911 lines restored in Douglas County

Updated Dec. 8 5:18pm: Internet connection, landline telephone and cell phone, including 911, connectivity has been restored to most of Douglas County. There remain sporadic areas of landline coverage in the Jacks Valley area of north Douglas County that are not yet fully functional via landline telephone.

This morning at 11:13 a fiber optic cable was severed in the location of Heybourne Road north of Stephanie Lane, in the Johnson Lane area of Douglas County in the valley.

The line was mistakenly cut by contract crews working on a water line project in the area.

A widespread service outage resulted effecting telephone and cellular services, including 911 communications capability in all of Douglas County and parts of Lyon County, Carson City, and Alpine County.

Notices regarding this critical service outage were made using the Emergency Alert System.

Crews from Frontier Communications responded to the location of the severed cable and began to effect repairs at approximately 12:50pm Dec. 8. Work to restore primary communications impacting 911 services has been made a priority.

All East Fork and Tahoe Douglas Fire Stations were staffed with additional personnel, as the public was informed to go to the nearest fire station to report any emergencies. Additional law enforcement staff was summoned from the Douglas County Sheriff’s Office, and extra roving patrols were instituted.

Communications between critical infrastructure, such as medical facilities, schools, banks, and some industrial sites were maintained through radio communications or an available phone line which still allowed for direct access to Douglas County Communications. Douglas County Amateur Radio Team (DCART) also assisted with making communications connections with Lyon County and some local facilities.

As of this notice, crews are still working to effect repairs. Further updates will be provided as they occur.

McClintock in position to be chair of House water-power subcommittee

By Gus Thomson, Auburn Journal

The power shift in Congress has positioned Rep. Tom McClintock to take over as chairman of the House water and power subcommittee.

And that will also mean he'll be positioned to advocate for an Auburn dam.



Tom McClintock

McClintock, R-Roseville, has served as ranking Republican on the subcommittee of the House Natural Resources Committee since being chosen by committee Republican ranking member Doc Hastings in July 2009.

He’s made no secret before and after his initial election in 2008 to Congress that he’s a proponent of building the Auburn dam – a long-delayed project estimated to cost as much as $10 billion that his predecessor John Doolittle was unable to convince Congress to fund over his 18 years in office.

McClintock said that as ranking GOP member of the water and power subcommittee, he hopes to continue as chairman with the changeover to the Republican majority in the House next month. The decision rests with the Republican House conference steering committee, he said.

Read the whole story

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2 scam warnings from South Lake fire officials

By Marty Scheuerman

The South Lake Tahoe Fire Department has been alerted to two potentially costly scams from individuals fraudulently representing themselves as members of the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department or their Firefighters Association.



The first scam involves individuals representing themselves as Fire Department inspectors targeting commercial businesses. They enter the business and “perform” an inspection and send a bill for as much as $8,000 for this inspection. Only uniformed fire personnel with valid departmental identification can perform any fire inspections.

If you have any questions, call (530) 542.6160.

If you feel uneasy or suspicious, contact local law enforcement at 911.

If you receive a bill for fire inspections and it is not for the city of South Lake Tahoe, do not pay it, and bring it to the Fire Department headquarters during normal hours at 2101 Lake Tahoe Blvd.

The second scam involves phone solicitations from individuals claiming to be with the Lake Tahoe Firefighters Association. The association does not solicit funds in this manner. If you get these calls, do not give any private information. Get as much information from the caller as possible and relay all information to law enforcement or the Fire Department headquarters.

In the latest phone scam, the call sends a package via UPS and requests a COD check. Always be suspicious, contact the Fire department at (530) 542.6160.The association does conduct fundraisers for specific purposes and will be glad to provide proof requested.

If there is ever any questions, contact the Fire department at (530)542.6160.

Marty Scheuerman is a division chief with the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

Early wet season bodes well for water users downstream

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

What a difference a year makes for water supply. Battered by November storms, the growing Sierra Nevada snowpack and major reservoir storage haven’t looked this healthy in at least four years.

Only a year after experiencing an extended drought, the state is starting to prepare for possible flooding.

“The November storms have saturated the soils and streams are flowing again,” said state hydrology chief Jon Ericson, based in Sacramento. “It’s quite a start.”

But water experts know the season could turn dry very quickly. That would mean less water for east Valley farmers and probably additional water cutbacks for west-side growers who face limited water deliveries come rain or shine.

West-siders get water from Northern California rivers. The water must pass through the troubled Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where water pumping has been limited to protect dying fish. A wet year would boost their water supply, but even then farm officials still expect below 60 percent of contractual allotments.

Read the whole story

Vehicles leave significant traces in Washoe Meadow park

By Kathryn Reed

A tree-thinning project in Washoe Meadow State Park that left substantial tractor tracks in the meadow and surrounding area has been suspended for the winter.

Rich Adams, forester with California State Parks, visited the South Shore park Dec. 7 after being notified by park users about the perceived degradation of the area.

His written recommendations to his superior, senior environmental scientist Tamara Sasaki, are, “Do not attempt additional over snow operations on the meadow this season.



Deep ruts in Washoe Meadow park from a tree-thinning project. Photos/Provided

“Revisit and inspect the meadow after all the snow and ice has melted off to adequately determine the full extent of soil compaction that occurred during over snow tractor operations.

“After the winter season has ended, mitigate any and all areas

of soil compaction by lifting the compacted soil with hand tools such as fire rakes and shovels. The contractor has already agreed to perform this task. At least some handwork will be required, although it is impossible to determine the extent of handwork that will be required until the meadow is completely clear of snow and ice."

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency permitted the 12-acre fuels reduction project. Over the snow operations are supposed to be less harmful to soils in stream environment zones.

The area being logged is one-eighth of a mile east of Seneca Drive and east of North Upper Truckee Road.

Adams in his report said, "The tree harvester and the log forwarder, two pieces of rubber-tired logging equipment equipped with snow chains and steel tracks, were operated over snow from Amacker Ranch to the forest thinning area, over a large open meadow. Ruts in the snow pack were visually very obvious today [12/7/2010]."

The work was done Dec. 1 and Dec. 2. By Friday contractor Dave Mercer determined further operations could not continue because of the deteriorating snow conditions brought on by warmer weather and snowmelt.

Jeff Cowen, spokesman for TRPA, said his agency's forester, Megan Scheeline, visited the site Dec. 2 at which time she deemed the site looked fine.

Photos taken Dec. 4 that were sent to *Lake Tahoe News* are the same ones sent to Adams. He said the photos look worse than reality.

"Upon close inspection, the visible segments of meadow surface actually appeared almost entirely untouched. There was some localized evidence of at least some minor soil compaction, where the weight of the logging equipment left an impression a few inches below the surrounding soil level," Adams wrote.

“These compacted areas were isolated and for the most part, shovel digging of the snow and ice immediately next to the melted out snow ruts showed that the meadow surface below the melted out snow ruts was still at the same elevation as the surrounding meadow surface. Therefore the dramatic photos of melted out snow ruts within the shrinking snowpack do not necessarily show rutting in the underlying meadow surface.”

For now, the logs will remain stacked until the contractor can remove them after the snow is gone.

Ice time, cost pit customers against South Tahoe officials

Publisher’s note: ***This is the first of two stories about the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena.***

By Kathryn Reed

Some customers of the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena are getting a colder reception than the temperature inside the rink. And it’s uncomfortably icy in there.

“First and foremost we need to recognize the problems before we can address them. We can’t be in denial. I’m not,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke said. “From the number of people I’ve talked to I believe there is validity. There is some consistency in the issues raised. Some call it complaints. I call it customer feedback.”



Chris Hawken and Rob Swain talk about the ice rink. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The issues have been raised for years, but nothing has changed. Until now. Change has started with a new city manager and recreation director. (Stan Sherer starts in January, but will be in town Thursday to meet with some ice rink users who are dissatisfied with the customer service.)

Disagreements about ice time among the user groups and favoritism are some of the reasons for the discontent.

As with most ice rinks, there are three main groups using the ice – the public, hockey players and figure skaters.

A meeting Nov. 29 among nearly 40 stakeholders and three city officials has created a thawing of emotions.

“There is change coming. We perceive a huge light at the end of the tunnel,” said Joanie Malarchuk, a figure skating coach. “With regards to figure skating ice time, we don’t have consistent ice time year after year, month after month, day to day.”

Looking at the six-week calendar posted on the arena’s website proves her point. The freestyle listing is for figure skaters.

Inconsistency makes it difficult for Malarchuk and other coaches to grow the figure skating program when they can’t

tell clients what days/hours are available for training on a long-term basis.

Some users didn't want to speak to *Lake Tahoe News* for fear it would cause a setback in the progress being made.

Rob Swain, who runs the rink that opened in May 2002, says flexibility is needed to accommodate everyone.

Figure skaters need the ice at 23 degrees, while hockey players have it at 19 degrees. The former can shatter the ice with their skate tips if the ice is too cold.

In between user groups the $80,000 Zamboni makes the sheet usable again.

The rink has about 73 hours of programs a week out of a possible 168 hours. To have the rink open it requires at least one person at the desk and possibly a skate guard depending on the users.

Chris Cefalu, who is credited with keeping the A league hockey program going, is content with what is going on.

"There is no unhappiness. I think the rink cooperated with me," Cefalu said. He blames the economy for the dwindling number of hockey players and the desire to have fewer games.

Swain said with South Tahoe being the only rink in the region (Reno no longer has one) people travel more than an hour for this sheet of ice. This can present scheduling issues.

The ice rink costs $270/hour to rent. The December 2010 fee schedule says adult hockey leagues pay $260/hour. It costs a local resident $7.50 during public skate time. Figure skaters pay $12/hour.

"More transparency is causing some resentment because people want the same deal," Swain said.

Swain said hockey players want to renegotiate what they are paying. Swain, who is a hockey player and has kids in the sport, said hockey players are subsidizing the ice rink.

However, it is not unusual for various user groups at other ice rinks to pay different rates. What's unusual are the constant changes, and not sticking with a posted and department approved payment plan.

These types of rate fluctuations could be considered a gift of public funds – which is illegal.

Swain says it's just part of doing business – trying to appease users by making deals regarding rates.

But Swain, during a four-hour interview with *Lake Tahoe News* this week, admitted he has bent to pressure from different user groups to offer payment plans that have not remained consistent over time.

Looking for resolution



The South Tahoe ice rink is often not used, but still people argue about access.

Swain is defensive about what is going on at the rink. He is not thrilled someone outside the department was brought in to

handle disgruntled customers. But customers said their complaints were met with silence – not even an answer to why something could not change.

Nancy Kerry is the city employee tasked with devising a plan for the ice rink. Although her job as No. 2 in the Redevelopment and Housing Department might seem like an odd choice, it's her background as a former assistant city manager that gives her the skills for such a job.

"I needed a fresh approach. I was not satisfied with the institutional response," O'Rourke said. "She has been a very good facilitator."

Interim parks Director Chris Hawken, who did not get the top job, told *Lake Tahoe News* he is fine with having someone else take a look at what is going on at the rink.

"I see a downfall on our side is we need better communication," Hawken said. "Afterward, people said 'if we had known all that was going on, we wouldn't have had to come to the meeting.' We do listen to concerns."

He is referencing the Nov. 29 meeting facilitated by Kerry, with himself and Swain in attendance.

Hawken said ideas in recreation tend to be cyclical. He thinks that is part of what is going on at the 8-year-old facility.

O'Rourke and Kerry disagree because the complaints have been going on for years without resolution. Swain acknowledged stacks of emails have been presented to higher ups.

Kerry said her goals include creating consistent policies, a coaches' manual, and developing customer service directives for staff.

Garrido’s letters offer insight into suspect’s thinking

By CBS 13

SACRAMENTO – For the first time ever, a look inside the mind of a woman accused of kidnapping and raping Jaycee Dugard. These letters from Nancy come from a prison pen pal, a woman who she befriended at the El Dorado County Jail. That pen pal wanted Nancy’s story to be told.

At first glace, you’d never know these were words from a prisoner; A friendship that started in the El Dorado County Jail, and continues with Nancy Garrido’s pen pal serving a sentence in state prison.



Nancy Garrido

Nancy’s love for Phillip and God was a constant theme throughout her letters.

“Phillip sends me Bible studies that I truly enjoy and bring me closer to our God,” writes Nancy.

But, it’s clear Nancy knows she and Phillip will never reunite on this Earth.

Read the whole story

Vail Resorts post $43 mil. quarterly net loss

By Ed Sealover, Denver Business Journal

Vail Resorts Inc. (NYSE: MTN) Tuesday reported a net loss of $43 million in the fiscal quarter ending Oct. 31, but it raised its “Resort Reported EBITDA” guidance for the fiscal year to reflect its recent acquisition of a Lake Tahoe ski resort.

The Broomfield-based company typically loses money in the first quarter of each fiscal year, when its four Colorado and two California ski resorts are closed to winter sports, but it must continue paying administrative expenses to year-round employees.

The first-quarter loss for fiscal year 2011, which equalled $1.20 per diluted share, was greater than that of first quarter 2010, which was $41.2 million or $1.14 per diluted share.

On average, analysts had expected a quarterly loss of $1.10 a share, Thomson Reuters reported.

Read the whole story

Truckee residents skeptical of dam safety concerns

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

TRUCKEE – Amid dark clouds and wind, rain pummels the Sierra Nevada crest outside this quaint resort community. Near the airport, water begins to gush from the base of a big federal dam, undermining its foundation.

Then the earth shudders and the dam gives way, sending a giant wall of water hurtling down Martis Creek and the Truckee River Canyon. Pine trees snap like matchsticks. Bridges are blown out.

Downstream, Reno turns into an inland sea.

That is the nightmare scenario the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers described at a meeting here last week to discuss the Martis Creek Dam, which the agency calls one of the riskiest in America.

“Frankly, it’s not safe to operate in a normal manner,” said Matt Allen, leader of the corps’ dam safety study team.

Townspeople, though, responded warily, saying they fear the government is inflating the risk to build support for a new dam that would destroy large portions of picturesque Martis Valley.

Read the whole story

Ownership changes launch new era for Tahoe ski resorts

By Rob Sabo, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

The sale of Squaw Valley USA and the purchase of the management contract for Northstar-at-Tahoe represent a continued shift in the ownership and operating structure of major destination ski resorts.



The Lake Tahoe region has been the focus of much investor attention during the past few months, with larger corporations taking a hard look at potential returns from regional ski resorts, many of which have enjoyed a marked increase in annual skier visits.

In late November KSL Capital Partners of Denver purchased Squaw Valley for an undisclosed amount. The resort was founded in 1949 by the late Alex Cushing and owned by his wife, Nancy and a handful of investors.

And the management contract for Northstar, owned by CNL Lifestyle Properties and run by Booth Creek Ski Holdings, was purchased a month earlier by Vail Resorts of Broomfield, Colo. Vail Resorts also owns and operates Heavenly Mountain Resort at Stateline.

Both transactions represent a movement at big ski resorts away from smaller corporate ownership to larger, well-funded companies, says Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association.

Berry says the age of small families and corporations owning premier destination ski resorts – particularly in California – has all but ended as large and better-funded corporate entities capitalize on the earnings potential of resort

ownership. Corporations own virtually all of the premier resorts in California, Utah and Colorado, he says, primarily because increased lift ticket sales have led to higher revenues.

Read the whole story