91 pounds of pot, 658 plants found in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Between two storage sheds, a house and a vehicle in South Lake Tahoe 91 pounds of pot and 658 marijuana plants were confiscated.

The bust started when a California Highway Patrol officer pulled John Morrissey, 29, of South Lake Tahoe over for reportedly going 50mph on Highway 50. He was arrested on charges of transporting 6.5 pounds of processed marijuana.

This led to a search warrant being executed May 19 by South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team officers at two storage units at 2140 Emerald Bay Road and Morrissey's residence at 1842 Guadalupe St.

"He had packages for sale ready to, other parts were drying and other parts were on racks," explained Jeff Catchings, SLEDNET commander.

Catchings said the storage sheds were big enough to pull a tractor-trailer into.

At the suspect's house officers said they found 30 grams of psilocybin mushrooms and two gummy bears injected with LSD. They also confiscated a butane honey oil extraction lab that is used to extract pure THC from the plant.

"It's on the same scale as operating a meth lab," Catchings said.

The street value of the marijuana is about $230,000. It sells for between $2,000 and $3,000 a pound.

An arrest warrant has been issued for Morrissey's partner,

Jonah Shanks of South Lake Tahoe, for cultivation and conspiracy to distribute.

Catchings said Morrissey told officers he was selling to one of the collectives in town. That particular collective denied buying from Morrissey. Morrissey does not possess a medical marijuana card.

STPUD locks in rates for people with water meters

By Kathryn Reed

Although the South Tahoe Public Utility District board was offered more options in how to bill metered water customers, the board on Tuesday voted unanimously to stick with the original proposal.



This means residential customers with meters will see 55 percent of their bill a fixed rate and 45 percent based on consumption at a rate of $2.05 per 100 cubic feet.

While the topic brought out the masses May 5, only two people attended the May 24 morning meeting.

However, at a different meeting that same day resident Jim Long brought up the inequity of the rate structure with state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville. Gaines was in town talking to constituents at the Riva Grill in South Lake Tahoe.

Gaines said his staff will follow-up on the question to see if

there is a better way for the state to be dealing with metered customers in tourist areas where consumption averages fluctuate because of the number of second homeowners.

It’s the people with large lawns who will see the most difference in their rates. Long said he is one of those people.

Dennis Cocking, spokesman for South Tahoe PUD, said staff will be looking at ways to help people who end up with exorbitant bills, but he stressed they will also have to come up with a new landscaping design.

It’s the state of California that is mandating meters be put in. The idea is this will lower consumption. But no money was put in the bill for the installation of meters. Nor does the state allow water districts to wait to bill customers based on consumption until all meters are in by 2020. This is why STPUD customers now have different rates instead of everyone continuing on with the flat rate.

California water districts with less than 3,000 customers do not have to install meters. This means on the South Shore that Lukins, Lakeside and Tahoe Keys water customers under the current law will not have meters installed.

Nevada water customers have meters because the state said do it or lose funding.

Excitement surrounds arrival of LTCC’s next president

By Kathryn Reed

Kindred Murillo is able to identify with college students in ways many presidents aren't able to. That is as a recent student herself.

Murillo, whose contract as the next president of Lake Tahoe Community College was ratified Tuesday night, went through graduation ceremonies last weekend at Pepperdine University. She had earned her doctorate in December.



Incoming LTCC President Kindred Murillo, left, speaks May 24 with board member Roberta Mason. Photo/Kathryn Reed

After the board unanimously approved the three-year contract that takes effect July 1, applause filled the boardroom. This was much the same reaction that greeted the board's decision earlier this month to hire Murillo.

Murillo, 56, attended the May 24 meeting. The first weekend of June she will be in the area with her husband looking for a place to live. And she plans to be here full time starting June 24.

"I want to help bring people together. That is what I do well," Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting. "And I

want to be part of the community."

She is moving to Tahoe from Pleasant Hill. She is currently vice chancellor for the Contra Costa Community College District based in Martinez.

Murillo has had her eye on LTCC for a while. She almost applied for the president position when Guy Lease left three years ago. She knows Lease and has heard good things about LTCC.

"It has a good reputation for being a good college, student focused, good faculty and a good community," Murillo said.

As someone who went through the community college system at a time when she was a young mother – her son is 40 – Murillo has high praise for what these two-year institutions can provide students.

"I'm one of those people it helped," she said of community colleges.

She is familiar with Tahoe, being an avid skier. She has a scar from ACL surgery to prove she's been on the slopes.

One of the things that caught the board's attention is that she wants to stay in Tahoe for a while and not use this position merely as a steppingstone.

Her current office is in a high rise and does not afford her much interaction with students. That will change at LTCC because the president's office is in the main building of campus and requires walking through the commons area to get to it.

Faculty and staff are practically giddy about Murillo's arrival. She received several hugs Tuesday night.

One person called her "genuine," adding that during Murillo's public forum she talked about wanting to be part of the fabric

of the college.

Murillo's contract is for $165,000 a year, includes the normal health and pension benefits, calls for $625/month for in district travel expenses, and $10,000 moving expenses.

This compares to Paul Killpatrick, the third president of the college and the one who did not fulfill his three-year contract, who started at $190,000 a year. He received the same other perks, plus a $1,000/month housing allowance. For the past year Steve Maradian has been the interim president. He leaves in a month.

Throughout Tuesday's meeting Murillo was taking notes – evening noting the June 4 softball game between students and staff/faculty.

Murillo says she wants to make sure LTCC is a focal point of the community.

"A small college in a small community is important to the economic development," Murillo said.

Gaines gives Tahoe residents earful on TRPA, state budget

By Kathryn Reed

Money, TRPA, redevelopment agencies, water meters, ADA lawsuits, and California's lousy business climate were some of the topics brought up Tuesday during an open forum with state Sen. Ted Gaines.

This was Gaines' first visit to South Lake Tahoe since being

elected to the state Senate in January. The Republican from Roseville is keeping up his tradition of visiting various parts of his district to connect on a more intimate basis with constituents.

In a one-on-one with *Lake Tahoe News* before the event started May 24 at Riva Grill, Gaines touched on how forest management practices continues to be a priority with him.



Ted Gaines speaks to constituents May 24 in South Lake. Photo/Kathryn Reed

He wants to create more public-private partnerships to make sure fuel thinning projects continue as the more traditional sources of funding dry up.

“If we can negotiate the right deal, it shouldn’t cost the taxpayer money,” Gaines said. “You need to look at what satisfies (the logging company) and what satisfies our goal.”

Gaines spoke a bit about his bill that would require Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s Governing Board to file the 700 financial disclosure form. He had to do this when he was on the Placer County Planning Commission – a non-elected position.

“When you are making a financial decision for an agency, the

public has a right to know any financial issues that should be disclosed," Gaines said. "It's part of living in a fish bowl. They are making huge decisions about the local economy at the lake."

To the whole group he said he hopes SB271 in Nevada will bring what he calls much needed change to TRPA.

"While I agree (TRPA) has been overzealous with its authority, (the board) needs local control. My concern is you get people who are appointed who have special agendas," Gaines said.

He believes a fully functioning TRPA will bring economic vitality to the Lake Tahoe Basin, along with the desired environmental improvements.

But Gaines is also not in the camp with the League to Save Lake Tahoe supporters.

"I'm tired of the League to Save Lake Tahoe litigating every project," Gaines said.

Lew Feldman asked the senator what his take is on Gov. Jerry Brown's desire to do away with redevelopment agencies.

Gaines said in a conversation he had Monday with the governor's staff he does not believe that idea is going to go forward even though it was in Brown's May revised budget.

"I'm not convinced there is enough support on either side to get is approved," Gaines said.

Deb Howard brought up how redevelopment is the key to getting affordable housing built in South Lake Tahoe.

Gaines said even if redevelopment agencies are abolished there would still be a mechanism for getting that type of housing built as well as dealing with blighted areas.

When it comes to the state budget Gaines is adamantly opposed

to continuing with the tax hikes that are supposed to expire this year. Brown wants them on the books for another five years and has tied his budget to them continuing.

Gaines recognizes the economy is still fragile, but sees glimmers of improvement in the technology, tourism and trade sectors.

Gaines also wants a better business climate for the state and will keep trying to get useless and conflicting legislation off the books.

“The governor’s message to us is he is not beholden to anyone. But I don’t see him acting to reform government. I would like to see him deal with pension reform and regulation reform,” Gaines said.

The senator praised Democrat Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom for going with Republicans to Texas to find out how that state has improved the business climate and to see how it might translate to California. He also pointed out that with Newsom’s business holdings in Squaw Valley that he has his pulse on the Lake Tahoe economy.

Tom Davis wants the senator to do something about the lawyers who have hit up the South Shore and other areas of the state with lawsuits over the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Gaines said he is working with both parties to implement a piece of legislation that passed last year that would address this concern. He said the Trial Attorneys Association is the roadblock.

Andrew Strain bestowed praise on Gaines for interjecting himself into the Highway 50 Echo Summit issue when it looked like the road might be closed while ski season was still going on.

Gaines said he has lots of issues with Caltrans.

“We need to continue to work with Caltrans on their lack of communication and their skills,” Gaines said.

He mentioned how at last weekend’s press conference announcing the summit was open he arrived at the designated time but Caltrans didn’t start the event until two hours later.

“This nonchalant attitude of theirs needs working on,” Gaines said.

Fire at Kirkwood puts Mountain Club off-limits

By Kathryn Reed

With occupancy only at 35 percent for the long holiday week, the people who had planned to stay at the Mountain Club at Kirkwood won’t be severely inconvenienced.

All of those guests and the ones staying in the condos Monday night are sleeping elsewhere because of a fire that started about 10:20pm.

It started May 23 on the third floor in or around one of the units, according Michael Dalzell, spokesman for Kirkwood Mountain Resort. He said the unit with the most damage was not occupied at the time.

Several units in the nearly 50-unit complex had extensive water and smoke damage. The cause of the fire is not known.

Kirkwood fire officials did not immediately return calls. They were assisted by East Fork and Lake Valley firefighters.

Dalzell said it took several hours before the fire was put out.

Those who were evacuated were located to other lodging at the resort. There were no injuries.

The Mountain Club is a freestanding building in the village that operates on a one-eighth ownership.

Underground parking connects the entire village. This is where the ticket office is, Monte Wolfe’s and the high-performance demo center. Water damaged those businesses as well, according to Dalzell.

However, none of those businesses were expected to be open this weekend.

There is no estimated cost of the damage. A date was not given when some of the units will be able to accessed and/or used.

Cops to beef-up enforcement over Memorial Day weekend

The Avoid the 6 DUI Campaign will be deploying officers this holiday weekend at DUI/Drivers License Checkpoints and DUI Saturation Patrols throughout El Dorado County to arrest impaired drivers who still don’t get the message.

The Memorial Day weekend is witness to the kick off of summertime recreation and holiday travel, along with many college and high school graduations seeing thousands celebrate their accomplishments. The next 100 days will also see a rise in deaths and injuries as far too many individuals get behind the wheel impaired.

The enforcement campaign begins Friday night with DUI/Driver's License checkpoint in Placerville with special DUI Saturation Patrols deploying in South Lake Tahoe.

More local DUI Saturation Patrols will be out on Saturday and Sunday nights in Placerville and South Lake Tahoe. The California Highway Patrol is deploying all available officers Memorial Day weekend onto freeways and county roads in their jurisdiction.

Law enforcement regionwide is asking for support this holiday weekend and all summer:

• Be responsible when hosting a party; don't allow friends and family to drink to excess

• Always promote a designated sober driver

• Report drunken drivers, call 911

Funding for the Avoid Campaign is through a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Standing water to make for a doozie of a mosquito season

By Stephen Ward

With summer approaching, residents and vacationers are beginning to flock to the lake and its resorts, basking in the sun and enjoying the season.

Unfortunately, they're not the only ones who love the warm

weather; mosquitoes are starting to pervade the Lake Tahoe region, and counties are stepping up their defense to ensure this mosquito season isn’t a nasty one.



Tahoe's other season -- mosquito season is about to arrive.

Ada Barros, public information officer for Placer County’s Vector Control District, said Tahoe’s wet winter might result in this mosquito season being worse than in previous years.

“When the water pools earlier, that gives (mosquitoes) more habitat to develop,” Barros said.

Barros’ district covers the Truckee, Kings Beach and Tahoe City, as well as the northwest region of the lake.

Karen Bender, supervising environmental health specialist for El Dorado County Environmental Management, agreed with Barros, saying this summer is susceptible to an influx of mosquitoes.

“(El Dorado County) is expecting this season to be heavy with mosquitoes due to the large amount of moisture in the basin over the winter and into spring,” Bender said.

County officials aren’t the only ones predicting an escalated mosquito season. Gary Barbato, hydrologist for the National Weather Service, said this past winter created a lot of

stagnant water in the area through snowmelt.

“Whenever there’s a lot of snowmelt, you’re going to have more ponding, and more mosquito activity,” Barbato said. “From what I know about water, that’s primary mosquito breeding ground.”

Barbato, in fact, does know quite a bit about water. He received a master’s degree in water resources from the University of Wyoming and has worked for the NWS for 30 years. He said the high water mark for runoff, an indicator of when the mosquito season will be at its apex, is estimated to be about June 6.

In order to prevent large mosquito infestations in the region, El Dorado County technicians check breeding sources and treated areas where mosquito larvae are found, Bender said. Some areas, such as Trout Creek, are not accessible for monitoring since logging activities are taking place, Bender said.

Barros said her group sprays two types of insecticides across Placer County, larvicide and adulticide. Larvicide is sprayed primarily in water and is used to kill premature mosquitoes, while adulticide is used to prevent mosquitoes capable of flight. Barros said her group has never needed to spray adulticide in the Tahoe region.

As well as spraying, Barros’ group tests dead birds for West Nile virus and has a sentinel chicken coop that it takes blood samples from regularly.

No cases of the West Nile Virus were discovered in humans last year in the Tahoe area, however three cases were found in the foothills of Placer County.

“A lot of folks don’t realize there are different types of mosquitoes,” Barros said. “Although there are some right now in the foothills, they’re not necessarily the ones that carry disease.”

Brooks Martin, a physician who specializes in family practice at Barton Family Medicine, said West Nile Virus symptoms are difficult to pinpoint, but no cases of the virus were discovered in his office last year.

“Unless people come in with meningitis-like symptoms, we generally don’t believe West Nile virus is the cause,” Martin, who has been practicing medicine in the area for more than 20 years, said.

Bender said no cases of West Nile virus occurred last year in her group’s area of the Tahoe basin, but warned that dogs and other pets can be exposed to West Nile in the same way humans can. Animals are resistant to the virus and rarely become ill, she said.

As for what people can do to prevent mosquito bites, Bender suggested eliminating all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding, including old tires and kids’ play toys. Another tip Bender said is to use insect repellent containing DEET.

Barros’ group advises people to exercise the three “D’s” – drain standing water, defend with repellent and long-sleeved clothing, and to call her district with any questions.

Calif. bill regarding TRPA board disclosure passes hurdle

A bill designed to bring transparency to those who serve on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board cleared the

California Senate floor today.

SB593 was introduced by state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville.

SB593 would require each California member of the TRPA Governing Board to comply with the requirements of the Political Reform Act, and to file with the Fair Political Practices Commission a statement of economic interests.

“Currently, the California members of the TRPA can make decisions in which they have a conflict of interest and the public has no way of knowing,” Gaines said in a statement. “SB593 would better enable the public to hold these members accountable and creates an important layer of transparency and oversight for this Governing Board.”

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

LTCC student died from natural causes

Lake Tahoe Community College student Beverly Elizabeth Barday’s death was from natural causes based on a pre-existing medical condition, according to the El Dorado County coroner’s office.

Barday, 36, was found unresponsive in the Commons area of the school March 25.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Bill to remove Nevada from TRPA moves to full Senate

By Anne Knowles

CARSON CITY – With two weeks left in the legislative session, a bill that would remove Nevada from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is finally making its way through the Legislature.

Senate Bill 271 is expected to move to the Senate soon for a full vote after several amendments to the legislation were approved by the Senate Government Affairs committee this morning. If passed by the Senate, the bill will move to the Assembly where it will be heard by the corresponding committee there.



Nevada is making progress in pulling out of the TRPA. Photo/LTN file

The bill withdraws Nevada from the TRPA unless changes to the Compact outlined in the legislation are approved by Nevada and California lawmakers, and ratified by Congress. The withdrawal would take effect Oct. 1, 2013, unless extended by proclamation of the governor to Oct. 1, 2015.

The bill now calls for a report on the impact of exiting from the TRPA to be conducted by the Legislative Committee for the Review and Oversight of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Marlette Lake Water System. That report would be available to legislators next session, before any final decisions were made to leave the agency.

“There are plenty of places to stop (the process) if it proves to be problematic,” said state Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Gardnerville, a sponsor of the bill and a member of the Senate Government Affairs committee, after the meeting.

Settelmeyer said he would not predict the bill’s chances of passage. Similar legislation has failed in the past.

The amendments proposed by the Senate Finance committee and approved by Senate Government Affairs include the oversight report looking into possible outcomes if Nevada leaves the current two-state agency. Other amendments that would alter the TRPA and need to be endorsed by California and Congress include removing the supermajority requirement for members voting on matters before the TRPA; a provision providing that anyone who challenges the regional plan has a burden of proof that it violate the Compact, and a requirement that the TRPA consider changing economic conditions so the plan does not adversely affect Lake Tahoe’s economy.

“If the economy improves, we can increase the environmental restrictions,” Settelmeyer said. “It can work to the environment’s benefit.”

If Nevada does leave the TRPA, an amendment to the bill provides that all projects previously approved by the TRPA would continue, or be grandfathered in.

The bill outlines the creation of the Nevada Regional Planning Agency should the state drop out of the existing agency now comprised of members from California and Nevada.