Ex-STHS security guard's trial on hold

By Kathryn Reed

The trial of the former South Tahoe High School security guard accused of smoking pot with a student is not happening this week as scheduled.

Larry Brown's attorney filed a motion to suppress evidence. That issue is scheduled to be heard Sept. 24.

"Defense also wanted us to take a look at some character evidence they are in the process of pulling together with the thought that it may persuade us to make a different settlement offer, which I advised I would not do in any event without first also meeting with the victim and her parents," Hans Uthe, El Dorado County deputy district attorney, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "If we cannot settle the matter and if the motion to suppress evidence is denied, then the case will be reset for trial."

Brown, 63, pleaded not guilty in May to charges of having provided marijuana to a minor. He is charged with one felony count and two misdemeanor counts related to his arrest in November involving marijuana and a 16-year-old female student.

Wildland fire near Markleeville

By Kellene Stockwell, Channel 2 News

Fire crews are battling a 460-acre blaze south of Lake Tahoe in Markleeville near the Wolf Creek trailhead in the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness.

The Wolf Creek Fire is currently 10 percent contained.

Sierra Front says it started Tuesday night and that lodgepole trees are fueling the blaze.

No structures are threatened and several trailheads remain closed.

Caltrans on track with closure of Hwy. 50 in spring 2011

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Caltrans is one step closer to having all the hurdles cleared so it can close Echo Summit in both directions next spring in order to replace the dilapidated rock wall.

It was a brief hearing Aug. 5 before Jim Baetge at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office in Stateline. With that behind them, Caltrans hopes to have the permits from TRPA on Monday. Then the internal environmental certificate can be obtained.



Sandbags will be replaced next year on Echo Summit. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The plan calls for replacing the wall that dates to 1939 with a sturdier, higher barrier that will be 32 inches off the ground. It's all in the name of public safety.

"We don't believe it will impact the scenic quality," Steven Gaytan, Caltrans transportation engineers, said after Thursday's hearing. "It will look better than the sandbags."

Some of the areas that have crumbled or been plowed into by vehicles have sandbags as a makeshift barrier.

With TRPA rules mandating no dirt be moved before May 1, Caltrans hopes to secure a waiver so construction can begin in April. This is all dependent on the weather.

No matter the exact start date, Highway 50 in to South Lake Tahoe from the west will be closed for two weeks – 24 hours a day. The next 36 days it will be reduced to one-way controlled traffic.



Highway 50 from Johnson Pass -- a not-so-well maintained county road.

If it’s a less than ideal snow year, work could be done by Memorial Day. If it’s like this past winter, a traffic nightmare could snarl summer travel.

Sue Barton with the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and Steve Teshara representing South Shore Transportation Management Association both said this is the best alternative so the work is expedited.

The thinking is May is one of the slowest months on the South Shore, so ideally businesses will not be severely impacted.

Plus, there are plenty of ways to get to South Tahoe without crossing Echo Summit. Johnson Pass is a route locals know about. The back way by Kirkwood on Highway 88 is a scenic alternative. Coming down via the West Shore on Highway 89 is another option.

Culprit in high-speed chase headed for prison

By Kathryn Reed

Christopher Wadstein of South Lake Tahoe pleaded guilty this week to being a felon in possession of a firearm, and evading a police officer and reckless driving.

His latest arrest was June 29 when he led law enforcement on a high-speed chase through South Lake Tahoe that ended in the Upper Truckee Meadow.



Christopher Wadstein on June 29 headed to Barton Memorial Hospital. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Wadstein, 21, entered the guilty pleas on Aug. 2. He is scheduled to be sentenced Aug. 16. He faces up to three years in prison.

Although what led officers to be looking for Wadstein was a kidnapping in the early morning hours of June 27, he was not charged in that crime.

South Lake Tahoe police officers never divulged details of that incident. They deferred comment to the District Attorney's Office – which did not charge Wadstein with kidnapping.

The woman who was allegedly held against her will was not physically harmed.

Smart phones on agenda at Tahoe area tech conference

Publisher's note: ***This week's technology conference at Northstar-at-Tahoe has brought out a who's who in the tech world, like Bill Gates, and other representatives of today's leading companies.***

By Alexei Oreskovic, Reuters

About 200,000 smartphones and other devices based on Google's Android operating system are sold every day, CEO Eric Schmidt said on Wednesday, underscoring the strong challenge to rivals like Apple's iPhone.

The world's No.1 search engine is hunting for new revenue opportunities as growth in its core Internet business slows and as new technologies like smartphones and social networking services transform the way consumers access the Web.

Schmidt expects revenue from search advertising on mobile phones to eventually exceed the revenue Google generates from searches on PCs. But he could not predict when.

"It looks like Android is not just phenomenal but an incredibly phenomenal success in its growth rate," Schmidt

told reporters on the sidelines of the Techonomy conference in Lake Tahoe, California, where he spoke on a panel earlier.

Read the whole story

Prop. 8 likely headed to Supreme Court

By Maura Dolan, Carol J. Williams and Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times

A day after Proposition 8 was thrown out in court, both sides in California's debate over gay marriage are focusing on the next fight in a battle that is likely to end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Opponents of gay marriage immediately vowed to appeal a federal judge's ruling saying same-sex unions were legal in California. [Updated at 10:30 a.m.: Gay-marriage opponents formally filed the appeal Thursday morning.]

Read the whole story

The next step will come Friday, when U.S. District Chief Judge Vaughn R. Walker holds a new hearing. The judge stayed his order allowing gay marriage at least until then. And it remains unclear if –and when – gay marriages will begin again in the state.

Lawyers on both sides expect the ruling to be appealed and ultimately to reach the Supreme Court during the next few years.

El Dorado Beach face-lift about to commence

By Kathryn Reed

A reunion is how some people described Wednesday's groundbreaking ceremony of the multi-million dollar Lakeview Commons project in South Lake Tahoe.

Missing, though, were key people who had an early vision to keep the 56 acres of prime real estate that straddles both sides of Highway 50 for the people. It started with D.L. Bliss and was carried on by the Lake Valley Foundation in the 1920s. This land is deed restricted when it comes what can and cannot be done with it.



What El Dorado Beach will look like in summer 2011. Rendering/RHAA

"We could not do this project today if we had to buy the property," Ray Lacey, California Tahoe Conservancy deputy director, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the Aug. 4 event.

His agency has allocated $6 million to the project that will

be built in phases. The first phase will get under way next week at El Dorado Beach.

Others missing from Wednesday's festivities included Dennis Machida. He was at the helm of the CTC when the idea of creating what is now called Lakeview Commons started percolating in 2004. The following year he died at age 58 of a heart attack.

Deb Vreeland, the project manager through the planning phase, has since relocated to Montana. Several people bestowed high praise upon her.

More than 50 people turned out on this bluebird day to reflect on the process, the future and above all to prove projects in South Lake Tahoe don't all get stalled or sit on shelves as planning documents.

Manuela Anne King, vice president of Royston Hanamoto Alley & Abey – the landscape architects, spoke of all the things people talked about wanting in the more than 30 public meetings that were conducted.

Many are being incorporated into the project:

• Beach access for everyone

• Improved crossing at Highway 50

• Non-motorized boathouse (which will be LEED gold)

• Better, more convenient restrooms

• New picnic tables

"I feel this project accomplishes the major goals put out there by the community," King said.

Besides the aesthetic improvements, the terraced seating and new vegetation will help with erosion control, which is all about the clarity of Lake Tahoe.

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El Dorado County pulls out of Tahoe bus agency

By Kathryn Reed

Not only is the South Shore bus agency losing vehicles, it has lost a member.

El Dorado County no longer is part of South Tahoe Area Transportation Authority.

“A registered letter was sent (July 29) to participating agencies,” county Supervisor Norma Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News* on Wednesday. “We are working out the details of service for our constituents.”



El Dorado County's buses are parked indefinitely. Photo/Kathryn Reed

She believes 15-20 people in the Meyers area regularly ride public transit. There are also people with physical issues who

used the on-call bus service.

For two hours the supervisors last week discussed what to do with public transit in the basin. The lack of an insurance certificate and other concerns resulted in the county pulling its two buses out of the fleet.

Santiago said the fourth lawsuit filed by MV Transportation was the final straw for her and her colleagues.

The remaining members of STATA are South Lake Tahoe, Douglas County, Harveys, Harrah's, MontBleu, Horizon, Lakeside, Heavenly, Ridge Tahoe, Tahoe Transportation District, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. TRPA is a non-voting member of STATA.

The regular board meeting for this Friday has been postponed to Friday the 13th.

Andoh files civil rights lawsuit against South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

A civil rights lawsuit has been filed in federal court against South Lake Tahoe, the city police department and Officer Russell Liles.

John Andoh, former transit administrator for South Tahoe Area Transportation Agency, in documents filed Aug. 2 in U.S. District Court in Sacramento alleges he has been racially discriminated against.



John Andoh

According to the city's website, in 2008 there were 164 black people in town accounting for 0.7 percent of the population.

Andoh at that time would have been one of those black people.

The defendants in the case had not been served as of Aug. 4. City Attorney Pat Enright told *Lake Tahoe News* on Wednesday night he was not aware of the lawsuit.

A series of events, mostly in 2009, led to Andoh seeking legal counsel and the lawsuit being filed.

It was fairly well known Andoh had a brief relationship with Allyson Ritchie, a subordinate. Ritchie was hired to do clerical work. She is white.

The suit says, "During the relationship, Ms. Ritchie advised plaintiff that she had a brother (Andrew Eissinger) who was a police officer of the city of South Lake Tahoe and that this individual would become enraged should he discover that Ms. Ritchie was involved in an interracial relationship."

According to the document, the relationship ended in May 2009. When Ritchie's position was eliminated two months later, the reason given was budget cuts. The document says she disputed that and alleged it had to do with breaking up with Andoh.

Less than a week after Ritchie was let go, Andoh was involved in a vehicle accident with a cyclist. Officer Liles, who was hired as a rookie in summer 2008, took the report.

Soon thereafter an arrest warrant was issued for Andoh for

allegedly giving false information to an officer. That charge was eventually dropped, but not before Andoh's name was muddied in headlines and with his bosses at STATA.

"We are not limited to the theory about the girlfriend and brother. The arrest itself was unfounded," Jeffrey D. Fulton, Andoh's attorney, said.

The lawsuit questions why Andoh's job was eliminated earlier this year.

The four claims in the lawsuit in large part deal with the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments and subsequent Civil Rights legislation.

No specific dollar amount is being asked for in the damages. Fulton said his client is willing to let a jury come up with a figure.

A status conference has been scheduled for Oct. 25 in Sacramento.

Nevadans react to gay marriage ruling in Golden State

By Sean Collins Walsh, Reno Gazette-Journal

While supporters of same-sex marriage celebrated in the streets of San Francisco Wednesday, Northern Nevada activists mulled what the rejection of a same-sex marriage ban in California will mean for Nevada.

Judge Vaughn Walker of U.S. District Court in San Francisco on Wednesday overturned Proposition 8, a statewide referendum that banned gay marriage in California in 2008.

Kevin Ray, spokesman and organizer of Reno Gay Pride, called the ruling “certainly another step forward for equal rights for all citizens.”

“Many people certainly from Reno and Northern Nevada will go to San Francisco to get married,” he said.

Opponents criticized the ruling.

Read the whole story