Federal grant may increase Internet speed in El Dorado County

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Hopes of establishing fiber optic Internet service in rural areas of El Dorado County got a boost Friday with the announcement of a $46.6 million grant to a Central Valley project.

The grant, part of federal stimulus funds, went to the Central Valley Independent Network of Fresno to establish what is known as a “middle mile network” that will establish an ultra-reliable, super-high-speed fiber trunk line up California’s Central Valley and along much of Highway 49.

The project will allow improved Internet connections in underserved rural areas.

Read the whole story

STHS beefing up security

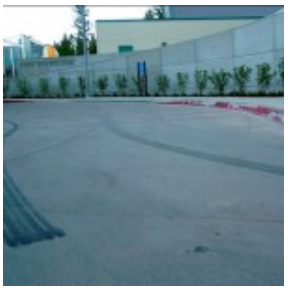
By Kathryn Reed

Skid marks remain at South Tahoe High School where a truck at 1:30 one morning last week did a few doughnuts in the circular entryway.

Cameras captured a truck, believed to be a black Ford, 2008 era, with wide wheels. Enhanced equipment will soon be

installed to make sure the next person who vandalizes school property can be definitively identified.

The skid marks will be cleaned up and Aspen Hollow will replace the damaged landscaping. It may not be done by Thursday's open house.



School officials are not happy with skid marks at STHS. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Much of the short Lake Tahoe Unified School District meeting on Aug. 24 pertained to surveillance equipment. The board unanimously agreed to spend $15,483 on the Career Technical Education building and $23,338 on the Overcrowded Relief Grant classroom wings. The equipment is being bought with Measure G money.

Measure G is the $64.5 million facilities bond voters approved in 2008. Another $30 million has been secured in matching grants from the state.

With millions being spent at the high school, officials want to secure the entire facility. A perimeter fence is not being talked about, but it's likely a gate on Viking Way will be installed. Already speed bumps have been put in to slow traffic.

“We will do it tastefully,” Superintendent Jim Tarwater told the board.

Motion sensors are going into classrooms.

“If someone breaks in, we’ll know about it,” Steve Morales, facilities director, said.



New gates would look better than the 13th Street entrance to STHS.

At the two-story Stadium View building every teacher has a unique code to gain access to the building and then their classroom. This is an added layer of security in such a large building so staff does not have to worry about someone being in the building who shouldn’t be.

Board member Sue Novasel expressed concern staff may give out the code to students. She pointed out how when her kids were at STHS they ended up with keys to the school.

Morales explained that a record is kept of who enters when so it will be easy to know whose card is being used when.

The other idea brought up to better secure the campus is to have cantilever gates installed between buildings. They would be open during school hours and closed off all other times.

Economy hits South Shore wedding business

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

Lake Tahoe has long been a hot spot for weddings – the romance of exchanging vows near the lake's deep blue waters and surrounding mountaintops is undeniable.



Regan Beach in South Tahoe is a year-round wedding spot. Photo/Kathryn Reed

But, like many other destination wedding hubs, Lake Tahoe is seeing far fewer nuptials these days.

About 1,100 fewer people tied the knot in El Dorado County last year than during 2006 – a nearly 30 percent decline.

Read the whole story

State deferral of K-12 dollars no biggie for LTUSD – this year

By Kathryn Reed

Even though state lawmakers this week decided to shore up part of the state's money shortage by burdening school districts, Lake Tahoe Unified School District is not sweating the decision.

"It was something we all anticipated," LTUSD CFO Deb Yates told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It has no real impact this year."

The action on Aug. 23 means K-12 districts will not receive the scheduled $2.5 billion from the state in September. The deferral was expected in October, not a month sooner.

Some districts will have to borrow money to cover the shortfall.

Lawmakers still have not come to any resolution about the $19 billion deficit the state faces. The budget for the current fiscal year was supposed to be in place June 30. IOUs are expected to be issued by the state in one to three weeks.

Yates said enough money sits in all of the district's accounts to cover the lapse in payments from the state. But if this happens next year, she said, the district may be forced to take out a short-term loan.

English instructor takes interim dean job at LTCC

By Kathryn Reed

Two in-house candidates were vying to be interim dean of Instruction and Social Sciences at Lake Tahoe Community College, with Kurt Green coming out on top.

The English instructor will not have any teaching responsibilities while he is in this role. Green served as interim administrator at the South Lake Tahoe college several years ago.

He takes over for Diane Rosner who retired earlier this summer.



LTCC is juggling administrators.

The Aug. 24 meeting was the final meeting for Susan Middleton, who for the past month has been acting president for the past month. Her main job had been as vice president of Academic Affairs and Student Services. She has been with the college for a quarter century.

This leaves Cynthea Preston, dean of instruction, and Virginia Boyar, head of career and technical education, as the most

tenured administrators on campus.

Susan Niehoff came on board in January as vice president of Business Services; Tom Greene started this month as Middleton's replacement; and Steve Maradian starts Aug. 31 as interim president.

Green is not expected to be in the interim dean role for longer than this academic year that is about to start.

"We are looking at potentially restructuring the administrative team and the administrative duties," board President Kerry David told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Until the board, with input from faculty, staff and administrators, comes up with a plan, the future hierarchy of the college remains an unknown.

Overhaul at South Tahoe rec center will save city millions

By Kathryn Reed

Unbeknown to swimmers, those at the front counter, people working out on the gym equipment and employees, the boiler which heats the facility was replaced Monday with one that makes the old one look like a relic from the Dark Ages of technology.

The new one weights 750 pounds; the old one 8,000 pounds. The new one is about one-fifth the size of the old one. It will be up and running in a couple weeks.



Jim Fisher, left, and Duc Le begin installing the rec center boiler Aug. 23. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Two boilers date to when the South Lake Tahoe complex opened in the 1970s. One will remain as a backup to the spiffy new one.

“We are going to save $1.6 million over a 24-year period,” explained Gary Moore, director of the city’s Parks and Recreation Department, of the retrofit at entire facility. That is a net savings.

The total savings is $2.4 million. The cost of the equipment is $850,000. The money to pay for this comes from a 15-year 3 percent loan from the California Energy Commission.

With the retrofit to the center that houses the community pool and the neighboring ice rink, a savings of $65,000 is expected in the first year.

Aircon Energy out of Sacramento is doing the bulk of the work, with local contractors being used when possible. On Aug. 23 it was a truck from local contractor Dale Rise that was hauling away the old boiler. It will be recycled.



The new blue boiler is a fraction of the size of the old white boiler.

Next up is digging the trench between the pool and ice rink. The turbine being installed to heat the pool will create electricity. That electricity will then be used to operate the ice rink.

The air handler for the pool bubble will be installed this fall.

All the lighting changes were done earlier this summer. New fluorescent bulbs and sensor devices were installed.

“We spent $60,000 for lighting to retrofit this site. The payback is $18,000 a year, so it doesn’t make sense not to do it,” Moore said. “The lighting is cool. It is brighter in the gymnasium, but it’s using half the wattage.”

Savings from the entire project will be used to pay off the loan.

“Once the equipment is paid off, whoever is sitting at this desk should lobby hard to keep it in this department,” Moore said. He is retiring Oct. 1.

Good side of CHP killer up to defense to bring forward at penalty phase

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Jurors in El Dorado Superior Court are likely to face a tide of emotional testimony as the penalty phase of the David Zanon murder trial gets under way this week.

Prosecutors are expected to present descriptions of Zanon's victim – California Highway Patrol Officer Scott Russell – evoking the tragedy of a good man's life lost.

No one disputes that he was a good man, said David Brooks, Zanon's public defender.

Brooks, by contrast, will address his client's troubled upbringing and will try to produce evidence that Zanon had a good side, despite his acknowledged criminal history.

"It's going to be quite the roller coaster ride," Brooks said.

Read the whole story

Suspects sought in 2 arsons at N. Nevada schools

The Douglas County Sheriff's Office is seeking information regarding separate arson incidents that occurred recently at two elementary schools.

The incidents were discovered at Minden and Gardnerville elementary schools on the mornings of Aug. 18 and Aug. 19. In each of the incidents, evidence of the arson was discovered by school custodians.

Evidence consisted of blackened scorch marks on backboards of handball courts at both schools, as well as an exterior wall of the main office building at Minden Elementary School.

Also found at the scenes were broken glass bottles and wicks made from ripped cloth material. No flammable liquid was present, but it is believed the suspects filled glass containers with some type of flammable liquid, then set the cloth wicks afire, and threw the liquid filled glass bottles at the walls – similar to a Molotov cocktail.The incidents are being investigated by the Douglas County Sheriff's Office and East Fork Fire and Paramedic District. A reward of $500 is being offered to anyone with information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of the suspect(s). Your identity is not needed and you may remain anonymous.

Anyone with any information regarding this incident is urged to call DCSO Investigator Ed Garren at (775) 782.9908, EFFPD Arson Inspector Terry Taylor at (775) 782.9861, or Secret Witness at (775) 782.7463.

No budget, no Cal Grants for college students

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

It is a perilous time to be a college student depending on the state of California to get through school.

Some 335,500 students going to California colleges this fall have qualified for Cal Grants because their family incomes are so low. They need the grants to pay tuition, buy books or cover basic living expenses.

But without a budget for the 2010-11 year, the state is not sending out any Cal Grants.

State budgets have been late for so many years now that larger institutions have adapted. Campuses in the University of California and California State University systems will front the Cal Grant money to their students, then get reimbursed when a budget is signed.

Read the whole story

Latinos hit hard by foreclosures

By Jim Wasserman, Sacramento Bee

Latino homeowners have taken the harshest blow from California's foreclosure crisis, accounting for 48 percent of homes repossessed from late 2006 through 2009, a nonprofit consumer group reported Tuesday.



Statistics from the Center for Responsible Lending showed that Latino owners surrendered 301,086 homes to lenders – almost half the state's 625,356 foreclosures during the period.

About 11 percent of California's foreclosures – 69,176 –

occurred in El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento and Yolo counties. Statewide, 41 percent of loans that resulted in foreclosure were made in 2006, the report said.

Read the whole story