

Barton Hospital turns to Disney for lesson in guest services

By Phil Galewitz, Kaiser Health News

Barton Memorial Hospital sent its 900 employees back to school in June to learn how to provide better service. Their instructor: The Walt Disney Co.



"Disney understands guest services," said Kathy Cocking, Barton's vice president of operations. "And we're not as good as we want to be."

In classes at the hospital, two Disney consultants taught employees how to think more creatively and improve their attitudes toward their jobs. They stressed that patients want not just good clinical care, but personal attention, too.

Barton is one of a growing number of hospitals seeking help from the entertainment giant whose theme parks and resorts are famed for meticulous landscaping and rigid employee service standards.

Since October at least 25 hospitals have signed on for multi-year consulting agreements that can include visits to Disney World to observe customer service operations as well as employee training sessions at the hospitals, said spokeswoman Stacey Thomson.

Disney officials attribute the increase in health consulting business to a provision in the new federal health law that requires Medicare payments to hospitals in 2012 reflect

patient satisfaction ratings.

Medicare has been publishing patient satisfaction scores on its Hospital Compare website since 2008. Starting in October 2012, Medicare will begin withholding 1 percent of its payments to hospitals. That money – \$850 million in the first year – will go into a pool to be doled out as bonuses to hospitals that score above average on several measures, including patient satisfaction.

“Everyone understands these scores will impact our livelihood and our future,” Cocking said. “That’s why we had Disney come here.”

In response to advice from Disney, the South Lake Tahoe has revamped its employees’ dress code, improved its landscaping and changed its hiring to focus on applicants’ attitudes, she said.

Read the whole story

Wildfire burning in Alpine County

Updated July 25 4:40pm:

The Airport Fire burning north of Markleeville is now estimated at 80 acres, but officials said fire crews on the scene should be able to contain the blaze.

The fire, which started about 1:15pm, is burning in the Indian Creek Reservoir area. The Indian Creek Campground facilities and Alpine County Airport facilities were evacuated, but there were no structures being threatened.

The fire was holding at 80 acres, and crews were making good progress on knocking it down, Sierra Front Interagency Dispatch Center spokesman Helen Frazier said.

By Reno Gazette-Journal

As of 2:15pm the Indian Creek Fire had grown to 70 acres and is burning uncontrolled with no estimate of control or containment, according to the Sierra Front Fire Protection District.

The fire in Alpine County south of Gardnerville required the evacuation of Indian Creek Campground and the Alpine County Airport facilities.

The fire is being battled by 10 engines, three air tankers, one helicopter and three hand crews.

Read the whole story

Court allows USFS to log in Angora burn area

Updated July 25 at 1:30pm:

The U.S. Forest Service today was given approval by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to begin logging the Angora burn when judges denied an emergency injunction sought by conservation groups.

U.S. Forest Service officials intend this week to begin

removing dead trees from the Angora burn area on the South Shore.

In documents filed Friday with the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, the agency says it is not required to ensure black-backed woodpeckers have adequate habitat in Lake Tahoe.

Earth Island Institute's John Muir Project and the Center for Biological Diversity say otherwise.

They have sought an injunction to prevent the \$3 million, 1,398-acre project from continuing after losing in U.S. District Court.

The Forest Service owns most of the 3,000-plus acres that were burned in the June 2007 Angora Fire. The federal agency contends removing a bulk of the trees will help prevent a future catastrophic fire and is the next step in its restoration plans.

The conservation groups believe preserving the woodpeckers' habitat needs to be addressed before the logging can begin – if ever.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Troublesome bears keep Nevada authorities busy

Nevada Department of Wildlife officials have been busy in the last 24 hours dealing with bears in Lake Tahoe and Carson City.

A bear wondering around the Raley's shopping center off

Highway 28 in Incline Village on Sunday was killed by wildlife officials. They said this was necessary because it was the third time the bear had been deemed a nuisance.

In Carson City this morning, authorities tranquilized a mom and two cubs caught in a trap on West Washington Street. The trap had been set the night before when the animals were seen in the neighborhood.

Officials are trying to determine if the mama bear has caused problems before. If not, all three could be released Tuesday.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Tahoe's Ritz-Carlton bought by lending group

By Mark Anderson, Sacramento Business Journal

The lending group that held the note on the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe bought the note for \$85.5 million in a foreclosure auction Monday morning at the Placer County Courthouse.

Bank of America, primary lender on the development, first filed a notice of default on the property in March 2010. In that notice last year, the bank claimed Highlands Hotel Co. LLC was \$18.6 million in default on the hotel and a neighboring parcel. The default involved two loans totaling \$157 million.



Ritz-Carlton
at Northstar
has new
owners.

Photo/LTN file

The luxury hotel opened Dec. 9, 2009 to what was a good ski season but also the depths of recession.

Read the whole story

Officers investigating possible homicide in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe police officers are investigating the death of a 52-year-old man as a possible homicide.



Officers said they were called by the dead man's roommate to their residence in the 3700 block of Forest Avenue at 3:15 Monday morning because the victim was not breathing and had sustained a head trauma.

Names are not being released of either man. The 55-year-old surviving roommate is being questioned, but had not been arrested as of noon July 25..

“At this point and time we are covering all of our bases,” Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. With the roommate being the reporting party and the last person to see the victim alive, officers have a lot of questions for him.

An exact cause of death has not been determined by the medical examiner.

Uhler would not say if a weapon had been recovered. A search warrant was expected to be secured today so officers could further search the residence.

Uhler only characterized the men’s relationship as roommates. The house on Forest is one-bedroom, and 416 square feet. Another person lives on site, but not in the same building.

U.S. students lack basic geography knowledge

By Valerie Strauss, Washington Post

Newly released geography scores from the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress show that fewer than one-third of the nation’s fourth, eighth and 12th graders were proficient in the subject.

On the following seemingly easy question, only 33 percent of eighth-grade students who took the test got the correct answer:

Which of the following is an accurate statement about the American Southwest?

- a) Alternating areas of dense shrubbery and sand dunes often make travel difficult.
- b) Arid conditions make access to water an important public issue.
- c) Generally fair weather means that most people rely on solar energy in their homes and businesses.
- d) Easy access to Mexico has led to a strong manufacturing sector.

The correct answer is B.

And 33 percent of eighth graders indicated they had no understanding of the relationship between tectonic plates and earthquakes.

NAEP, administered to nationally representative samples of students by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education, is sometimes referred to as the nation's report card because it is the only K-12 assessment system given across the country. The 2010 assessment in geography was given to 7,000 fourth graders, 9,500 eighth graders and 10,000 twelfth graders.

Recently released scores on NAEP tests in civics and U.S. history, together with the geography results, generally show disappointing performance in the social sciences, particularly in the 12th grade.

Read the whole story

Fire departments adopt universal code for better communication

Nine fire agencies from four Nevada counties and one California county have agreed to adopt and implement a standardized apparatus and station identification system.

Fire agencies from Douglas, Carson, Lyon, and Storey counties in Nevada, and Alpine County in California, will be implementing the system starting Oct. 1. Chiefs from the participating agencies realized the value of having one system for the numbering of fire stations and apparatus, even though they are all dispatched from separate dispatch centers.

Currently each agency has its own numbering system, creating conflicts with duplicated apparatus and personnel numbering on incidents where regional support and cooperation is essential. Carson City Fire Chief Stacey Giomi developed the system, which provides each agency with a master number as the primary agency identifier. Other numbers identify the apparatus and personnel.

The group also agreed on common apparatus terminology, whereby apparatus of the same type will be referred to with the same name for that type. Currently, the regional agencies have three terms to identify an ambulance. Under the new system, an ambulance is now known as a “rescue” in all participating jurisdictions.

Fire Chief Tod Carlini from the East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts in Douglas County said in a statement, “While this may seem like a simple step to take, it breaks with what we have been doing for at least the past 30-plus years I have been in the fire service. With the current state of our economy, moving in a direction which attempts to maximize our

efforts and funding on a regional basis makes sense.”

The agencies participating include:

Douglas County:

East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts

Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District

Carson City

Carson City Fire Department

Lyon County

Central Lyon County Fire Protection District

Mason Valley Fire Protection District

North Lyon County Fire Protection District

Smith Valley Fire Protection District

Storey County

Storey County Fire Department

Alpine County

Eastern Alpine County Fire Department.

Man dies from injuries in Nifty Fifty Trolley incident

John Hunsberger, 60, of South Lake Tahoe died from the injuries he sustained this month when he stepped from a Nifty

Fifty Trolley, according to police officials.

The incident occurred July 11. Hunsberger died at Renown Medical Center in Reno on July 15.

He is the fourth person this year to die in a traffic related accident in South Lake Tahoe.

To help combat traffic incidents, South Tahoe officers will be out in force in the Al Tahoe neighborhood this coming week.

Between July 11-24 South Lake Tahoe police officers conducted a concentrated traffic enforcement program within the Tahoe Keys neighborhood as part of its Neighborhood Traffic Enforcement Program. During that time, 54 traffic stops were conducted by officers, with 10 citations written for speed, 17 for stop sign violations, three for other traffic violations and 37 written warnings were issued.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Preliminary redistricting plan affects Tahoe's state Senate seat

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

Political careers of numerous California state senators could be altered or jeopardized by a key decision made Friday by the independent commission drawing new districts.

What seemed like a simple numbers game by the 14-member panel carried massive stakes because it signaled which lawmakers may

be forced to run next year and which in 2014.

Put simply, senators drawn into new districts that are identified by odd numbers must gear up campaigns immediately, while those in even-numbered districts can relax for three years.

Affected senators are Ted Gaines, R-Roseville (who represents Lake Tahoe); Ed Hernandez, D-West Covina; Rod Wright, D-Inglewood; Mimi Walters, R-Laguna Niguel; and Tom Berryhill, R-Oakdale.

Two other senators were caught in the numbers game, but the issue may be moot because they are vying for other offices – Democrat Leland Yee for San Francisco mayor and San Diego Democrat Juan Vargas for Congress.

Political junkies and Capitol aides were eagerly awaiting the commission's vote.

"The minute this came out, the tweets were flying – I got a ton of hits on my website," said Paul Mitchell of Redistricting Partners.

Effects of numbering extend beyond lawmakers' careers to communities, too, because some areas may find themselves with two senators in 2013 while others will not be represented by anyone their voters placed in office, Mitchell said.

Though important, the numbering decisions Friday were tentative. Their impact could change if draft maps are altered before a final vote Aug. 15.

Read the whole story