Judge to consider releasing Garrido transcripts

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Phillip and Nancy Garrido will be sentenced June 2 for the kidnapping and rape of Jaycee Lee Dugard, but that won't be the end of the case that day.

El Dorado Superior Court Judge Douglas Phimister has scheduled a hearing after the sentencing to decide whether to unseal the transcripts of Dugard's appearance before a grand jury last September.

Phimister agreed to hold the hearing in response to an April 29 request from the *Bee*. In a letter to the judge submitted on behalf of media organizations statewide, the *Bee* asked the judge to grant "access to the documents immediately upon the closure of this case."

Phimister previously rejected media attempts to gain access to the documents, saying they should remain sealed until the case is over.

District Attorney Vern Pierson has previously opposed release of the document, and Nancy Garrido's attorney, Stephen Tapson, has described their contents as evil and said they should never be opened.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County cemetery ready to bury racial slur

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released documents Tuesday acknowledging it was responsible for using a racially inflammatory version of the name Negro Hill when that town's cemetery was moved to El Dorado Hills to make way for Folsom Lake in 1954.

Negro Hill's old cemetery – on the land between forks of the American River – was one of several moved when Folsom Dam was built.

Instead of saying Negro Hill, though, markers in the new Mormon Island Cemetery, to which bodies were taken, instead use a word too raw to use in the newspaper.

They say the bodies were moved from (N-word) Hill.

The markers don't refer to those buried there – who were most likely of various races – but only to the town's name.

"We don't know why, when in so many other instances the cemetery was called Negro Hill, the new gravestones and our records use the more offensive word," wrote Corps Lt. Col. Andrew B. Kiger, in an apologetic memo accompanying the released documents.

Read the whole story

Lukins water rates may go up to pay for improvements

Lukins Brothers Water Company users are about to see higher bills as the company secures a $2 million loan to begin a multi-year improvement plan.

Lukins is the water provider for the Mikasa center at the Y in South Lake Tahoe and then for people living on the east side of Emerald Bay Road.

The company was unable to get grants and government money for the project. The interest rate on the loan is anticipated to be 6.5 percent for 20 years.

They money will be used to improve water flow in the event of a fire, install new pipes and valves, install fire hydrants, and other improvements.

Residential customer with a 1-inch connection can expect a surcharge of $21.69 per month for the first 10 years, with it dropping to $19.72 for the second decade. Those with a three-quarter-inch connection would pay an additional $13.01 per month for 10 years, then $11.83 for the remainder of the loan.

People wanting to protest Lukins' ability to secure the loan and therefore stop the rate increases may email the California Public Utilities Commission at water_division@cpuc.ca.gov.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Lake Tahoe fire chief submits resignation

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti tendered his resignation Thursday. His last day on the job will be Sept. 1.

In a sweeping interview in his office May 6, Gigliotti looked like a man ready to take on new challenges – possibly in the Lake Tahoe Basin – but also as one who is wistful about his six years at the helm of SLTFD and what the future might bring.

The 46-year-old said he likes to be an innovator. He calls himself an "architect of significant change." With economic constraints placed on the city, the department has fiscal limitations that don't lend themselves toward the changes he likes to make.



Lorenzo Gigliotti

While he survived the round of layoffs and incentivized early retirements in the city's reorganization plan earlier this year, Gigliotti knows his departure will be a financial savings to the city. He also survived a vote of no confidence from the firefighters union.

In his letter of resignation, Gigliotti wrote, "My hope is

that any realized savings or economies from my leaving can be used to preserve the integrity of the response system the community presently enjoys."

To *Lake Tahoe News* he said his decision to leave had nothing to do with all the changes City Manager Tony O'Rourke has made since coming on board in August.

"We have a real strategic plan after all these years. It's all good stuff," Gigliotti said. "But they need a fresh set of eyes."

O'Rourke does not know how the hierarchy in the department will shake out.

"The good news is we have sufficient time to proceed in an orderly fashion to arrange for an effective transition," O'Rourke said.

Besides the traditional routes of considering internal or external fire chief candidates, O'Rourke said he would look at the entire public safety structure to see if one person in charge of police and fire would be viable. The city has done this before.

"We also need to know how it's going to go with collective bargaining because if we don't get some of the concessions that are built into the five-year plan, that will have some weight on what direction we go," O'Rourke said.

Time in Tahoe

Since his arrival in January 2005, Gigliotti has been part of the 2007 Angora Fire, the recent signing of another five-year ambulance agreement with Lake Valley Fire and El Dorado County, managing 43 employees two years ago to 39 today, changes in council members, and a change in who his boss is.

The dated alder wood and green paint that were in his office when he arrived are still there. Same with the well worn brown

chairs.

The 2,000-magazines and other debris were hauled out. Now manuals and binders fill the space in his office on the second floor of the station near the Y.

After the 2005-06 flooding on the South Shore that required about $1.5 million in cleanup costs, Gigliotti's responsibilities increased to be the city's emergency response manager.

This is his third year he will manage the mutual aid between the nine California and nine Nevada fire agencies that include the basin and reach up to Reno.

It's those interagency agreements that account for mutual aid support on a routine basis as well as during catastrophes like the 2007 Angora Fire.

In the last four years the city has bought three wildland firefighting engines. Pre-Angora it had a couple pickups that could go off-pavement.

When he talks about how the assault on the fire was executed it is with a certain calm, but also with a bit of authority.

All that Gigliotti would have changed is the weather. That Sunday nearly four years ago was so incredibly windy. When the winds shifted, it sent flames racing toward the 254 houses that were eventually reduced to ash.

When it comes to medical care, South Lake Tahoe and Lake Valley fire departments were awarded the ambulance contract by El Dorado County earlier this year after having first secured the contract 10 years ago.

One thing Gigliotti will be working on before he leaves is what to do with station No. 2. He said an internal study shows the station on Highway 50 across from South Tahoe Middle School is functioning fine.

O’Rourke wants an independent evaluation, which will be done May 18-20 when a consultant from Texas comes to town to assess the level of service and response from that station and at the two other main ones in town. A fourth station is unmanned at the airport.

In the last 10 years, the department has averaged about 2,900 calls a year.

What’s next?

Gigliotti, who with his wife has six children ranging in age from twin 9-year-olds to a 29-year-old, wants to stay in the basin. As he wraps up things in the department, he will contemplate where he goes next.

He’s been in the fire service business for 29 years, having started as a paramedic in San Diego.

Gigliotti is entrenched in Rotary and has been instrumental in getting the Cub Scouts being viable at Bijou.

When he’s not in uniform, Gigliotti can be found touring on his motorcycle.

Study: Calif. public employees compensated better than private sector

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

Battle lines sharpened Thursday over California’s public pensions with the release of a new report that concludes pay

and benefit packages for public workers are better than those for their counterparts in the private sector.

Commissioned by pension overhaul advocates poised to seek changes, the report drew immediate fire from public employee unions, which have muscled up to fight the emerging pension wars.

The two-part study, released by the California Foundation for Fiscal Responsibility, also cautions that public pension obligations threaten to crowd out money for public services.

The foundation, headed by longtime pension change advocate Marcia Fritz, has proposed several pension cost-cutting ideas, including a cap on pension payouts, higher employee contributions and higher retiree health premiums. The proposals would affect both current workers and future hires.

While Fritz has yet to offer the changes for potential voter consideration, former Fair Oaks Assemblyman Roger Niello has submitted an initiative, and another group, California Pension Reform, expects to have its own plan for the ballot.

Capitol Matrix Consulting, the Sacramento-based firm that researched the study for Fritz, estimated the impact of those proposals on various employees, based on length of service and whether they are safety or miscellaneous workers. Nearly every scenario envisions deep cuts to employee benefits and employer costs.

Read the whole story

No time for taxi, baby arrives on Tahoe street corner

As members of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department were responding to the usual calls for service on Cinco de Mayo, the Corado family was enjoying a quiet night at home. Their two worlds were about to collide in a chaotic, but positive way.

Maria Ortiz-Corado, nine months pregnant, was 10 days from her due date when she went into labor. This was not her first child so she did not panic. Her husband, Jonatan Corado, called a taxi to take them to Barton Memorial Hospital. The couple waited at the bus stop at the corner of Pioneer Trail and Aspenwald for the cab to arrive. The baby, however, did not wait.



South Tahoe's newest resident gets a police escort to hospital. Photo/Provided

At about 12:28am Thursday, police dispatchers Jill Broadfoot and Linda Clark received a frantic phone call reporting a baby was being born at the bus stop. The dispatchers began coaching

the caller through the birthing process, while simultaneously dispatching fire department medics and police officers to the scene. Officers Chris Webber, Angie Kallstrom, and Sgt. Brad Williams all responded. The Corados' son, David, was born just as Webber arrived.

Kallstrom and Williams helped provide comfort to the new family until medics arrived to transport the family to the hospital via ambulance. Mother and son were a bit cold, but otherwise healthy.

South Tahoe General Plan update doesn't sit well with League

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe has spent more than three quarters of a million dollars on a document that on Tuesday the League to Save Lake Tahoe all but said it would file a lawsuit against if the city approves it.

The controversy surrounding the General Plan update has to do with it not complying with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan.

The goal was never to have it comply.

The idea when the $877,605 contract with Mintier Harnish was signed in August 2007 was the consultant would devise a document that was forward thinking and be done while TRPA updated the Regional Plan.

Then City Manager Dave Jinkens was a strong advocate for the city being able to control its destiny, put in writing what it wanted to do, and to have influence on the updated Regional Plan.

But that Regional Plan update got sidetracked and isn't expected to come before the TRPA Governing Board until December 2012 at the earliest.

In the meantime, the city has a document that it is ready to have the council approve. It says which parts don't comply with the Regional Plan and that projects wanting to do something in that section would not be able to without TRPA approval. Much of this has to do with height and density regulations.

Michael Lozeau, attorney for the League, and the council engaged in an unusual back-and-forth dialogue May 3 during the City Council meeting.

"I'm not trying to antagonize you. I'm trying to slow you down," Lozeau said. This was long after he told the council it needed a "much more legally defensible document."

The reason the city wants to go forward is that a current General Plan (the last one was updated in 1999) would allow the Tahoe Valley Community Plan to move forward. A community plan is needed in order for the two South Lake Tahoe projects (Raley's at the Y and Mikasa) in the TRPA's Community Enhancement Program to go forward. An extension to the CEP was granted, but those projects will need to show progress in early 2012 to stay viable.

The council on Tuesday was supposed to have a workshop on the General Plan, but they were too tired at 4pm to keep going with the agenda. For now, the plan is have the workshop as the first item of the open session May 17, which starts at 9am, with a vote likely to take place that day. Another public hearing will be conducted.

Metered water users flood STPUD rate increase hearing

By Kathryn Reed

A four-hour meeting Thursday night about potential South Tahoe Public Utility District rate increases ended with metered water customers' voices being heard and no one opposing the likely 3 percent sewer rate increase.

The latter will definitely be on the May 19 agenda (meeting time 2pm) for a board vote. It would increase the average customer's rate by less than $1 a month starting July 1.



Nearly 40 people turned out May 5 for the public hearing about

STPUD's
proposed rate
increases.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

The water meter rate, though, is a bit more convoluted process. Although staff will be meeting with the board's finance committee comprised of Chris Cefalu and Eric Schafer next week, it's likely a new proposal will not be crafted before the next meeting. (Agendas are posted on the district's website which can be accessed by clicking on the ad to the right of this story.)

Part of the issue is the state is mandating water districts install meters by 2025. And the customers with meters as of 2011 must be charged based on consumption, per state mandates.

Until now South Tahoe Public Utility District residential customers have all been billed a flat rate. The 3,000-plus customers with meters are about to have a fluctuating bill based in part on the amount of water they use.

Most of the approximately 40 people at the meeting May 5 were there to talk about their metered rates. What many of them are concerned about is the summer irrigation season could cause their quarterly bill to hit four figures.

For people in the Angora burn area, where growing anything is exasperatingly difficult, they fear for what their next bill will be.

Tony Colombo, who lost his house in the 2007 fire, said he and his wife have spent nearly $50,000 on landscaping because of the 50 percent attrition rate on plants. The soil, even though he has rototilled twice and added amendments, is not fostering plant growth.

He watches the high water table that wasn't there pre-fire,

because conifers absorbed the moisture, send water oozing off his land and into the street, while at the same time he knows he'll soon need to turn the sprinklers on for the young vegetation.

Exasperation fills his voice as he addresses the five-member board.

The post-Angora Fire area is not the only place within STPUD's jurisdiction with a high water table.

Lake Tahoe News has approached STPUD, South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency officials with the idea that locations with high water tables ought to be looked at as areas to capture water that could be reused for irrigation. A city employee told *LTN* because water is not scarce here that is not likely to happen. And with rules in place that aren't friendly to using gray water, they say, what's the point?

Why metered water?

The impetus for the state legislation was based on the desire to decrease consumption. For most of the state, the country and the world water is a scarce resource. As much as it is renewable, it cannot be manufactured.

The theory is if people pay for what they use, they will use less – at least initially.

But for districts like STPUD that is easing into meters instead of installing them all at once, it means varied rates for customers. California mandates the district not charge more than it needs to operate.

Although that figure is not a moving target, changing the rate structure to get to the needed operating dollar amount makes rates a moving target for metered customers. It's balancing fixed costs against consumption.

About 87 percent of what South Tahoe PUD charges water

customers is based on fixed costs, while the remaining 13 percent is consumption.

Looking at options

Consultant Shawn Koorn of HDR Engineering Inc. is tasked with revisiting his numbers that led him to come up with the metered rate plan.

What people in the audience spoke to was a desire to have a higher fixed rate and lower consumption rate. This would allow them have a more predictable bill and to ease into this whole metered rate plan.

“We have to let our landscaping go or it will cost us $1,000 (in water),” Linda Thompson told the board.

She was articulate and forceful in her frustration with the proposed rates.

Harold Singer, speaking as a citizen and one who lost his home in the 2007 fire, said with the district close to meeting its 2015 consumption goals as of today, why not restructure the rate for metered customers to make it a more gradual transition.

Plus, he said, “You may have more stable revenue if you have a higher fixed rate.”

Singer also suggested the district educate people to read their meters so they don’t face sticker shock when the bill arrives.

Report: Casinos notch small gain in 2010

By Amanda Finnegan, Las Vegas Sun

After two years of declining revenues, the U.S. casino industry showed more stable results in 2010, according to an annual report released Wednesday by the American Gaming Association. Gross gaming revenue from commercial casinos totaled $34.6 billion in 2010, a nearly 1 percent increase from 2009.

The AGA this morning released its “State of the States” results, a survey that looks at how the commercial casino industry was affected last year through national and state economic data, as well as public opinion results. The 2010 survey combined the 22 states with commercial casinos and those with racetracks, which AGA President and CEO Frank Fahrenkopf said gives a more accurate depiction of the industry.



Stateline casinos have suffering in recent years. Photo/LTN

“Clearly, a 1 percent increase is not indicative of a complete recovery. This recovery is going to be slow and laborious, particularly because the national economy is still struggling

to fully emerge from the recession. As consumer discretionary spending goes, so goes our industry. We're not out of the woods yet, but this modest increase coming after two years of declining revenues is significant," Fahrenkopf said on a conference call Wednesday discussing the results.

Consumer spending at Nevada casinos increased slightly in 2010 to $10.4 billion from $10.39 billion in 2009. Of the 21 states that had commercial casinos or racetracks in 2009, 14 saw increases in consumer spending during the year-over-year period, the report indicated.

Read the whole story

Canal damage may force water rationing in Placer County

By Matt Weiser and Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Repairs to a Placer County water canal destroyed by a landslide could be at least a month away, water officials said, likely requiring mandatory water rationing for many customers starting next week.

A section of the Bear River Canal slid off a mountainside near Colfax on April 19. The canal, owned by Pacific Gas & Electric Co., is a crucial water source for the Placer County Water Agency, which serves 57,000 customers ranging from suburban residents in Roseville to farmers in the foothills.

The agency has been able to meet demand with other sources and stored water, avoiding harm to customers so far. But the agency's board will consider declaring a water emergency at a

special meeting Tuesday.

This would result in a mandatory 25 percent water rationing order for treated water customers in the Auburn and Bowman areas, while other areas of the county would be asked to reduce outdoor water use by 10 percent on a voluntary basis and to water only on alternate days.

The cuts would be deeper for untreated irrigation water customers. Small farmers around Auburn would see a mandatory 50 percent reduction, while the cut to commercial farms and golf courses would be 25 percent.

Read the whole story