Luther Pass construction resumes

Caltrans today announced that construction has resumed on a $16 million environmental improvement project on Highway 89 between Highway 50 and the Alpine/El Dorado county line.

This final phase of the Luther Pass project will widen shoulders, rehabilitate and reconstruct drainage facilities.



Work on Luther Pass started in 2010. Photo/LTN file

This will allow roadway run-off to be directed to treatment collection facilities rather than Lake Tahoe and its tributary waterways.

The project is financed entirely by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

How authorities missed

Garrido

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

As lawyers prepare for Thursday's sentencing of Phillip and Nancy Garrido in the kidnapping of Jaycee Lee Dugard, questions remain concerning his parole supervision during the time that she was abducted, raped and gave birth to two daughters fathered by her captor.

Documents acquired exclusively by the *Reno Gazette-Journal* through a federal lawsuit reveal that the officials handling his case from the very beginning were by all accounts fooled.

Read the whole story

Census: Mixed bag on what states spend on education

Public school systems spent an average of $10,499 per pupil in fiscal year 2009, a 2.3 percent increase over 2008, according to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Public schools in New York spent more than any other state or state equivalent, with $18,126 per pupil in 2009. The District of Columbia ($16,408), New Jersey ($16,271), Alaska ($15,552) and Vermont ($15,175) had the next-highest spending.

Nevada ranks No. 44 when it comes to dollars spent on per pupil education and California is No. 29.

"Most children in the United States rely on public schools for their education, so it's important for people to understand

how available resources are being spent within the public education system," said Lisa Blumerman, chief of the Census Bureau's Governments Division, said in a statement. "These data provide a detailed look at how taxpayer money is being spent on education."

States or state equivalents that saw the largest percent increases in per pupil spending from 2008 to 2009 were the District of Columbia (12.4 percent), Utah (10.3 percent), Minnesota (9.4 percent), North Carolina (7.4 percent) and Maine (6.3 percent).

Public school systems received $590.9 billion in funding in 2009, up 1.5 percent from the prior year. Of that amount, state governments contributed $276.2 billion (46.7 percent), followed by revenue raised from local sources, which contributed $258.9 billion (43.8 percent), and federal sources, which provided the remaining $55.9 billion (9.5 percent).

Total spending by public school systems was $604.9 billion in 2009, a 2 percent increase from the prior year. Total current spending was $517.7 billion (85.6 percent), of which $311.9 billion went to instruction.

Other highlights:

– States and state equivalents that spent the least per pupil were Utah ($6,356), Idaho ($7,092), Arizona ($7,813), Oklahoma ($7,885) and Tennessee ($7,897).

– Instructional salaries accounted for the largest spending category for public elementary and secondary education, totaling $209 billion in 2009.

– Property taxes accounted for 65.2 percent of revenue for public school systems from local sources.

The data used in the tabulations came from a census of all

15,331 public school districts.

For more information, visit the Census Bureau’s website.

Docks in, store about to open at Fallen Leaf Lake

Docks are in and the store is about to open at Fallen Leaf Lake.

At the meeting this weekend for the community services district, the board unanimously approved the five-year concessionaire contract with Tahoe Recreation, a division of California Land Management.

“We devoutly wish for some continuity here,” board President Tom Bacchetti told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The private company is in the process of stocking the store’s shelves and readying everything for operation at the South Shore lake. It’s expected the store will be open the second weekend of June.

The marina was open on the chilly, snowy Memorial Day weekend for boats to launch. The docks, however, went in afterward.

Also at the May 28 meeting, the board made Fire Chief Gary Gerren permanent general manager. His contracts as fire chief and general manager are for five years.

– Kathryn Reed

Teen survives knifepoint robbery, 2 suspects in jail

The California Highway Patrol and the South Lake Tahoe Police Department worked together to put two suspected armed robbers behind bars late Monday evening.

At about 10:30pm May 30, an 18-year-old South Lake Tahoe resident was walking alone in a residential neighborhood to visit a friend. A vehicle pulled up beside her. As it did, a man jumped from the front passenger seat of the vehicle and demanded she give him her purse. When the victim hesitated, the suspect brandished a knife and the victim surrendered her purse.

The thief then got back into the vehicle and a female driver sped away.

Officers Travis Cabral and Ric Martinez broadcast a suspect and vehicle description to other officers and agencies in the area. A CHP officer heard the description. He had just issued a citation to a female for running a stop sign in the same area as the robbery.

He was able to provide a name, description, address and vehicle information, including the license plate number to the South Tahoe officers.

Kathryn Mundt of Rocklin admitted to the robbery and told officers she and Michael Barnett, also of Rocklin, had committed the robbery to obtain gas money. Barnett did not admit to the theft, but was positively identified by the victim as the man who took her purse at knifepoint.

The knife was recovered in the suspect vehicle.

Barnett and Mundt were booked into the El Dorado County Jail in lieu of $50,000 bail.

Slashing victim in another battle – perp up for parole

By Kathryn Reed

Susie Rizk Laney was nearly shredded to death at the hands of a former boyfriend. Looking at her and listening to her it would be hard to know the hell she has been through. That is, until she rolls up her sleeves, lifts her shirt above her waist and pushes aside her shoulder-length hair to show her neck.

Scars.

They are everywhere on her body.



Susie Rizk Laney is fighting to keep the man who tortured her in prison.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

They are the physical reminders of what Steve Wasserman did to her on Oct. 25, 2005, with a 2-foot-long Samurai sword. Their daughter who was 4 at the time watched as daddy tried to kill mommy at their South Lake Tahoe home.

Laney had gotten a restraining order against Wasserman the day before the attack. But a piece of paper is little deterrent to a desperate, angry man with a freshly sharpened sword.

“The last thing my daughter saw was me bleeding to death and then she didn’t see me for four weeks,” Laney said. She was 35 when the incident occurred. Wasserman was 32.

She praises God for the strength to live, to carry on each day. Laney also believes it was the Lord’s intervention that led her to meet and marry Shannon Laney. Although he is a sergeant with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department, the incident is not how they met.

The two started dating in 2007 and were married the following Valentine’s Day. Laney adopted Harmony after Wasserman agreed to give up his parental rights. Now it’s a family of five with Laney’s two children from a previous marriage.

“I was praying for protection over our lives after the attack. I never expected He would send me a police officer,” Laney said. “My God used something so tragic and turned it into something so beautiful. It is a perfect union. We are best friends.”

The Laneys sat down with *Lake Tahoe News* to discuss the latest chapter in this ordeal and to bring the community up-to-date with where Susie Laney is since the near-fatal attack that left her with 19 cuts, requiring more than a dozen surgeries and how she is coping with losing the range of motion in her hands.

Emotionally, Laney is now confronted with Wasserman being eligible for parole. His hearing is July 25 at 1pm. If he were granted parole, he would be let out in October 2012.

Wasserman was given a seven-year to life sentence for burglary, aggravated mayhem and the use of a deadly weapon. He accepted the plea deal the day the jury was being interviewed. He had threatened to plead insanity, which could have let him out on the streets sooner. This is why Laney didn't push for attempted murder.

What the Laneys want is for Wasserman to stay behind bars while Harmony is still a child. He could be put on a three-, five- or 15-year cycle for parole hearings. They want him on a 15-year cycle. That would put Harmony at age 24 before he were able to come up for parole again.

They have no intention of letting Harmony see Wasserman until she is an adult – assuming she wants to then.

"This guy needs to be stopped. He almost got away with murder," Laney said. "It's not about revenge. It's not about payback. It's about protecting my family."



Scars are a constant reminder of the ordeal Susie Rizk Laney went through.

Her husband says, “We believe in forgiveness, but we don’t have to forget what a threat he is to us or anyone else.”

He believes Wasserman would be a repeat offender.

Worst-case scenario if Wasserman is let out next year, is the Laneys believe they would have to home school their children, hire someone to stay at the house if the sergeant is working and be always looking over their shoulder.

For the most part, though, the Laneys lead a normal life. They do the typical family stuff – camp, wakeboard, go to church.

But Laney admits not a day goes by that she isn’t reminded of what happened to her. She has to look at the scars every day. She knows it’s her daughter’s biological father who did it to her.

She spent 1½ years in physical and occupational therapy. Her right hand was nearly sawed off. Her knee plate was cut in half. She couldn’t talk or walk. She wasn’t able to comb her daughter’s hair, let alone take care of some her own basic needs.

“It’s not always easy, the recovery process,” Laney said. “Certain things have been taken away, things I can’t do. I get frustrated and mad.”

While mother and daughter have been to counseling, both are in a stable mental state now. The nightmares have subsided. Harmony knows what happened, remembers the day vividly.

“She remembers her dog licking the blood off her mom’s head,” Shannon Laney said.

The Laneys say Wasserman knew what he was doing, that the attack was premeditated. Officers apparently found a hit list at his home with names of people he planned to kill.

Laney can’t say enough good things about Officer Ric Martinez

who stormed the San Francisco Avenue residence and saved her life.

“He’s my hero,” Laney said. Martinez arrived to find Wasserman over Laney with the sword on her heart. Blood was everywhere.

Laney is working for an orthopedic surgeon. She is able to share her story with others, to bring them hope, to show them that life does go on.

A Facebook page has been set up to keep people informed about what is going on regarding Wasserman’s parole hearing. Pictures of Laney when she was in the hospital show some of the gravity of her wounds.

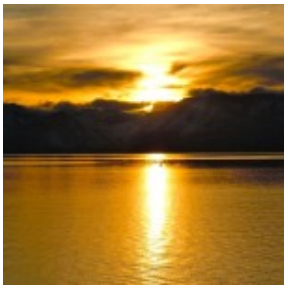
Letters to the parole board are due July 4. Address letters to: Confidential, Classification and Parole Representative, Mule Creek State Prison, P.O. Box 409099, Ione, CA 95640; RE: BPT Hearing 7/25/11; Steven Wasserman-F41068.

Scientists studying why some Tahoe clouds produce moisture

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

A Gulfstream turboprop sits on the McClellan Airport runway under gray, gloomy skies. Kim Prather has waited two weeks for this day.

“I can’t believe there are finally clouds,” she says gratefully as she and her research team check and calibrate several million dollars’ worth of equipment stacked in the plane’s cabin.



Looking for answers in Tahoe's clouds. Photo/LTN file

After the plane takes off, it slices through a 9,000-foot-thick layer of storm clouds, zigzagging up the western slope of the Sierra Nevada to probe the mysteries of California's rain and snow.

Onboard, a special instrument that Prather invented and named "Shirley" will blow apart atmospheric particles with a laser and map their chemical composition, all in real time. Other devices will count and measure millions of cloud droplets, record water content and analyze gases.

On the ground, in the Tahoe National Forest, another array of equipment will simultaneously sample Sierra air masses.

Prather's team is trying to figure out why some clouds give up their moisture and others don't as they roll across the mountain ranges that provide much of the state with water.

They wonder: Is urban pollution reducing precipitation in Northern California's high country? Is Gobi Desert dust blown thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean boosting the Sierra snowfall? Will atmospheric rivers – the moisture-laden bands in the sky that drenched the state in December and March – dump even more rain with global warming?

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe going after sign violators; Placer County eases rules

By Kathryn Reed

While South Lake Tahoe officials are cracking down on vehicles driving around with signs in the back of pickups advertising charity events and churches that use sandwich boards, Placer County is relaxing its sign ordinance.

Bob Albertazzi, community police officer for South Tahoe, said because the sandwich board sign was not secure in the back of the truck, it was considered an illegal sign. The sign was advertising Rotary's annual raffle ticket for a car giveaway. This is one of the service club's main fund-raisers – with most of the money then going back to the community.



South Tahoe is cracking down on signs, but has used sandwich boards for its own garage. Photo/LTN

“The sandwich board was in the back of the pickup. That was an illegal sign because it was a sandwich board. If they try to drive that pickup, it would have flown out and it is not considered part of the vehicle,” Albertazzi explained.

But on the other end of the lake, Placer County Board of Supervisors agreed this month to relax county ordinances relating to the placement of signs for businesses as a way to stimulate the economy. The idea is if people can better see a business, the business will get more customers.

The change in Placer County is not expected to be permanent.

“Sign restrictions remain to address sign issues that affect health and safety, such as conflicts with vehicle traffic and sight distance, and aesthetic issues, such as overuse of portable and bright signs, and clutter,” according to Placer County officials.

In South Tahoe, Albertazzi admitted to having been lax in his enforcement of churches using sandwich boards on the weekends to direct people to services. He now intends to crackdown on them as well.

In addition to sandwich boards, banners and flags are also not allowed in South Tahoe.

Most of the rules regarding signs in the Lake Tahoe Basin originated with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Chapter 26 of the Regional Plan talks about the TRPA sign regulations.

Nevada bill to withdraw from

TRPA moves to Assembly

As expected, the Nevada bill that would drastically alter the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency structure has moved from the Senate to the Assembly.

SB271 would allow Nevada to back out of the bi-state Compact. However, California and Congress would have some say in how things go forward.

“We are appalled by today’s action by the Nevada Senate,” Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, said in a statement. “This bill is a cynical ploy by real estate agents and developers upset that the courts are requiring the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to have a plan in place that achieves and maintains environmental objectives before they can build more piers, hotels, condos, subdivisions and timeshares not allowed under existing plans.”

A date has not been set for when the Assembly will hear the bill.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Lake Valley fire hires chief from within the department

By Kathryn Reed

Gareth Harris has been selected at the next fire chief of Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

He takes the helm from Jeff Michael who will retire June 24.



Gareth Harris

When Harris was hired in 2005 from the Half Moon Bay Fire District as battalion chief and fire marshal for Lake Valley he was the first hire at that level outside of the department.

“There is such a family culture here that once I proved I was worthy of being one of the family members, I was readily accepted,” Harris told *Lake Tahoe News*. “My goal as the new leader is to continue that culture, that tradition.”

Harris, 49, has no plans of making sweeping changes. He expects to evaluate things and continue moving forward in the direction the department has been going.

As battalion chief he is incident commander at most scenes – whether it’s a structure fire, rope rescue or hazardous materials incident. As fire chief, he will be responsible for the entire department.

In the coming weeks more changes are expected at Lake Valley.

“Nothing is cast in stone yet, but the idea is we have very qualified individuals in our department that we will be promoting,” Harris said.