

Fire leaves South Tahoe residents without place to live

A house on Fresno Avenue in South Lake Tahoe sustained about \$20,000 in fire damage July 17.

Light smoke was coming from the gable vents and roof area around the chimney when firefighters responded at about 7:30pm.

An electrical malfunction is believed to be the cause, though the investigation is ongoing.

No one was home at the time of the fire. However, the renters were relocated to a hotel because the fire marshal declared the residence at 3033 Fresno Ave. unfit for habitation.

The insulation was removed and two trusses were found to have major damage, one of the trusses had a 3-foot section of the bottom chord burned through, according to firefighters.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Lake Tahoe vacation rentals stabilize; short stays the new norm

By Rob Sabo, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

The market for vacation rentals at Lake Tahoe is strengthening

and consumers aren't demanding deep price discounts as they did in recent years, property managers say.

However, shorter stays are still the norm.

The market for high-priced rental homes in Lake Tahoe tanked with the national economy as cost-conscious vacationers opted against weeklong trips to the lake, and revenues for property owners fell as price-minded property managers slashed costs in hopes of luring more customers. However, several of Lake Tahoe's largest property management firms say business is on the rise this summer over last year, and customers are unlikely to see further price cuts.

NAVIS, a Bend, Ore. firm that helps vacation property managers track market statistics, says check-ins at Lake Tahoe properties rose 84 percent in the second quarter versus the same period in 2010, but revenues increased just 38 percent in the same time frame.

Susan Grigoleit, accounting manager with the Hauserman Rental Group in Tahoe City, which manages more than 160 properties on the west and north shores of Lake Tahoe, says business is up 30 percent over last summer. The past three years were stagnant for the 45-year-old company.

"It was a real break-even scenario," Grigoleit says. "Our company has been very productive in the Tahoe area for many years, and we have seen growth every year, but the last three years we were barely breaking even. It wasn't what we had gotten used to. We definitely felt the change in the economy and people not spending money like they used to."

In the midst of the recession, Hauserman Rental Group dropped its pricing on rental homes to match its competitors, and Grigoleit says the company gave further discounts to savvy consumers in order to rent properties. However, this season the company is holding firm on most quoted prices. Last-minute and "shoulder-season" bookings – reservations made after the

ski season and before summer kicked off – still enjoyed additional discounts.

“We made price adjustments and had no problem doing that the last couple of years,” Grigoleit says. “But we were definitely losing ground, and we decided our rates are still very competitive. Prime time, we are sticking to our rates.”

Chuck Maas, marketing consultant to Lake Tahoe Accommodations, the largest property management firm at Lake Tahoe with more than 300 properties and four offices, says bookings are up about 15 percent this year over last. Reservations typically lag in late April, May and early June, and in late September, October and part of November. The typical vacation rental is only occupied between 16 and 24 weeks per year, Maas says.

Read the whole story

Players in both states developing South Shore vision

By Kathryn Reed

Taking a look at the South Shore it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out things must change or the area will be irrelevant to tourists.

Various stakeholders who want to revamp the area from Ski Run Boulevard on the California side to Kahle Drive on the Nevada side have put out a call to action. The state line is not an impediment, but instead viewed as nothing more than a traffic light along Highway 50.

“It benefits us if we work regionally,” Lisa Granahan,

economic vitality manager, in Douglas County said. A collaborative approach with more partners is also beneficial when it comes time to look for funding for specific plans.



Driving down Highway 50 it's hard to know the recreation opportunities that abound on the South Shore.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

As South Lake Tahoe City Manager Tony O'Rourke put it, "We are one market ... one destination. Tourists could care less about the state line."

Redevelopment attorney Lew Feldman is impressed so far with how things have evolved since last fall.

"The level of participation is extraordinary. It is a new day in terms of trying to achieve environmental and economic excellence," Feldman said.

Design Workshop's Aspen and Lake Tahoe offices have been massaging the vision that is starting to evolve. This week more clarity to the direction players want to go will come to light.

A two-day charette is scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday, with Wednesday being a working day. It is not open to the public.

Richard Shaw of Design Workshop says what will make this plan different than all the others sitting on shelves collecting dust is that it will have a vision for the South Shore out 25 to 30 years, with some ideas that can be implemented immediately. A working document should be completed this fall.

Starting in Douglas County

All of this talk of turning the economic and environmental tide around began in Douglas County. Knowing government cannot cure all that ails society, a partnership has been formed with private entities to help various regions in the county – with one person designated as the “champion” of a particular project.

Tahoe is one of 12 projects in the county.

Granahan said government can't do it alone. She said bringing the private sector on board makes sense because businesses have a lot to lose by not helping to improve the economy.

In the county's strategic plan it's about concepts more than it is specifics to provide more latitude and creativity.

At Lake Tahoe the “champion” is Mike Bradford, CEO of Lakeside Casino. He has assembled interested people – including Andrew Strain from Heavenly Mountain Resort, O'Rourke, Feldman, Douglas County officials, Embassy Suites, Edgewood Companies and others.

Bradford said, “The refrain coming back was the problem is we don't have a plan.”

Gaming is no longer king and everyone wants recreation to be the leading tourism draw to the area. It's also one of the three components to the Lake Tahoe Prosperity Plan. (B Gorman with Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce did not return

multiple calls.)

South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts (the former Gaming Alliance) is paying Design Workshop \$50,000 to come up with a plan.

"This town is dying. Someone needs to resuscitate it," Bradford said. "We need a discovery a day for tourists."

Finding consensus

"I'm not disagreeing the initial reason people travel to Tahoe is the lake," Shaw told *Lake Tahoe News*. "But the reality is when you are there, particularly on the South Shore, it's a struggle to find recreation opportunities. Short of high rises, there is almost no view opportunity."

He pointed out while locals and repeat visitors know where the public beaches are, it is near impossible for a first-time visitor to find them. The same goes with mountain bike trails and other outdoor activities that the marketing gurus are telling them exist here.

Bradford simplified the goal of all of this – "To draw a picture of what Tahoe should be."

While sitting in his casino's restaurant Bradford readily admits the gaming model is no longer relevant.

"We never created a connectivity," he says. "That is what we are focused on now. How we connect the product."

The product is no longer what's inside, but everything that is outside.

Feldman says it's time "community character" is a factor in planning.

"This will help TRPA understand what the local jurisdictions and property owners in the Compact area believe is necessary and desirable to achieve environmental and economic

excellence,” Feldman said.

(TRPA officials were not available for comment.)

What those involved in this process want is to show the bi-state regulatory agency there are other ways to accomplish environmental goals, which in turn will stimulate the economy. But change must come from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to make all of this a reality. Stakeholders are hoping to be influential as the Regional Plan update is being worked on and should be released late 2012.

So many people today speak to the built environment being horrible for the natural environment. This is because what was erected in the 1960s had little or no thought about sediment, what pollutes the lake and how runoff without treatment is not a good thing if Lake Tahoe is not to turn into a brown body of water.

“It’s a very risky and costly process to gain approval for a project (in the Lake Tahoe Basin),” Shaw said. “There is a conflict between the business model that can succeed and what development parameters are.”

Forests sucking up planet’s fuel emissions

By Margaret Munro, Vancouver Sun

The world’s forests gobble up so much carbon they are protecting the planet from the worst impacts of humans’ staggering fossil fuel emissions.

An international study has concluded forests suck up a third

of the carbon pumped into the atmosphere each year through the burning of oil, gas and coal: “That one third taken up by the forests would otherwise be in the atmosphere,” said Werner Kurz of the Canadian Forest Service, co-author of the report published Thursday in the journal Science.

The oceans suck up another 20 percent of the emissions, which means “we have basically been getting a 50 per discount on all our fossil fuel emissions,” said Kurz.

The report is the most comprehensive assessment yet of the global forest “sink” and shows trees from the tropics to the boreal play a huge role in controlling the global carbon budget by sucking up vast amounts of carbon from the air and locking it away in wood and soil.

It says that the forests have been a major carbon sink since 1990, and shows the changing dynamics of the world’s trees.

It says fire and insects hit this country’s forests so hard between 1990 and 2007 that the carbon sink in Canada’s managed forest was “reduced by half”. On the other side of the Atlantic, the carbon sinks grew in fast-growing new forests in Russia and northern Europe.

Read the whole story

Wyland’s whale won’t be on Calif. license plates

By Tony Barboza, Los Angeles Times

For years, a painting of a whale’s tail splashing out of the gray, misty ocean has been one of the most popular license

plates in California. Nearly 200,000 have been sold, raising millions for coastal and environmental conservation programs.



But the artwork by Wyland was deep-sixed after the Laguna Beach muralist's request for 20 percent of the state's profits from the plates to fund his environmental foundation was rebuffed. Wyland also has a gallery in South Lake Tahoe.

Rather than tangle with the artist over the rights to the painting, titled "Tails of Great Whales," the state decided to retire the plate instead and hold a contest to replace it.

The new plate to debut Aug. 2 is a crisper, brighter rendering of a whale's tail that California Coastal Commission officials say more closely resembles an actual whale – a humpback – than Wyland's more dreamy design.

Tens of thousands of the whale-tail plates can be spotted on California roads, according to the state Department of Motor Vehicles. They are some of the most sought-after of the state's 10 specialty plates, which include depictions of such state treasures as Lake Tahoe and Yosemite. Since the plates were introduced in 1997, sales and renewals have raised more than \$60 million for coastal and environmental conservation programs.

Read the whole story

Lawsuits piling up after Nev.

train crash

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

In most rail-crossing accidents, trains slam into trucks or cars as they try to sneak through the rail gates, get stalled on the tracks or fail to heed or receive warnings of an approaching train.

But the deadly crash on Highway 95 east of Reno in June was different: A semitrailer truck traveling on a high-speed highway skidded 320 feet before slamming into an employee dormitory car on an Amtrak passenger train, killing six and injuring dozens.

"It's pretty rare," said Tom Demetrio, a Chicago-based lawyer who has a history of big wins in railroad cases and who, along with Reno lawyer Bill Bradley, has filed two lawsuits over the deadly crash.

"A vehicle shouldn't hit a moving train."

That difference has raised questions about why John Davis Trucking Co. driver Lawrence Valli, 44, locked up his brakes before impact, and whether the 70 mph speed limit on U.S. 95, and the angle of the track and the road were factors that contributed to the crash.

Concerns about the safety of that rail crossing, raised by the Amtrak engineer operating that train and another engineer who was involved in a Sept. 14, 2010 near-miss at the same crossing, may mean that others, including Amtrak, Union Pacific and the Nevada Department of Transportation, could be named in upcoming lawsuits, according to lawyers involved with and watching the case.

Much will depend on the final report by the National Transportation Safety Board. Investigators who have been

working on the case since Day One will come up with a probable cause for the accident some time in the next year.

Depending on the results, that report could lead to a flurry of lawsuits against whoever is named as responsible for the fiery crash.

Within days of the deadly June 24 California Zephyr crash, the first lawsuit was filed. Alexandra Curtis, an on-duty train attendant from Evanston, Ill., claimed John Davis Trucking in Battle Mountain was negligent when it hired, trained and supervised its driver, Valli, who was killed in the crash.

Read the whole story

DCSD hires back employees

ZEPHYR COVE – Taking a conservative approach to the 2011-12 fiscal budget allowed Douglas County School District to hire back 29 of the 40 teachers who were told in the spring they would not have a job this coming school year.

The board on July 12 voted to reinstate the positions along with several classified jobs. Some classified employees also had their hours upped, which means they will qualify for benefits.

“We worked off the governor’s proposed budget in late January. We were hoping it was a worst case scenario,” Superintendent Lisa Noonan told *Lake Tahoe News* during a break in the meeting. “The Legislature approved more money than we planned for.”

Even though the Nevada Legislature meets every other year, the funding is one year at time. This means the district could be

faced with more cuts in the following school year.

In other action at the meeting, Noonan gave the board members (Karen Chessell was absent) information to read about having an appraisal done at the shuttered Kingsbury Middle School at the lake.

At the special meeting July 25 at 3:30pm in Minden, the board will be asked to appoint Johnson-Perkins & Associates of Zephyr Cove to be the district's appraiser. The state will pick a second appraiser per state law.

– Kathryn Reed

Washoe County deputies slash types of calls they respond to

Washoe County sheriff's deputies are cutting back on the types of calls they respond to because of budgetary constraints.

Effective immediately, patrol units will no longer be automatically dispatched to incidents where:

- * Parties are already separated, except in domestic violence calls
- * The suspect is no longer at the scene
- * There is no evidence available at the scene
- * Total loss is less than \$2,500 or does not involve the loss of a firearm. The total loss figure will rise to \$3,500 beginning on Oct. 1 as a result of an amendment to state law

passed during the 2011 legislative session.

Because the majority of intrusion alarm responses are for false alarms, deputies will no longer respond to residential or commercial alarms unless there is additional information from a responsible party that indicates an actual crime may be in progress or has occurred.

In addition deputies will no longer automatically respond to:

- * Non-injury or hit-and-run vehicle accidents and accidents that occur on private property (such as a commercial parking lot), unless one of the drivers is believed to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, there is an existing traffic hazard to a public roadway or if there is evidence still on the scene of an accident that occurred on a public roadway.
- * Civil problems in which there is no court order directing deputies to respond.
- * Graffiti, unless it is a call to an act in progress.
- * Basic property crimes, such as vehicle burglaries, destruction of property, commercial burglaries, larcenies and fraud.
- * Threats, unless there is a reasonable belief of a present and immediate danger.
- * Juvenile problems, noise disturbances and Dumpster rummaging, in cases where the description of the incident does not arise to the level of a crime.

The public may file reports online. For further information, call (775) 328.3001.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Royal Gorge ski resort defaults on \$16 mil. loan

Royal Gorge LLC, owners of North America's largest cross country ski resort, has defaulted on its loan.

According to the notice filed in Nevada and Placer counties, Royal Gorge property owners owe Armed Forces Bank of Irvine \$16,743,442.91.

The owners have until late September to pay the loan or face the prospect of having the Donner Summit property taken over by the bank.

In 2005, owners purchased 3,000 acres that include the ski resort and Rainbow Lodge with the intention of building 1,000 condos and a link to Sugar Bowl Ski Resort.

All of those plans were met with great opposition from a slew of groups, most notably Sierra Watch.

"It's our job to make sure that, if the property does indeed change hands, it moves away from speculative development and into permanent conservation," Tom Moores of Sierra Watch said in a statement.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Partial version of Dream Act bill on Brown's desk

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

Legislation that would extend more scholarship opportunities to college students who are undocumented immigrants was approved by the state Senate today.

Assembly Bill 130, one of two "Dream Act" bills under consideration in the Legislature this year, would allow undocumented immigrants who currently qualify for in-state tuition to apply for scholarships funded with private donations. The bill, by Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, D-Los Angeles, was approved by the Senate on a 26-11 vote.

Sen. Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres, was the only Republican to vote in favor of the bill.

The group of students targeted by the bill, which is not limited to undocumented immigrants, represents a small segment of the overall student population at California colleges and universities.

The second "Dream Act" measure, Assembly Bill 131, would make undocumented immigrant students eligible for publicly funded financial aid, including Cal Grants. It has yet to come up for a full floor vote in the upper house.

Read the whole story