El Dorado County jury convicts man of killing CHP officer

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

An El Dorado County jury Wednesday convicted David Charles Zanon of running down and killing a California Highway Patrol officer and attempting to murder other officers.

The first-degree murder conviction with special allegations makes Zanon, 40, eligible for the death penalty.

Zanon killed California Highway Patrol Officer Scott Russell in a 30-mile, high-speed chase in which Russell was struck and killed along Highway 50 in Shingle Springs while attempting to stop the chase with a spike strip on July 31, 2007.

Read the whole story

Massive tree planting in Reno far from sprouting

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

More than three months after announcing plans to plant up to 3 million carbon-sucking trees north of Reno, the exact status of an Australian company's Smoke Creek project remains unclear.

Representatives of the ECO2 Forests Inc. international

forestry company say they remain “100 percent committed” to their project. But plans for a ground-breaking event in May were postponed and top company executives have not responded to repeated requests for interviews with the Reno Gazette-Journal.

In an e-mail statement to the newspaper July 9, ECO2 Forests representative Andrew Laing said the company intends to proceed.

“ECO2 Forests remain 100 percent committed to the U.S. sustainable forest program in Washoe County,” Laing wrote. “We aim to ensure this project delivers long-term employment for hundreds of Washoe County locals.”

In April the company, based in Queensland, Australia, announced plans to plant up to 3 million “kiri” trees on 14,000 acres near Winnemucca Ranch Road, with initial planting to commence in May. The company reported it was working with Jaksick Entities, landowners in the area.

Read the whole story

Lakeview Commons bid awarded; groundbreaking today

By Kathryn Reed

This morning’s ground breaking of Lakeview Commons almost had to be rescheduled. That’s because South Lake Tahoe’s City Council didn’t have a contractor in place until Tuesday morning.

Three items on Aug. 3’s consent agenda all related to the

project. They took about as much time to resolve as it did to listen to the litany of public speakers who turned out to plead their case for keeping pot dispensaries open. (Creation of an ordinance to ban the clubs will go to the Planning Commission, then the council at yet to be determined dates.)



Beach-goers will soon have a better experience at El Dorado Beach. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Today's 10am event at El Dorado Beach is mostly ceremonial. It was scheduled this week so outgoing City Manager Dave Jinkens could be part of the ceremony since it has been under his watch that this portion of the originally named 56-acre project has become a reality. (This is Jinkens' last week.)

The real work to transform the beachfront area into a more user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing gathering spot will begin next week.

The council restarted the bid process in June after deciding what was sent out was a bit convoluted.

On Aug. 3 the council voted 4-1 to award the nearly $4.5 million project to Reeve-Knight out of Roseville. Councilman Jerry Birdwell voted no without giving input to why he dissented.

Clark & Sullivan Construction out of Sparks petitioned the bid award, saying Reeve-Knight's numbers for subcontractor work v. in-house work were out of whack.

The Sparks firm was picked as the lower bidder in the first round that was subsequently quashed by the council in June.

A couple local contactors spoke at the council meeting, saying Reeve-Knight should not be awarded the bid. One spoke about the irregularity of being able to change the bid once submitted; another believes not enough locals would be hired.

City Attorney Pat Enright and engineer Jim Marino told the council they have confidence in the bids and Reeve-Knight.

In other action:

• Even though incoming City Manager Tony O'Rourke had asked for the 2010-11 budget to be worked out once he started next week, Jinkens insisted it be approved on his watch. It was on Tuesday. But it was a 3-2 vote to have a super majority (at least four) say yes to tapping into the 25 percent reserves. Councilmen Bill Crawford and Jerry Birdwell don't like the idea of tying future council's to that requirement.

No incumbents running in South Tahoe council race

By Kathryn Reed

Sixty percent of the South Lake Tahoe City Council will be new after voters cast their ballots Nov. 2.

Jerry Birdwell joins Kathay Lovell and Bill Crawford in

deciding not to seek another term.



Jerry Birdwell

“I’m going to take a breather. I’m going to enjoy running the (Black Bear) Inn, sitting on the farm (in Sutter Creek), and doing more traveling with my partner,” Birdwell told *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday night.

At 68, Birdwell is ready to turn his attention to things besides city government. But he isn’t turning his back on the city. Before running four years ago, Birdwell was active with the Ski Run Boulevard BID. This is something he anticipates doing again.

He wishes he could have brought more transparency to city government. He said it would only come with honesty and openness about what is going on.

“I think the first time it came to my attention was when I asked (former City Attorney) Cathy DiCamillo what the city was paying in outside counsel. She looked at me across the desk and said, ‘I have no idea.’,” Birdwell said. “I said, ‘Why not?’ She said, ‘It doesn’t go through me.’ That to me was my first knowledge that transparency was lacking in city government and it was bothering me.”

Birdwell said that interaction got him thinking about his days on the Ski Run BID board and not being able to get a straight answer out of the city about the money paid in by BID members and how much had been spent.

He thinks the city needs to figure out where it wants to be and what it wants to look like in five, even 10 years. He also thinks the city better have a realistic understanding about revenues, realize property taxes aren't going to be what they were a few years ago and that the bleeding has not stopped.

"We need to adjust our budget accordingly. I think future councils will have a major problem dealing with that," Birdwell said.

While he continues to serve the rest of his term for the next few months, one thing he will work on is securing a permanent city hall for the town. He and Councilman Bruce Grego were appointed Aug. 3 to an ad hoc committee to investigate whether the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* building on Harrison Avenue would be viable.

(The paper is not selling or going out of business, just the structure is for sale.)

With presses having been there years ago, soil studies would need to be done to make sure no ink leached into the ground.

An appealing aspect to officials is other city entities are directly across Highway 50.

With no incumbent running for City Council, the deadline to file paperwork is Aug. 11. Here are the people who have taken out papers.

Perez education controversy

spills into EDC sheriff's office

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Five uniformed employees of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office are under investigation in connection with using online education from unaccredited sources to qualify for higher pay.

A survey of officers' credentials began following questions about the educational credentials of Stan Perez, a CHP officer who had been a candidate for Sheriff until he dropped out of the race last year.



Stan Perez

"We said we better make sure we don't have the same problem," said Sheriff Fred Kollar.

Read the whole story

Plumas fire may be contained this week

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Smoke was visible in the Reno area on Tuesday as winds blew in

smoke from the Bar Fire in the Plumas National Forest two hours west of Reno, said Zach Tolby, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno.

Progress was made Tuesday on the 900 acre fire as firefighters utilized helicopters and an aerial ignition process to burn out an inaccessible chunk in the center of the fire area, said Michele Jiménez-Holtz, a spokeswoman at the Plumas National Forest.

Along with continued work to mop-up the northern perimeter of the fire and hose-lays on portions of the east and west flanks of the fire, the strategic burn-out has given fire managers increased confidence that the Feather River Canyon fire will be successfully contained this week, Jiménez-Holtz said.

Sacramento man drowns at Lake Tahoe

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

An 82-year-old Sacramento man drowned Saturday afternoon in Lake Tahoe after his inflatable boat capsized, official said today.

The incident occurred near the 700 block of West Lake Boulevard.

Sgt. John Giovannini of the Placer County Sheriff’s Department said Robert Clyde Cook was transporting family and friends between a boat and the shore when his Zodiac craft capsized at 3:46 p.m.

Cook, who was not wearing a life jacket, tried to swim to

safety but drowned about 250 yards offshore where the water is about 10 feet deep.

Read the whole story

Prop. 8 decision to be released Wednesday

By Sacramento Bee

U.S. District Court Judge Vaughn Walker will issue a decision Wednesday on the constitutional challenge to California's Proposition 8, the ban on same-sex marriage, according to a court announcement today.

Walker's written order will be released electronically Wednesday – no hour was given – and will later be available for public review in federal courthouses in San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose.

Walker presided over a historic trial January and June in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in San Francisco. Two gay couples challenged Proposition 8, which voters approved in November 2008, saying it violated their federal constitutional right to equal protection.

Walker's decision, whatever it may be, is expected to be appealed.

Fire scorches wooded area by Cascade Falls

Fire officials don’t know what started a nearly three-quarter acre fire near Cascade Falls on Monday night.

A helicopter helped crews from the U.S. Forest Service, Lake Valley and CalFire fight the blaze.

It was reported about 5:30pm on Aug. 2, contained by 7:15pm and controlled by 9:40pm.

The fire was where the falls exit the ridge in an area with moderately heavy fuels.

With no lightning yesterday, it’s likely the fire was started by humans.

– Compiled by Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County youth dies on football field

By Bill Lindelof and Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

An undiagnosed heart defect caused the death of an 11-year-old boy who collapsed during football practice, a pastor of the youngster’s family said today.

Andrew Jacob Lamphere of Garden Valley was practicing with a “Junior Midget” football team at Golden Sierra High School in Garden Valley, north of Coloma, when he collapsed on Monday.

The Rev. Chris Whited, youth pastor to the boy, said at a press conference that the family has been informed by the sheriff’s department that the youngster died from the defect.

Read the whole story