Suspected drunken driver takes out school fence

By Kathryn Reed

A driver lost control of her vehicle on Pioneer Trail, taking out a log fence and metal cyclone fence at Sierra House Elementary School.

“We intend to have some temp fencing up this morning and permanent repairs complete within a few days,” Steve Morales, Lake Tahoe Unified School District facilities director, said.

Taylor Atkinson, 18, of South Lake Tahoe was driving a black Honda Civic on Sept. 5 at about 2:20am when she hit the fence, according to officers.

“During the collision investigation, Atkinson displayed signs of alcohol intoxication and was subsequently arrested for driving under the influence,” California Highway Patrol Officer Jeff Gartner said.

She was booked into El Dorado County Jail.

Chamber exec rents room without license or paying TOT

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce Executive Director B Gorman and her husband have been renting the lower portion of their South Lake Tahoe home without a business license and

without paying transient occupancy tax.

When reached Sept. 7, Gorman said it was “pretty much friends and friends of friends” who stayed at their house.



B Gorman

But then why advertise the fully equipped downstairs apartment on a website? The reviews on the Airbnb website read more like people who don’t know the Gormans.

Gorman wasn’t on the phone long enough to ask her why she doesn’t have a business license or why she doesn’t pay TOT.

“I’m not going to have this conversation with you,” Gorman said. “We are not going to dabble in it (meaning the rental) and that’s all I’m going to say.”

The reason this is an issue is that as head of the chamber she advises people how to operate a business. One thing she tells people is to get a business license. The chamber sells people a packet of information about how to open a business on the South Shore. Gorman meets one-on-one to advise people how to open a business.

Gorman is violating the law according to Chapter 28A of the South Lake Tahoe City Code Vacation Home Rentals ordinance which says, “No owner of a vacation home rental shall rent that unit for 30 consecutive calendar days or less without a valid vacation home rental permit for that unit issued pursuant to this chapter.”

Part of the ordinance also says owners are required to have,

“Evidence of a valid transient occupancy tax registration certificate issued by the city for the vacation home rental.”

Christi Bozes in the Finance Department said the Gormans don’t have a business license or a vacation rental permit and there is no record of them ever paying TOT.

In the terse and short conversation Gorman had with this reporter she said they no longer plan to rent out the house. The listing on Airbnb was up the morning of Sept. 7 and down that afternoon.

According to Airbnb’s website, it “is an online marketplace allowing anyone from private residents to commercial properties to rent out their extra space.”

Patrick Atherton, president of the chamber board, knew nothing of Gorman’s second source of income until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

“I had no idea. I will research a little more and go from there. I am completely unaware,” Atherton said.

Here are some reviews on Airbnb about the Gormans’ fully equipped lower residence:

From Dec. 26, 2009, “This was our first time using airbnb, and these hosts set the bar high.”

From July 6, 2010, “suite accomodations at hotel prices. added bonus: great location with water/mountian views. already planning a return trip. note: this was our first experience with airbnb; it definetly won’t be our last.”

From July 15, 2010, “We can only say that all the wonderful things previous reviewers have written about B and Jim’s place and their hospitality is just scratching the surface.”

From Sept. 4, 2010, “We have a very nice stay with Jim and B. The place is beautiful. Jim and B were very friendly and

helpful. We highly recommend them.”

Regional property values continue downward skid

Jim Wasserman, Sacramento Bee

Sacramento-area property values collectively tumbled another $10 billion from 2009 to 2010 – about 12 percent of losses suffered statewide by property owners, according to new statistics from state tax authorities.

But some believe the hard-hit capital region has seen the worst of its declines.

A report from the California Board of Equalization pegs land and building values assessed for tax purposes at about $260 billion in Amador, El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties. That’s the amount subject to taxes for government services provided in the fiscal year that began July 1, 2010.

Read the whole story

Tahoe fire officials plead

for cash from congressman

By Kathryn Reed

With charred trees all around him and having driven through much of the neighborhood that will forever be scarred by the Angora Fire, Rep. Tom McClintock took it all in.

“I’m in fact finding mode right now,” the Republican from Granite Bay said at the end of Tuesday’s tour.



Rep. Tom McClintock, center, listens to Lake Tahoe Basin fire officials Sept. 7. Photos/Kathryn Reed

He would make no statement how he might help bring more cash to the Lake Tahoe Basin to help create a healthier forest. But he does favor allowing timber to be harvested so the cash that comes from that work would pay for the harvest or thinning.

“This excess timber will come out one way or another. It will either be carried out or burned,” McClintock said.

The congressman started the day on the West Shore to see what

lingers from the August 2007 Washoe Fire that was started when barbecue flames got out of hand. Five homes and nearly 20 acres were destroyed.

A contingent of fire officials from throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin escorted McClintock on the tour, pointing out how the West Shore was not treated and how parts of the Angora burn area had been.

Walking in near the end of Zuni Street in an outfit better suited for the halls of the Capitol than the forest of Tahoe, McClintock was surrounded by charred trees. Some have blue paint patches, signifying they will soon be felled.

This section of the June 2007 fire that reduced 254 houses to ash and burned nearly 3,100 acres is close to the ignition point of the illegal campfire.



Kit Bailey

“If the SEZ (stream environmental zone) had been treated it would have reduced the impact to the houses downwind and downstream,” Kit Bailey, fire chief for the U.S. Forest Service in Tahoe, said.

This means had there been funding for more thinning and had the agencies been playing nicer at the time to allow for such work, maybe some of the destroyed houses would still be standing.

The Sept. 7 field trip was all about lobbying the congressman for money. He is on the Natural Resources Committee. For that

committee he is the lead Republican on the Subcommittee on Water and Power, and he is also a member of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee.

The fire officials were able to the get the ear of Sens. Harry Reid, D-Nev., John Ensign, R-Nev., and Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., when they were in the area last month for the annual environmental summit. (No one can remember the last time Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., set foot in Tahoe.)

With McClintock's side of Congress being responsible for appropriations, his support will be key when reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act comes up for a vote. This piece of legislation would bring $415 million to the Lake Tahoe Basin over eight years. A chunk of it would go to fuel reduction projects.

The Forest Service gets a base amount of cash each year for these projects, but it fluctuates. It's stimulus money and cash from Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act that have helped the USFS and local fire agencies to thin as much as they have. But both of those supplies are running dry.

This year the Forest Service expects to treat 2,000-3,000 acres mechanically and another 1,000-1,500 acres by hand.

Lake Valley Fire Chief Jeff Michael told McClintock how his department has money to fund two year's worth of projects. If more is not secured, he expects that 20-person team will be out of work.

"Eventually we are going to run out of state and federal funds and it will be up to the land owner," Duane Whitelaw, North Tahoe Fire Department chief, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Some of the challenges fire districts have is we don't own the land we're treating."

It is California Tahoe Conservancy and state parks property he is talking about.



Bill Holmes

Bill Holmes, unit chief with CalFire, spoke a bit about how the building code regulations that went into affect Jan. 1, 2008, are a step in the right direction, but he wishes wood decks had been banned.

“Wood decks are the first thing to catch fire,” Holmes said to the group standing in the forest. “If that catches fire, the house catches fire.”

He said the decks are a greater threat than shake roofs because the number of shake roofs is minimal now.

Dennis Cocking with South Tahoe Public Utility District was on the tour giving a bit of history how his agency had put in about $18 million in infrastructure improvements to the area before the fire hit. That allowed water flow to be continuous.

On an average day the agency produces 12.5 million gallons of water. On June 24, 2007, the first day of the Angora Fire, 24 million gallons were produced.

“That’s why infrastructure improvements are so critical,” Cocking said.

South Tahoe PUD is hoping for cash from the LT Restoration Act, too.

For the fire districts, this is the third year of a 10-year abatement plan. The problem is, without more money, the plan won’t be finished. Whitelaw said the purpose of having McClintock walk in the forest was to see what wildfires can

do, but also see what thinning projects can do.

Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care unable to save bird with West Nile

By Reno Gazette-Journal

The Mono County Health Department said a Hawk has tested positive for West Nile Virus.

The Swainson’s Hawk was picked up near Topaz and taken to the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care in South Lake Tahoe , where it died on Aug. 24, Mono County Health Officer Richard O. Johnson said. The positive test was the first in Mono County this year.

Read the whole story

Freezing temps returning to Lake Tahoe Basin

By Kathryn Reed

Bring in those plants that don’t like freezing temps and get out the fleece, it’s going to be nippy out. A hard freeze is possible this week.

A low-pressure system from the Gulf of Alaska will be sitting over the Lake Tahoe-Reno area on Wednesday and Thursday. Expect the high in Lake Tahoe to be 60 Wednesday and in the upper 50s on Thursday. Overnight lows will be near freezing on Wednesday and in the upper 20s Thursday night. In areas a little farther from the lake, like Meyers, take a couple degrees off those temps.



It was warm enough Labor Day for a family to enjoy Cove East; but the outside air will soon resemble the lake temp. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Reno will be about 70 on Wednesday and in the 60s on Thursday.

“The temperatures will rebound by Saturday,” according to Rhett Milne, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno. That means low 70s for the basin.

Most of the moisture associated with the cold front should pass to the north of the region, though scattered afternoon and evening showers on Wednesday are possible.

For today, a red flag warning remains in affect until 11pm.

This means with all the wind and dry conditions the fire danger is high.

Lake Tahoe, though visibly low, remains 0.8 feet above the natural rim.

“I don’t think we’ll go below it. Maybe if we don’t get anything for another month or so we’ll go below,” Milne said.

Mild temblor near Lake Tahoe

By Reno Gazette-Journal

The United States Geological Survey website reports there was an earthquake of magnitude 2.1 under northwest Lake Tahoe this morning.

The Placer County Sheriff’s Office has not received any reports of anyone feeling the earthquake. The report has not been reviewed by a seismologist.

The quake was reported at 6:07am about 10 miles southeast of Truckee. It is reported to be at a depth of 5.3 miles.

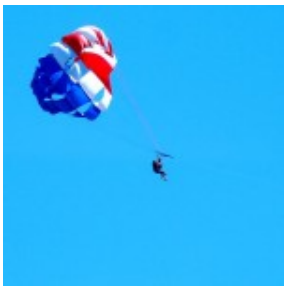
Summer’s last hurrah brings tourists to Tahoe

By Frank X. Mullen Jr. and Sean Collins West, Reno Gazette-Journal

As the planet’s clockwork ticks towards fall, the extended Zuck family is making the most of summer’s last hurrah at Lake Tahoe.

Family members from Elk Grove, Calif., and Dallas gathered at the lake on Labor Day weekend in a ritual dating back to 1976. Sailing, boating, hiking, eating, biking, climbing, swimming and relaxing on the beach were on the agenda.

“It’s a little bit of heaven here on earth,” said Dwight Zuck of Elk Grove, whose family has owned a cabin on the lake for more than three decades.



Parasailing is popular at Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Dwight’s brother Dave, from Dallas, said sometimes the best thing to do is nothing.

“The beauty and serenity, the peacefulness of nature is all around you,” he said. “This is our last shot at summer. After this, it’s back to work and school and back to the grind.”

Thousands of holiday visitors took advantage of mild weekend weather at the lake. Traffic crawled from Tahoe City to South Lake Tahoe on Sunday. Diners waited a half-hour for a hamburger at the Char Pit in Kings Beach, where the customer line went into the parking lot. Parking was scarce.

Read the whole story

Poor communications during Angora Fire lead to changes elsewhere

Publisher's note: ***The actual number of structures lost in the Angora Fire was 254 houses.***

By Dana M. Nichols, Stockton Record

SAN ANDREAS – Calaveras and Alpine counties are pioneering a microwave-based communications network for public safety agencies that will speed the work of law officers on their beats and patch the communications gaps that have hindered inter-agency cooperation during major disasters such as the 2007 Angora Fire near Lake Tahoe.

The planned network will cross the crest of the Sierra Nevada in places where there are no phone lines, beam signals into remote canyons that are emergency radio dead spots, and allow officers to run license checks and other queries from terminals in patrol cars.

Eventually, it is expected to serve as a model for a $50 million network that will link virtually all California and western Nevada emergency agencies from Lake Tahoe north.

The effort is the brain child of Clay Hawkins, a former Calaveras County Sheriff's Department captain who is the county's chief assistant administrative officer, and Robert Levy, the undersheriff in Alpine County. Levy saw first hand what a communications meltdown means when he arrived with five

Alpine patrol units to assist evacuations and traffic control at the Angora Fire in June 2007.

“This fire was so bad, everybody threw everything they had at it,” Levy said. “We got up there, and there was no communications.”

Read the whole story

Property owners finding trees marked without their consent

By Kathryn Reed

Blue numbers are mysteriously cropping up on trees along Powerline Trail. It’s not just Forest Service land being marked. And it’s not the feds with the spray paint.

It’s NV Energy out of Reno numbering the trees.

But no one is letting homeowners know what is going on.



NV Energy marked the tree, middle, being a threat to the power

pole on the
right.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

For Janill Gilbert, whose house in South Lake Tahoe backs to the trail, it was a bit disconcerting to come back from a jog one day to find a tree in her yard with the number 798 on it.

If it falls one way, it goes into the power line, falls another it hits open dirt, falls the other two ways it could do some serious structural damage.

It’s not just dead trees or ones in the forest Gilbert has seen marked. All have been in the 700s.

Up the trail a bit is No. 800 – on land the Forest Service owns.

“We do work with the utilities. We have agreements and easements with them,” Cheva Heck, USFS spokeswoman, said. This parcel is one of the urban lots the agency owns.

But the Forest Service didn’t have any insider information over any other property owner. They found about the painted trees when *Lake Tahoe News* called.

An NV Energy official said the plan is to notify property owners their trees are going to be felled when all have been marked. The plan is for the work to be done this fall.



Not all rust colored pines

have been tagged for removal.

“We have a 60,000-volt line from Stateline to Meyers. An arborist is out there now going through the entire line. He is not done,” Fay Anderson, spokeswoman with the utility, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Fay said it is the power company’s responsibility to make sure limbs and trees don’t threaten the lines. They have the authority to trim or remove trees in their right-of-way.

“Most properties have easements for utilities,” Fay said.

Dealing with NV Energy issues is not new to Gilbert.

The trail is a bit of an L-shape through the forest. Where it starts going uphill is where a pole caught fire in May. Gilbert said they heard a noise, saw flames and called the fire department. The decision was to let it burn out, which took about 24 hours, as embers fell onto the snow below. Soon after a new pole was erected.

Looking at the land behind Gilbert’s house and the others along the street, it’s hard to know what the arborist was thinking when he chose to tag certain trees. The one in her yard and up a short ways are dead. But other ones along the route that could conceivably fall onto the power line are dead, too.

Gilbert wonders if the power company will have to come back next year. Something is killing her trees. In the handful of years she’s lived in the house 15 of the 20 backyard trees have had to come down.

She speculates it is drought conditions. With being at the bottom of a hill, her vegetation is not well watered. Plus, she doesn’t have an irrigation system out back.

NV Energy might want to drive along her street. The seemingly healthy trees in front are swaying against the power lines.