Nevada lawmakers returning money from poker firm

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

The PokerStars PAC report shows that 48 out of 63 lawmakers received cash last year, shortly before the company paid for two of them – Assemblymen William Horne and Kelvin Atkinson – to go to London.

I have listed the contributions below from the PAC filing, although some lawmakers are now pulling out records as they say they do not have any recollection of getting the money.

The real issue: Why would anyone take money or favors from a company the feds had already alleged had been operating illegally here?

The algorithm for contributions was obvious at the top – leaders got a lot of cash – but stranger as it got toward the bottom, with differing amounts and no good reason to leave some of those 15 off the list. And why not Bill Raggio, who at the time was returning to be the biennial power he always was.

Read the whole story

Wedding industry in Tahoe takes hit with fewer

marriages

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Live by Cupid’s arrow, die by Cupid’s arrow.

El Dorado County has traditionally issued more marriage licenses per capita than the California average, but now its numbers are declining far faster than average.



Lake Tahoe is the main reason El Dorado County’s per capita rate is nearly four times that of the state.

People want to get married in one of the world’s most beautiful places.

“We’ve had people fly in from Australia just to get married in South Lake Tahoe, just to say they’d done that,” said Bill Schultz, El Dorado County’s recorder/clerk.

Couples have skydiving weddings, beachfront weddings, state park weddings and even Gunbarrel (not shotgun) weddings at the top of the Gunbarrel ski run at Heavenly Ski Resort.

It makes for a multimillion-dollar industry.

In recent years, however, marriage has taken a dive at the lake.

The county issued almost 25 percent fewer licenses in 2010 than it did in 2006.

California licenses dropped only 5 percent during the same period.

The reasons are economic and social.

The social factor is that people just don’t get married like they used to.

Women don’t need a breadwinner, and couples don’t see a stigma to cohabitation.

Read the whole story

Water levels require work at toxic Alpine County mine

Publisher’s note: ***This update on the Leviathan Mine in Alpine County will be in the Lahontan Water Board’s May 2011 executive officer’s report.***

By Chuck Curtis

The Lahontan Water Board’s emergency contractor has been successfully treating polluted water at the Leviathan Mine Superfund Site this spring to prevent ponds at the site from overflowing. The water board manages the site, a former sulfur mine, for the state of California, which owns the property.

The site is located north of Monitor Pass at an elevation of approximately 7,000 feet, between Markleeville and Topaz Lake.

Mining operations exposed sulfur in the rocks and mine wastes to air and water, and that caused the creation of sulfuric acid. The acid dissolves minerals, including arsenic, aluminum, nickel, and others, in the rock and waste materials. This metal-rich acidic wastewater is termed acid mine drainage, or AMD.



The treatment system at one of the ponds at the Leviathan Mine. Photos/Provided

The state purchased the site in the early 1980s to build a pollution abatement project, as the owner at the time had no means to reduce the flow of AMD from discharging to Leviathan Creek. Without capture or treatment, the AMD created toxic conditions in the creek, effectively killing aquatic life as far as about ten miles below the mine, where the creek joins the East Fork Carson River.

The state's pollution abatement project included construction of a series of evaporation ponds to collect two sources of the AMD discharge at the site. Starting in 1999, the water board's contractors have treated AMD in the ponds each summer to reduce pond overflows that happened in the spring following wet winters. Since 2000, there have been essentially no polluted water discharges from the ponds managed by the State.

Due to heavy precipitation at the site this winter (160 percent of normal as of April 14, 2011), water board staff determined that the ponds would overflow this spring without emergency treatment actions. Water board staff arranged an emergency contract to treat the AMD in the ponds to prevent an uncontrolled pond discharge.

On April 1, the contractor cleared the 10-mile-long road to the site of snow, and, on April 5, treatment operations at the site began. Those operations, in which lime is mixed with the water in the smallest of the ponds, have continued every day since. The lime neutralizes the acid, and the toxic metals in the AMD settle to the pond bottom.

Successful treatment and discharge of the first batch of pond water occurred on April 9, and the second batch was discharged on April 14. Approximately 800,000 gallons of AMD was treated and discharged to the creek in those two batches. Treatment operations will continue until the threat of pond overflow has passed. A significant precipitation event this spring could still overwhelm the ponds and our emergency treatment operations, but that possibility decreases with each day of treatment.



The overflow structure at the upper ponds has about 3 inches to go before overflow.

Doug Carey, engineering geologist with the water board's Leviathan Mine Unit, led a tour of the site for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund project manager and U.S. Forest Service staff on April 13. The USEPA was pleased with the actions that the water board has taken under difficult conditions to prevent pond overflow and its harmful

effects on the creek and its aquatic life. Those difficult conditions have included snowstorms and single digit nighttime temperatures.

The Forest Service acknowledged that snow removal was completed in compliance with its specifications, and no damage to the road base occurred as a result of snow removal activities; the Forest Service owns the Leviathan Mine Road that provides access to the site.

In addition to observing the water board's emergency treatment operations, the tour included viewing areas at and downstream of the site that are affected by the former mining operations. In addition to the water board, Atlantic Richfield Company is conducting pollution abatement activities at the Leviathan Mine site, and it has been required by the USEPA to conduct a Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study to evaluate the nature and extent of contamination and to develop a final cleanup remedy for the site. The USEPA named Atlantic Richfield as a potentially responsible party for the pollution at Leviathan Mine due to its purchase of Anaconda Mining Company, which conducted mining at the site in the 1950s and 1960s.

Chuck Curtis is division manager of the Cleanup and Enforcement Division of the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Lahontan Region.

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2 arrests in stolen catalytic converter case

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies arrested two Sacramento men April 14 in regards to stolen catalytic converters.

Deputies pulled the two over at 2:45am in Cameron Park near Bass Lake and Green Valley roads.

The deputy identified both subjects determined Xeng Vue was on probation for stolen property, specifically catalytic converters.

Deputies conducted a probation search of the vehicle and located a pipe cutter and other tools which could be used to cut and remove catalytic converters from vehicles. In the trunk was a catalytic converter, deputies said.

Vue and Thao Xioong were arrested on charges of possession of stolen property and conspiracy to commit grand theft.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Time to comment on Heavenly's development plans

By Kathryn Reed

Heavenly Mountain Resort will begin improving the ski area next month, days after this season ends April 24, if all the approvals from the U.S. Forest Service go through.

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is seeking comments until April 29 on proposed capital improvements at Heavenly. The resort wants to build of a permanent ski school structure and create of a Kids Adventure Zone near the top of the gondola, widen some ski trails in the Sky Express area and improve vehicle access to the top station of the tubing lift.



Six more days of this ski season, then Heavenly begins improvements for 2011-12. Photo/LTN

These projects are part of the resort's master plan.

"The children's ski school building will be consistent in look and feel to the Tamarack Lodge, which our guests have really enjoyed. While the temporary yurts have served us well over the years, this permanent structure will elevate the ski school facilities to the same world-class level as our ski school instruction," resort spokesman Russ Pecoraro told *Lake Tahoe News*.

With General Manager Pete Sonntag having risen from the ski school side of the industry, this is close to his heart – to have such a facility that complements the philosophy of parent company Vail Resorts – "experience of a lifetime".

The improvements are part of a nearly $90 million cash infusion by the Colorado-based company into its six ski resorts before the 2011-12 begins.

The ski school building will be nearly 3,000-square-feet, with a height between 25 and 30 feet.

Trails on the California side of the mountain that will be widened to increase capacity and ease congestion include:

Ellie’s, Liz’s, Upper Ridge, Canyon, Jackpot and High Roller. Trees will be taken out via over-the-snow removal methods. Some boulder will be moved to the edge of the trails. The total cleared area is approximately 4.16 acres.

“The trails in upper California were originally built in the 1960s. We have chosen to widen these trails to accommodate the new ski and snowboard equipment and techniques, which will improve the overall ski and ride experience,” Pecoraro explained.

For more information on the proposals and how to comment, go online or call Jonathan Cook-Fisher at (530) 543.2741.

Although the last day to ski at Heavenly is Easter, the resort will be open May 13-15 and May 28-30 for sightseeing and tubing. Summer operations begin June 7.

Delving into the mind of an alleged serial killer

By Jaclyn O’Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

Joseph Naso is a 77-year-old self-employed photographer whose life experiences – on the surface – don’t seem different from those of many other men.

After a 1950s stint in the U.S. Air Force, he married and soon became a father. Decades later, he divorced, but maintained a relationship with his former wife. During the past several years, he became caretaker to his extremely mentally ill middle-aged son, often lashing out against the system by making legal challenges regarding the son’s treatment. Naso

thought he could do better than health care workers, some whom he deemed incompetent and refused to let inside his home.

But Naso amassed a criminal history dating back to 1955 and seemed to have a fondness for women's underwear – including an arrest relating to the alleged theft of underwear in the 1990s from a department store, according to the San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News. and asking a female neighbor in Yuba City, Calif., if she was selling women's underwear at her garage sale, according to Sacramento News 10.

Neighbors in Lemmon Valley described Naso, who had dozens of addresses spanning the country throughout the last several decades, to news media as strange and mentioned the fences around his modest home, which allowed no view into his backyard.

And when dozens of law enforcement officers and forensics crews stormed Naso's home in April 2010, removing boxloads of his property, they felt their unease was validated.

On Tuesday, law enforcement accused him of being a serial killer who murdered women in crimes that, at least in three of the cases, can make him eligible for the death penalty if convicted, according to the Mercury News. Such special circumstances can include robbery, kidnapping or rape. The four women he is charged with killing had the same initial in their first and last names, which suggests some organization and planning. It also suggests the name alliterations could have been his calling card.

Read the whole story

Pedestrian hospitalized, driver arrested in Truckee

On April 17 at about 8:10pm, Truckee police officers personnel were dispatched to a report of a vehicle vs. pedestrian collision on Donner Pass Road in front of the Sunset Mobile Home Park at 11700 Donner Pass Road.

The injured man was transported to Tahoe Forest Hospital by ambulance and later to Renown Medical Center in Reno for treatment of serious injuries stemming from the accident.

The driver of the vehicle, Ronald Sosnowski age 60 of Coronado, was later arrested for reportedly driving under the influence of alcohol.

This accident is still under investigation. Anyone who witnessed this collision is asked to contact Sgt. Robert Womack at (530) 550.2335.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

$250,000 donation helps Truckee animal shelter with building plans

A married couple who wishes to be unnamed recently bolstered the Humane Society of Truckee-Tahoe's animal shelter campaign with a $250,000 donation.

The donation is the second $250,000 donation from an

individual or family foundation for the new shelter. To date, the organization has raised about one-half of its $3 million goal.

The current 1,000-square-foot kennel was built in 1998 as a temporary holding kennel for abandoned, seized, and rescued dogs and cats. Through a partnership with Truckee, HSTT houses a limited number of animals at the shelter, and many more dogs and cats are in volunteer foster homes.



Heavy snows during a recent storm caused the roof of the current kennel's office to collapse, leaving the building unusable until it can be repaired.

The current kennel can only accommodate about eight dogs and 30 cats, although at times, there are upward of 30 dogs and 80 cats in need of shelter. Such limited space can terrify animals, often causing aggression and fights among dogs and stress-induced illness in cats. The kennel also lacks adequate space to quarantine sick or injured animals, and because of its location in the Town Corporation Yard, it is only open to the public two hours per week for adoptions.

HSTT has partnered with Truckee to share the cost of construction and operation of a new shelter. Approximately 1.5 acres of land have been secured at no cost to HSTT. However, in order to maintain the agreement with the town, HSTT must raise i5w portion of the funds before starting construction. While the recent donations have helped, the economic downturn has made fundraising more difficult than originally anticipated, and the organization is looking to the local community to help make the shelter a reality.

The new shelter was designed to accommodate current and future needs by an architect who specializes in shelters and

veterinary hospitals. The facility will include real-life rooms for dogs and large, colony-style cat rooms, with perches, windows to the outside, and natural sunlight.

The building will include an education and training center, allowing HSTT to expand its humane education, dog training and pet assisted therapy programs. Open daily to the public, the new shelter will provide a convenient location for people to meet and adopt their future pets.

Forest Service to spruce up Meeks Bay property

By Susan Wood

With all the new, proposed development activity happening on the West Shore of Lake Tahoe, the Meeks Bay Resort is in line for a face lift starting this spring and going through fall.



The U.S. Forest Service is planning a number of improvements at Meeks Bay Resort.

Graphic/Provid
ed

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is proposing a project to remove power lines, retrofit utility equipment, stabilize the slope with vegetation and make irrigation improvements – among them, the creation of water basins used to collect runoff. Massive stormwater runoff makes indentations where it channels into the lake. These best management practices – essentially known as erosion control methods – will use $250,000 under the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.

The U.S. Forest Service owns the lands and the buildings at the resort, while the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada operates the seasonal venue under a permit with the federal government.

Even with the Forest Service managing 75 percent of the land around Lake Tahoe, the federal agency still recognizes the desire among user groups to have access to the lake.

“Lakefront access is a big role of the Forest Service,” said LTBMU Landscape Architect Ashley Sommer, who’s spearheaded the project.

The project also calls for installing about 200 feet of paved road to make the lake more accessible to users. The cabins Meeks Bay Resort rents out will become more accessible with walkways that resemble the work the agency has done at the Nevada Beach Campground.

“In the total picture, the contribution to our facilities is important as we’re able to go in and upgrade,” LTBMU spokeswoman Cheva Heck said.

This prime property comes with a history, too. The Kehlet House – which is rented out mostly in the summer – is eligible for the National Registry of Historic Places. The two-story home with seven bedrooms was the living quarters of the Kehlet

family, who originally owned and ran Meeks Bay Resort.

There is a concern improvements come at a price.

Ed Porras, the general manager hired by the tribe to run the resort, expressed a little concern the work would flow into their peak summer season and be disruptive.

“Our initial feeling is (the planning) is a little last-minute. But through a series of meetings, we’ve made it quite clear – repeatedly – that this is not a light situation because we’re concerned about the financial impact,” Porras said.

A more acceptable time line for the tribe and the resort management was finalized that involved spring and fall, and Porras hopes that time line is honored.

The work is intended to be completed by 2012.

“When it’s over it will be a plus. The improvements should be nice, and we look forward to the Forest Service work,” he said.

Porras characterized the resort’s business as “resilient,” adding last year’s sales and bookings were the best since 2003 – even in this tough economy.

“With the economy, I think people are finding value for their vacation dollar. Instead of spending $25,000 to go to Europe. They can come to Tahoe for $3,000,” he said.

UK betting company buys Cal Neva sportsbook

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

William Hill PLC, a land-based bookmaker and online betting company in the United Kingdom, announced Thursday it is acquiring Northern Nevada-based Club Cal Neva Satellite Race and Sportsbook Division and Southern Nevada-based American Wagering Inc., in a $39 million deal.

The deal will give William Hill its first presence in the United States and a strong foothold in the Nevada sports betting market.

The acquisition will add Cal Neva's 31 sports book locations and American Wagering's 77 sites, which operate in Nevada as Leroy's, to William Hill's large sports betting portfolio.

William Hill first approached American Wagering in late November after deciding to look at land-based gaming in the U.S. about nine months ago. American Wagering established its Leroy's brand in 1978, and its technology is licensed by big casino operators such as MGM Resorts, Boyd Gaming and Wynn. Cal Neva, meanwhile, decided to approach William Hill in January.

The CEOs of Cal Neva and American Wagering welcomed the acquisition, citing William Hill's wider range of betting products as a good way to increase bettor interest. These include William Hill's expertise in what's called "in-running" betting, which allows bettors to wager on events or matches that are still in progress.

Read the whole story