LTUSD on snow day; DCSD, TTUSD, LTCC in session

By Kathryn Reed

It's a snow day for schools in Lake Tahoe Unified School District. It's a school day for students in Douglas County School District, Tahoe Truckee Unified School District and Lake Tahoe Community College.

The TACCD meeting for Monday has also been canceled.

Ron Christino told *Lake Tahoe News* at 5:45 this morning that all the roads look good, including the top of Kingsbury Grade. Christino is the bus guru at the lake for DCSD.



LTUSD buses won't be leaving the garage today. Photo/Kathryn Reed

He said NDOT has everything plowed on the highway and the Kingsbury General Improvement District has the side roads plowed.

"They do the school bus routes first thing in the morning and then they go to the other side streets," Christino said.

This is not the case with South Lake Tahoe plows on LTUSD

routes. *Lake Tahoe News* knows of at least one street on the bus route that often isn't plowed until after the buses have gone by.

It's a little windy and blowing snow at the top of the grade, Christino said. He is more worried about what Tuesday will bring. His sources tell him it will be 10 below zero, more snow and ice conditions on the roads when he starts his day.

DCSD is scheduled to be out for the Thanksgiving holiday Wednesday after a half day of classes. LTUSD is supposed to be out Tuesday after a half day.

Harrah's boss says gaming industry gets bad rap

By Amanda Finnegan, Las Vegas Sun

Harrah's Entertainment Chief Executive and President Gary Loveman said a major roadblock in the path of the growth of casino companies is misinformation about the industry.

Rather than talk about the industry's recovery, Loveman used his afternoon keynote address at the Global Gaming Expo Wednesday to campaign against the misconceptions that surround the casino industry. He made no mention of the Las Vegas-based operator's progress or future plans during his address.

"The vast majority of people cannot conveniently access our services, and that is a big problem. People who want to use our services have to get on an airplane, make an international trip or drive hours for something that we could provide," Loveman said.

“It should offend us every day that adults can’t entertain themselves in the way that they want to when they have access to so many other things.”

While products like fast food and liquor that are viewed as unhealthy are available almost everywhere in the U.S., casino companies only operate in 13 states, Loveman pointed out.

Read the whole story

Single digits, snow to continue

The National Weather Service in Reno has extended the winter weather advisory for the greater Lake Tahoe area until 10am Nov. 22. A winter storm watch has been issued from Monday evening through Tuesday afternoon.

Moderate snow is expected overnight Sunday. Meteorologists are calling for snow accumulations of 6 to 12 inches along and west of Highway 89 with 3 to 6 inches elsewhere.



Forecast -- Highway 89 about to be even whiter. Photo/Kathryn

Reed

Winds will be from the southwest at 15 to 25mph, with gusts to 40mph.

The storm Monday night could bring another 1 to 2 feet at lake level.

This is on top of the more than 2 feet of snow that has already fallen at the lake, multiple feet in the higher elevations, and inches in the Reno-valley areas.

Expect the roads to be nasty as temperatures dip – possibly as low as 5 degrees Sunday night in Reno. The forecast for South Lake Tahoe shows Tuesday's overnight low as zero. Although the sun will return Wednesday, the high is expected to be 21 degrees with an overnight low that night of 8 degrees.

– Kathryn Reed

Flights increase at LT Airport, hangar space goes unused

With 13 hangars at Lake Tahoe Airport vacant, this means $65,000 in revenues not being generated. Airport Director Sherry Miller is trying to find ways to fill those spots, likely with incentives. Details have not been worked out.



A report to the City Council this month from the Airport Commission shows traffic count year to date is up nearly 20 percent, while reports of noise level being higher than allowed is down 14 percent compared to 2009.

While CalStar and HeliTahoe say their numbers are slightly down from a year ago, the Lake Tahoe Flight School that opened in January 2009 is seeing its business increase.

To help with airport work an unpaid intern has been brought in to work on the updating the Airport Emergency Plan, Airport Certification Manual and clean up the archives.

– Kathryn Reed

Day without a Bag event spreads in SoCal

Publisher's note: ***The South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Commission is contemplating a Day without a Bag event.***

By Barbara Henry, North County Times

A city-sponsored Environmental Commission that has explored the idea of banning plastic bags in Encinitas hasn't achieved that goal yet, but reports growing success with its once-a-year, bag-free day.

"It gets bigger every year," commission Chairwoman Elizabeth Taylor told the City Council on Wednesday night.

In fact, the "Day Without a Bag" event, which occurs during

the holiday shopping season, has proved so popular that it's about to go countywide, she added.

The commission held its first plastic bag-free day in December 2008. During that event, about nine participating merchants handed out free, reusable bags and encouraged shoppers to keep using them in future store visits.

A year later, a dozen participating merchants handed out a total of 4,000 reusable bags.

This year's event is set for Dec. 16, and the commission expects to have 100 participating businesses from across the county, Taylor said.

Environmental organizations, including the Surfrider Foundation, have long sought a ban on plastic bags. They stress that such bags are hazardous to wildlife and a huge trash headache for communities.

However, the bag-ban movement faced some setbacks this year, Taylor and others said. A state proposal to ban single-use plastic bags made it partway through the legislative process but failed to win approval in the state Senate.

Read the whole story

TTD trying to get handle on BlueGo bus system

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – One day the short-range transit plan for the South Shore will be adopted and implemented.

Gordon Shaw of LSC Transportation Consultants gave yet another presentation on the plan that has been talked about for months. This time the Tahoe Transportation District board heard it. The board is expected to take action on it at the December meeting even though some of what is in the plan is already being implemented.



BlueGo buses operate under a fiscal cloud of uncertainty. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We have stopped the bleeding,” Shaw told the TTD board this month. “We have more money coming in than going out – not much.”

He spoke about what to do in 2011 –- which is in the plan STATA adopted and is being used now.

Shaw also gave two scenarios for what transit on the South Shore might look like in 2015. One was essentially the status quo if there is no economic recovery and the other considers financial improvements in the region.

The latter plan has a goal of bus service on Highway 50 every 10 minutes.

“This is what you see when you go to Park City,” Shaw said. “Then the ridership increases.”

He’d like to see trolley service on the East and West shores.

Shaw pointed out some stops don’t have benches and several don’t have shelters. He also suggested the participation agreements with the private entities be reviewed and made consistent. He’d like information provided in Spanish. He wants the fares to stay as they are, but do away with tokens and make the payment system simpler.

Carl Hasty, TTD executive director, added that opportunities his group has that bankrupt South Tahoe Area Transportation Authority didn’t have is by the time 2015 roles around waterborne transit could be integrated into the land transit as a connector.

He also said Caltrans has a signal plan for Highway 50, but about $3.5 million is needed. “That’s something the district could help with,” Hasty said.

According Hasty, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency hired Shaw to come up with the plan that was presented. But during presentations to the now defunct STATA board that distinction was not made clear. It appeared STATA had hired Shaw to do the transportation plan.

TRPA would be involved because it is the parent of the Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization. The TMPO, as it is called, is the transportation division of TRPA, according to its website.

It is through the TMPO that federal and state transportation dollars come. TRPA in turn hands it out to the appropriate entity.

One reason a private company could not run the entire bus operation is the feds and states want to give dollars to another government agency – which the TRPA is.

TTD can also be a conduit for money. This agency has been

around since the 1980s, though not always active.

In other transportation news:

• TRC Consultants, the firm hired by STATA to run the buses after MV Transportation was fired by the now-bankrupt STATA board, is using the name BlueGo Transit Management Inc. for its South Shore operation. The company is based in Florida.

The agreement for the company to operate BlueGo was ratified at the TTD meeting earlier this month. This was a formality now that the bankruptcy judge terminated the agreement TRC had with STATA. The TRC agreement is good through June 30, 2011.

Although the firm will be paid $23,460 per month, the source of TTD's income to make this happen has not been solidified.

South Lake Tahoe and Ridge Resorts have signed agreements.

Douglas County commissioners will discuss the matter at their Dec. 2 meeting.

Heavenly Mountain Resort and Lakeside Casino are close to signing, according to Hasty.

Negotiations are under way with Harveys, Harrah's and El Dorado County. The MontBleu contract is under review.

• All individual members of the former STATA board have been served papers in the lawsuit naming them as defendants in papers MV has filed. Nick Haven, a non-voting member representing TRPA, was not sued. His employer, though, was.

MV is going after the several million dollars it believes is owed to it from STATA. With STATA having few, if any, assets other than the more than $600,000 in a court ordered frozen bank account, MV believed its only recourse was to sue the individuals.

Schwarzenegger launches climate change group

By Margot Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Tuesday launched an international organization to tackle climate change with leaders from regional governments in Europe, South America, Africa, Asia and the United States.

The failure to achieve an international climate pact in Copenhagen last year left many people discouraged, Schwarzenegger said, addressing several hundred delegates to a "climate summit" at UC Davis. But now, he added, "The sub-nationals should do their work…. The green revolution is moving forward full speed ahead without the international agreement."

Despite Schwarzenegger's cheerleading, the signing ceremony for the Regions of Climate Action group, known as the R-20, had a lame-duck quality. Only one other U.S. governor, outgoing Democrat Jim Doyle of Wisconsin, was present for the signing in the half-empty auditorium; no provincial leader from China, Earth's largest carbon-emitter, agreed to join the effort.

Schwarzenegger officials had predicted that about 100 government leaders would sign the pact to cooperate on climate change; but in the 11 months since the governor first announced the initiative, only about 25 states and provinces have agreed to be part of the group. Besides Doyle, the group includes the governors of Michigan, Oregon and Washington.

Read the whole story

McClintock, Obama on same page with earmarks

By Rob Hotakainen, Sacramento Bee

WASHINGTON – Since joining Congress two years ago, Republican Rep. Tom McClintock has taken heat from Placer County officials for resisting earmarks, money that's used to pay for pet projects back home.

"There are a number of local officials who became addicted to earmarks," said McClintock, of Elk Grove, who represents California's 4th Congressional District.

"But if local officials of the community aren't willing to use local dollars for a local project, why should the taxpayers of some other community cough up the money?"

As he prepares to join the House majority when the new Congress convenes in January, McClintock now has an unlikely ally: President Barack Obama.

Read the whole story

Municipal trouble – all economics is local

By The Economist

America’s most sordid government scandal of the year was probably one that took place inside one of its tiniest governments: that of the city of Bell. Bell is really more of a blue-collar neighbourhood within the vast conurbation of Los Angeles than anything recognisable as a city. But the city elders, eight of whom are now awaiting trial, nonetheless paid themselves outrageous pensions and salaries—almost $800,000 a year in one case, about twice what Barack Obama makes—while fleecing residents in countless innovative ways.

Bell is a reminder that local government can cause big problems. There are roughly 90,000 local governments in America, mainly cities, counties and school and utilities districts. Together with the 50 state governments, they account for 15% of total employment. But whereas the private sector did most of its job-shedding early in the recession and is now slowly hiring again, state and local governments began lay-offs later and still have far to go. The National League of Cities thinks nearly 500,000 workers in local government will lose their jobs in the current and coming fiscal years.

The main revenue sources of local governments are sales and property taxes. Sales taxes dropped along with consumer spending and remain depressed. Property taxes only began falling some time after the housing bust, because the houses first had to be reassessed at their lower values. But now they are down for the foreseeable future. So are other local revenues, such as hotel fees, which depend on travel.

Read the whole story

Meyers Landfill takes twice as long to cap, closure remains

By Kathryn Reed

It will never look like a pristine forest, but one day the old Meyers Landfill site on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe could be a place worth visiting.

For now, though, it's completely off-limits.

With nearly a third more debris found at the site than anticipated, the closure to the area remains in effect until at least through 2011. This is because the construction associated with getting the cap on the old dump is not done. Part of the area will remain closed for three years. At that time the U.S. Forest Service, the landowner, will decide what to do for the long term.



Intact garbage found this summer at the old Meyers Landfill. Photos/Gail Bakker

This information will given out to a sparsely attended Nov. 18

meeting at the Forest Service headquarters in South Lake Tahoe. That same day an extension to the closure was signed by acting Forest Supervisor Eli Ilano.

The heavy equipment at the site has been removed, with the remaining pieces to be out by the end of the weekend.

About 107,000 cubic yards of waste was consolidated into one area.

“We found a lot of bottles, pieces of metal, clothes, pieces of carpet, chunks of concrete,” Gail Bakker, USFS engineer and project leader, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting.

Even readable newspaper remnants were found. And the area off Pioneer Trail near Elks Club Road has not been a dump since 1971. (It started as a landfill in 1947.)

This proves things don’t easily decompose, even with decades of rain and snow to help with the process.

Debris covering the South Tahoe Public Utility District line was removed so it can be accessed in the future. It won’t be covered by the cap. Soil samples were taken in that area – about 12 feet below the manhole. They turned up negative.

For now, a layer of soil covers the site. A French drain was also installed to collect subsurface drainage from neighboring slopes.

Next summer the black impermeable plastic cap will be installed.

“One reason we chose a thicker cap is because we knew people would be back there,” Dennis Geiser, engineer with the USFS regional office in Vallejo, said.

A drainage layer will be included, more soil and then native plant seedlings.

“We cannot allow deep-rooted plants because the liner is 3 feet from the surface,” Bakker said. If trees or shrubs sprout, they will be yanked out.

The entire disturbed area is more than 20 acres. However, the liner will cover 7 acres, with what’s called the plateau area encompassing another 4 acres.

There will always be restrictions on the use of site – no buildings, no wells.

What concerns Forest Service officials with snow on the ground is snowmobilers using the area during the temporary closure. A chain link fence is up around the inner most sensitive area, while the orange construction fencing is around the perimeter. More signs will go up soon.

But as the snow mounts that orange fence can disappear. Then, there are the people who don’t care and ride on through. Damaging the stormwater protection systems is the major concern, along with riders injuring themselves.

Law enforcement as well as forest protection officers will be in the area to educate people and cite violators when necessary.

Once the cap is in place, groundwater testing will be ongoing. The cap is designed to prevent further leaching of contaminants into the groundwater. Vinyl chloride is the main contaminant people are worried about. It is a breakdown component of solvents that had been dumped at the waste site.

If the cap is working, then the contaminated groundwater (there are no drinking wells are in the area) will dissipate. If it doesn’t work, this will be detected via the monitoring wells showing continued or increased levels of contaminants.

One plume is moving toward Saxon Creek, another toward Pioneer Trail.

With this being deemed a CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act) site per the Environmental Protection Agency, specific remediation measures had to be used. It took this long to begin construction of a cap because it took nearly 20 years and millions of dollars worth of litigation to reach a settlement earlier this year.

The original estimate on the design of the cap was $7 million, which includes $5 million for construction. With it taking another building season, that bill will come in higher. El Dorado County, which was the main defendant in the case because it operated the landfill, must also cover 100 years of operations and maintenance at the site.

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