UNR research leads to AIDS treatment

By Michael Martinez, Reno Gazette-Journal

He has been doggedly pursuing the mysteries of a single organism, one that causes deadly fungal meningitis, since he was an undergraduate at the University of Iowa in the 1960s.

But the research by microbiology professor Tom Kozel of the University of Nevada, Reno has earned a satisfying dividend: a new, rapid blood test that could lead to early diagnosis and potentially save the lives of thousands of people stricken with fungal meningitis, a leading cause of AIDS-related deaths in developing countries that is close going to market.

“It’s great when something you do helps people,” Kozel said Wednesday after walking visitors through his lab in the Center for Molecular Medicine.

He discussed the antibody that would make testing people in emerging countries, where there are limited medical facilities, more practical.

Normally it takes a spinal tap to extract fluid and lab analysis to detect fungal meningitis or cryptococcus.

Read the whole story

Study: California needs to

manage water for today

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

A new report released Wednesday on California's well-recognized water management problems might be most noteworthy for what it does not include.

The report by the Public Policy Institute of California, "Managing California's Water," does not suggest deep water conservation on farms.

It also does not presume that all of the state's native fishes can be saved. Or that all its aquatic habitats should be restored to some pre-settlement ideal.

Rather, the report's theme is "reconciliation," which the authors define as managing California's water resources to benefit the environment and the economy of today.

"We have to keep in mind, we don't have a natural system left in California," said Peter Moyle, one of the co-authors and a fisheries professor at UC Davis. "We need to build a system that works as well for people as it does for fish."

The authors propose a shift from managing water and habitats based on the needs of a single endangered species to one that preserves whole ecosystems. They go so far as to suggest this may mean sacrificing some species for a greater good.

The 500-page report focuses on statewide water problems, but the eight authors acknowledge the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta remains at the heart of many issues.

Read the whole story

Caesars Entertainment quarterly net revenue declines

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Caesars Entertainment Corp. on Friday posted improved results for Las Vegas in the fourth quarter as gamblers returned to the Strip in bigger numbers.

While Caesars lost money companywide in the quarter – in part due to a slump in Atlantic City – net revenue in Las Vegas increased from 2009's fourth quarter thanks to the acquisition of Planet Hollywood and higher spending by visitors, despite flat or lower hotel room rates.



Harevey and Harrah's at Stateline saw revenue decline from the previous quarter. Photo/LTN file

Net revenue of $727 million in the Las Vegas market was up from $649 million in the year-earlier quarter.

This helped boost Caesars' profit from operations in Las Vegas

from $97 million in 2009’s fourth quarter to $101 million in the 2010 quarter. Same-store sales in Las Vegas increased 0.9 percent, Caesars said.

While hotel occupancy in Las Vegas remained above 90 percent, average daily room rates fell or were flat because of increases in the city’s room count, Caesars said.

Caesars’ Las Vegas properties are Bally’s Las Vegas, Bill’s Gamblin’ Hall & Saloon, Caesars Palace, Flamingo Las Vegas, Harrah’s Las Vegas, Imperial Palace, Paris Las Vegas, Planet Hollywood and the Rio.

Friday’s numbers indicate these properties are holding their own against intense competition from the likes of MGM Resorts International, Wynn Resorts, Las Vegas Sands and newly-opened competitor the Cosmopolitan.

Caesars’ properties in Laughlin, Reno and Lake Tahoe generated quarterly net revenue of $94 million, down from $102 million as visitation declined and guests spent less.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe attorney faces disciplinary action from State Bar

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe attorney Jordan Morgenstern faces disciplinary action from the California State Bar.

“We would not have gone forward with (the) matter if there was not evidence of misconduct. We do not go forward on speculation and conjecture,” Susan Kagan, deputy trial counsel for the State Bar, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Jordan Morgenstern

In the 12-page report, it details several instances where Morgenstern took money for work, held onto the money for months, didn’t do work and didn’t return money in a timely manner.

Common practice for an attorney is to set up a trust account for each client so money is not co-mingled.

In the December ruling, the State Bar Court of California recommended Morgenstern be on probation for two years. The state Supreme Court will have the final say, which usually takes four to six months after the Bar has made its decision.

According to Kagan, the Supreme Court rarely overturns the Bar’s ruling.

If the court rules to discipline Morgenstern, the probation would begin 30 days later.

“What I admitted to was not providing clients with accounting as quickly (as I should have),” Morgenstern said. He said he agreed to a settlement because “I didn’t want to continue to pay a lawyer and go through all the garbage they put you through.”

Morgenstern said the disciplinary action is not newsworthy.

However, Kagan with the State Bar said, “We get a large number of complaints every year. Only a small number get to investigation and then an even smaller number to discipline.”

In a terse conversation with *Lake Tahoe News*, Morgenstern repeatedly bad-mouthed one of the people who brought allegations against him.

“I’m filing a restraining order against her today for what she is doing,” Morgenstern said Feb. 24 of Brenda Rogers.

Morgenstern and Rogers told *Lake Tahoe News* they plan to sue each other. Neither had anything nice to say about the other.

Report: Early childhood education helps economy

By Michael Martinez, Reno Gazette-Journal

A report that outlines the economic value of early childhood education was unveiled this week by staff from the Children’s Cabinet and school district officials.

Mike Pomi, Children’s Cabinet executive director, and others from the nonprofit group were joined by Washoe County schools Superintendent Heath Morrison and school district Trustee Estela Gutierrez and Gov. Brian Sandoval at the governor’s mansion in Carson City.

The report attempts to describe how the early childhood education industry has become a significant component of Nevada’s economic infrastructure and helps drive the economy,

providing financial benefits in three primary ways.

Read the whole story

Educators grapple with necessity of mandated testing

By Kathryn Reed

Testing was going on this past week in many classrooms within Lake Tahoe Unified School District.

Nothing out of the ordinary about that.

And that is the problem for some educators. Testing seems to be more common than teaching.



Is education in the United States best defined as No Child Left Untested?

Politics is a large part of the problem. It's people in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento telling local school districts what to do. These people may not have been in a

classroom since they were a student.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater says the powers that be ask districts what they want or need, districts respond, and the politicians do something else.

If he were in charge of the state or federal Education Department for a day, Tarwater said his first priority would be to measure schools on growth and not against one another.

“I would set up a plan so every child would have one-on-one computing from third grade up. Assessment would only be for growth and how to support kids, and I would not compare them to other kids,” Tarwater said.

He would also eliminate the high school exit exam.

“They don’t do that in college – take one test to see if you get a degree,” Tarwater said.

Part of the problem is the federal No Child Left Behind, which is still in place even though President Obama has introduced Race to the Top to supersede his predecessor’s education policy. NCLB mandates all students – including special ed and English learners – be at a proficient level by 2014.

“There is definitely a level of frustration in having to move to that performance level,” said Sue O’Connor, English learner program coordinator for LTUSD. “We hear the federal government is moving to a growth model. We just haven’t seen it.”

LTUSD board President Wendy David would like the state and feds to give school districts more flexibility.

“I would like the pendulum to swing back so there is some choice for teachers and students,” David said. “Maybe the financial crisis will do that. Testing takes away from valuable learning time.”

Board discussions

Some teachers call it No Test Left Behind.

At the Dec. 14 school board meeting, Bijou Community School second-grade teacher Loreen Norberg read a holiday themed testimony about testing into the record. With her, she had a stack of material related to the myriad tests she gives – and this is to 7-year-olds.

“I don’t have time to teach children before the next assessment,” she told the board. “In my mind, what we are doing is backward. This testing is ridiculous.”

That night, David said, “Learning should be our most important focus.”

At the Feb. 2 board meeting, a discussion item was the movie “Race to Nowhere” that had been shown on the South Shore in January. The movie’s website describes it this way, “Featuring the heartbreaking stories of young people across the country who have been pushed to the brink, educators who are burned out and worried that students aren’t developing the skills they need, and parents who are trying to do what’s best for their kids, Race to Nowhere points to the silent epidemic in our schools: cheating has become commonplace, students have become disengaged, stress-related illness, depression and burnout are rampant, and young people arrive at college and the workplace unprepared and uninspired.”

One issue in the movie is the amount of homework students are required to do each night. LTUSD’s homework guidelines call for 10 minutes per grade level. This means a second-grader has 20 minutes and a senior two hours.

That’s the suggested minimum.

“I agree it sounds good, but there is no maximum,” board member Larry Green said. “So many times they are coming home with so much more.”

David relayed the story of a young man she worked with through CASA who had been accepted to the Naval Academy. He never made it to Annapolis. He shot himself. He left a note saying something to the effect of, “I can’t do this anymore.”

“In honor of him, I think we always need to be cognizant of that – and the need for counselors,” David said.

South Tahoe High School Principal Ivone Larson said homework is a unique concept to the United States. International students at her school are used to studying from a book.

She said the percentage of homework fluctuates from teacher to teacher.

Jodi Dayberry, second-grade teacher at Tahoe Valley Elementary School, told the board, “As you discuss homework changes, please include teachers. We are the ones responsible for assigning it. The second piece is assessment.”

She wants the district to look at what is mandated v. what the district has implemented when it comes to testing.

Kathy Haven, a former teacher and now ardent parent supporter at Bijou, said, “We need to create learners, critical thinkers and problem solvers. We need to teach parents more about what to do at home.”

She also stressed the need for teaching more through hands-on learning and less through worksheets.

“If something should be changed, I think it should be teacher driven,” board member Sue Novasel said.

Novasel said she had to intervene in her children’s education at South Tahoe High because they were getting burned out with all the advanced placement courses they were taking. Those classes require a specific test from the private AP company. So many colleges require those classes for a student to be accepted.

Inside the classroom

This past week it was the Blueprint testing that was going on. It's a test to gauge how the students will do on the state mandated two-weeks worth of tests in May. The district has been doing this for five years.

"It's required by the state as monitoring of student learning; to see what they need extra work on," Tarwater said.

But this means students are being tested on something they may not have learned for a test that is three months from now.

Because LTUSD is labeled a program improvement school under No Child Left Behind, this is another round of testing the feds require.

Five out of six LTUSD schools are Title 1 – meaning at least 35 percent of the school population qualifies for a free or reduced lunch. Title 1 status means more federal dollars. But LTUSD isn't even allowed to say no to these dollars and therefore try to get out of NCLB.

Bijou first-grade teacher Susan Earnest calls Race to the Top "No Child Left Behind Lite" – adding, "It again is punitive rather than based on success. I do think testing is helpful. I just don't think it is being used correctly. It's labeling staff and schools as failures."

For Dayberry at TVES, she is frustrated that one test can have so much impact on a child's life, the fate of a district, the money that comes with a test score.

"We are putting labels on kids," Dayberry said.

Earnest believes the quick fix mentality in Washington is not allowing for systemic changes to occur that will bring the United States' level of education up to that of other countries.

Gene Matteucci, fourth grade teacher at Tahoe Valley, said, “It’s frustrating to be told (what to do) by legislators who have never been in the classroom. They know very little how a classroom operates and what kids need. They don’t ask me what works.”

He has 32 students, no classroom aide. He doesn’t have time to give individualized attention when there about 320 minutes in the day.

Much of the testing requires Scantrons – those cards with bubbles to fill in.

Tarwater believes Scantrons are on their way out and testing on computers will be the norm. The district is moving toward having most students have a netbook. He believes testing using tools students are used to will engage them more. It also could provide for more accurate answers and no bubble designs. At the younger grades they don’t have the manual dexterity for Scantrons, but still must use them.

Melissa Bornstein has to administer a test to her second-graders at Bijou that requires them to circle about 150 bubbles. And this is a test to gauge how well they read.

“If they read to me, I know if they can read,” she said.

Bornstein knows testing is good to decipher how students are doing, “but I feel like we test too much. I would like to be teaching a little bit more.”

After teaching for 28 years, Bornstein believes she has a strong grasp on identifying students who are getting the material and those who are not.

Matteucci feels the same way.

“We don’t need the frequency of tests. When you are in the class you know what they know and don’t know,” Matteucci said.

Bornstein said, “If a child doesn’t get it, my options are limited. I have been told my goal is to get to the end of the pacing guide. But, personally, I want to teach them.”

Pacing guides are used to make sure students and teachers are where they should be along a time line set by people who don’t work at the school site.

All of this rigidity has also taken a lot of the personality out of the classroom so it’s difficult for the teacher to bring his or her twist to teaching that makes that room unique. It’s all about jumping when the district, state and feds say jump. Asking, “Why should I jump?” does not appear to be an option for teachers.

Dayberry, at TVES, said the problem is teachers are always feeling like they are playing catch-up.

It’s test, assess, reteach, retest and so on. But the learning part – the real learning, not the learning to take a test part, is what seems to be missing.

The four-times a year diagnostic testing the district requires is helpful to Earnest. It requires her to sit individually with each student for 30 to 60 minutes.

“It does take up a lot of instructional time, but the payoff is you can target instruction much more accurately so you don’t waste time teaching what they know. This way you are not shooting at the middle,” Earnest said.

But she admits if no aide is available to help during this time, she has had the rest of the class watch an instructional video.

“Nationally and statewide we need to look at how much time we are taking to administer tests,” Dayberry said.

Matteucci is also an advocate of diagnostic testing as well as a proponent for taking a holistic approach to each student.

“We give them language arts and math and if they don’t get it, we give them more language arts and math,” Matteucci said. He wants arts, music, science and history to be as important and not threatened to be eliminated because of budget cuts.

“Test scores are going up, but are kids really smarter?” Matteucci asks. “I want to instill a lifelong love of learning and that is more than filling in bubbles.”

Furthering the discussion

Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village this academic year has been putting on a series called Discussions in Education. The third presentation will be March 3 from 7-9pm in rooms 139/141 of the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences at SNC.

Learning in the 21st Century is the topic next week. Educators and researchers will share insights into the necessary changes needed in the United States’ education system. A video from Sir Ken Robinson and Daniel Pink will also be shown.

Commission recommends rolling back state pensions

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

California’s state and local governments should roll back pensions for existing employees, dump guaranteed retirement payouts and put more of the burden for pension benefits on workers, a bipartisan watchdog commission said Thursday.

Any attempt to reduce pensions for current workers would prompt a legal battle royal. Still, the 12-member Little Hoover Commission concluded that government pension funds are

in such dire financial straits that they'll never right themselves without cutting into benefits for those working now. The proposal wouldn't affect benefits drawn by current retirees.

"This is one of the toughest issues that we've taken on," said Chairman Daniel Hancock shortly before the commission unanimously approved the 100-page report and its recommendations.

Sacramento politicians had anticipated the moment. While Democrat Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed a mix of taxes and cuts to close the state's estimated $26.6 billion deficit, his budget doesn't explicitly address pension changes, which would anger unions and would not save money immediately.

Republicans have criticized that as a glaring oversight. Senate Republican leader Bob Dutton of Rancho Cucamonga has said his caucus would offer some pension-reform ideas once the commission released its report.

Read the whole story

Homewood ski area proposals divide W. Shore community

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Art Chapman is a man who knows what he wants. What he wants is to turn Homewood Mountain Resort into a profitable year-round destination.

What locals want is a mixed bag. Thirty-three people spoke at a public hearing Feb. 23 before the Tahoe Regional Planning

Agency. It was split between those who want the West Shore community to stay as it is and those who want it revitalized; with a few in the middle.

The 2,000-page draft environmental impact statement and environmental impact report for the resort are out for public comment. At Wednesday's meeting it was revealed this period has been extended to a total of 90 days, with the cutoff being April 21.

Six alternatives are proposed. One is to close the ski resort if the figures don't pencil out to make a profit.

Chapman is president and chairman of JMA Ventures, the San Francisco company that bought Homewood in summer 2006. At that time the 1,400-acre resort with 1,260 skiable acres was losing money under the ownership of pistachio farmer Jeff Yurosek. Chapman said he planned to turn the ledger black.



JMA President Art Chapman wants to turn Homewood into a viable ski resort. Photo/Kathryn Reed

He hasn't.

Homewood, Chapman told the Governing Board, has lost nearly $5 million from 2006 to 2009. An auditor has not verified the

negative 2010 figures so he is not releasing those.

To make a profit, the resort needs to attract an average of 700 skiers a day during the week. That would be an increase of 400 a day, Chapman said.

JMA wants to build 99 residential units, a 75-room hotel, have underground parking for lodging and a parking structure for day use, replace two lifts – one with a gondola, and build a mid-mountain day lodge.

Talking one-on-one with *Lake Tahoe News*, Chapman said the project could start in 2013, would be completed in two phases over five years, would require one season of limited skiing, and would provide 180 year-round jobs.

He anticipates full-time residents occupying the housing units.

The 15,000-square-feet of retail would include a deli, ice cream parlor and hardware store. Chapman said that is what residents requested. The day lodge will come with a pool for the community. Opening the mountain to hiking and improving the bike trail in the area are also on the table.

What concerns many who spoke in opposition to the development is the size of the project and how it may change the look and feel of this area on Highway 89 that is nearly right on Lake Tahoe. Many also don't believe the stats provided about air quality and how vehicle miles traveled will be reduced. Concern about the height of the structures was also brought up. Creating light pollution in an area that provides unobstructed views to the Milky Way was another concern.

After the public had its say, the Governing Board echoed some of those concerns and asked for answers. (Board member Claire Fortier, who represents South Lake Tahoe, left before hearing public comment because of a commitment she said she had before being appointed to the TRPA board.)



Developers want the proposed amphitheater to be the permanent home to the Lake Tahoe Music Festival.

Board member Casey Beyer was perplexed by how the TRPA measures height.

Executive Director Joanne Marchetta replied, “The way we measure height we compare apples to televisions. There is great room for misunderstanding.”

The controversy is when a structure is built on a slope. Instead of measuring from the foundation to the roof at each spot, height is essentially calculated by the lowest point to the highest point.

Board member Byron Sher carried forward the public’s concern about the amendments and code changes that would be required. His contention is codes need to be changed and then the project brought to the board.

Colleague Nancy McDermid told him that isn’t possible. She learned this in her four years on the Douglas County Planning Commission. She said it’s impossible to know what building codes will be in 10 years, so the rules need to continue to be tweaked to keep up with the times.

Marchetta explained this property straddles three plan area statements that are “old and disjointed.”

“A lot of the amendments are to address inconsistencies made 2½ decades ago when we didn’t know what this ski area would be,” Marchetta said.

Friends of the West Shore is a group opposed to the development. The organization is conducting a survey to see what people have to say about the developer’s plan.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe sent a press release Feb. 18 stating its opposition as well as having a representative speak Wednesday.

Amanda Royal, spokeswoman for the League, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting that ended at 4:35pm, it’s possible some project at Homewood would work, but not this one. She said the League’s focus is on making sure the thresholds TRPA is mandated to uphold are not violated.

Even though economics was a common theme throughout the day, Royal said that is not a threshold and therefore is not a concern of the League’s.

The League’s release said, “In the past several years, the TRPA has changed course dramatically to a piecemeal approach to planning at Tahoe. Projects are negotiated on a case-by-case basis. The process is clearly flawed as it has produced several projects that have received stunning exceptions to Tahoe’s rules. Each irresponsible project sets the stage for more irresponsible projects down the road, creating an unpredictable system that overall endangers Tahoe’s unique ecological values.”

Board member Shelly Aldean seemed to pick up on this sentiment when she asked whether staff had looked at other projects in the works or was this an isolated analysis.

The answer by TRPA staff was they look at funded and unfunded projects.

“I would think then the improvement at Fanny Bridge should have been included,” Aldean said.

The bridge in Tahoe City is a choke point for traffic. However, seismic and other concerns require it to be replaced, which will also come with realignment. None of this is in the environmental documents.

A copy of the draft EIS/EIR is available on the TRPA’s website.

Census: Douglas Country grows 13.9% in 10 years

The U.S. Census Bureau today released population totals and demographic characteristics about Nevada.

The five most populous incorporated places and their 2010 Census counts are: Las Vegas, 583,756; Henderson, 257,729; Reno, 225,221; North Las Vegas, 216,961; and Sparks, 90,264.

Las Vegas grew by 22 percent since the 2000 Census. Henderson grew by 47 percent, Reno grew by 24.8 percent, North Las Vegas grew by 87.9 percent, and Sparks grew by 36.1 percent.

The largest county is Clark, with a population of 1,951,269. Its population grew by 41.8 percent since 2000. The other counties in the top five include Washoe, with a population of 421,407 (increase of 24.1 percent); Lyon, 51,980 (increase of 50.7 percent); Elko, 48,818 (increase of 7.8 percent); and Douglas, 46,997 (increase of 13.9 percent).

Countersuing ADA litigator pays off for one business

Publisher's note: ***Scott Johnson has been making the rounds in South Lake Tahoe, too.***

By Nicole Banks, North Sac News

"I almost fell out of my chair."

That's the response Johnnie Walker had after learning the judge's verdict.

Those legal costs were the result of one letter. That letter was from Scott Johnson, an ADA litigator from Carmichael. Johnson's letters have appeared on doorsteps throughout the state from restaurants to dentist offices to gas stations. The notice states that the business must become compliant with various changes to disabled signage and parking as required by the American's with Disabilities Act. It gives notice to alter the property and/or to settle with Johnson monetarily. For businesses unaware of the guidelines, it is a shock; some of whom risk shutting down for the cost of paying thousands of dollars in fees or construction for the proper wheelchair slopes, redesigning of the interior of a location and parking expansions.

For Johnnie Walker, it meant he was getting sued. He manages the property at 6500 Watt Ave., but wasn't the one to receive the letter. It was his tenant, operators of a massage therapy office.

"I'd never seen the guy before in my life. Neither had the people leasing my property. In court he had no receipts, no

proof he came to the business. First I thought it was a joke or something. But it turns out this guy wanted a lot of money.”

He found out what Johnson was doing was neither a joke nor illegal.

Read the whole story