El Dorado supes to take up racist headstone issue

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County officials hope to take a firm step to right a 57-year-old wrong at Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting, with a proposal to replace 36 headstones at Mormon Island Cemetery that feature a racist slur stamped into the concrete.

The markers are on anonymous graves relocated from the Gold Rush town of Negro Hill before the area was inundated by water behind the Folsom Dam in 1954.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contracted to move those graves and those from several other cemeteries and isolated gravesites to be flooded.

However, recently released documents show the Corps consistently used the epithet usually referred to as "the N-word" in the place of "Negro" when referring to the town.

Read the whole story

Gaming to return to old Bill's casino in Stateline

By Kathryn Reed

Movement is finally occurring at the old Bill's casino in Stateline.

Mike Laub bought the property in March 2010. His original plan

was to turn the parcel into a strip club. Douglas County commissioners prevented that from happening.



Bill's had been a Harrah's Entertainment property until 2010.
Photo/LTN file

Douglas County Community Development has three building permits active for the building next to Harrah's Lake Tahoe on Highway 50. One is to renovate the interior, though no specific tenant is listed.

The second permit is expected to be issued today. This is for a 6,400- square-foot Pete's Restaurant and Brewhouse. It will have a bar and limited gaming.

"I am currently reviewing a permit application for Dotty's Casino. It is approximately 6,600 square feet and has a small bar. They are just proposing slots and video poker games," Dave Lundergreen, Douglas County building official, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The permit is likely to be approved this month.

USPS studying idea to close 2 Lake Tahoe post offices

By Kathryn Reed

When people in Homewood go to their box at the post office today they will receive a notice stating the U.S. Postal Service is beginning to investigate the possibility of closing the office.

The same study is taking place regarding the Glenbrook office.



"We are looking at locations that are stacked on top of each other, so we can still meet everyone's needs and reduce our brick and mortar operation," explained David Rupert, USPS spokesman.

The Bijou office in South Lake Tahoe closed in June 2010. That closure is estimated to save the Postal Service $2 million in 10 years. Down the road discussions about what to do with the Stateline office will begin in earnest.

On the West Shore, there are about 600 active boxes in Homewood. About 1.5 miles away in Tahoma are another 600 boxes.

Homewood box holders are invited to a meeting June 23 at 6pm at 740 Timberland Lane, Tahoe City to discuss ideas.

This is the beginning of the study process, Rupert said, stressing no decision has been made.

Some options include moving all Homewood customers to Tahoma, closing the retail windows and leaving the boxes, or having a remote location for mail pick up.

Dealing with the Glenbrook office may pose more issues because the next closest retail location in seven miles away in Round Hill. An option being considered is cluster boxes for those 150 customers.

“The problem is we have a very small post office that brings in very little money in Glenbrook. The costs are very expensive between the facility and the personnel,” Rupert said. “To have them kind of babysitting 150 boxes is hard to justify in this economic environment.”

Glenbrook postal customers have a meeting set for June 8 at 6m at the golf course.

Any changes to the post offices would not happen until the end of the year.

Vacation home market faces long road to recovery

By Rob Reuteman, CNBC.com

The buyers’ market for vacation homes is likely to continue for years, with activity largely limited to buyers with enough cash to circumvent a tighter, post-recession lending environment.

Thirty-six percent of all vacation-home buyers in 2010 did not use a mortgage – versus 29 percent the year before – while more than half of them financed less that 70 percent of the purchase price, according to the National Association of Realtors. Of those who bought a second home as a rental investment, 59 percent paid cash.

“Mortgage lending in the past three years has been pretty rough, with much higher underwriting standards,” says Paul Bishop, NAR’s vice president for research. “People drawn into the market at this point are buyers with substantial cash, or people not dealing with a mortgage. If your credit is strong and you put down a sizeable down payment, lenders are more interested.”

Vacation homes remain the hardest-hit sector of the U.S. real estate market. Sales fell 1.8 percent to 543,000 in 2010, according to the NAR’s 2011 Investment and Vacation Home Buyers Survey. The median price was $150,000 in 2010, down 11.2 percent from $169,000 in 2009.

Read the whole story

Record snowpack could threaten Western states

By Kirk Johnson and Jesse McKinley, New York Times

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo. — For all the attention on epic flooding in the Mississippi Valley, a quiet threat has been growing here in the West where winter snows have piled up on mountain ranges throughout the region.

Thanks to a blizzard-filled winter and an unusually cold and wet spring, more than 90 measuring sites from Montana to New Mexico and California to Colorado have record snowpack totals on the ground for late May, according to a federal report released last week.

Those giant and spectacularly beautiful snowpacks will now

melt under the hotter, sunnier skies of June — mildly if weather conditions are just right, wildly and perhaps catastrophically if they are not.

Fear of a sudden thaw, releasing millions of gallons of water through river channels and narrow canyons, has disaster experts on edge.

“All we can do is watch and wait,” said Bob Struble, the director of emergency management for Routt County in north-central Colorado. The county’s largest community, Steamboat Springs, sits about 30 miles from the headwaters of the Yampa River, a major tributary of the Colorado River that has 17 feet of snow or more in parts of its watershed.

“This could be a year to remember,” Mr. Struble added in a recent interview in his office as snow fell again on the high country.

No matter what happens, the snows of 2011, especially their persistence into late spring, have already made the record books.

But the West has also changed significantly since 1983, when super-snows last produced widespread flooding. From the foothills west of Denver to the scenic, narrow canyons of northern Utah, flood plains that were once wide-open spaces have been built up.

Many communities have improved their defenses, for example, by fortifying riverbanks to keep streams in place, but those antiflood bulwarks have for the most part not been tested by nature’s worst hits.

And in sharp contrast to the floods on the Mississippi River — one mighty waterway, going where it will — the Western story is fragmented, with anxiety dispersed across dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of large and small waterways that could surge individually, collectively or not at all.

In California, officials staged three days of flood training last week, running disaster scenarios and practicing the grunt work of filling sandbags and draping and tying down tarp. The state's aging levee system has long been a source of concern, with fears of large-scale failures that could leave Sacramento, the state capital, vulnerable to a Hurricane Katrina-scale flood. The anxieties are amplified this year by the deep snows in the Sierra Nevada, where some ski spots around Lake Tahoe saw more than 60 feet this season.

Read the whole story

Water regulators demand permits for coastal fireworks

By Tony Barboza, Los Angeles Times

Water regulators have voted to require pollution permits for coastal fireworks displays in southern Orange County and San Diego County, in what they said was the first such regulation in the nation.

Operators of seaside fireworks shows from Laguna Beach to the U.S.-Mexico border will have to pay a $1,500 annual fee, minimize the discharge of pollutants into the water and clean up shells, cardboard, fuses and other debris under the rules approved Wednesday by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The rules, which take effect in June, will largely affect displays along the coastline, but will also apply to fireworks over rivers, streams, reservoirs and lakes.

Officials said the policy is an attempt to protect bodies of water from pyrotechnic shows that scatter pollutants and trash. The metals and chemicals that produce explosive effects and bright colors can also contaminate water and become toxic to aquatic life

“The new requirements balance the importance of public displays of fireworks as part of our national and community celebrations and the need to prevent degradation of water and sediment quality from the fallout of firework combustion residue,” David W. Gibson, the water board’s executive officer, said in a news release.

Water board officials said it was the nation’s first comprehensive policy to regulate fireworks as a pollution source subject to the federal Clean Water Act.

Read the whole story

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46 states forced to reduce services to deal with budget gaps

By Marsha Mercer, AARP Bulletin

Despite signs the economy is brightening, state governments face a fourth straight year of financial crisis. To balance their budgets over the past three years, officials have cut programs that help their most vulnerable residents, including older people and the disabled. They’ve hiked university tuitions and sliced K-12 school spending. They’ve laid off hundreds of thousands of public employees and pared workers’

benefits and pensions.

It took all this and more to close $430 billion in state budget gaps during the worst economic period since the Great Depression.

But more tough decisions and deep cuts lie ahead. On the chopping block are programs that Americans rely upon from cradle to grave: Many states are slashing child care assistance, and at least one state, Virginia, will eliminate the fund that paid for indigent burials.

“Everything is on the table – and it has to be,” says Chris Whatley, deputy executive director of the Council of State Governments, a nonpartisan policy research group based in Lexington, Ky.

Forty-four states and the District of Columbia are projecting $122 billion in budget shortfalls for fiscal 2012, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which reports that nearly every state plans to spend less in 2012 than in 2008, after inflation.

Fiscal 2012, which starts July 1 in most states, “is shaping up as one of the most difficult budget years on record,” according to the center, which advocates fiscal policies that help low- and moderate-income people. And some states are predicting deficits totaling $75 billion in fiscal 2013, which starts in July 2012.

“These are painful cuts,” California Gov. Jerry Brown said in March as he signed $11.2 billion in spending reductions to programs benefiting the poor, the sick and older people, to close a $26.6 billion deficit in the 2011-2012 budget. “It hits vulnerable people. It’s not the kind of thing I like doing … But when you have a deficit, you have to.”

But, the governor warned, “the next round of cuts will be much more painful and much more disruptive.”

Read the whole story

Skip the detour – Echo Summit is open

Echo Summit is open.

This section of Highway 50 that connects the South Shore to points west will be open on weekends and subject to controlled traffic during the week.

Motorists can expect 20-minute delays while work continues for up to six week.



Work on Echo Summit finished ahead of schedule. Randy Pench/Sacramento Bee

There will be no traffic restrictions on weekends including over the Memorial Day Weekend.

The rock wall barrier replacement project at Echo Summit was funded in part ($1.9 million) by the American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The following are quick facts about the barrier replacement project at Echo Summit:

• 1,302 lineal feet rock barriers along Highway 50 at Echo Summit were removed and replaced.

• The entire width of the roadway for one mile was resurfaced.

• The rebuilding effort included seven walls along the eastbound lane; the longest is 298 feet and the shortest is 68 feet.

• Approximately 20-25 people worked at the job site during each of two shifts (except when work was temporarily suspended due to weather).

• The historic rock walls were removed two feet below the roadway. In addition, most of the eastbound lane along the length of the walls was removed to a similar depth.

• The form liners for new barrier have a rock texture; workers hand carved the top surface and ends for design authenticity.

• The rock and rubble removed from the project becomes the property of South Lake Tahoe and will be delivered to a designated site.

Transit district working numbers to create balanced

budget

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The Tahoe Transportation District needs to find about $50,000 in the next month or it won't be able to approve a balanced budget.

The board was given the sobering news at its meeting this month.

Another component that could affect the district is the May revise to the California budget which calls for reductions in transportation dollars.

The budget has been broken into capital improvement projects, transit and general fund. Because TTD has not been the parent of the BlueGo bus system for an entire fiscal year, the operating numbers are difficult to compare year-over-year.

But revenues are definitely on the decline. South Tahoe Public Utility District puts a portion of connection/hook-up fees toward TTD. With construction near a standstill, those dollars are waning.

Since the bankruptcy of South Tahoe Area Transit Authority, not all the partners associated with that group have signed on to be part of the BlueGo run by TTD.

An item that struck board members odd is the $30,000 allocation for the telephone system. Accountant Joanie Schmitt said she has been working with AT&T, but the issue is tied up in bankruptcy. Board members said they'd work their connections to resolve that issue.

If that comes to fruition, the current deficit of $48,782 would be substantially decreased.

With fuel costs on the rise, the budget calls for $785,000 on

that line.

The board is expected to vote on the budget at the June meeting.

In other action:

• It was disclosed that the Stateline-to-Stateline bike demo project may still start this summer, but because the U.S. Forest Service has not signed off on all the paperwork the delay will mean it won't be completed in one building season.

• The board accepted the donation of two prefabricated bus shelters from Bently Nevada.

• Andrew Strain was nominated to be chair of the board for another year and Will Garner vice chair. A vote will be taken at the June meeting.

• Angela Swanson has replaced Bruce Grego as South Lake Tahoe's rep to the district. She was nominated to oversee a committee devoted solely to BlueGo.

• The deadline to submit a request for proposal to operate BlueGo was extended to May 25.

Gardnerville pilot's plane, remains found in Amador County

By Sam Cohen, FOX40 News

AMADOR COUNTY – The plane of a missing winery owner has been found in Amador County near Salt Spring Reservoir.

Search and rescue aircraft flew over areas in Amador and Calaveras counties Friday looking for Robert H. “Budge” Brown and his plane.

Friday afternoon, Brown’s son confirmed to FOX40 that his father’s plane was found in Amador County. The son said he was numb from the news, and his heart sank as he watched news coverage Friday night. A body was found in the wreckage.

According to Amador County sheriff’s deputies, around 3:45 Friday afternoon, members of the search team found the wreckage of Brown’s Lancair plane south of Bear River Reservoir in very rugged, snow covered terrain in the El Dorado National Forest.

The plane crashed outside the initial search area that was covered by ground crews. The wreckage covers about a 300-yard area, but officials were able to find the tail and serial number and did confirm the plane belongs to Brown. They also found personal items in the debris, including Brown’s passport.

Read the whole story