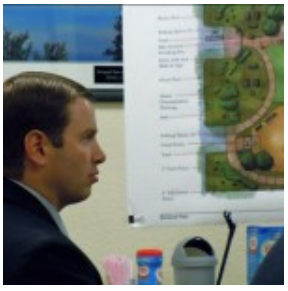
South Tahoe exchanges 50 TAUs for neighborhood park

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe city councilmembers were more concerned about dogs than tourist accommodation units when they approved the transfer Tuesday of 50 units to Stateline.

The five had a lively discussion about whether a dog park should be part of a larger park on Bonanza Avenue where the former C&M Lodge sits. Little was said about Edgewood Companies using the 50 TAUs it has development rights to from that property for the planned Edgewood Lodge on its golf course about 6 miles away in Nevada.



Brandon Hill, project manager of Edgewood Lodge, listens June 7 to council deliberations. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Hotel rooms are a commodity because the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has said so. This is the bi-state regulatory agency's way of limiting the number of hotel rooms in the Lake

Tahoe Basin.

The council approved the transfer 5-0.

The dog park was ultimately eliminated from the plans. But having it dog friendly is a must, according to the council.

Before Edgewood has access to the TAUs it must build the park (it has said it can do it before winter) or put up a bond that would ensure it is built. The city has a history of not securing such performance bonds – just look at the hole in the ground near Stateline that was supposed be a convention center, two hotels, retail and open space. Now it's bankrupt. (And hearings just keep getting moved forward with no resolution, with a July date now on the calendar for the parties to come to a resolution.)

A consultant was brought in to help decipher the city's best use of the TAUs. (Documents are available on the city's website under the June 7 agenda.) Transferring the TAUs and having Edgewood get rid of the structures on the property and build a park was the best option, according to the report that cost nearly $16,000. (The city and Edgewood split that expense.)

The city will own the park, with an anticipated annual maintenance expense of $7,000.

Vail Resorts posts increase in quarterly earnings

Vail Resorts Inc.'s fiscal third-quarter earnings rose 5.6 percent, with resort officials today underlining skier visits

were up in Colorado and California, and declaring for the first time a quarterly dividend for stock investors.

For the quarter ended April 30, the only publicly traded ski resort reported a profit of $76.9 million. This is up from $72.8 million a year ago. The latest period included $2.6 million in write-downs and $6.6 million in debt-extinguishment charges. Revenue jumped 18 percent to $414.5 million.



The Tamarack Lodge, which opened this past season at Heavenly, helped boost F+B sales for Vail Resorts. Photo/LTN file

Shares closed Wednesday at $43.41 and are down 17 percent this year.

This is often the most telling of the quarterly reports because it includes February, March and April – all ski months.

Vail is an indicator the travel and tourism sector is on the rebound.

The company bucked a trend in California where overall skier visits were down 12 percent for the 2010-11 season.

“For the 2010-2011 ski season, visits to our Colorado resorts were up 4 percent compared with a gain of 1 percent for the rest of the Rocky Mountain region. Visits to our Tahoe resorts, including Northstar-at-Tahoe in both periods, increased 3.9 percent in contrast to a 7.1 percent decline for the rest of the Pacific Southwest Region (which includes California). Visits to all six of our resorts were up 4 percent, adjusted as if we owned Northstar-at-Tahoe in both periods, compared with 0.1 percent growth for the rest of the U.S. ski industry,” CEO Rob Katz said in a statement. “Northstar-at-Tahoe has been a great addition to our company, achieving record visitation and profitability, and helping to drive a 36 percent increase in our Tahoe season pass program for the 2010-2011 season.”

Vail owns Heavenly Mountain Resort on the South Shore. In October it acquired Northstar-at-Tahoe in Truckee.

Companywide spring season pass sales for the 2011-12 season were up 19 percent in units and 27 percent in sales dollars through June 5, compared with the prior year period ended June 6, 2010, (adjusted as if Northstar-at Tahoe were owned in both periods).

One-third of Vail’s season pass sales come in the spring when the price is at its lowest. Those sales are not part of this quarterly earnings report.

Lodging reported net revenue was $49.8 million for the quarter compared to $44.9 million for the same period last year, for an increase of 11 percent.

Closing of four condominium units at the Ritz-Carlton Residences at Lion’s Head helped drive a surge in Vail Resorts’ real estate porfolio. Net revenue was $13.2 million for the quarter compared to $3.2 million a year ago.

It was also announced Vail Resorts’ will be issuing its first cash dividend of 15 cents per share of common stock.

– Kathryn Reed

Money in the bank to keep Measure G projects going

By Kathryn Reed

Voters approved Measure G in 2008, but few have seen what their money has been spent on.

This is because most people don't have a student at South Tahoe High School and that is where the bulk to the work has been since construction began. The high school has been transformed and continues to be. The third new structure will open to students at the start of the 2011-12 school year in August.



Pat Martin, left, talks with contractor Joe Stewart during the June 8 tour of the TADA building. Photo/Kathryn

Reed

To get the public oriented with what is going on at Gardner Mountain an open house is slated for Aug. 26 from 5-7pm.

This is something the bond oversight committee embraced at its June 8 meeting at the high school.

The irony is people much farther away know about the improvements Lake Tahoe Unified School District is making structurally and with programs. A president of a Korean university has toured the campus. Calls have come from Alaska and other areas of the country asking what STHS is doing and how it has been able to do so.

At the Wednesday meeting the committee also went over the annual financial statement. More than $16.7 million in bonds still need to be issued. CFO Deb Yates said the third series couldn’t go out now because the assessed value of properties in the district is so low.

What is allowing construction to keep going is the state has pledged more than $30 million to the district in matching grant dollars, with more than $27 million of that in the bank.

When the committee last met in January the cash flow was getting a bit iffy, but since then the state has come through with its money.

The district has a meeting set for June 22 with its bond counsel to discuss where to go from here.

With the state awarding LTUSD so much cash, it means more projects will get completed than originally planned for. But at the same time the 2010 building code changes are costing some projects more than anticipated.

The second annual report to the community will be available on *Lake Tahoe News* soon. The district needs to make minor

corrections that were identified at the meeting.

In other action:

• The committee re-elected Pat Martin as chairman, and voted in Casey Blann as second in command.

STHS high-tech theater arts building to open in August

By Kathryn Reed

It’s the best theater on the South Shore.

That was the overriding sentiment heard Wednesday night as members of the Measure G Bond Oversight Committee toured the Theatre Arts and Design Academy that will welcome students in August at the start of the next school year.

Also overheard were comments from committee members being happy either their children or grandchildren would be going to South Tahoe High School one day – to experience the facilities and programs.



The Theater Arts and Design Academy

is changing the look of South Tahoe High School. Photos/Kathryn Reed

While the seating at the theater is slightly less than the old theater (350 vs. 265), everything else about it makes it look like a metropolitan performing arts center – albeit scaled down.

Eliminating seating had to happen to accommodate use by disabled people, improving visibility and making the necessary acoustical enhancements.

A spiral staircase is to the audience's left – which could be incorporated into a production or just be used to access the rafters for lighting needs. What looks like bed springs have give to them to eliminate noise from the production crew walking overhead during a performance.

The 28,000-square-foot building is one of several being built at South Tahoe High School as a result of the voter-approved $64.5 million facilities bond (known as Measure G) and subsequent state matching grant dollars totaling $32 million.

While the whole sum is not being spent on the high school, the bulk is – $44 million.

The Stadium View building opened this school year, while the Construction, Arts and Transportation Academy opened in April 2010. More are still to come.

Steve Morales, facilities director for Lake Tahoe Unified School District, said the final touches on the TADA building would be made this month, with staff being trained in July and students occupying it starting Aug. 29. Seats in the theater will arrive about June 20.

“This is the hardest one-story building I’ve ever built,” Joe Stewart of SMC Contracting told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I doubt I’ll ever build something like this again.”

It’s all the small details and abundance of technology that made it more intricate than the average classroom. Subtleties like installing oversized doors facing the CAT building so theater sets can be brought in were not left out.

About 17,000-square-feet of the original performing arts building was used, with 11,000-square-feet being new.

“If we don’t do this, we lose this generation,” Angela Swanson said walking from one high-tech room to the next. She was on the school board when Measure G was passed and is now a consultant helping continue to secure grants for LTUSD.

What she was speaking about is all the high-tech components incorporated into this building.

Morales said they like to call it a mini Pixar Studios.

Some of the doors are so heavy one needs to be in good shape to open them. This is all about the acoustics.

There are multiple walls to deal with acoustics, too. One might be a structural fire-rating wall, with a wall on either side to keep noise from the outside out.

“There is acoustic treatment in every room. Some are higher than others,” Morales said in the TV studio. No echo could be heard. It was like a flat, true sound of his voice resonated, or rather didn’t resonate.

Principal Ivone Larson said much of the design concept is the result of years of trips to Hollywood by students and staff to learn about jobs in Hollywood.

“Everything you see today is a replica of actual studios,” Larson said.

The whole idea is students will be ready for a job when they graduate high school. With the No. 1 industry in California being entertainment, STHS is equipped the mold the next crop of creative geniuses.

“We have rooms that reflect the programs. You don’t often have that,” Superintendent Jim Tarwater said as he tagged along on the tour that revealed sound rooms, editing areas, a TV studio, music room, media lab, sound mixing area and more.

LTUSD is reaching to the lower grades to get them on a career path that ties into the high school and might lead them to Lake Tahoe Community College. There are 11 areas where the district wants to link South Tahoe Middle School to South Tahoe High.

Digital arts will be one of the first electives for eighth-graders. Culinary arts is another area.

While the TADA building is nearing completion, work on the Blue and Gold gym next to it has started with the removal of asbestos. SMC should be able to start its work on it Saturday.

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Controversial grave markers removed in El Dorado County

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Controversial grave markers at the Mormon Island Relocation Cemetery in El Dorado Hills have been removed in preparation for installation of new markers.

The original markers on graves relocated from the Negro Hill Cemetery in 1954 had to be changed because they substituted the racist N-word for Negro where they indicated the original location.

Read the whole story

Calif. budget talks hit impasse over tax extension

By Anthony York and Shane Goldmacher, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Republican lawmakers are prepared to let voters decide whether to close California's stubborn budget deficit with higher taxes in exchange for major changes in state spending, public pensions and regulatory policies.

But a week before the legal deadline for a spending plan, and with lawmakers' pay hanging in the balance, a final budget accord between Gov. Jerry Brown and Republicans remains elusive amid disagreement over which should come first – tax hikes or an election.

Both sides said Tuesday that the crucial stumbling block is a demand by Brown that Republicans extend current vehicle and sales tax rates to help balance the budget until voters have their say. Those rates will otherwise expire July 1.

Brown said such a "bridge tax" is necessary after talks on a June ballot measure collapsed earlier this year. Republicans said they were not willing to raise taxes themselves but would be willing to ask voters to do so.

"Right now, this tax question is the sticking point," Brown

said in an interview Tuesday.

He and Republicans have largely settled, however, on a core package of policy overhauls to be enacted if a tax deal can be forged soon. Those include a new restraint on state spending to force California to use any future windfalls to pay down tens of billions of dollars in debt incurred by past budgets.

In addition, public employees would have the option of a retirement package that would include a 401(k), according to legislative staffers who spoke on condition of anonymity because budget negotiations are still in progress.

Read the whole story

Washoe County man accused of bilking investors out of $1 mil.

By Kellene Stockwell, Channel 2 News

Authorities have arrested a Washoe County man they say stole more than $1 million from eight people.

Investigators with Secretary of State Ross Miller's Securities Division arrested 67-year-old Jack Schwartz on June 3 on five felony counts of securities fraud and 10 felony counts of theft.

Investigators say Schwartz approached his alleged victims with offers of 20% interest returned on their money invested in a number of ventures, including companies Schwartz controlled and other businesses which had signed agreements with Schwartz

allowing him to raise capital on their behalf. Investigators say Schwartz then deposited the investments into his own companies' accounts, but used it for non-business expenses like mortgage and credit card payments and deposits into his ex-wife's account.

Investigators say investments made by the eight victims ranged from $30,000 to $200,000.

Read the whole story

Nevada sends crews to fight Arizona wildfires

The Nevada Division of Forestry firefighters are helping fight the multiple devastating wildfires in Arizona.

"Since the fires started, we have sent 10 personnel to help fight the fires in eastern Arizona," Nevada Forester and Fire Warden Pete Anderson said in a statement.

NDF has agreements with Western states to help in such situations. Nevada recoups costs for its services.

More than 311,000 acres have burned in Arizona and more than 3,000 people have been evacuated from their homes. Eleven structures have been lost.

"The National Weather Service forecasts that in Nevada we are moving from a wet spring into warmer, drier weather," Anderson said. "Significant fire fuels have built up this spring and will become highly flammable as the vegetation dries out. It is important for Nevadans to be aware of the potential for wildfire when enjoying outdoor activities."

Southern Nevada implemented fire restrictions May 14. Western Nevada is expected to implement fire restrictions in the coming weeks.

Placer County receives award for not burning piles in Tahoe

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Placer County is one of 12 entities nationwide being recognized this week by the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C.

The Clean Air Excellence Award recognizes the county's air pollution control district's work diverting Lake Tahoe area forest debris from burn piles.

"By transporting this forest residue out and instead of burning it in burn piles we are reducing pollution put into the atmosphere," said Supervisor Jim Holmes, who is in D.C. to accept the award.

Removing the wood scraps from the forest floor also reduces the risk of a catastrophic wildfire. The biomass is currently being transported out of the basin, but officials are considering building a one- to three megawatt biomass plant to turn the slash into energy. Locating the plant has proved more controversial.

The EPA award is in its 12 year.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe council pushes back on vacation rental changes

By Kathryn Reed

Normally when anything having to do with vacation rentals is on the South Lake Tahoe City Council agenda, the room is packed, emotions run high and colorful descriptions of tourists' antics are relayed.

June 7 was a little different.

Council members and the public were a bit miffed to know nothing about the proposed changes until the agenda was released late last week. And then the council was not eager to pass what staff brought forward.



Vacation rentals run the gamut in Lake Tahoe.

When Councilmember Bruce Grego asked Community Police Officer Bob Albertazzi if anyone had asked him to rewrite the ordinance, he said no. All he was tasked to do was make administrative changes so all issues except the transient occupancy tax came under the purview of the police chief.

Albertazzi explained while he was in the ordinance he came across things he thought should be changed – like eliminating the need to post the sign on each vacation rental, how parking is handled, and putting a fixed number on how many people can ever be in a vacation rental.

Councilwomen Claire Fortier and Angela Swanson admitted their children might have been at one of those vacation rentals when the senior class at South Tahoe High School had a party. They would have been violating the rules if Albertazzi had his way.

He had proposed the limit be double the number of people allowed to sleep at a rental.

Mostly the council did not like what Albertazzi proposed. They asked for staff to bring back another proposal in two weeks, at the June 21 meeting. Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion because of his ownership in the Tahoe Keys Resort.

The vacation rental ordinance has been around since 2003. It's been tweaked at different times.

Jim Morris, president of Lake Tahoe Accommodations, spoke at Tuesday's meeting, saying what the city really should be looking into is vacation rentals by owners not collecting transient occupancy tax. He contends the city is losing out on a half million dollars a year on the rentals not paying the tax.

All rentals are supposed to apply for vacation home rental permit. Then they are supposed to collect the appropriate tax.

Individual property owners don't need a business license for this. Property managers, though do.

This is a list of the 1,239 vacation rentals the city has on record.

In other action:

• South Tahoe is continuing its agreement with Lake Tahoe Unified School District for the 2011-12 school year to have an officer at the school act as the school resource officer. The district will reimburse the city about $52,105 a year for an officer to be on the campus.

• The council approved the city's Business Plan – the first of its kind. This gives the city an action plan to carry out the Strategic Plan that was approved earlier this year.

• Delayed the workshop on the sign ordinance until June 21.

• Agreed to keep the Latino Affairs Commission at five members unless that commission asks to increase its board. Only five people applied for the position last go-round. One commissioner, at least, believes it should be expanded to seven members. The City Council wants that commission to think about expanding its representation to all ethnicities so it is more of a cultural affairs group.

• Heard a presentation from Sue Rae Irelan of the California Tahoe Conservancy about the South Tahoe Greenway bike trail. Mayor Hal Cole had to recuse himself because the CTC is seeking a right-of-way for the route to go through his property.