to receive top-notch training in a rural clinical site rather than at an urban hospital. The result, according to research from rural medical programs around the nation, is more involvement with procedures and the real-world challenges for doctors who don't have a legion of specialists at their disposal – like medical students at university health centers do.

While working with TFHS medical professionals, Rural-PRIME students receive extensive hands-on training in the use of telemedicine and simulation technology. Internationally recognized for its telemedicine program, UC Davis School of Medicine has incorporated this expertise into the Rural-PRIME program. Telemedicine is the diagnosis and treatment of patients in remote areas using video conferencing and medical information transmitted from another urban location, like Sacramento or San Francisco. In this case, information is

transmitted from medical instructors at UC Davis to TFHS physicians and their visiting medical students. The use of telemedicine has been shown to improve access to specialty care in rural areas statewide and provides a valuable tool for training future rural physicians.

Sierra Colina housing project prevails in court over League

By Kathryn Reed

Just more than two years to the date of filing a lawsuit to stop the 18-acre Sierra Colina project in Stateline from progressing, the League to Save Lake Tahoe lost its battle.

The winners are Steve Kenninger and Gail Jaquish who own the property and want to develop it, as well as TRPA.

The League had sued the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency – citing transfer of land coverage as its main issue.



Sierra Colina, outlined in orange, in Stateline won in court on Aug. 30.

U.S. District Judge Robert Jones in Reno on Tuesday ruled in TRPA and Sierra Colina's favor.

"Judge Robert C. Jones' decision heralds a significant victory by allowing responsible development which invigorates the economy and creates jobs to advance in the Lake Tahoe Basin without frivolous lawsuits tying up environmentally beneficial projects," Kenninger said in a statement.

Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League, did not respond to a request for comment.

"We were confident throughout the whole process that the Governing Board made the right decision with the approval of the Sierra Colina project," Julie Regan, spokeswoman for TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The board approved the project in summer 2009.

Regan elaborated that the bi-state regulatory agency is extremely pleased the judge cited the numerous environmental benefits of the project in his 25-page decision.

The decision released Aug. 30, came 29 days after both sides gave testimony. At that time the judge wondered why the lawsuit was filed. Jones in his ruling cites much of what the final environmental impact statement says in terms of quantities of pollutants that will no longer enter Lake Tahoe if the project is completed, how the project goes beyond the environmental requirements, how bike-pedestrian trails will be improved, and the reduction of disturbances in stream environmental zones.

"The court spent a great deal of time walking through the various environmental benefits of the project and that was a factor in the decision," Regan said.

Kenninger and Jaquish did not wait for the judge's decision to begin environmental improvements. Work on Burke Creek is under

way.

With the Lake Tahoe Basin having a limited time frame when dirt can be moved – May 1-Oct. 15 – the soonest ground could be broken is next year because building permits still need to be secured and the economy needs to help indicate when would be the time to build.

When built, Sierra Colina will include 41 market rate dwellings and nine moderate-income deed restricted places. Forty-two units will be in 21 townhouse-style duplexes, with eight being single-family homes.

The goal is to be the first neighborhood in the basin to have all units meet state of the art green sustainability criteria.

Here is the court ruling.