

Former Caesars Tahoe exec returns to Vegas after stint in Reno

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno-Gazette-Journal

Larry Woolf's five-year run operating the casino inside Reno's Grand Sierra Resort will be over on Monday.

The long-time gaming executive, whose formative years are tied to such legends as Bill Harrah and John Ascuaga, will head back to his Las Vegas headquarters of Navegante Group, the casino management firm he's owned and operated since the mid-1990s.

The Grand Sierra's new owner, The Meruelo Group, has hired another veteran gamer, Tony Santo, whose Santo Gaming firm already manages the hotel, to take on the casino, too.

Woolf magnanimously acknowledges the change, saying, "It's best to run a hotel and casino as one unit."

But even the competitor in a hotly competitive market, Woolf also points to his success in growing casino revenue last year at the 2,000-room hotel, opened in 1978 as the MGM Grand-Reno, while the overall Reno-Sparks market sputtered.

Read the whole story

Firefighters gaining control on Geiger Grade Fire

By Reno Gazette-Journal

The Bain Street Fire on Geiger Grade near Toll Road is about 40 percent contained this evening and full containment is expected by Tuesday, according to fire officials.

The blaze scorched about 600 acres in steep terrain Sunday afternoon, and fire officials expected containment of the fire on Tuesday.

Fire officials said that about 40 percent containment of the Bain Street Fire was reached Sunday evening.

Onlookers were being asked to stay out of the area and the Nevada State Patrol closed the unimproved area of Toll Road, near the fire, to keep onlookers out.

Officials also asked motorists who had to travel on roads near the fire to use extra caution because fire crews and apparatus are working in the area.

Fire investigators have determined the fire was human caused and are in the process of questioning witnesses and suspects.

"From the onset of the fire, conditions were extreme; all of the elements that make for a difficult fire attack were in place," Reno Fire Department Battalion Chief Tim Spencer said Sunday. "Crews (Saturday night) did a great job of protecting structures from the fast moving and erratic fire. We made large strides with constructing hand and dozer lines which complimented a highly effective air attack."

No structures have been lost and no injuries have been reported.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe Y gas station in the works

A gas station, convenience store and car wash could break ground this fall at the Y in South Lake Tahoe at the site of the old Shell station.

Raley's, which leases the land from the Salvo Trust, has all the paperwork before South Lake Tahoe officials and has asked for an expedited review before the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

If it all comes together, a foundation could be put in this fall before dirt can no longer be moved.

The city is in the design review stage, with it expected to be before the planning commission in September.

– Kathryn Reed

California leaning toward returning to June for primary

election

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

Tired of presidential candidates treating California like an ATM, raising vast sums of money here but spending it in states where campaigns cost less and matter more, state officials four years ago agreed to hold the 2008 primary in February.

The early date, they hoped, might focus more attention on the Golden State. "Now California is important again in presidential nominating politics," Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said at the time.

But more than 20 other states moved their primaries up, too, and California, if not the afterthought it was in previous elections, was marginalized yet again.

Now, Gov. Jerry Brown is expected to sign legislation moving next year's presidential primary back to June, consolidating it with the statewide primary election.

"We've learned that shifting a date doesn't matter," said Jaime Regalado, executive director of the Pat Brown Institute of Public Affairs at California State University, Los Angeles. "Only if we had a more competitive balance between the two parties, then I think we would play a larger role ... Then they simply wouldn't drop in, parachute in to get money, and leave."

Assembly Bill 80, by Assemblyman Paul Fong, D-Cupertino, to shift the primary election to June, moved through the Legislature with bipartisan support, though some Republicans said they voted for it reluctantly only because of the cost savings involved.

Read the whole story

Pedestrian dies crossing Hwy. 50 in Stateline

A Calaveras County woman has died from the injuries she sustained after being hit by an alleged drunken driver while she was crossing Highway 50 in Stateline.

Joan Marie Hamrick, 60, of Valley Springs was struck while going from the Horizon casino to MontBleu at 1:17am Saturday. She was flown to Renown Medical Center in Reno where she later died.

David Ray Stephenson, 35, of Discovery Bay was booked into jail on charges of felony DUI.

Nevada Highway Patrol troopers said Stephenson was driving an unregistered silver Ford truck when he struck Hamrick, who was in a cross walk. He was followed less than a mile to Kahle Drive by a witness.

Officers waited for the suspect to return and then arrested Stephenson.

The accident is still under investigation. Anyone with information is asked to call Sgt. Scott Famer at (775) 689.4623.

– Kathryn Reed

Nonprofit releases first green directory in Nevada

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

A nonprofit group hopes the release of a new “green directory” will help Nevada attract more business and get the state one step closer to its goal of being a renewable energy leader.

The Nevada Institute for Renewable Energy Commercialization released the first edition of its Nevada Clean & Renewable Energy Product & Service Supply Directory this week.

The directory includes a list of more than 300 companies in the state that work in various fields of the renewable sector, including suppliers, contract manufacturers, assemblers and developers. The group first started soliciting company names for potential inclusion in June.

“Now that we have the list, we can go to the next phase, which is using what we know is available in the state for company attraction,” said Jim Croce, NIREC president and CEO. “A lot of renewable companies that have an interest in relocating to Nevada are looking for strategic partners in the state who can help them by providing components and services. This list shows those companies which businesses are here to support them.”

Croce expects the list to grow to at least 500 companies. The second edition is scheduled for an October release. NIREC has a contract with the state to provide quarterly updates to the list through the first quarter of 2012. It is uncertain how the list will be maintained after that.

Read the whole story

Nevadans relying on food stamps more as jobs disappear

By Nevada News Bureau

Nevada experienced the greatest growth among the states in food stamp caseloads between 2007 and 2010 with an increase of 128 percent, according to a recent report from the Urban Institute.

The jump in caseloads is attributable to a nearly 250 percent increase in state unemployment between 2007 and 2010, the report says.

The Unemployment and Recovery Project report said caseload increases across the country are a reflection of high unemployment, as well as increased participation rates and program changes that make it easier for families to get benefits.

Nearly 45 million people currently receive help from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps), an increase of about 69 percent since the recession began near the end of 2007.

A recent report said 329,105 Nevadans received assistance from SNAP in March, citing statistics obtained from the state Division of Welfare and Supportive Services.

Today, SNAP reaches about one in seven Americans.

* Over half of SNAP-supported households include children, and one in five include a disabled, non-elderly adult.

* About one in eight SNAP-supported households include elderly

individuals.

* 96 percent are U.S. citizens, 1 percent are refugees, and 3 percent are documented non-citizens living in the U.S. long enough to qualify (aliens are not eligible for SNAP benefits).

* In 2009, about 29 percent of SNAP households had some earnings, 5 percent had some unemployment insurance, and many others reported disability or retirement income. Nearly one in five (18 percent) had no countable income.

The current debate over reducing the federal deficit has led some to propose scaling back federal program costs. The House Budget Committee passed a major restructuring that would block grant SNAP to the states with fixed federal resources.

House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan's budget plan would cut the SNAP program by \$127 billion – almost 20 percent – over the next 10 years (2012-21).

In addition to possible cuts to SNAP, thousands of Nevada residents who rely on financial assistance to pay their power bills likely won't get help this year because of federal funding cuts.

The Division of Welfare and Supportive Services recently said federal funding for Nevada's Energy Assistance Program will amount to only \$4 million this year, down from \$15.8 million in the fiscal year that just ended June 30.

South Shore election season

dominated by incumbents

By Kathryn Reed

There is going to be a new face on the South Lake Tahoe Public Utility District board in December.

Marylou Mosbacher, who has served for 21 years, is not running for another term. She knows she will miss being on the board, but said at 82 it's time to focus her attention more on grandchildren and great-children.



Marylou
Mosbacher

She is, though, hoping a woman fills her seat because she is currently the lone female on the board.

So far three people have filed for what is called seat No. 3 – engineer Randy Vogelgesang, businessman John Runnels and retired STPUD employee Claude Gunsch.

Dale Rise is seeking another term for seat No. 4. He is the only one so far going after that seat.

The three incumbents for the Lake Tahoe Unified School board have filed – Sue Novasel, Mike Doyle and Larry Green. No one has filed to challenge them.

Karen Borges has filed to retain her seat on the Lake Tahoe Community College board. Fritz Wenck, who has been on the board since the college started in the 1970s, has not filed.

He did not return to a call to find out what his intentions are.

Student Michael Bischoff has filed for the college board.

The deadline to file for the November election is Aug. 12. If no incumbent files, the deadline is extended to Aug. 17.

On July 29, the three-member board that oversees Measure S, the recreation initiative passed in 2000, massaged ballot language for the revised Measure R. The changes don't alter the amount property owner pay each year. It changes how money can be spent.

Another item that may be on the Nov. 8 ballot involves the pension plan for South Lake Tahoe employees. The City Council on Aug. 2 will discuss whether voters should have a say in the pension issue.

Nevadans frustrated without representation in House

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

When Democratic President Barack Obama this week urged Americans to contact their congressional representatives about the deadlock over raising the nation's debt ceiling, Nevadans who live outside Clark County had no one to call in the U.S. House.

With the U.S. House of Representatives' District 2 seat vacant since the resignation of U.S. Rep. Dean Heller, R-Nev., on May 9, thousands of Silver State voters are experiencing frustration without representation.

Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval appointed Heller to the U.S. Senate after U.S. Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., resigned in the wake of a sex scandal.

A special election won't be held until in September to fill the vacancy.

"So who you gonna call?" asked Guy Rocha, former Nevada state archivist, a reference to the theme song for the movie "Ghostbusters. "For the first time in Nevada history, the answer, at least for District 2 constituents, is nobody."

He said the state has never experienced "a vacancy like this," and it's complicated by coming at a critical time in history.

"We've never had a debt ceiling controversy like this one," Rocha said. "This one is going right down to the wire, and the future of the nation's economic viability could be on the line."

District 2 residents who want to make their voices heard could call the state's other two U.S. House members: U.S. Reps. Shelley Berkley, D-Las Vegas, and Joe Heck, R-Henderson.

Read the whole story

U.S. teens turning to heroin as a cheaper high

By Tim Johnson, McClatchy Newspapers

EL DURAZNO, Mexico — Mexico's heroin industry has had a bullish few years, and for traffickers the outlook is as uplifting as the scarlet, orange and yellow poppy flowers from

which the narcotic is processed.

What was once a problem largely confined to hubs in California and Texas, Mexican traffickers have expanded into the Midwest and the Atlantic Seaboard, narcotics experts say.

Using savvy marketing tactics, they've also repositioned heroin commercially, revamping its image from the inner-city drug of yore, with its junkies and needles, into a narcotic that can be snorted or smoked, appealing to suburban and even rural high school youth.

A coincidental factor has given the drug gangs a tail wind: The epidemic abuse of painkillers has ebbed in the United States, and youth now hunger for a cheaper high.

"We've heard around the country of changes away from prescription drugs, because they are either more expensive or more difficult to obtain, and a movement toward heroin, which is less costly," said Gil Kerlikowske, a former Seattle police chief who's the White House drug czar.

The U.S. State Department said in March that Mexico has surpassed Myanmar as the world's second largest poppy cultivator and produces 7 percent of the world's heroin, mostly for the U.S. market. The State Department and the United Nations say that Mexican poppy production has nearly tripled since 2007, though Mexico strongly disputes that estimate.

What's indisputable is that drug syndicates that produce black tar and brown heroin in Mexico's Sierra Madre mountains are pushing aggressively into areas where they haven't been active before.

Read the whole story