Lawyer: Garrido to plead guilty Thursday

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee



Accused kidnapper Phillip Garrido is expected to plead guilty Thursday to the 1991 abduction of 11-year-old Jaycee Lee Dugard in a bid to show compassion for Dugard as well as his wife, Nancy, one of the lawyers in the case told The Bee today.

Stephen Tapson, Nancy Garrido's attorney, said this afternoon that a deal was reached last week that calls for Phillip Garrido to enter a guilty plea and spend the rest of his life in prison. However, Tapson said he expects Nancy Garrido to face trial unless El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson agrees to a compromise that might allow Nancy Garrido to be released from prison in 30 years or so.

Neither Pierson nor Phillip Garrido's public defender, Susan Gellman, could be reached immediately today.

But Tapson said Phillip Garrido's expected guilty plea will allow Dugard to avoid testifying against the man who kept her captive for 18 years and whose sexual assaults of her resulted in two daughters being born in captivity.

He also said Garrido was showing mercy to his wife by agreeing to plead and showing that "the major evil person is out of the way."

Phillip Garrido's lawyer has conceded there is no way her 60-year-old client can ever hope to win release from custody. But Tapson holds out hope that Nancy Garrido, 55, may be able to win a deal that could see her walk free in 30 years. Tapson said prosecutors originally offered Nancy Garrido a 40-year

deal and that he was told the Dugard family did not object to that. But prosecutors later upped the offer to 184 years, he said, adding that it made no sense for him to accept an offer like that rather than go to trial.

Tapson said he still is hoping for an offer “within reason to avoid the tribulations of a trial at great cost to the taxpayers.”

The Garridos are accused of snatching Dugard off the street outside her South Lake Tahoe-area home as she was walking off to a school bus stop.

Nancy Garrido is believed to have been the one who dragged Dugard into the car. The couple is accused of taking Dugard to their Antioch home and keeping her captive in tents in the backyard and locked sheds until she was rescued in August 2009.

Both suspects admitted to their involvement in recent interviews with detectives, including one with Nancy Garrido that Dugard watched, Tapson has said.

Phillip Garrido, a convicted kidnapper and rapist, was on parole at the time of the kidnapping. Jaycee Dugard won a $20 million settlement from the state of California over parole agents’ failure to detect her presence at the Garrido house for years.

Dugard, who is now living in seclusion in Northern California and writing a book, has yet to speak publicly about her ordeal.

Her mother, Terry Probyn, filed a civil suit against the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation seeking special and general damages for negligence, failure to discharge mandatory duties, negligent hiring and training and infliction of emotional distress.

The suit, filed March 22 in Sacramento Superior Court, accuses the department of “egregious conduct” that caused Probyn to suffer “severe emotional distress learning of the torture and abuse her daughter endured while a captor of Garrido’s and trying to re-establish the relationship lost over all those years.”

Lake Tahoe League founding member dies

By Steve Timko, Reno Gazette-Journal

Fritzi Huntington of Glenbrook was remembered as a powerful, long-time advocate to protect Lake Tahoe and a friend of the environment in general. Huntington died March 10, 11 days after her 90th birthday.

“She loved Lake Tahoe and everyone who loved Lake Tahoe loved her,” said Rochelle Nason, executive director of The League to Save Lake Tahoe. “She was a delightful, kind, charming and generous person who made a great impression on everyone around her.”

Huntington was a founding member of The League to Save Lake Tahoe in the 1960s, Nason said, and served as its president from 1984 to 1986 and from 1987 to 1988. Forming the league also led to the creation of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Huntington was a member of the Lake Tahoe Area Council, which preceded the TRPA.

Read the whole story

Incline Village woman arrested after firing at man

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Washoe County Sheriff's deputies arrested an Incline Village woman after she allegedly fired a gun at a man she was arguing with at her home.

Michele Maher, 45, remains in the Washoe County Jail on charges of assault with a deadly weapon, discharging a firearm where a person is endangered, and possession of a firearm while under the influence of alcohol. Her bail was set at $6,890.

At around 9:40 pm Friday night, Maher was arguing with the man, 42, when he attempted to leave a residence on Crest Lane, Sheriff's spokesman Armando Avina said. Maher allegedly fired a shot from her .40 caliber Smith and Wesson at him, and then moved towards him as he hid behind a car, Avina said.

Maher and the male victim had both been drinking alcohol at the time of the argument, Avina said.

The two struggled for a bit before the gun went off again, hitting Maher in the left hand. When Sheriff's deputies arrived at the scene, she was bleeding heavily and was transported to Renown Regional Medical Center. The man did not suffer any injuries.

Neighbors who heard the shot told deputies that the bullet may have struck their home, and officers found a copper bullet from the dry wall of the couple's bathroom, Avina said.

Anyone with additional information is encouraged to contact

the Detectives Division at (775) 328.3320 or remain anonymous by calling Secret Witness at (775) 322.4900.

Highway 89 reopens amid caution

By Susan Wood

With Highway 89 reopening Monday evening at Emerald Bay near Eagle Falls after an avalanche buried a vehicle a few days before, at least one area resident would not be fooling when she says she won't be driving it.



An avalanche at Emerald Bay on Highway 89 buries Karrie Kunich's vehicle.

Karrie Kunich of Markleeville recounted with *Lake Tahoe News* the scare of her life on Friday afternoon – April Fool's Day, when the snow tumbled onto the major thoroughfare between the Vikingsholm turnout and Inspiration Point.

When all was done, a 60-foot wide, 10-foot high wall of snow

buried her sedan, allowing a very small space for her to escape on the driver's side. She recalled traveling southbound on 89 at 1:18pm and becoming annoyed at a motorist in front of her driving about 20mph because she had an appointment.

"All of sudden he sped up," she said Monday.

He beat the slide, but it was a whiteout in front of her. She slammed on the brakes, and the sound that roared over her car became increasingly louder. Her windshield shattered, and the vehicle stopped. There was snow everywhere.

"I was terrified. I thought I was going to be crushed," she said. "I literally said to myself when it stopped: 'I didn't die.'"

The rescue crew had to cut her out of her seatbelt. Emerald Bay Towing responded – a company her husband John Baker runs.

A devastating thought crossed her mind that her 4-year-old son usually sits where much of the snow landed.

"He wouldn't have made it," she said, her voice quivering.

A few bruises and scratches later, along with much soreness, she admitted to having a little stress related to driving – especially in winter. And, she has no intentions of driving on Highway 89.



The car has to be dug out on the passenger side by rescue

crews.

“I’d like to see that road closed all winter. It’s dangerous. I may be the minority here, but (opening it) isn’t worth somebody’s life,” she said.

The winter storms have kept the avalanche danger reports fluctuating between extreme to considerable, where it now sits. But more snow is expected in the forecast later this week.

“If we get a certain amount of snow then we’ll have to watch it,” Caltrans South Lake Tahoe Supervisor Bill Netto said Monday evening.

A Caltrans crew conducted a long assessment of the snowslide area on Monday afternoon to ensure no movement may occur.

S. Tahoe man launches website targeting vacation rentals

By Natalie Armstrong, Reuters

BOULDER, Colo. – Trying to make some extra money during the recession, Michael Joseph decided to rent his South Lake Tahoe vacation property. After being frustrated by the online options available to him, Joseph designed his own rental booking website.

“If an owner wants to maximize their exposure by advertising on lots of different travel sites, they have to build a separate ad on each site which takes 30 to 45 minutes and costs between $100 and $700 a year,” said Joseph, who founded

Boulder, Colorado-based Vacation Rental Partner (www.vacationrentalpartner.com) in 2009. “Most of these vacation rental owners don’t have the time to build these ads much less research which of the sites will actually give them a good return on their investment.”

Joseph said his company targets owners already renting their properties online, but who want to make more money and save time. He hopes to lure owners using vacation rental management companies, which take anywhere from 30 percent to 50 percent of the owners’ revenues.

Read the whole story

New manager for CalPERS fund

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

CalPERS replaced another outside investment partner Friday.

The pension fund said it’s switching management of a $570 million real estate portfolio to Canyon Capital Realty Advisors, a prominent Los Angeles firm. The portfolio, which includes office, industrial and apartment properties, has been managed by Deutsche Bank subsidiary RREEF.

Although the California Public Employees’ Retirement System announced the switch in a news release, spokesman Wayne Davis said the move hasn’t been finalized.

CalPERS didn’t say why it’s making the switch. Canyon and RREEF declined comment.

The pension fund has been overhauling its battered real estate portfolio. In February it formally adopted a more cautious

investment strategy. And it has dumped several big outside partners in the past 18 months, including prestigious firms like Blackrock and LaSalle Investment Management.

“We have confidence in Canyon and expect excellent management,” said Ted Eliopoulos, CalPERS’ senior investment officer for real estate, in the news release. The portfolio includes properties in California, Florida and Illinois.

RREEF will continue to manage a portfolio for Cal-PERS called CalWest. That’s a small collection of industrial properties that, ironically, RREEF was hired to manage in one of CalPERS’ investment shuffles last December.

Canyon manages and has developed billions of dollars worth of property. One of its assets is the Cal Neva Resort at Lake Tahoe. Once owned by Frank Sinatra, it was taken over by Canyon two years ago in a foreclosure proceeding.

A Canyon affiliate invests in urban real estate projects with basketball legend Magic Johnson.

Heavy snow prompts gas leak concerns

By Barbara Barte-Osborn, Sacramento Bee

Some Placer County communities atop Donner Summit and on Lake Tahoe’s west shore are beginning to experience gas leaks caused by heavy snow, as some Truckee-area neighbors did earlier this month.

Robert Miller, a Placer public information officer, reported about half a dozen leaks, caused by snow covering propane

tanks.

Propane gas becomes liquid when cold enough and can travel through snow and/or under houses, where it can explode if it meets an ignition source, Miller said.

That fact is keeping workers from using snowplows, which could trigger a spark, to reach the tanks and shut them off.

Read the whole story

Snowslide blocks Highway 89 at Emerald Bay

Updated as of 9:10am

Highway 89 remained closed Saturday due to a snowslide 10 feet high and 60 feet wide that covered the major thoroughfare at Emerald Bay, California Highway Patrol reported.

The mound of snow was reported to have fallen onto the road between Vikingsholm and Inspiration Point just south of Eagle Falls Friday afternoon, leaving one area motorist's vehicle traveling southbound buried in the snow on the right side of her vehicle and a clear reminder of this winter's avalanche danger. The Markleeville resident escaped on the driver's side.

CHP Sgt. Dan Lopez said Caltrans has cleared the road but will be evaluating the stability of the area before the road is reopened.

"They just don't want another one to happen," Lopez said.

Motorists are advised to take the East Shore alternative on Highway 28 around Lake Tahoe.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

‘Tis the season for roadwork

The California Department of Transportation announced a slew of projects aimed at road repair for El Dorado County and the Lake Tahoe Basin – including the major Highway 50 improvement planned at Echo Summit.

Projects will be going on highways 50, 267 and 28 through next week.

Highlighted is the following roadwork:

– Highway 50 (El Dorado County) Echo Summit: Work is scheduled to begin between late April and May on a $1.9 million project to reconstruct rock wall barriers and replace drainage on U.S Highway 50 near the Echo Summit. The project is funded in part by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). Visit Caltrans website www.Way2Tahoe.com featuring alternate routes motorists can use during the temporary full closure. Project is currently in winter suspension.

– Highway 28(Placer County) in Kings Beach: Work continues on a $46 million environmental improvement project to reconstruct drainage facilities and improve the road surface. Completion is expected in the fall of 2011. Project is currently in winter suspension.

Engineer claims facts about Lake Tahoe are wrong

By Linda Fine Conaboy

Author, professional speaker, civil and environmental engineer and self-proclaimed myth buster, David Antonucci says he just wants to set the record straight about, as he puts it, the widely repeated fibs, fakes and falsehoods surrounding Lake Tahoe.

In a recent interview with *Lake Tahoe News*, Antonucci said, “We spend hundreds of millions of dollars protecting Lake Tahoe and heavily regulate the built environment. We should as least have our basic facts about Lake Tahoe correct.”

And what, you ask, are these falsehoods? According to excerpts from his blog, Antonucci states that instead of 72 miles of shoreline, the lake is really 75.1 miles in circumference. The distance from north to south is in actuality 21.2 miles instead of the purported 22, and the width is 11.9 miles, which is close to the often-quoted 12 miles.



Facts about Lake Tahoe are being questioned.

What initially generated his suspicions was the frequently cited 72 miles of shoreline.

“I knew it could not be true because the encircling highways total 71.8 miles and the highways shortcut the major points jutting out into Lake Tahoe.”

He said he used his knowledge of Lake Tahoe, going back to his studies in environmental engineering at graduate school in 1972, to judge whether a fact seemed reasonable or not.

“I did my project for my master’s degree on Lake Tahoe water pollution control facilities,” he said. “These corrected scientific facts are based on my professional opinion as a civil and environmental engineer with a total of 37-years experience, including 36 at Lake Tahoe.”

Antonucci said he measured the length, width and circumference himself using U.S. Geological Service mapping.

“I got the shoreline length from the TRPA Shorezone Plan – they measured it directly – and I compared that to the USGS mapping for agreement. I spoke with UC Davis Lake Tahoe researchers on various issues. Most of my information comes directly or indirectly from research performed by UC Davis and others.”

Antonucci said he compared the cited facts to various credible sources and used his professional judgment to determine the truth for himself using his skills as an engineer.

“The initial problem was inexperienced people who went to various sources such as the book ‘Saga of Lake Tahoe’, but they got wrong information,” he said. “It got much worse with the advent of the Internet because people with no science or media training and no critical thinking skills were doing websites. They simply lifted the wrong information from another website and then mindlessly repeated the misinformation with reckless unrestraint over a modern-day digital path paved with laziness, naivety and fallacy.”

Not only is Antonucci at odds with the lake’s dimensions, he

also takes aim at the reasons for its astonishing palette of blue and green. We all know Lake Tahoe is a mirror, reflecting the ebbs and flows of the sky, right? Wrong. While it is widely believed that the lake’s brilliant colors are a result of the sky’s reflection on the water, Antonucci says not so.



“We spend hundreds of millions of dollars protecting Lake Tahoe and heavily regulate the built environment. We should as least have our

basic facts about Lake Tahoe correct.”

– David Antonucci

“The blue color is from the backscatter of blue light that penetrates the lake and overwhelms any reflection that may be occurring,” Antonucci said. “However, when the sun angle is flat and obscured by clouds, the lake surface can reflect the sky. I have seen orange and pink reflections, but the important point is that the famous blue color is not from the blue sky but from backscatter of blue light.”

Heather Segale, education and outreach director for UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center located on the Incline Village campus of Sierra Nevada College said the dimensions of the lake may be splitting hairs, but she agreed with Antonucci about the color, which she said has everything to with the important matter of Lake Tahoe’s clarity.

“There is definitely a bunch of stuff out there that’s not true,” she said. “Some of the sites that have wrong facts are various chambers of commerce and the USGS has some incorrect

info too.

“The most important fact that is incorrect is the explanation why the lake is blue,” Segale said. “It has to do with clarity, sediment and the algae in the water. Because there’s so much emphasis on keeping Tahoe blue, people need to understand it’s a function of the clarity and not the reflection of the sky. Otherwise all lakes would be blue like the sky, and they’re not.”

Unlike Segale, though, there are those who may not be as passionate about setting the facts straight as Antonucci.

Lake Tahoe weather historian, author and professional speaker, Mark McLaughlin said he thinks Antonucci may be too concerned about fairly minor matters, although he has not looked into the assertions and said he can’t comment on their veracity.

McLaughlin has his own bucket list of incorrect facts, such as the claim that the region receives 300 days of sunshine a year or that Jacques Cousteau explored Tahoe in a submersible, perhaps both subjects of another article.

Jeff Cowan, community liaison for TRPA has known Antonucci for a number of years and said he holds him in high regard.

“I think David’s claim is a delightful addition to the lore and mystery of Lake Tahoe,” he said. “We would defer to the USGS and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the official dimensions, but I don’t think changing Tahoe’s measurements could ever change how awe-inspiring this place can be.”

Chiming in, too, is Cheva Heck, public affairs officer for the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. She says her agency uses USGS as its last word on matters pertaining to Lake Tahoe. When asked about the interpretative signs around the lake and what it would mean as far as changing them to reflect potentially incorrect information, Heck said should that happen the signs would be corrected as they’re due for

replacement.

“The signs are costly,” she said. “We’d want to be sure of the official numbers, but we’d change the numbers on the signs as they’re replaced.”

With a plethora of credentials to his credit (Antonucci has undergraduate and graduate degrees from Cal Poly and Oregon State; is qualified as an expert on Lake Tahoe water quality in various courts in Nevada and California; spent several years on the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Board; served as the general manager and chief engineer of the Tahoe City Public Utility District, and more), he sticks to his guns when it comes to setting the record straight about Lake Tahoe’s basic facts.

And he’s serious about getting the word out. He developed his website, www.tahoefacts.com, wrote a booklet about Lake Tahoe entitled “Natural World of Lake Tahoe”, hands out his Tahoe Facts summary sheet when and where he can and gives free lectures to local, nonprofit groups.

“I think most people agree (with me) when presented with all the facts and an understandable explanation,” he said. “Most people don’t have a strong scientific background, so they rely on experts to interpret and make it understandable.”

For now, Antonucci will continue his quest to officially make what he believes are necessary changes to correct the record.

“I’m a myth buster at heart,” he said. “I like to use science to solve mysteries and debunk myths.”