Police search Tahoe school on lockdown

School officials placed Tahoe Valley Elementary School on lockdown Monday afternoon when two students allegedly reported seeing a suspicious man carrying a gun on campus.

During their lunch break at about 12:30pm, children were gathered in their classrooms while South Lake Tahoe police searched the premises. Officers received assistance from California Highway Patrol and El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, police reported.

The lockdown lasted for 20 minutes.

No one matching the description was seen by officers. Accounts by the students varied, with the location of the spotting narrowed to the eastern fence line of the playground at the school located in the Tahoe Island neighborhood.

The man had been described as a while male adult in his 30s, wearing a green shirt, black pants and brown boots.

—Lake Tahoe News staff report

Cities, counties face more heat on paying pensions

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

The bill is coming due this year for local governments struggling to fulfill generous pension promises they made in

better economic times.

Starting July 1, most cities and counties in the Sacramento region will need to step up their contributions to the California Public Employees' Retirement System, which administers benefits for their 14,000 employees.

These cash-strapped local governments will see their combined contributions jump by $26 million to a total of $200 million, a Bee analysis shows.

That's money that won't go to other services – such as police protection, recreation programs and senior centers.

The increase won't stop at $26 million, either. Higher CalPERS contribution rates are being phased in over the next three years and will remain in place for 30 years.

Today's situation is the reverse of a decade ago, when rich investment returns had boosted CalPERS' portfolio by $68 billion in just three years. When the fund proposed a plan to sweeten state retirements, it encountered scant opposition. By the end of 2000, local governments began adopting similar enhancements.

Now, thanks to a stock market meltdown, a housing free fall and thousands of job losses, local and state politicians are rethinking the retirement benefits approved then.

The Little Hoover Commission, a bipartisan government watchdog agency, last month calculated that the 10 largest public pension plans in California faced a combined $240 billion shortfall in 2010.

More than a third of that shortfall belonged to CalPERS, the commission found.

CalPERS has cited its 24 percent investment loss in 2008-09 as largely responsible for the higher contributions rates it's now charging local member agencies, along with longer life

expectancies for retirees.

But some say that doesn’t tell the whole story.

In El Dorado County, Auditor-Controller Joe Harn criticized CalPERS for not recognizing in the late 1990s that the strong investment returns wouldn’t last forever.

“They gave reports to local agencies that you could increase retirement benefits and it will be very, very affordable,” Harn said. “When the market jumped dramatically, they gave (local governments) relief from contributions.”

Read the whole story

Animal Services fees going up in El Dorado County

El Dorado County Animal Services fees are going up beginning April 1.

The fee to adopt a small animal (such as a rabbit) remains the same at $15, cat adoption fees go from $75 to $80, and dog adoption fees increase $s0 to $120.

The Board of Supervisors approved the increases in February.

To license an altered dog the fee goes from $15 to $20 for a one-year license and from $35 to $50 for a three-year license.

Fees for kennel licenses were also raised substantially, as well as fines for not having a current dog license.

State law requires all dogs over the age of 4 months have proof of a current rabies vaccination and a county license.

The fee to license an unaltered dog was increased substantially, going from $35 to $100 per year.

Fees for animal kennel licenses, particularly commercial licenses, were also increased.

For additional information about Animal Services, or to see the complete list of fee increases, go online.

Bay Area snowboarder found dead at Sierra-at-Tahoe

A 22-year-old San Jose snowboarder was found dead Sunday at 11:50am in a tree well covered in several inches of snow off a perimeter run at Sierra-at-Tahoe ski resort, the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department reported that afternoon.

The county Search and Rescue team went searching for the snowboarder Saturday evening and through the night after learning he turned up missing while riding with his brother and friends in the area of the Upper Powderhorn Trail in the West Bowl area of the resort. The popular run is flanked by clusters of trees on the outer reaches of the resort.

At least 60 searchers using snowshoes, skis, snowmobiles and a snow cat to aid in the search. The incident represented one in back-to-back Lake Tahoe region searches of snowboarders in which the other built an igloo to survive overnight near Waterhouse Peak and was found alive.

Accounts considered Walker to be an intermediate snowboarder. A preliminary investigation suggests Walker impacted the tree, but it hasn't been determined if the impact or the winter

weather caused his death. And, the wind chill Monday will bring the temperature down to 16 degrees, according to the Weather Channel.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Body found at LTCC identified

Updated as of 8:10pm March 29

By Susan Wood

Results from an autopsy of the 36-year-old Lake Tahoe Community College student found dead Friday afternoon in the Commons area could take weeks, the El Dorado County Sheriff's coroner's office reported Tuesday.

A toxicology report was ordered for the woman identified as Beverly Elizabeth Barday.

Barday was found slumped in a chair at the college. The cause of death is still unknown. but at this point authorities doubt foul play.

When discovered unresponsive at about 1pm, campus officials called 911, and a South Lake Tahoe Fire Department crew tried to revive the South Shore woman to no avail. She was pronounced dead at 1:20pm Friday.

Avalanche danger heightens in Sierra

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Avalanche danger goes up when snow falls down as heavily as it has in the Sierra this week.

Two snow slides involving people have been reported to the Sierra Avalanche Center since Tuesday.

One slide, during Thursday's big storm, carried enough snow to push a Subaru in motion across Highway 89 near Squaw Valley, according to the center's website.

No one was injured in that incident. A skier was partially buried by an avalanche near Mount Rose in Nevada on Tuesday, suffering chest and face injuries.

Up to 150 inches of new snow have fallen over the last week, with 45 inches falling in one 24-hour period at Squaw Valley.

The National Weather Service in Reno forecast up to 18 additional inches to fall at higher elevations in the Tahoe basin today.

Read the whole story

Alpen Sierra closes up shop

After 20 years near Stateline, Alpen Sierra Coffee Co. is closing up its retail operation.

Its last day is this Sunday, closing the door at 6pm.

Alpen Sierra has positioned itself as a signature South Lake Tahoe business, with a coffee roasting company based in the Carson Valley.

The economics and desire to downsize with the goal of focusing on its core product of wholesale coffee contributed to the business decision, a worker confirmed.

About 10 employees who work at the retail shop on Lake Tahoe Boulevard near the Village Center will be out of a job.

—Lake Tahoe News staff report

Geraldine Ferraro dies

By Elaine Woo, Los Angeles Times

Geraldine A. Ferraro, the savvy New York Democrat who was embraced as a symbol of women's equality in 1984 when she became the first woman nominated for vice president by a major party, died Saturday at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. She was 75.

The cause was complications from multiple myeloma, her family said.

Ferraro was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an incurable form of blood cancer, in 1998. She did not disclose her illness publicly until 2001, when she went on NBC-TV's "Today" show and said she had beaten the cancer into remission with thalidomide, the once-banned drug that had proven effective with some end-stage cancers. The cancer recurred, but she again went into remission after therapy with a new drug.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County pot grower denied parole over shootings

By Sacramento Bee

An El Dorado County marijuana grower who was convicted of the attempted murders of his brother-in-law and his nephew has lost his bid for a parole, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office said.

A state Parole Board panel ruled Tuesday that Silvestre Gonzalez, now 49, could not apply for another parole for 10 years, said Deputy District Attorney Jamie Verwayen, who appeared at the hearing on behalf of the DA's Office and the victims' family.

The victims had innocently wandered near Silvestre Gonzalez' pot grow and a guard shot them.

Gonzalez was convicted of two counts of attempted murder. He was sentenced to two consecutive life terms, plus an additional year for each term, The Bee reported.

Read the whole story

South Shore Biz Expo rolls on

despite storms

By Laurie Brazil

STATELINE – Blowing wind and a week filled with snowstorms couldn't keep the Lake Tahoe community from showing their support for the 2011 Business Expo Friday night.

This year's event, which was entitled "Pedal to Prosperity," was designed to tie in to the Amgen Tour – the nationally acclaimed bike event scheduled here in May.

At the MontBleu convention center, 72 booths represented businesses, ski resorts, government agencies, restaurants, and several local nonprofit groups. Although most vendors were located locally or in neighboring cities, a few came from as far away as Sacramento.

The ballroom was abuzz with a lot of chatting, laughter, remote interviews on radio or TV, but the most activity centered around those places that had food or drink to share. A popular trend was to gather many of the freebies that were offered to promote the various groups featured at the booths.

Some attendees bid on the silent auction items or entered in several of the evening's drawings. A few lucky folks walked away with a custom designed necklace and rode away with a beautiful beach cruiser.

The prevailing attitude was that this year's event, coordinated by the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, was not only instructional, but also provided many chances to socialize and sample delicious food.