South Tahoe Ace store calls it quits

Ace Hardware on Lake Tahoe Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe closed today.

“We just can’t make it. We cannot afford to keep the store open,” said Neil, who answered the phone Monday afternoon, but would not give his last name.

He said the closure had nothing to do with the DIY store opening nearby last year. He said the closing was “a personal thing”.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Small business job creation grant will reach Lake Tahoe

By Darrell Smith, Sacramento Bee

Sacramento-area small-business development centers will receive more than $600,000, among the first in a wave of federal SBA grants to fund job creation programs, hire more small-business counselors and support microbusinesses across the country, the U.S. Small Business Administration has announced.

“It’s about jobs, jobs, jobs – creating these jobs,” said Panda Morgan, director of the Northeastern California Small Business Development Center’s Greater Sacramento office, which will receive $100,000 as part of the award.

“Who has the potential to hire? It’s small business. We survive on the well being of small businesses,” Morgan said.

In all, nearly $3.9 million is headed to small-business centers in Alaska, Idaho, Iowa, Michigan, South Carolina and here in Northern California – six initial awards that are part of $50 million in funding included in the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010 that was signed into law in September.

The $616,586 grant for the Northeastern California Small Business Development Center also includes funding for other centers in Butte, San Joaquin, Shasta and Yuba counties, which cover a territory stretching from the Oregon state line south to Stockton and east to Lake Tahoe.

Read the whole story

White stuff covers Tahoe; sun to return Monday

Updated Jan. 30 10am.

A winter weather advisory is in effect until 4pm today for the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee.

About 4 inches have fallen at lake level in South Lake Tahoe as of 7:30am, with it continuing to steadily come down.

The National Weather Service in Reno said the white stuff will taper off to showers by about noon.

The revised accumulation totals by the Weather Service are at lake level for 4 to 8 inches, with 8 to 12 inches above 7,000 feet, up to 16 inches along the Sierra crest. .

Check the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News* for road conditions.



The end of the month is much like the start of January -- snowy in Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The sun is expected to return Monday. However, the warm temps that hovered over the region for the better of January have given way to more normal mercury readings. Expect the highs for the week to be in the 30s in the Lake Tahoe Basin and lows in the teens.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Fallen Leaf Lake without a concessionaire

By Kathryn Reed

After what seemed to be an endless quest to figure out what to

do about a concessionaire for the marina and store at Fallen Leaf Lake, the Community Services District is back at square one.

“Right now we are negotiating the separation agreement,” Sandy Wirth told *Lake Tahoe News*. She and her husband, Rob, took over the operation last May. “It just didn’t work out. It was more than we bargained for.”



Fallen Leaf Lake needs someone to run the marina. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Tom Bacchetti, president of the Fallen Leaf Lake CSD board, said he hoped to have everything with the Wirths resolved by the Feb. 12 meeting in South Lake Tahoe.

“They did have a multi-year contract that allows them to withdraw after year one,” Bacchetti explained.

The district has sent out a request for interest. The RFI states the district is looking for people who have run a similar operation. Gary Gerren, who was brought on last year as chief of the volunteer fire department, is the point person for collecting proposals. He was made interim general manager when former interim General Manager Tom Barnes was let go.

Barnes is pursuing a wrongful termination lawsuit against the Fallen Leaf Lake CSD.

Gerren is not making any more money with the extra responsibilities.

Nevada addresses transportation concerns through social media

With funding for Nevada roads declining and double-digit unemployment rates, Nevadans have a chance to voice their transportation-related concerns and suggestions to Congress through the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' "I Told Congress About Transportation" social media campaign.

The national campaign uses Facebook, YouTube videos and written comments to help people share their ideas, concerns and videos with Congress to build awareness and support for greater investment in America's transportation jobs and systems. The campaign is supported by the Nevada Department of Transportation.

"Nevada's transportation system is facing a multibillion-dollar funding shortfall over coming years," Susan Martinovich, NDOT director and president of AASHTO, said in a press release. "That is money that won't be there to build new capacity and maintain the existing roads that each of us rely on and that support Nevada's economy. Just as important is an investment in jobs; jobs which produce a product that will benefit thousands of people for many years. With this campaign, Nevadans can let Congress know how important our roads are, and let Congress know that federal funding is needed to keep people working and to keep roads open and

operating.”

To see what has already been said or to make comments, Nevadans may log on here.

Water content in Sierra above average despite dry January

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – Despite January producing more sunny days than snowy ones, the water content at the top of Echo Summit is greater now than it was a month ago, but percentage-wise the average has dropped.

Department of Water Resource officials were at the junction of Highway 50 and the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe on Friday for the monthly snow survey. Results at this location show the snow depth is 56 inches, with 24 inches of water content. The water content is 125 percent above average.



Frank Gehrke measures the water content at Phillips Station Jan. 28 as Tina

Cannon Leahy records the figures. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In December, the figures were 55.9 inches for snow depth, 19 inches of water content, for a reading of 158 percent above normal.

“January was pretty much a non-event,” Frank Gehrke, chief of the California Cooperative Snow Survey Program, said of the precipitation. He said this is typical of La Nina years. What wasn’t normal was all the wet stuff in December.

The concern is if this weather pattern continues, it could mean depleted reservoirs downstream. The snowpack in the mountains provides for about one-third of the water for all California households, industry and farms.

In South Lake Tahoe, the average precipitation for January is 1.96 inches. As of Jan. 28, the National Weather Service in Reno had recorded 0.08 inches for January. That number is likely to increase with a storm blowing in Saturday that could linger until Monday morning. It is expected to bring 2 to 4 inches of snow at lake level and 4 to 8 inches at higher elevations.

What concerns Gehrke is if most of the remainder of the water year is below average for snowfall, it could mean a faster snowmelt. Already the above average temperatures are creating streams and puddling water that is not normal for January.

“As we move into spring, there is a lot more sun angle and increased snowmelt,” Gehrke explained on this bluebird day that had the mercury in the Sierra hitting 50-plus degrees. “(This is bad) because then we won’t have the water in the spring.”

Most of the major reservoirs in California have two purposes – storing water for use and flood control.

According to the Department of Water Resources, Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's principal reservoir, is 102 percent of average and at 67 percent of capacity; Lake Shasta, the federal Central Valley Project's largest reservoir, is at 112 percent of average and 76 percent of capacity.

"Virtually all the major reservoirs are releasing water. The releases are mandatory by federal law. It's based on the flood control diagram," Gehrke said.

Even with water being let out, users of the State Water Project are expected to receive 60 percent of what they've requested. In 2010 users were given 50 percent of allocations. The last 100 percent allocation year was 2006. That was the same year it continued snowing well into May even thought it, too, was a La Nina year.

"California weather is characterized by extremes," Gehrke said.

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	60.6 inches	28 inches	133
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	56 inches	24 inches	125
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	63.8 inches	28.4 inches	145
Tamarack Flat	6,500 feet	60 inches	24.4 inches	126

Source: Department of Water Resources

Media barred from Garrido competency trial jury selection

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

The El Dorado Superior Court in the Phillip Garrido kidnap case has closed jury selection in the upcoming mental competency trial to the media, a move that sparked objections from a lawyer for The Bee and other news organizations.

In a notice posted on the court's website late Thursday, the court said that "due to the limited number of seats available in the courtroom, the media will not be allowed in the courtroom during Jury selection" when Garrido's mental competency trial is set to begin Feb. 28. He and his wife, Nancy, are facing charges that they abducted 11-year-old Jaycee Lee Dugard in 1991 and held her captive for 18 years.

The ban on coverage of the process will continue "until a jury has been selected," the court website stated.

The notice prompted immediate objections from Karl Olson, a San Francisco-based attorney for The Bee and a statewide coalition of media organizations who has been working to open up sealed documents in the high-profile case.

The dispute comes amid preparations for a hearing in Placerville on Thursday that may determine whether Garrido's mental competency trial actually begins Feb. 28.

Read the whole story

Debate in Incline circles on merits of roundabout

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

One day four years ago, Donald Kanare was waiting in traffic where Mount Rose Highway bottoms out at Lake Tahoe's Nevada 28, "sucking exhaust," when he had an idea.

The Incline Village resident, a native of New England, thought the place might benefit from a roundabout intersection of the type common where he grew up.

"I thought to myself, 'why don't we have a roundabout here? It seems like a perfect location,'" said Kanare, 55.

He pushed for the project, and state transportation officials agreed. With significant backing by the north Tahoe community, the Nevada Department of Transportation is designing a $2 million roundabout, with construction of the high-priority project expected to commence the summer of 2012.

"This is a good fit," NDOT roadway engineer Nick Johnson said of the project, which will slow traffic, while also addressing dangerous turns onto Nevada 28 from an existing stop sign and the accidents that sometimes result. An added benefit will be a reduction in air pollution from vehicles idling at the intersection.

Roundabouts slow traffic but keep it moving and are effective in reducing accidents in areas with high traffic volumes, experts said.

Read the whole story

Citizen survey: South Tahoe functioning at subpar level

By Kathryn Reed

Although some would argue a survey did not need to be taken, South Lake Tahoe officials believe having current data in writing gives them the authority to make changes people want, instead of guessing what they want.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke took his own analysis in September about the city. The new council did the same in late December-early January. The public was sent a survey in December, with results released this month.

Everyone is on the same page – the natural environment is great, everything else needs improving. Less than half of the survey takers rated the direction of the city as good or excellent.

"Clearly, it's not a surprise," O'Rourke said of the entire survey. "Now we are developing a course of action to address those weaknesses and build upon the strengths. We'll develop tactics and performance measures. Ultimately we need to build the public's trust."

From all this data and analysis of it, the council on Tuesday came up with five goals to work on.

Facts about the citizen survey:

• 1,200 utility customers were mail the survey – so not just South Lake Tahoe residents, but people affected by decisions

the council makes;

• 390 surveys were returned, for a response rate of 35 percent;

• The National Citizen Survey compares South Lake Tahoe responses to about 500 jurisdictions elsewhere in the United States to provide a benchmark.

In the executive summary of the citizen survey it points out, “Of the 31 characteristics for which comparisons were available, three were above the national benchmark comparison, two were similar to the national benchmark comparison and 26 were below.”

South Lake Tahoe is dead last with its residents when compared against others in employment opportunity category. Ninety-four percent said “poor” on the survey.

Compared to the 2008 citizen survey, people today believe things in South Lake Tahoe have gotten worse when it comes to ease of traveling via bus, car, bike and foot.

One thing that has improved slightly between the years is people think traffic signal timing is better. Otherwise they are more disenfranchised with streets – the repair, cleaning, lighting, snow removal, and sidewalk maintenance.

Forty-eight percent believe housing costs are reasonable, 20 percent believe there is ample affordable quality housing, and 30 percent believe the variety of housing is adequate.

In two years, people’s sense of community has dropped four percentage points to 46 percent.

Consultant Mike Levinson was brought in to decipher the volume of paperwork in front of the five councilmembers Tuesday, which went beyond the survey, to bring perspective to the material, and help them set goals.

“You have enormous potential with your amenities, in particular your airport,” Levinson said. “Fourteen percent of your tourists you are attracting are from Southern California and they are driving eight to 12 hours.”

He believes commercial air service will double that percentage.

Levinson said with three-fifths of all tourists coming from California, “You should do more to promote within that market. You are not taking advantage of that.”

He also pointed out with 78 percent of the city’s budget devoted to salaries and benefits, the council is going to have to address it if the city is going to be solvent.

“If you take all the data, you can build a case for change. There is a lot of room for improvement,” Levinson told the council.

Truckee bookkeeper accused of embezzlement

Truckee resident Keri L. Campbell, 37, was arrested Jan. 26 on embezzlement charges.

Campbell is an independent contract bookkeeper for several businesses in the Truckee–Tahoe region. Campbell is alleged to have embezzled more than $80,000 from at least one business while employed as a part-time bookkeeper. Campbell was booked into the Nevada County Jail in Nevada City.

Truckee police are gathering additional information on this case and anyone who may have additional information is asked

to contact Detective Arnie Lopez at (530) 550.2336 or Detective Danny Renfrow at (530) 550-2339.