Worst whopping cough outbreak since 1955

By Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times

Babies have been hardest hit by whooping cough in California, according to new statistics released by the state Department of Public Health.

All nine deaths so far this year have been among infants under 3 months old. Among patients who are critically ill with the disease, babies have also been disproportionately hospitalized.

According to the data released late Wednesday, of 196 patients known to have been hospitalized with whooping cough in California, 74% were infants under 6 months old and most – 57% – were under 3 months old.

Whooping cough is often spread to babies by parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents and other adults. Because infants do not begin vaccinations until they are 2 months old, health officials for months have been pleading for anyone who expects to be in contact with babies – especially pregnant women – to get vaccinated.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe houses get makeover

to remove lead paint

By Kathryn Reed

Despite red tape saying danger, and doors and windows all taped up, this house in the middle of South Lake Tahoe has not been condemned. The residents are still living in it.

It’s getting the ultimate exterior paint job. But it’s not the typical job for contractor Doug Bolton with Carpets Plus Color Tile. A whole lot more rules must be followed compared to most jobs.

This project off Al Tahoe Boulevard is the first of many the city will fund with the $1.5 million grant it received from the federal government to rid homes of lead.

One reason South Tahoe qualified for the grant is 85 percent of the homes were built before 1980, which means most are likely to have lead in either the exterior or interior paint.

For Julie Mullen, the lead is just on the outside and just on the siding. The eaves and trim don’t have lead, so they can’t be painted with grant dollars. The grant also allows for just one color. Mullen, at her expense, is having Bolton paint her eaves and trim a different color than the siding.

“It’s a little slow because of all the precautions,” Mullen said. “They want to make sure (the chips) don’t fly anywhere.”

Bolton has wrapped up the work on the house and is expecting the final clearance this week. He is going to bid on another job today and has three more of these painting contracts lined up.

He said he first heard about the lead paint rule in a trade publication even though the Environmental Protection Agency had it on the books since the 1990s. It’s the Obama administration that is enforcing the stringent requirements to

ensure houses with lead paint are secure and don’t have the dust flying everywhere.

When he started investigating about becoming certified, Bolton came across South Tahoe’s program and that is how he got involved. He agrees with Mullen that it takes more time because of all the precautions.

Mullen said the process to qualify to have work done went quickly. It was making the months worth of copies of documents that took the most time.

Age of the house and financial status of the residents are the big questions. Having children pushes people to the top of the list. (Lead paint poisoning causes learning disabilities and behavioral problems. It’s hard to get out of a person’s system.)

It’s the resident of the house who qualifies, not the owner. In this case, Mullen is the owner. She and her two children have lived there for 1.5 years, though she was born and raised in South Lake.

All potential houses are tested for lead with a $20,000 piece of equipment the grant paid for.

When Nancy Kerry, No. 2 person in the city’s Housing and Redevelopment department, applied for the grant she saw it as a way to give struggling contractors some work. Most of the jobs will be in the $5,000 to $10,000 range, but with people such as Mullen wanting more done the paycheck is even greater.

Other than the testing apparatus and paying for some classes out of town, the grant dollars are going into the local economy.

Ninety-three contractors took the special class to be certified to do the work. Seven of them took the advanced class to be a supervisor. The Environmental Protection Agency

requires a supervisor on each job.

The certificates earned by the people working on the Mullen house are posted on a board in her front yard. She doesn't mind.

"I hope people start to realize maybe they have lead in their houses too," Mullen said.

Kerry said the city's goal is to have 20 houses done by the end of the year. She expects 100 will be completed by the time the money runs out. It all must be done by 2013 based on the grant guidelines.

South Tahoe received a commendation letter from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for all of its accomplishments in the first year. Many grant recipients aren't close to having the first house worked on.

Kerry is going after an $800,000 Healthy Homes Grant that would eliminate mold, mildew and radon from South Tahoe homes.

For more information about the lead paint program, call Nancy Kerry at (530) 542.6043.

Judge: S. Tahoe's Lakeview Commons contract not valid

By Kathryn Reed

Lakeview Commons was dealt another blow Friday when a judge ruled the current contract is invalid.

What this means to the multi-million dollar overhaul of El

Dorado Beach and the walkway in the center of South Lake Tahoe remains to be seen. But it’s doubtful any work will resume until spring 2011 at the earliest.



Lakeview Commons' contract deemed invalid. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“The bottom line is we lost this (building season) to get after this project,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News* on Sept. 19.

In what has been a muddled contractual process since June between South Lake Tahoe and potential contractors is taking a court to unravel. On Sept. 17 El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey ruled the contract with Reeve Knight and the city is void and invalid.

Bailey scheduled a hearing for Oct. 1 at which time he is likely to rule on whether Clark & Sullivan, the Sparks firm that brought the case to court, should be awarded the bid or if the city should start the bid process all over.

“We are arguing only the City Council can award a bid and the court cannot order the city to award a contract to anyone,” City Attorney Patrick Enright said.

Clark & Sullivan challenged the awarding of the $4.5 million

bid after trees had been felled and excavating had begun. Bailey issued an injunction Aug. 30, which brought work to a halt. Reeve Knight's subcontractors shored up loose dirt that week, essentially winterizing the project.

The bid was awarded Aug. 3 on a 4-1 vote by the City Council. Councilman Jerry Birdwell voted no because he did not believe all the bid documents were done properly.

This item was originally on the consent agenda, but was pulled by one of the council members. The consent agenda is for items not requiring debate. Clearly, that wasn't the case for this subject.

Mayor Kathay Lovell has been a cheerleader for the project from the get-go. Now that it is mired in a court battle she is not returning calls.

Former City Manager Dave Jinkens was also a big proponent of the project. That is one reason why the contract was on the agenda at the last meeting he presided over, and why the groundbreaking on the project was the following day. His last day on the job was Aug. 6.

Enright believes if the judge throws the matter back into the council's hands, the current council should decide if Clark & Sullivan is immediately awarded the bid or if the process starts over. If it starts over, it's likely the council seated after the Nov. 2 election would vote on the next contractor. (Three new councilmembers will be elected.)

But it's also possible no matter what Bailey decides next month that Reeve Knight will appeal the decision, thus dragging out the dilemma even longer.

Reeve Knight has not been paid a dime for the work that has been done. With the contract being deemed illegal by the judge, Enright said California law states the company does not have to get paid. But he also said the contractor could make

an “equitable argument that they should get paid.”

Enright said the California Tahoe Conservancy grant that is funding the project is the likely source of payment for this and not city coffers even though the work was done without a valid contract in place.

It remains to be seen if any of the contractors will go after the city for legal expenses.

40,000 pot plants found near Markleeville

Marijuana plants with a street value of $30 million were uncovered south of Markleeville last week.

Alpine County sheriff’s officials believe the nearly 40,000 plants were part of a Mexican cartel grow.

U.S. Forest Service employees worked with deputies to rid the drainages and ridges of the plants.

Lack of state budget puts strain on individuals,

agencies

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

Without a state budget, California is relying on a patchwork of bank loans and personal credit lines to help sustain essential services around the state.

It isn’t the government borrowing the money directly, but the thousands of businesses that have supplied state operations, provided medical services and cared for children without reimbursement since July.

Many of state government’s business partners are used to the budget dance each summer: no budget, no payments. But as state leaders push the stalemate into record territory, contractors and care providers wonder how much longer they can last.

“I don’t even let my mind go there,” said Caroline Clausen, who borrowed more than $10,000 against her retirement account to keep Toddler Tech Preschool and Daycare open in Bakersfield. “I just try to take care of the day. I try not to give myself an ulcer.”

Read the whole story

Financial strife forces Amador County chamber to close its doors

By Matthew Hedger, Ledger Dispatch

The Amador County Chamber of Commerce has laid off all of its office personnel and contract help, including long-time Executive Director Jacqueline Lucido.

The announcement came late Wednesday from Acting Chamber President Mark Borchin, who said the decision to terminate three employees and one contractor was painful, but necessary, given the uncertain status of chamber finances.

A memorandum to the affected staff from the chamber's executive committee and obtained by the Ledger Dispatch reads, "Unfortunately, at this time, we do not have the funds to support our current budget and must reduce staff. Effective Sept. 15, 2010, we shall no longer require your services." The memo is signed by Borchin, Tom Blackman, Diane Gassaway, Sharon Lundgren and Kevin Blasingame.

After informing the staff of the decision, visibly shaken staff members began cleaning out their desks, as a locksmith worked on the front door of the chamber office in Jackson.

Read the whole story

Kirkwood solves short-term power issue, working on final

By Kathryn Reed

Electrical power at Kirkwood is a highly charged subject – and not an issue easily followed without an organizational chart.

This week PowerSecure, a company based in North Carolina that is the largest independent supplier of power in Northern California, was awarded the bid to supply power for the

Kirkwood Valley on an interim basis. Their Cummins diesel generators should be working in October.

“They will bring in their own equipment and operators. We have gone to an outsourcing solution that will significantly improve reliability (of power),” David Likins, CEO of Mountainsprings Kirkwood, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Construction of Kirkwood's powerhouse should be done by Nov. 1. Photo/Provided

Kirkwood’s electrical issues have been a source of debate for people who live in the valley because the resort, other commercial entities and residential units are off the grid. Complaints of high prices, outages and poor environmental practices have been the mantra for years.

The problem was exacerbated when a New Year’s Day fire destroyed the electrical plant.

Caterpillar diesel engines were brought in to keep the lights on and lifts turning.

In the eight-plus months since the fire a series of events related to the power issue have taken place and more significant dates are on the calendar.

Kirkwood Meadows Public Utility District is having a special

meeting Sept. 24 at 3pm in Kirkwood. The public hearing will address issues of connecting to the grid, and costs ratepayers may incur from that as well as the current construction of the replacement powerhouse.

Long term, Kirkwood would like to tie into the grid via going through National Forest and connecting with Pacific Gas & Electric lines. The draft environmental impact statement is under agency review. It should be out for public comment later this year. It's possible the final EIS could be approved in spring 2011, with construction to tap into the grid beginning next summer.

"They have identified a route in an already disturbed area," Likins said.

But the need for a powerhouse in Kirkwood remains even if the area that touches on El Dorado, Alpine and Amador counties taps into the grid.

The grid connection will be a single point instead of a loop, meaning when a line is down or something else happens to the power supply, Kirkwood will be in the dark. A backup will be needed to keep the lights on.

That is why plans are going forward to replace the powerhouse. That building is under construction now. The building and underground distribution system will be replaced this fall.

"We lost about 60 percent of our circuits in the fire. We could Band-Aid through those issues last winter. It was a very fragile system," Likins said. "Instead of a bowl of spaghetti, we had a strand," he said of the wiring.

During the winter and spring months all of the connections will be made and the exhaust system put into place. The goal is for it to be operational in spring or summer 2011.

The entire cost of this project is close to $10 million. The

exact cost will depend on the final design of the interior. The structure is big enough to handle alternative energy, but may not need that if everything goes through with the grid connection.

Earlier this month Kirkwood Meadows PUD sold $5.5 million worth of bond anticipation notes to help fund the power plant.

Those general obligation bonds will be repaid through property taxes, water and wastewater fees. Electrical users won't be hit until the sale of Mountain Utilities goes through. Mountainsprings Kirkwood is selling the utility to KMPUD.

The sale of the land between the two entities closed this month. The sale of the utility is expected to close in June 2011 after the California Public Utility Commission signs off on everything.

What skiers will notice this winter in regards to the powerhouse is parking near Red Cliffs has been eliminated. Even though 80 spaces were lost, more than three times that number have been created slopeside. This means less walking.

The theory is residents and visitors will have uninterrupted electrical service as the changes take place.

If Mother Nature cooperates, expect the lifts at Kirkwood to be spinning before Thanksgiving – via the Cummins engines.

STPUD board president sentenced for 3 misdemeanors

By Kathryn Reed

Dale Rise, president of South Tahoe Public Utility District's board of directors, was sentenced today for three misdemeanor counts of resisting arrest.

Rise was arrested in September 2009 on felony charges after he got in a confrontation with officers at his South Lake Tahoe residence. Officers were called to the house by his daughter.



Dale Rise

He pleaded guilty to the three misdemeanors on Sept. 2. Last spring he told Lake Tahoe News he wanted the case to go to trial. Why he pleaded guilty is not known since he didn't return phone calls.

Rise was sentenced to a 52-week anger management course, three years probation, 500 hours of community service, $2,250 in fines, and peaceful contact with his wife and daughter. The latter means if an argument between them becomes unpeaceful, it will be a violation of his probation.

At the Sept. 17 sentencing before El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury the judge gave a little lecture to Rise about the importance of police officers being able to do their job and enter a home when need be. She used the analogy of how law enforcement didn't thoroughly investigate what was going on where Jaycee Lee Dugard was held captive for 18 years and how if officers don't investigate, then no one knows what crimes might be occurring behind the door.

"We thought it was a fair disposition," said Pete O'Hara, El Dorado County deputy district attorney.

He called Kingsbury’s analogy “appropriate.”

When it comes to Rise’s position on the STPUD board, nothing will change unless his colleagues want it to. State law and utility district code only call for the removal of a director if convicted of a felony.

Economy curtails Indian casino expansion

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The weak economy prompted Cache Creek Casino Resort to suspend a big expansion project Wednesday, shelving plans for an event center, parking garage and other amenities.

The announcement by the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, which owns the casino in rural Capay Valley, provides further evidence of the struggles in the gambling industry. Tribal casinos in Northern California, plus the commercial operations in Reno and Lake Tahoe, have imposed layoffs and made other cutbacks in the past two years.

“The outlook for the economy, both locally and across the U.S., just made this decision necessary,” said tribal spokesman Greg Larsen.

The tribe said it will continue with the renovation to its 200-room hotel. But a 2,200-seat event center has been put on hold, along with a 900-vehicle garage and expanded gambling and restaurant space. The project was supposed to begin construction next year.

Read the whole story

Probyn denied claim by state agency

By Bay City News Service

SAN FRANCISCO – The California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board voted unanimously today to reject a claim by the mother of kidnap victim Jaycee Dugard for emotional and psychological injury caused by her daughter's abduction, a spokeswoman for the board said.

Government claims and victim compensation are two distinct programs, both overseen by the board, spokeswoman Janice Mackey said.



Terry Probyn

Dugard's mother, Terry Probyn, filed her claim with the board as a government claim against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Mackey said.

In the claim, Probyn said she was psychologically and emotionally injured by "various lapses by the Corrections Department contributing to daughter Jaycee Dugard's continued captivity, ongoing sexual assault and mental and/or physical abuse."

Read the whole story