

Nev. Tourism Commission prepares to absorb other entities

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Nevada Tourism Commission got its first view of its new-look agency that will include the Museums and History Division, the Nevada Arts Council and the Nevada Indian Commission when it consolidates in October.

Commissioners heard presentations from the three organizations' representatives at last Thursday's quarterly meeting and formed a search committee to choose a tourism and cultural affairs director.

Larry Friedman, commission interim director, is overseeing the agencies until the Oct. 1 consolidation.

The Legislature approved the consolidation in the last week of the session this month. Consolidation of agencies was a goal Gov. Brian Sandoval outlined before the session.

A committee of leaders from the three groups and two tourism commissioners will review applications for the director, who will have a seat on Sandoval's Cabinet. The full commission is expected to forward three names for Sandoval's consideration within two months.

Read the whole story

Quakes shake North Shore area

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Two earthquakes strong enough to be felt struck north of Lake Tahoe near the California-Nevada border this afternoon.

One measured 3.0 and the other measured 3.1, according to the Nevada Seismology Laboratory. Both were about 1 p.m. They have been reviewed by a seismologist. They were about 6 miles north of Crystal Bay and were about 4 miles to 4.5 miles deep.

Washoe County Sheriff's Office spokesman Armando Avina said dispatchers at the Incline substation felt the quakes but got no calls from the public.

Read the whole story

Sandoval snubs NV Energy lobbyists with veto

By David McGrath Schwartz, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY — Gov. Brian Sandoval entered office with an impressive resume and sterling reputation, a moderate-to-conservative governor for a moderate-to-conservative state.

If there was a criticism, it was that he, like many Nevada politicians who climb the ranks, was too close to the traditional interests that pull the levers of power in the state.

Some are rethinking those assumptions, however, after Sandoval

vetoed a bill rammed through the Legislature at the last minute.

The legislation was Assembly Bill 416, which was pushed by NV Energy, the state's powerful electric monopoly that once employed Sandoval, and its hired lobbyists, Pete Ernaut and Greg Ferraro, the friends Sandoval credits with first suggesting he leave the federal bench to run for governor.

They both later served as volunteer campaign managers.

The veto "demonstrated he's not owned by anybody. He's his own man," said Susan Fisher, a Nevada lobbyist who represented Valley Electric Association, a rural utility co-op, which opposed the bill. "It put to rest a lot of questions and rumors swirling around even before (Sandoval's) election. These buddies, are they going to tell him how to vote? Clearly, no."

Timothy Hay, a former state consumer advocate forced out when Sandoval was attorney general, said, "I think it showed the governor has enough independence to look beyond the short-term politics of legislation, to the long-term impacts of energy policy. It's a refreshingly good sign to me."

The transmission bill was NV Energy's top legislative priority. It would have allowed the utility to build transmission lines to export power using Nevada ratepayer money to fund it, a policy that critics said risked as much as \$1 billion in consumer financing.

Not only the legislation was questioned. It was the way it passed.

NV Energy lobbyists, including Ferraro and Ernaut, pushed to get the language passed in the final hour of the session, after traditional avenues to pass legislation failed. The *Sun* detailed the last-minute maneuvering and the fact that some lawmakers didn't know what they had voted for.

Read the whole story

Kindertown remains open per judge's order

By Kathryn Reed

Kindertown Day Care and Preschool was granted a reprieve this morning, allowing it to remain open for at least a month.

The South Lake Tahoe center for youngsters has been in a fight with the Department of Social Services for nearly two years.



This may not have been the last graduating class at Kindertown.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Warren Stracener changed his mind June 22. Six days ago he said the center must close June 24. Today he said owner Maria Barrows-Crist will have her day in court July 22 in Placerville.

"I'm not only thrilled for myself, but I'm thrilled for my families," Barrows-Crist told *Lake Tahoe News* after the hearing.

Mike McLaughlin, who represented Barrows-Crist in court, said the judge reversed his stance from a week ago based on information he received in the last week. He wants both sides to present more information to him in the next month.

None of the families who have children at Kindertown had taken their kids out after being told last week about the threat of closure by Barrows-Crist. State licensing officials were also calling families starting June 17.

The center will be small and private again starting July 1 because the state has eliminated its funding. This leaves about 50 children at the center, though there is room for more.

With the loss of the children who were receiving the state subsidy, it means Kindertown needs fewer employees. A total of eight workers will have left because of this forced decline in enrollment.

S. Tahoe wants to divide lobbying work between 2 firms

By Kathryn Reed

As important as Lake Tahoe is, when it comes to power in the Legislature, South Lake Tahoe is rather inconsequential.



Hiring two lobbyists is what the South Lake Tahoe City Council believes will bring the city more clout, money and a seat at the table with people in Sacramento.

Three lobbying firms on Tuesday were interviewed in public by the council. The Houston Group, which has been the city's firm of choice for the past several years, is essentially being fired.

California Strategies and Suter, Wallauch, Corbett & Associates are the two firms left standing. With each having different strengths and weaknesses, it was the council's belief the combo would do better than flying solo with one.

Staff is going to talk to both firms to see if they would reduce their monthly rates based on the scope of work being scaled back. The council also wants to know specifics about work they would do instead of the more broad, generalities that were presented Tuesday.

South Tahoe High grad Tony Brunello gave the bulk of California Strategies' presentation, while Lynn Suter touted her firm's abilities.

Brunello spoke of his company's breadth, including the seven offices encompassing 26 partners. Their proposed rate is \$8,500 a month. The city is going to ask for it to be reduced to \$6,000.

Suter is the Senate's appointee to the California Tahoe Conservancy board. She said to avoid a conflict she would not vote on CTC grants involving the city. Considering South Tahoe is a major component of the CTC, a lot of recusing could be in Suter's future.

Her firm's client list is predominately other cities in

California. South Tahoe Public Utility District is also a client and Suter came highly recommended from the district.

Suter came in with a monthly rate of \$4,500. The city is going to ask that be reduced to \$2,000.

South Tahoe wants to have a voice in Sacramento to better procure funding for roads, be on the inside when legislation is being talked about that would affect the area, and to have easy access to lawmakers who are making decisions that affect the basin.

Getting South Tahoe's designation of being a rural community changed to metropolitan is another objective the city wants a lobbyist to work on. This would put the city in a better position to obtain more transportation dollars. Based on the number of tourists accessing the roads – especially with a highway going through the center of town – the wear and tear is not that of a town with a steady population of 25,000 people.

The council is expected to revisit the lobbyist issue at the July 12 meeting.

In other action:

- The council allocated \$65,000 from the asset forfeiture fund to upgrade the dispatch radio system for the police department.
- The Sustainability Commission's request to have all city sponsored events use South Tahoe Refuse's special event recycling program, with the goal to have zero waste events, was granted.
- All agreed with Councilman Bruce Grego that communication with Nevada lawmakers needs to continue to ensure what they deem as progress regarding the revamping of TRPA through SB271 does not lose steam.

- An ad hoc committee of Councilwomen Claire Fortier and Angela Swanson was created to deal with California legislative issues. A working plan and name for the committee is expected at the July 12 meeting.
 - The June 30 meeting with Douglas County will be rescheduled – possibly in September.
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S. Tahoe council too tired to work; sign discussion delayed

By Kathryn Reed

It's 3:30 in the afternoon and the South Lake Tahoe City Council is too tired to finish what's on the agenda. It's the second meeting in a row the five have said they just don't have the stamina to keep going.

They've pulled the stamina card more than these two times. The five only meet twice a month – usually – to do the city's business the people have elected them to do, but they don't always work a full eight-hour day. They seldom take less than an hour for lunch.



This sign is
out of
compliance

with South
Lake Tahoe's
ordinance.
Photo/LTN

In July, they only have one meeting scheduled.

Yes, they still had closed session to deal with Tuesday after canceling the workshop on signs. But the only item to be discussed was City Attorney Patrick Enright's review. This was the second meeting in a row for that topic. And earlier on June 21 he got his 5 percent raise without any discussion. It was on the consent agenda – which is where non-controversial items tend to wind up because they don't need vetting.

Figuring out what to do about signs has been an issue most of the council members have wanted to tackle. But they keep deferring the issue.

Now the topic is slated for a special meeting on June 28 at 7pm at Lake Tahoe Airport. This means staff has to work late. Of course they already have been paid to sit through two meetings to not say a word about signs.

(The meeting will start at 6pm in closed session to discuss the complaint, which the city was served Tuesday afternoon, by the League to Save Lake Tahoe over the city's General Plan.)

The issue with signs is that most in the city limits don't comply with the ordinance. The previous council told the police department not to enforce the rules because it would mean another financial burden to businesses. Signs are not cheap.

Enforcement of temporary signs, like sandwich boards and banners, was never supposed to be lax.

Hilary Hodges, director of Development Services, is looking for direction from these five to see if as improvements are

made to Highway 50 they want to enforce the sign ordinance.

As sidewalks and bike paths are put in at different places, it will mean some signs will have to be moved. The setback is supposed to be a minimum of 5 feet.

The questions are: Move the old sign out of the way? Or, put in a new sign out of the way that complies with the ordinance?

Next week's meeting will be a discussion, with no action taken.

Any business putting up a sign is supposed to have it go through a review process by the city's planning staff. The application fee for a sign permit is \$130.

When a damaged sign, like at Lily's Tires, is replaced with what was there – that's fine to do without a permit. (That particular sign is not in compliance, but is grandfathered in for the time being.) When a sign is replaced with something new, like what Barton did for its offices on Highway 50, they were supposed to have received a permit – and didn't, according to Hodges.

What are described as lollipop signs are non-conforming. The same goes for signs that list a ton of businesses like Kings Trading Post.

Group signs that follow the rules are at Ski Run Center and at the center anchored by Ross.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in its Regional Plan also talks about signs. The city and five counties in the basin are allowed to have stricter regulations.

4-wheelers tear up USFS land in Tahoe City, South Lake

By Kathryn Reed

Ruts from illegal 4-wheel drive activity are marring U.S. Forest Service land throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin. In Tahoe City, what was a meadow with strands of green grass covering it now looks like a crime scene. And it is.

A price tag has not been put on the damage. The most serious incident this month occurred in Tahoe City, with the other in South Lake Tahoe.



A Tahoe City meadow has been ruined by illegal 4-wheel activity.

Photos/USFS

Law enforcement is looking for the suspects in the North Shore case, while the three male 17-year-olds from Stateline who were caught on the South Shore were given a lecture. If they are caught doing it again, such leniency is not likely to be granted.

None of the violators was in a place that allows 4 wheeling even when it's dry.

“Cross country is not allowed at all. They were in places that vehicles are never allowed,” USFS spokeswoman Cheva Heck said of the violators.

The meadow in Tahoe City has ruts at least 6 inches deep and several inches wide from some big tires. Tire marks show the violators were spinning doughnuts.

With the designated off-road trails super wet this year, some won't open for a while. The Forest Service's website lists projected opening dates for the trails. But with the National Weather Service issuing a flood advisory through 9pm June 24 for creeks, streams and rivers near South Lake Tahoe, Tahoe City, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, the dirt roads in the basin are going to be wet for quite a while.



Tire ruts will become hard and "permanent" as the water recedes.

“We are concerned for people's safety and protection of resources of soil and plant habitat,” Heck told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Massive ruts, especially like the ones left in Tahoe City, stay that way until crews restore the land. This degradation leads to erosion problems.

The culprits on the North Shore accessed the area from road

No. 73 off Fairway Avenue. Witnesses told authorities they saw a newer, blue pickup out there.

Penalties could be a maximum of six months in jail and/or a \$5,000 fine. If caught and found guilty, the suspects would likely have to pay the Forest Service to restore the meadow to the pre-damage condition. This is never an inexpensive task. If they aren't found, it's taxpayer dollars that will restore the meadow.

On top of the damage to the meadow, the suspects left a smoldering campfire behind. The fire was reported June 13 and was most likely started the weekend of June 11-12, Heck said.

Anyone with information is asked to call (775) 831.0911. Anonymity will be granted and a reward may be offered.

The Forest Service was alerted to the South Lake Tahoe incident when someone reported the 4-wheeling to police, who then called the USFS.



Damage just
outside Van
Sickle Bi-
State Park in
South Lake
Tahoe.

This area behind the now demolished Colony Inn Hotel is loosely called Chonokis Meadow. It requires crossing California Tahoe Conservancy land to get to the USFS owned meadow. CTC doesn't allow motorized vehicles on its land – and

the Forest Service doesn't allow driving through meadows.

"(There was) no gate or signage there that says 'road closed' or anything of that sort. Since the damage, the USFS has put in Carsonite posts indicating that vehicles are prohibited," Heck said.

The boys who were caught in the act had a Jeep and 4-wheel truck.

"They were very cooperative when officers spoke with them. Their impression was (the boys) didn't realize what they were doing. They were really compliant and concerned," Heck said.

The soil there was spongy and the damage is nowhere near as horrendous as how the culprits violated the meadow on the North Shore.

Poll: Feinstein's popularity sputtering before '12 election

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein's public approval rating remains positive, but enthusiasm for re-electing her is far less than in previous years, according to a Field Poll released today.

As Feinstein prepares to run for re-election next year, California voters are inclined to support her, 43 percent to 39 percent, according to the poll.



Dianne
Feinstein

That four-point margin – the same as Feinstein posted in a Field Poll earlier this year – is her smallest ever in a pre-election year. First elected to the Senate in 1992, her margins of pre-election year support ranged from 19 percentage points to 29 percentage points before, the poll said.

Yet Feinstein's public approval rating remains favorable, with 46 percent of voters approving of the job she is doing, according to the poll. Thirty-one percent disapprove, and 23 percent have no opinion.

Read the whole story

Body of woman found near Marlette Lake

The Washoe County sheriff's coroner expects today to have a positive ID on the female body found near Marlette Lake on the East Shore of Lake Tahoe.

Deputies had been looking for Kelly McGinness, who has been missing since Saturday. They are not saying this is McGinness.

Deputies said there is no sign of foul play.

Groundwater depletion detected from space

By Felicity Barringer, New York Times

IRVINE – Scientists have been using small variations in the Earth's gravity to identify trouble spots around the globe where people are making unsustainable demands on groundwater, one of the planet's main sources of fresh water.

They found problems in places as disparate as North Africa, northern India, northeastern China and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley in California, heartland of that state's \$30 billion agricultural industry.

Jay S. Famiglietti, director of the University of California's Center for Hydrologic Modeling here, said the center's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment, known as Grace, relies on the interplay of two nine-year-old twin satellites that monitor each other while orbiting the Earth, thereby producing some of the most precise data ever on the planet's gravitational variations. The results are redefining the field of hydrology, which itself has grown more critical as climate change and population growth draw down the world's fresh water supplies.

Grace sees "all of the change in ice, all of the change in snow and water storage, all of the surface water, all of the soil moisture, all of the groundwater," Dr. Famiglietti explained.

Yet even as the data signals looming shortages, policy makers

have been relatively wary of embracing the findings. California water managers, for example, have been somewhat skeptical of a recent finding by Dr. Famiglietti that from October 2003 to March 2010, aquifers under the state's Central Valley were drawn down by 25 million acre-feet – almost enough to fill Lake Mead, the nation's largest reservoir.

Read the whole story