

Real estate market improving in Tahoe faster than in Reno

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

Home values in Lake Tahoe got a shot in the arm from the East Shore during the first half of the year, but the positive news was tempered by a dip in the number of homes sold.



The median price for a single-family home in Lake Tahoe rose 2 percent year-over-year to \$540,375, while the average price increased by 9 percent to \$962,705, according to Chase International's mid-year report.

The price increase was fueled by sales transactions in the East Shore. Median sales price for the East Shore was up 20 percent to \$625,500, while average sales price rose 67 percent to about \$1.6 million.

Actual unit sales, however, fell by 4 percent to 435 compared to the first half of 2010. The mixed numbers reflect a market still trying to find its footing.

"We had some strong sales and increases the first quarter but saw a decline in the second quarter of this year," said Sue Lowe, corporate vice president for Chase International. "I think we are still bouncing around the bottom of the market."

Read the whole story

Great stage performances believe reality of Tallac Assoc.

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – The Tahoe Tallac Association board and staff could take some pointers from the characters on stage at the Boathouse Theatre.

The five women starring in the play “Dixie Swim Club” are fabulous in how they capture the nuances of a friendship born in college that lasts into their 70s when there are only four of them left.



Sheree
Hollinger
(Teri Leve),
right,
consoles Jeri
Neal McFelley
(Amy Sando)
who is the
least likely
of the friends
to become
pregnant.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

They laugh, they yell, they console, they cry, they endure – they find a way to make their lives work as individuals and as a team.

The behind the scenes maneuverings of the Tahoe Tallac Association – the 30-plus-year-old organization that oversees the annual Valhalla Music and Arts Festival – does not resemble a team.

Lake Tahoe News in September reported the financial difficulties the South Shore organization was having.

It's only gotten worse. Grants have not been secured – which is the major source of income to pay the acts, employees and keep the lights on. Marketing seems to be a foreign word to the group. Press releases are sent by the acts coming, if at all, not the association – which makes for a lack of cohesive message or no message.

A once robust volunteer corps was not to be seen July 8 on the second night of “Dixie Swim Club.” Instead it was Executive Director Lori Cramer selling tickets. Volunteers used to receive regular emails about when to sign up for work detail. That hasn't happened this year.

Unfortunately the realities of TTA sound more like the ingredients board member and theatrical director Dave Hamilton could write into a script. Instead, he and those left behind must figure out a way to dig themselves out of financial hole that seems to keep sucking them under.

On July 7, Eric Taxer resigned from the board. Last month the board met without the executive director – a highly unusual move. The next meeting, presumably with the board and staff, is July 11 at 5:30pm – most likely in the Twin Cabins in front of the Valhalla Grand Hall.

In Taxer's letter to the board that was obtained by *Lake Tahoe News* he writes, “We will be starting our new Fiscal Year with

approximately \$38,000 of debt. The only immediate source of income with the new fiscal year will be the holiday faire and gala, expected to generate \$12,000 in income. But, we will have snow removal expenses, winterization expenses, continued insurance, utilities, and payroll. I have repeated in prior meetings for over a year the importance of fundraisers. I have stepped up to the plate and organized such. Other members who have committed to do so have basically bailed on their responsibility."

If the workings of the nonprofit, which is run by a volunteer board and an executive director who is owed thousands of dollars in back pay, were near the caliber of the programs put on at the various venues near the shore of Lake Tahoe, it would have coffers overflowing with greenbacks.

Cramer is the TTA's fifth executive director. She was a board member before taking over for Steve Farnsley, whose services the board said it no longer needed. Before Farnsley it was Kathy Farrell at the helm. She embezzled from the organization, though the board chose not to press charges.

Hamilton and Taxer have loaned the association thousands of dollars that have yet to be repaid.

The remaining board members, according to the TTA website, are: Norm Glenn, Hamilton, Ginger Nicolay-Davis (who is worth catching in one of the remaining six performances of "Dixie Swim Club"), Bruce Rettig, Frank Riley (catch him with Tahoe Improv Players on Aug. 2), Pam Taylor and Kim Wyatt.

Nicolay-Davis and Cramer were sent an email last week by *Lake Tahoe News* asking some general questions – nothing about the financial situation. That day, July 1, Nicolay-Davis responded, "We will get info over to you shortly." The deadline to answer was July 7. *Lake Tahoe News* never received answers to its basic questions – Like what is new this year?

One thing *LTN* knows is new is greater access to the lawn area

– including free concerts on select dates.

Another new thing is better dialogue with the U.S. Forest Service, which owns the land just beyond Camp Richardson. Taxer deserves a great deal of credit for being tenacious in researching documents and getting the appropriate people to listen. When Deputy Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais was hired he helped foster an atmosphere of cooperation between landlord and tenant.

While the board figures out how to function more effectively, the shows will go on. Here is this year's festival schedule.

Report: Parole officers failed to supervise Garrido

By Robert Salonga, Contra Costa Times

A newly released report reads like a laundry list of oversights by agents charged with monitoring Phillip Garrido's federal parole in the 1990s, when he kidnapped and began his 18-year imprisonment of Jaycee Dugard.

The confidential review released Friday by James Ware, chief district judge for the Bay Area, was meant to bring attention to improvements made in monitoring parolees still under federal watch.

Written in December, it echoes a 2010 audit of Garrido's supervision by state parole agents, outlining a general lack of close supervision of the now imprisoned two-time kidnapper and rapist.

Among the report's criticisms are that agents:

- Downplayed repeated drug violations and substituted therapists' assessments for their own
- Never made sure Garrido registered as a sex offender
- Kept such loose track of him that when he started habitually raping the captive Dugard in 1991, his parole check-ins were at the agents' office rather than his home near Antioch.

Garrido was the charge of federal officers between 1988, when he was released from prison for the 1976 kidnapping and rape of a South Lake Tahoe woman, and 1999, when his parole was transferred to the state.

Read the whole story

DAs get cash to fight workers comp fraud

By Darrell Smith, Sacramento Bee

Sacramento-area district attorneys will get more than \$1.4 million in state grants to fight workers compensation insurance fraud in 2011-2012, the state Insurance Commissioner's office announced Tuesday.

Sacramento County will receive \$900,000. El Dorado County was awarded \$330,000. Yolo County will get \$245,960.

The grant awards total \$32 million to DAs across California and will fund fraud investigations and prosecutions. The funding still must be approved in the final state budget, insurance officials said.

Read the whole story

Stoned driving is uncharted territory

By Ralph Vartabedian, Los Angeles Times

It was his green tongue that helped give away Jimmy Candido Flores when police arrived at the fatal accident scene near Chico.



Flores had run off the road and killed a jogger, Carrie Jean Holliman, a 56-year-old Chico elementary school teacher. California Highway Patrol officers thought he might be impaired and conducted a sobriety examination. Flores' tongue had a green coat typical of heavy marijuana users and a later test showed he had pot, as well as other drugs, in his blood.

After pleading guilty to manslaughter, Flores, a medical marijuana user, was sentenced in February to 10 years and 8 months in prison.

Holliman's death and others like it across the nation hint at what experts say is an unrecognized crisis: stoned drivers.

The most recent assessment by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, based on random roadside checks, found that 16.3% of all drivers nationwide at night were on various legal and illegal impairing drugs, half them high on marijuana.

In California alone, nearly 1,000 deaths and injuries each year are blamed directly on drugged drivers, according to CHP data, and law enforcement puts much of the blame on the rapid

growth of medical marijuana use in the last decade. Fatalities in crashes where drugs were the primary cause and alcohol was not involved jumped 55% over the 10 years ending in 2009.

“Marijuana is a significant and important contributing factor in a growing number of fatal accidents,” said Gil Kerlikowske, director of National Drug Control Policy in the White House and former Seattle police chief. “There is no question, not only from the data but from what I have heard in my career as a law enforcement officer.”

Read the whole story

Court deals Caesars setback in \$8.6 mil. tax refund case

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – The Nevada Tax Commission has won a procedural battle with Caesars Entertainment related to the casino company’s pursuit of \$8.6 million tax refund.

Caesars sued the state, arguing it should not have paid tax on the aircraft it purchased in 2006 because the planes’ first flights were to locations outside Nevada and during the first 12 months of operation, they were used for interstate commerce – ferrying corporate executives and casino patrons around the country and globe.

An administrative hearing officer and the Nevada Tax Commission rejected the company’s argument late last year. Caesars, then known as Harrah’s, appealed, filing a complaint in District Court in Clark County.

Now, the state Supreme Court has ruled that Clark County District Judge Kenneth Cory should review the Tax Commission's decision to deny the refund. Cory initially ruled that there should be a new hearing as sought by Caesars, allowing more issues to be introduced rather than adhering only to what was presented to the commission.

Read the whole story

Property tax dispute ends in Incline, Crystal Bay residents' favor

By Brian Duggan, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Nevada Supreme Court ended a nine-year property tax dispute between 8,700 North Lake Tahoe residents and Washoe County on Thursday, saying homeowners in Incline Village and Crystal Bay are due a property tax refund.

While estimates of the refund came out to about \$13 million in 2009, with interest county officials are now estimating they could owe the residents up to \$40 million, impacting the Washoe County School District, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, Incline Village General Improvement District and the state.

The high court on Thursday knocked down the county's appeal of a 2009 district court decision that agreed with a series of previous tax panel decisions that said the 8,700 residents paid too much in property taxes in 2006-07 and should have paid at 2002-03 levels.

Public safety funding whacked by lawmakers in Calif. budget

By Kathryn Reed

With the California budget approved last week, it means \$84,305 is not coming to the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

Statewide, Senate Bill 89 takes \$130 million in vehicle license fees away from cities. The money could be filtered back to cities and counties in the form of grants. However, it throws a wrench into the budgeting process.

South Lake Tahoe department heads are working out their respective budgets before the City Council starts the process of approving the 2011-12 budget that takes effect Oct. 1.

"From our review of the budget, we see one huge flaw in regards to the COPS (Citizens Option for Public Safety)/booking fee remediation funding issues. While it appears that these funding sources dried up, the Legislature did provide funding, in part, by raiding non-expiring VLF funding that goes to the cities for general purpose use," police Capt. Martin Hewlett told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The result looks like that our budgeted items appear OK in that the Legislature has provided for those funding sources, but the city, in general, may see a loss in VLF funds in other areas. My information has not shown what those losses will be to our city."

Reports are a lawsuit is likely to be filed either by the League of California Cities or another coalition of municipalities. The grounds would be under Proposition 22 which was approved by voters to prevent the state from taking local money.

Hewlett said Cal-Chiefs lobbyists, "Have been intensely involved in conversations with legislative leaders since last (week) in order to restore the original funding and to lessen the impact on the cities loss of VLF."

Diversions project allows water from Truckee River near Reno to be collected

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

More of all that water rushing down the Truckee River can now be captured for use.

At a time when there's much more water in the river than normal for this time of year, a newly completed structure allows the area's primary water provider to divert nearly 10 million gallons per day more than it could previously.

And with the river's water the cleanest and cheapest available, that's clearly a good thing as summer's heat arrives and the demand for water spikes, said Mark Foree, general manager of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

"We always want to maximize use of Truckee River water," Foree said. "This project allows us to do that."

Foree refers to the new Glendale diversion structure on the river near the intersection of Glendale Avenue and Galletti Way.

The \$3.7 million structure, finished last winter and put into use in June, increased the amount of the river's water that can be diverted to the nearby Glendale water treatment plant from 28 million gallons per day to 37 million gallons per day.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe launches user-friendly website

By Kathryn Reed

Information about South Lake Tahoe is finally easily accessible.

The city replaced its outdated website this month with one that can actually be navigated without needing a doctorate in information technology. Visually, it's also inviting.

It has all the info readers will want, but it is presented in a format with the user in mind instead of the government employee.



South Lake
Tahoe's
website has
been
overhauled.

Instead of listing departments – which might not be intuitive to most people – a tab called “City Services” has the general categories people would seek. Most people with a planning question would not instinctively know this falls under the Development Services Department. That is why “Planning, Land Use & Zoning” is a category under “City Services”.

One of the constant complaints the city receives through surveys and other means is people don't know what is going on. Calendars on the website are aimed at making that issue go away.

While the website is still a work in progress, that is actually a good thing, according to city officials. A goal of the city's is to be more responsive to citizens – residents and tourists. This includes having a website that provides people with what they want. So, if something is missing, it can be added.

The last website was difficult for staff to update because of the old-style platform and technology that were used. (The old site was up for at least a decade without any real upgrades.)

Twenty-two employees are trained to work on the website, with two being the gatekeepers to what sees the light of day. That number is likely to change as time goes by. The reviewers are checking to make sure the message and format is consistent, and to weed out duplicate information.

Another issue this site is addressing is better communication with the public.

“It is easy to track our responsiveness,” city spokeswoman

Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This is because the feature “Let’s Talk” that is accessed via the home page allows people to ask specific questions. It goes to the appropriate person, and usually to multiple people. The person asking the question can then track the response. The exchange, while visible on the city’s website to the person posing the question, is not sitting there for the whole world to see.

Until this week people wanting to ask the fire department a question had to do so in writing and deliver it to the station. Not so with the online questionnaire.

One thing still being worked out is if police reports will one day be available by asking for it through the city’s website.

A category not often found on government websites is the “Communication Center” – another tool to interact with people. People can be sent emails about a slew of things by going under “City News,” then to the right is a button saying “Notify Me”. Social media is another venue to stay in touch with the city.

“We want two-way communication,” Kerry said.

Updates on city projects are also provided.

For people who want to read the content in another language, every page allows the words to be translated.

The website cost \$36,000 to build – which according to Kerry – is cheap for a government site, and one that functions like the city’s does. It has 300 pages, with more that can be added as needed.