Surge in annual use at Reno-Tahoe airport

By Bob Brundage, Reno Gazette-Journal

More than 3.8 million passengers and 113 million pounds of cargo went through Reno-Tahoe International Airport in 2010, an increase in both categories over 2009.

The report from the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority shows annual growth of 1.8 percent for passengers and a 10.4 percent increase in cargo.



Travelers pick up their luggage from Reno-Tahoe airport. Photo/LTN file

In 2009, 3.76 million passengers and 102 million pounds of cargo flew into the airport.

“The numbers tell a story of the airport’s commitment to the community,” said Krys Bart, airport authority president/CEO. “The airport plays a vital role in this region’s economy and we are doing all we can to add flights, cargo and business to our community.”

In the third quarter of 2010, Reno-Tahoe International was

named by the Air Transport Association as the No. 1 airport in the nation for adding commercial flights lost during the recession. The airport added 17 flights.

Read the whole story

Investment banker accused of fraud; Holly's Place survives

By Jessie Marchesseau

"I don't know what to say. It just really, really, really hurt a lot," Holly Eimer, owner of Holly's Place, said of her experience with former financial planner Lori Zoval.

Zoval is the South Lake Tahoe resident indicted last July on charges of wire fraud. The charges stem from an investment fraud scheme allegedly enacted by Zoval while working as an investment banker in Folsom. However, Eimer said she was also swindled out of hundreds of thousands of dollars by Zoval.

Sitting in the common area known as the Rainbow Room at Holly's Place, Eimer describes how Zoval became a trusted friend and colleague who nearly cost her this business. Holly's Place is a dog-friendly vacation retreat in South Lake Tahoe. The pet-friendly sanctuary sits on more than an acre in the center of town and consists of four studio units, one cabin and the Rainbow Room which was formerly a barn. The community kitchen, flickering wood stove, casual sofas and ping pong table within make the Rainbow Room a cozy place for guests to hang out, and, of course, dogs are always welcome.



Holly Eimer of South Tahoe is trying to be recover after being swindeled out of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

“I don’t care about making money,” Eimer said. “I just want people to love this place as much as I do.”

This sunny outlook may be what has kept Eimer and Holly’s Place going after losing three cabins to foreclosure, dealing with a tax nightmare and watching her nonprofit, Tahoe Helping Hands, go belly-up. She estimates that hiring Zoval cost her nearly half a million dollars.

Eimer met Zoval through the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce in 2006. She says she was impressed right from the start and soon hired Zoval as her financial planner. By the end of the year, Eimer had hired Zoval on fulltime to run Tahoe Helping Hands, an organization she set up to make the retreat wheelchair accessible.

“I remember feeling like she might really be interested in my idea,” Eimer said, “because my idea has been, for the last 10 years, making this place wheelchair accessible for people like myself.”

Eimer was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1989, and though she is not in a wheelchair now, she knows she might be someday. For Eimer, the disease has affected her cognitive abilities more so than her physical abilities, something she suspects may have made her an easy target.

“I wanted to help people,” she said. “I wanted to help people because I know what it’s like to have MS.”

Eimer said Zoval convinced her to refinance three of her properties and opened numerous credit card accounts under the name Tahoe Helping Hands. She said Zoval then used the credit cards extensively on trips, hotels and a lavish lifestyle, leaving Eimer with thousands of dollars in unpaid credit card bills.

Zoval was in charge of the overall financials of Tahoe Helping Hands for nearly two years. Then in October 2008, Zoval went on a business trip to San Diego and never returned.

Eimer said she considered Zoval a friend, and had even allowed Zoval to live on the property with her son and boyfriend while she was employed there. However, after Zoval left, Eimer discovered bills, loans, mortgages and taxes had not been paid, and she was facing foreclosure.

Having founded Holly’s Place more than 20 years ago, tears well in Eimer’s eyes as she talks about losing three of her cabins. Her dream of a retreat for people with disabilities is all but gone now. And after what has happened, at 61, Eimer is ready to start slowing down.

“It’s time to downsize and time to rest,” she said, “and I just hope I can financially make it.”

Eimer was more than willing to provide financial documents to the FBI last summer for use in the case against Zoval. Eimer said she does not want Zoval to do this to anyone else.

Zoval pleaded not guilty at the initial hearing six months ago, but the case is still in the pre-trial stage. She is out on bond, and her lawyer, Mark Reichel, said she is “working hard to support her family through a tough time.”

At a hearing before the judge on Feb. 11, the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Sacramento reported a proposed plea agreement had been offered to Zoval. Details of the agreement have not been made public. Reichel requested a continuance until April 8 to further review the case and continue negotiations on the proposed plea agreement.

If Zoval pleads not guilty at the April 8 hearing, the case will be set for trial at that time. Reichel said he does not know how Zoval will plead.

High-tech reps say Nevada needs skilled workforce

By Guy Clifton, Reno Gazette-Journal

Industry leaders told Nevada policy makers the No. 1 challenge the state faces in luring high-tech business to the state is the lack of a trained and educated workforce.

Kevin Whitney of TechAmerica, an advocacy group that represents 1,200 high-tech companies across the country, said an hour-long discussion with state Legislative leaders and the governor’s office focused on issues the state faces in luring such companies to move to the state or expand existing businesses.

“Many of those issues centered around a lack of workforce

development and skills acquisitions that our companies require to relocate or expand our operations, here in the state of Nevada," Whitney said. "Oftentimes what you see is these companies come here to do a project and unfortunately have to import their workforce from other states."

Capgemeni, a tech firm working on the Nevada Business Portal and with the state department of employment and training, found those challenges firsthand, said company executive Kevin Doyle.

Read the whole story

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250 birds euthanized from cockfighting operation on West Slope

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado Animal Services has euthanized 250 birds after uncovering what appeared to be a large, illegal cockfighting operation in Garden Valley, El Dorado County officials said today.

The discovery began Sunday with a traffic stop in Diamond Springs, during which sheriff's deputies found two roosters with injuries consistent with fighting.

After finding slashing blades in the vehicle, deputies arrested Samuel Cuevas Ayala, 50, of Garden Valley and Rogelio Reyes-Higareda, 39, of Placerville on suspicion of conspiracy and possession of bird fighting equipment and a fighting game cock.

Read the whole story

CalPERS being investigated by feds

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

CalPERS officials acknowledged that federal prosecutors are conducting a criminal investigation into the bribery scandal afflicting the big California pension fund.

In a report to the CalPERS board, senior staff members wrote that “federal prosecutors in California” have sought millions of pages of documents and other information from the pension fund and the Washington lawyer who has been investigating the matter.

The existence of a criminal investigation was reported last spring by the Wall Street Journal, citing anonymous sources. The report from the CalPERS staff marks the first public acknowledgment of a criminal probe.

Last spring, then-Attorney General Jerry Brown sued former board member Alfred Villalobos and former CalPERS Chief Executive Fred Buenrostro. The lawsuit said Villalobos bribed Buenrostro and two others at CalPERS in order to steer billions in pension fund investments to his Wall Street clients.

Read the whole story

Tahoe-Reno entities collaborate to bring meetings to region

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nineteen area hotels, events centers and tourism agencies are pooling marketing resources to bring in corporate meeting planners for free in hopes of landing their business.

Dubbed "Come see. Fly free," the campaign will provide round-trip transportation, lodging, meals and a customized site inspection to one person per company planning a convention or other business meeting.

"This program will make the very important site-selection process much easier, affordable and comprehensive for meeting planners nationwide," said John Leinen, vice president of convention sales at the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority.

The RSCVA has committed $30,000 to the program, spokesman Ben McDonald said, but he did not divulge the total pool, saying it includes "proprietary" marketing money from co-op members, some of which are private businesses.

But if the outlay for a visit results in a meeting or convention booked, he said, then the host hotel will pay back the co-op, created several years ago, for the costs incurred.

Read the whole story

Tahoe-Reno Co-op Members

Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority

North Lake Tahoe Resort Association

Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority

Atlantis Casino Resort Spa

Circus Circus Reno

Eldorado Hotel-Casino

Grand Sierra Resort and Casino

Harrah’s Lake Tahoe

Harrah’s Reno

Hyatt Lake Tahoe

John Ascuaga’s Nugget

National Bowling Stadium

Peppermill Resort Casino Spa

Reno Ballroom

Reno Events Center

Reno-Sparks Convention Center

Reno-Sparks Livestock Events Center

Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe

Silver Legacy Resort Casino

California medical pot advocates call for statewide regulation

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Alarmed by a police backlash against pot dispensaries in some California cities, lawmakers and advocates for medical marijuana are calling for statewide regulation of medical cannabis stores and new laws to clarify rules under which they operate.

Additionally, some medical marijuana advocates are pushing lawmakers to consider regulations – similar to those in Colorado – that would permit medical marijuana providers to operate as for-profit businesses.

Currently, under California law, dispensaries providing medical marijuana must operate as nonprofit "collectives" of registered medical marijuana patients who reimburse dispensaries for the costs of providing medicinal pot.

But medical cannabis in California has boomed into an industry generating an estimated $1.3 billion in transactions and paying hundreds of millions of dollars in salaries, rent and overhead costs.

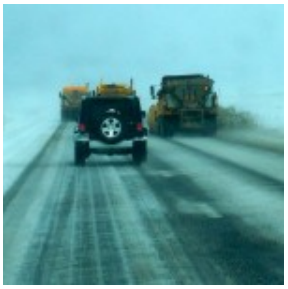
Read the whole story

Weather related traffic accidents keep NHP hopping

With falling and blowing snow throughout Northern Nevada earlier today, troopers from the Nevada Highway Patrol were kept busy by responding to several calls for service.

In a six-hour time frame between 4-10am, 19 motor vehicle accidents were investigated, 17 slides-offs or spin-outs were reported and the Department of Public Safety-Communications Center fielded 298 phone calls. The crashes and spin-outs outs were observed throughout the entire region of Northern Command. Only a couple of the accidents had injuries reported and those were either self-reported or only minor in nature, according to officers.

Speed too fast for conditions was the lead contributing factor in those events, Trooper Chuck Allen said.



Snowplows Feb. 16 along Highway 395 in the Washoe Valley. Photo/Provided

“With another band of winter-like weather forecasted for our region this week, motorists can greatly minimize the chance of an unplanned event by adjusting their driving habits and allowing more time to accomplish their commute,” Allen said in

a statement. “In an effort to maximize your visibility, remove all snow from the windshield, side mirrors, rear window both tail lights and rear license plate before starting your journey.”

Commuters who observe a stranded motorist or other roadway emergency are encouraged to dial *NHP from a cell phone so the closed trooper will be dispatched.

Truckee man gets 25 to life under 3 strikes law

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A Truckee man with a long criminal history, including manslaughter, has been sent to prison under the state’s “three-strikes” law.

Douglas Harold Doyle, 51, whose past crimes including an alcohol-related vehicular manslaughter conviction in which a Tahoe City schoolteacher was killed, was sent to prison for 25 years to life, according to a news release from the Placer County District Attorney’s Office.

He pleaded guilty to a charge of drunken driving and was sentenced Feb. 2 by Placer County Superior Court Judge Colleen Nichols.

Read the whole story

Fallen Leaf Lake contends with liquor, voter fraud issues

By Kathryn Reed

It may not be known for a while who will be operating the store at Fallen Leaf Lake, but it could be decided at the next board meeting if alcohol will be allowed to be consumed this summer.

Controversy swirled last summer that resulted in no alcohol being sold out of the store at the end of the South Shore lake. This is because some of the residents of the enclave believed sales of alcohol would create a dangerous scenario with potentially impaired people driving on the narrow, curvy road.



The politics of Fallen Leaf Lake are nowhere near as tranquil as the water. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In the past, the store operated with a liquor license much like a grocery store – no consumption on the premise. Rob and

Sandy Wirth, who had the concessionaire contract last season, wanted to get a license allowing people to drink beer or wine on site. Then the uproar started. Then they decided not to sell alcohol in any form.

There are those who contend the lack of liquor sales prevented the Wirths from making money. The Wirths have exercised their right to back out of the contract after one year. A settlement agreement has been tentatively reached, with the final details being worked out. Until it's completed, the document is not for public review.

The Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District is accepting applications until Feb. 28 from perspective concessionaires for the upcoming season.

At the March meeting it's likely an item for discussion and possible action regarding liquor licenses will be on the agenda.

At the board's Feb. 12 meeting, President Tom Bacchetti told those in attendance he has been told a handful of residents have hired an attorney to investigate voter fraud. This would affect most of the board members. Bacchetti said it was referred to the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, which in turn referred it to the Secretary of State's Office.

Shannan Velayas with the fraud division of the Secretary of State's Office told *Lake Tahoe News* her department cannot reveal if an investigation is going on, much like police don't disclose when an entity is being investigated.

Velayas said anytime sufficient evidence of wrongdoing is found, that material is handed over to law enforcement, such as a district attorney. The DA has the ability to prosecute people, not the Secretary of State's office.

At issue at Fallen Leaf Lake is who is allowed to vote in elections and who can be elected.