

Moody's: Caesars Entertainment finances vulnerable to weak economy

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Debt-laden Las Vegas Strip casino giants Caesars Entertainment Corp. and MGM Resorts International could be hurt more than competitors by continued weakness in the U.S. economy, Moody's Investors Service reported recently.

In a special report on concerns the U.S. economic recovery may be slowing, Caesars and MGM Resorts were named as being "more reliant on continued economic improvements to grow out of the their high (debt) leverage than higher-rated companies are."

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's and Harveys at Stateline.

"While gaming companies took their lumps during the Great Recession and have largely put themselves back on track, they remain vulnerable to bumps in the U.S. economic recovery given their decimated balance sheets," Moody's said. "If consumers cut their gambling budgets or casino trips, company earnings could be affected. This could result in (debt) downgrades of especially lower-rated companies that have been counting on a stronger economic recovery."

Moody's noted the Federal Reserve last week reported that the economy was expanding less quickly than it predicted and unemployment may remain high longer than expected.

Read the whole story

Award offered in poisoning of dog in Meyers

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The Humane Society of the United States is offering a \$2,500 reward in connection with what is believed to be the intentional poisoning of a dog in the Meyers area near South Lake Tahoe.

An Irish Wolfhound named “Bella” was found having a seizure on the deck of its owners’ home in Meyers June 25.

After the dog died, it was taken to a veterinarian, who thought it had been poisoned with rodent bait laced with strychnine.

Read the whole story

Nevada officials alert as wildfire threat increases

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

After a particularly quick-moving wildfire burned more than 17 square miles east of Reno, danger posed by dry grass and brush is abundantly clear, fire officials said Tuesday.

While a late-season snowpack continues to dampen fire danger

in the high country, heat-cured cheatgrass and drying sagebrush combine to produce a significant risk in the lower elevations of western Nevada.

“The probability of ignition is definitely getting higher,” said Paul Petersen, a fire management officer for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

The danger was demonstrated Saturday when a wildfire took off east of Reno near Nixon, quickly burning across miles of grass and brush. No structures were damaged and the fire was declared contained Monday after charring 11,195 acres.

Read the whole story

Nevada's driving while on the phone ban takes effect Oct. 1

Senate Bill 140, which was passed this year by the Nevada Legislature and signed by Gov. Brian Sandoval, goes into effect Oct. 1. The law prohibits the use of a cellular phone or other handheld wireless communications device while operating a motor vehicle in certain circumstances.

This is a primary law which means that officers do not need to observe a separate violation before initiating a traffic enforcement stop.

To help educate the motoring public and to create as much awareness about this important law, traffic enforcement officers who observe this violation may initiate a traffic stop; however, no citations for using this handheld device maybe issued until Jan. 1, 2012.

Woman rescued after 40-hour ordeal in Eldorado National Forest

By John Scheibe, Ventura County Star

"We love you," one woman yelled as Lauren Ellen DeLaTorre recounted her two nights lost in the woods high above much of California in the Eldorado National Forest over the long July Fourth weekend.

The 53-year-old Camarillo woman had gone for a hike Saturday with a group of friends and got separated from them after deciding to go back to her cabin.

"It was really something," DeLaTorre said Tuesday night as she stood in front of Tierra Linda Elementary School in Camarillo, where she teaches kindergartners. She recounted what it was like to get separated from her friends and then realize she was lost and alone in a big forest.

Her leg and arms were badly scratched from her nearly 40-hour ordeal.

After realizing she was lost, DeLaTorre's instinct was to climb to higher ground, even though this would mean leaving the area where she first got separated from her friends.

In trying to find higher ground, DeLaTorre got farther away from where searchers would eventually look for her.

Fortunately, DeLaTorre once worked for the U.S. Forest Service. She is well-versed on what someone who is lost should do, including making sure they have as warm a place as

possible to sleep at night and drink plenty of water.

Read the whole story

Brown leaving Douglas County manager job for Ore.

By Anne Knowles

MINDEN — Michael Brown, Douglas County manager since 2008, has turned in his resignation letter. He is going to become city manager of Hillsboro, Ore., a city of 94,000 near Portland. His last day with the county is July 8.

The Douglas County Commission will discuss at its July 7 meeting whether to conduct a search to fill the job or offer the current assistant county manager the position under a two-year contract. Steve Mokrohisky has been the assistant county manager since 2009.

“My thinking is the board will come to some decision on Thursday since Michael’s last day is the next day,” said Nancy McDermid, vice chair of the commission.



Michael Brown

Brown is cashing out his vacation time, so he’s technically on

the payroll into August.

Brown worked for Douglas County for 14 years, starting in 1997 as an administrative analyst. He grew up in Oregon, where he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Oregon. He later obtained a master's degree in public administration from the University of Kansas.

"It's a progressive move career-wise," Brown told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Like here, we have a very strong collaboration with business. And I've had a long-standing goal of working for a city. On the personal side, my best friends and family are there. And it's a beautiful area ... 25 minutes from Portland and one hour, 15 minutes to the coast."

Hillsboro is well-known for its many high-tech companies, including Intel Corp.'s largest site and the biotech firm Genentech, as well as customer service center for Yahoo and Netflix.

Brown said the staff in Hillsboro is twice the size of the staff in Douglas County. Hillsboro's adopted 2010-11 budget is about \$312 million; Douglas County's tentative 2011-12 budget is \$120 million.

Brown said his salary here is just less than \$136,000 and will be \$146,000 in Hillsboro. In its adopted biennium budget, Douglas County has allocated \$351,444 for county manager, which includes county manager, assistant county manager and staff.

Brown said the highlights of his 14 years with the county include being instrumental in the regional water line, expansions of the jail and library, technology upgrades at the sheriff's and comptroller's offices, and a move to private management of the airport as well helping to shepherd a voter-approved change in the airport ordinance that enables the airport now to seek Federal Aviation Administration funds.

"I made strategic staffing decisions, restructuring to create a leaner, more responsive staff," Brown said.

Brown has nothing but praise for his possible successor.

"I'm very impressed with Steve. He has high integrity, and is very talented, very smart and committed to public service in Douglas County," Brown said.

Before coming to Douglas County, Mokrohisky worked for Milwaukee for 11 years.

The commissioners' meeting is 1pm July 7 in the Douglas County Historic Courthouse in Minden.

Census: 2nd year for businesses to hire fewer people

In 2009, businesses with paid employees numbered 7.4 million, a decline of 168,000 establishments from 2008, marking the second consecutive year of decline, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Further, between 2008 and 2009 employment dropped 5.3 percent, a decrease of more than 6 million employees, for a total of 114,509,626.

In 2008, the number of establishments decreased by about 104,000, although the number of employees increased by almost 300,000.

These findings are from County Business Patterns: 2009, which

provides the only detailed annual information on the number of establishments, employees, and first-quarter and annual payroll for most of the 1,100 industries covered at the national, state and county levels.

The statistics are broken down according to employment-size classes (for example, number of establishments with one to four employees) and legal form of organization (for example, corporations and partnerships).

“During the early years of the decade, the nation saw steady, if moderate growth in the number of establishments year to year,” William Bostic Jr., associate director for economic programs at the U.S. Census Bureau, said in a statement. “In contrast, the years 2008 and 2009 coincided with the recession and showed declines. In 2009, we also saw a drop in the number of employees.”

Between 2008 and 2009, all states showed declines in the number of establishments, led by Arizona, which lost 6,000 establishments (4.3 percent) and more than 200,000 employees (9.1 percent). Only Alaska (1.8 percent) and the District of Columbia (0.1 percent) gained employees from 2008.

Retail trade was the sector with the largest number of establishments (1.1 million). Next were professional, scientific and technical services (842,566 establishments); health care and social assistance (799,271); other services (except public administration) (722,701); construction (712,977); and accommodation and food services (635,239).

All five of these sectors showed declines, led by construction with a 7.8 percent decline in the number of establishments and a 15.3 percent decline in the number of employees.

County Business Patterns excludes those who were self-employed, employees of private households, railroad employees, agriculture production workers and most government employees.

Suicide likely cause of death at Horizon

While the investigation of the death of Loretta Sangara, 68, of Placerville is ongoing, preliminary findings indicate her fall from a Stateline casino balcony was an intentional act of suicide, Douglas County deputies report.

Investigators with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office have determined Sangara, who suffered from medical problems, made elaborate arrangements with friends and family members regarding the disposition of her estate and funeral arrangements, and appears to have been planning to commit suicide for some time.

Her body was discovered July 1 below a 14th story balcony at the Horizon casino.

An autopsy was conducted by the Washoe County Coroner's Office, and investigators are awaiting the results of the autopsy and toxicological examination before making a final determination.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

49 arrests in Douglas County

during long weekend

With the exception of a few altercations in the casino core area of Stateline, Nevada Beach and Zephyr Cove Beach, the Fourth of July crowd was well-behaved, according to Douglas County sheriff's officials.

During the weekend, 49 people were arrested on charges including strongarm robbery, assault, battery, theft, vandalism, trespassing, threats/harassment, indecent exposure, possession of a controlled substance, DUI, child endangerment and probation violation.

The celebratory crowd in the Stateline, Round Hill and Zephyr Cove areas of Lake Tahoe seemed no larger than in past years, deputies said.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

T-storm rolling into South Shore

Those are no ordinary dark clouds rolling into the South Shore.

The National Weather Service in Reno had issued a severe thunderstorm threat for northeastern Amador, east central El Dorado and west central Alpine counties for Tuesday afternoon. Quarter-size hail and damaging winds in excess of 60 mph were associated with the storm in the Highway 88 area.

At 3:55pm the Doppler radar showed the storm in that area had subsided.

However, the NWS says, "Very heavy rainfall with occasional lightning is still expected with this storm. Ponding of low lying areas is possible."

Lightning can strike out to 15 miles from the parent thunderstorm. If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning, according the Weather Service.

It's recommended to be off any body of water and to seek shelter – including a vehicle – until the storm passes.

A 30 percent chance of heavy rain is in the forecast Wednesday for the Lake Tahoe Basin, including Truckee.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report