California seeks OK to sue Stateline man in CalPERS case

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

California officials have asked a bankruptcy judge for permission to pursue their lawsuit against Alfred Villalobos, the former CalPERS board member they've accused of bribing top pension fund officials.

"Bankruptcy is not a haven for wrongdoers," lawyers for Attorney General Jerry Brown said in papers filed last week in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Reno.

Villalobos filed for bankruptcy protection in June, a month after Brown's office sued him and former CalPERS Chief Executive Fred Buenrostro. Normally, filing in bankruptcy court would automatically shield a debtor from being sued.

But Brown's lawyers argue that the bankruptcy shield doesn't apply to "police and regulatory actions," including the suit they've filed against Villalobos.

Read the whole story

Weather Service issues fire warning



Dry conditions and the threat of thunderstorms have prompted the National Weather Service in Reno to issue a fire warning for the Lake Tahoe Basin as well as the Carson City-Reno area.

A fire weather watch means that critical fire weather conditions are possible.

Scattered dry thunderstorms are being forecast for Wednesday afternoon into the evening.

In the watch area, fuels have been deemed critically dry. Dry fuels combined with expected lightning would result in critical fire weather conditions, the Weather Service said. Erratic and strong winds are expected Wednesday as well.

Feds eyeing regulations for large-scale dog breeders

By Rob Hotakainen, McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON – As the president of the Sacramento Kennel Club, Rosemarie Blood says that large-scale dog breeders should regulate themselves, without any intervention from the federal government.

“I think the dog people have to police themselves. … It’s a sad thing when the government has to step in,” Blood said.

But Dale Glazer, owner of the Rocklin Family Pet Shop & Self Serve Dog Wash, says that more oversight from Washington is needed, just as farm animals are regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Read the whole story

Reno airport leads nation in percentage of new flights

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Reno-Tahoe International Airport led the nation for the percentage of new flights added, a new survey found.

The airport added 17 new or seasonal flights to its schedule in the last nine months – an increase of 14.7 percent, according to statistics from the Air Transportation Association.

Detroit Metro was second with a 13.4 percent increase, followed by Milwaukee Mitchell Field at 12.3 percent.

Read the whole story

July 4 can mean freedom to litter Lake Tahoe beaches

By Stephen Ward

Pristine might have been the last word to use to describe the beaches of Lake Tahoe early this morning.

Thanks to a group of volunteers on the South Shore, most

people will never know what the shoreline looked like after people left behind their trash from the Fourth’s festivities.

With the South Shore’s population more than doubling for the holiday weekend, the impact on the environment is noticeable, as is people’s reluctance to be responsible for themselves. Instead of using trash receptacles, they left their trash and other items on the beach.



Trash collected from South Tahoe beaches on a previous July 5. Photo/Kenny Curtzwiler

This is the 11th year Kenny Curtzwiler, owner of K&K Services, has rallied his staff together to clean the majority of El Dorado Beach, along with Regan Beach and the walkways surrounding Highway 50.

“One day I walked over to El Dorado Beach and noticed it was wrecked, and I decided to start cleaning up,” Meyers resident Curtzwiler said. “I never asked the city for help, I just decided to clean it myself.”

South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Director Gary Moore sang the praises of Curtzwiler, saying the cleanup takes a lot of pressure off his department. Until last year, Curtzwiler had paid the dumping fees.

Curtzwiler and his five employees are sticking to the same regime they have for the past decade, which involves coming to the area with a dump truck and trailer to load all the waste into the beds of the vehicles before taking the collection to South Tahoe Refuse. Curtzwiler estimates approximately 50 yards of trash are accumulated each year.

He is starting the work this morning at 6 on the lake side of Highway 50 across from Aloha Ice Cream, they work their way east and anticipate being done by 10:30am. Curtzwiler says volunteers are welcome.

According to Curtzwiler, the majority of trash found at the sites is broken chairs, empty beer bottles and wet clothes.

Clean Tahoe crews will also be out today. The nonprofit that picks up trash in the public right-of-way in the El Dorado County portion of the basin was preparing to spend the majority of today restoring the facilities tarnished by tourists.

“We have two trucks we use to pick up trash from the public walking areas,” said Ellen Nunes, who runs Clean Tahoe.

Clean Tahoe has set its focus on cleaning the public parameters, and believes a few hours will be needed in order to fully regenerate the grounds.

The U.S. Forest Service owns Nevada, Kiva, Pope and Baldwin beaches on the South Shore. Because phone calls were not returned, it’s not known what their plan of action is for the debris left behind form Fourth of July revelers.

While many organizations anticipate a substantial amount of garbage left behind, some resorts don’t consider cleaning up after the holiday a grueling endeavor.

Austin Sass, spokesman at Zephyr Cove Resort, anticipates the Zephyr Cove beach to be back to normal within two to three

hours, and says the time it takes to restore the property isn’t different than any other weekend.

“We get our entire staff out there and pick up trash until the beach is clean again,” Sass said.

As for harmful materials, Sass is steadfast in ensuring the property will not be threatened by the use of fireworks or glass beverages.

“We have recycle bins at the front of all entrances to the beach,” Sass said. “And you can’t even see the fireworks from our beach since we’re a cove, so we close before the show even gets started.”

Though jurisdictions have fines for littering, with resources on the Fourth devoted elsewhere, it is impossible to enforce such laws.

Nevada second mostly likely state to issue speeding ticket

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

Drivers traveling this holiday weekend be warned: Nevada is tied for second in the nation most likely to issue a speeding ticket.

That’s according to the National Motorists Association, a “drivers’ rights” group that helps people fight traffic charges.

Florida tops the list for speeding tickets, with Nevada and Georgia are tied for second, Texas fourth and Alabama fifth.

Drivers in Montana are least likely to get stopped for speeding, the study found. People in Wyoming, North and South Dakota and Alaska are next in line for avoiding traffic citations.

Read the whole story

Feds may yank Medicare funds from Placerville hospital

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

The emergency room of a Placerville hospital from which a mentally ill woman escaped in March had problems so severe that they represented “an immediate and serious threat” to the safety of all psychiatric patients treated there, a state investigation found.

The California Department of Public Health investigated Marshall Medical Center after Linda Carol Clark, who was being involuntarily held at the facility as a danger to herself, fled the emergency room and commandeered an ambulance. Clark, 39, of Folsom, later was shot to death by police.

The probe found the hospital in violation of various federal and state regulations, according to a letter mailed to the facility this week by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The state determined that the most serious deficiencies, all of which pertained to the handling of patients in the

emergency room, were corrected during the inspection, the letter said.

Read the whole story

Bluth, Douglas County parking lot battle escalates

By Kathryn Reed

It appears Douglas County's elected officials and staff are not communicating well.

Commissioners Nancy McDermid and Greg Lynn met Friday morning with Chuck Bluth at his Glenbrook residence to discuss the disputed parking lot of the Nugget Building in Stateline. (This is where Sushi Pier and other businesses are.) Commissioners then went on to view the site for themselves.



This section of parking lot at the Nugget Building is being disputed. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Commissioners had been told by staff and the District Attorney's Office to let them handle the situation and not engage Bluth in conversation.

After the July 2 meeting, Bluth told *Lake Tahoe News*, "I think Nancy came up with some very good ideas and concepts and they will take it back and discuss it with the other commissioners." He didn't want to divulge specifics.

McDermid did not return a call.

When contacted Friday afternoon by *Lake Tahoe News*, the county manager's office quickly came up with a press release. (It was originally Steve Mokrohisky, assistant county manager, who contacted *LTN* in May about the issue. Click here for that story and background.)

The two-page press release outlines a back-and-forth dialogue between the county and Bluth about a lease price, length of contract and improvements to be made. The last sentence says, "The county continues to hope that we can come to an agreement and is ready and open to resume discussion with Bluth Enterprises."

Apparently, County Manager Michael Brown doesn't know two of his bosses have already resumed discussions.

Because some of what has allegedly been agreed to was done verbally, the situation has escalated in writing between Bluth and the county to where each is accusing the other of changing the parameters to an unacceptable outcome.

Perhaps the commissioners can resolve the issue. For now, the lot is open.

South Lake Tahoe council hires city manager

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's next city manager has read the grand jury report, he knows the disconnect between the government and the people it is supposed to serve, he knows about shoveling snow, he knows about the economic rollercoaster ride of a tourism based economy – and still Tony O'Rourke accepted the job.

O'Rourke's experience in the private and public sector led the City Council on Thursday night to vote 4-0 to select him over the three other candidates they interviewed. Councilman Bill Crawford has chosen to stay out of the interview and selection process.



Tony O'Rourke will replace Dave Jinkens as city manager of South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Austin Fay

"I think it's a great community and a great opportunity for progress. I know there are some real challenges," O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News* shortly after he was offered the job July

1. “It’s an opportunity to respond to the needs of the community and produce a government that works better.”

Lake Tahoe News did not post this story earlier because the final details of O’Rourke’s contract as well as final documents involving the background check did not come until today. A verbal agreement was given, but the contract has not been signed and all the particulars are still being worked out.

O’Rourke will be making in the ballpark of $169,502 – what current City Manager Dave Jinkens is earning per year. The contract will probably be for three years, also what Jinkens started with. Other benefits beyond the standard health and retirement are being worked on. It is not known if these would include moving costs, paying for temporary housing, a housing allotment, car or something else. His first day on the job should be right around when Jinkens leaves Aug. 7.

The council is expected to ratify the contract at the July 13 meeting.

“It is going to be a whole paradigm shift in style,” Mayor Kathay Lovell said of going from Jinkens to O’Rourke. “(O’Rourke) is very refreshing. He has great people skills, great communication skills. I think he is really strong.”

The four council members who voted all favored O’Rourke. However, Councilman Bruce Grego, who again did not return phone calls, has been lobbying to keep Jinkens on longer.

Councilman Hal Cole was not available for comment.

O’Rourke, 55, this morning let his bosses at the Beaver Creek Resort Company in Colorado know he is leaving. He has been their executive director since 1996.

According to the company’s website, it is “a very special hybrid, combining a homeowners’ association, a resort

association, with some municipal services added. The Resort Company, a Colorado nonprofit corporation incorporated on April 30, 1979, was designed to help Beaver Creek become and remain a unique resort community."

It does have ties to Vail Resorts, which owns Heavenly Mountain Resort.

"I think that he is strong enough he will be independent and he will not be tied to Vail Resorts," Councilman Jerry Birdwell said. The hiring of a city manager has not gotten Birdwell off the fence in deciding if he will seek a second term in November, nor will he give a date for when he expects to announce a decision.

Birdwell went on to say, "I think he was the best qualified person who applied for the position and he will be a great asset to this community."

O'Rourke's familiarity with airports was another positive, Birdwell said.

"He comes in understanding a mountain resort and tourism," Lovell said. "In the capacity he currently has, even though it is not an incorporated city, it's like it. They have an elected board, they have similar utilities, they have police and fire."

One difference is the average daily room rate in Beaver Creek is about $500, while it is $120 in the redevelopment area of South Lake Tahoe and much less in the rest of town.

O'Rourke sees his blend of private and public experience as a bonus. He thinks one of the problems with cities is having leaders with only government experience.

Before joining Beaver Creek Resort Company, O'Rourke was assistant city manager in Tallahassee for a year; city manager of Coral Springs, Fla., from 1992-95 and assistant city

manager from 1989-92; assistant city manger of Richardson, Texas, from 1983-85. He has also worked in Dallas, Ithaca, N.Y., Boulder, and was community development director of Isla Vista in California from 1977-79.

Lovell admitted his lack of experience in California was a strike against him when it came to her vote, but she said all the other aspects of his career and experience swayed her to put him at the top of her list – the same place the other council members put O'Rourke.

O'Rourke will be moving to the area with his wife and 16-year-old son. They have two other children who are in college. He is a skier, but prefers to snowshoe with his dog.

O'Rourke plans to engage the public as soon as he arrives.

"I want a laundry list of names of a cross-section of the community to see what the issues are," O'Rourke said. "We will quickly develop a strategic plan of action to address the most significant issues."

O'Rourke said change is definitely needed in the city and that "it's not a painless process and not without a lot of blood, sweat and tears."

He added, "Talk is cheap. We have to produce results. What attracted me to this (job) is that it is a great opportunity to produce great results. I'm not naïve. I know the difficulties of the past. We have to be above that."

Homeowners rally to fight

Homewood development

By Austin Fay

HOMEWOOD – Something has to be done in regards to the proposed Homewood Mountain Resort development. That was the overriding sentiment of Friday's meeting of the Friends of the West Shore, a nonprofit organization aiming to provide a community voice to Homewood's development plans.

Water usage, the height of the new lodge (which will almost be twice as high as the 32-foot-high existing north lodge), traffic and whether or not the new Homewood development fits into everyone's view of the West Shore were issues that brought people to the edge of their seats.



A rendering of what Homewood's owners would like to build.

This group of homeowners aims to incorporate environment, community and economic sustainability into what JMA Ventures of San Francisco wants to do. JMA bought the resort a few years ago and also now owns Alpine Meadows Ski Resort.

Currently, Homewood's population is just less than 370 full-time residents, with about 1,000 second homeowners. The expansion proposal would almost double the town's population. The mountain is about 1,100 acres, including the base area.

The large elements of the 316 mixed-unit proposed plan will consist of a 75-room five-star boutique hotel, 40 condominium residences in the north base, 99 condominiums at the south base, 13 on-site residences for staff, 30 penthouse units, 36 residential condominiums with 20 lock-out units so the condo owner can rent the space, 16 townhomes, grocery store, a full-service restaurant, spa, fitness facility and up to 25,000 square feet of retail space.

Gold-level LEED certification will be sought from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Also, the Madden and Ellis chairlifts will be replaced with high-speed quads, but the total skiable terrain of Homewood will remain unchanged.

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Homewood Mountain Resort’s master plan is here.

Thirty community members gathered at the Rideout Community Center on the West Shore on July 2 to talk about what the developer wants to do. According to the group’s handouts, Friends of the West Shore’s goal “is to have the Homewood Mountain Resort development reflect and enhance the rustic quality and scale of surrounding community, historical buildings both past and present, and protect our natural resources.”

The group also believes the developer’s plans are too big and “the current HMR proposal will negatively change the character of the West Shore forever.”

When asked by Roger Kahn, a small business owner, how many were year-round West Shore residents, nine of the 30 raised a hand.

When asked if their financial wellbeing was dependent on the West Shore, five people raised a hand, including David Tirman, executive vice president with JMA Ventures. Tirman was there to field questions about the proposed development.

“Currently, the revenues are not covering the costs of (Homewood’s) operation,” Tirman said of the reason for the development.

But that isn’t good enough for some of the residents.

“We need to be alert on this issue, we can’t just close our eyes and say, ‘we can remain fine on this issue because Dave’s (Tirman) such a great guy and wouldn’t do anything wrong’,” Susan Gearhart, president of FOWS said. “But every issue on deck is a viable issue, the economics are a viable issue, the community is a very viable issue.”

Tom Rosenberg, a homeowner on the West Shore for 25 years, is writing an opinion piece for the July 4 *Sacramento Bee* discussing how “the leadership of the TRPA has lost its sense of direction … and the way the Homewood project has been presented is very questionable.”

These are sentiments the group shares. Rosenberg is a writer who has taken an interest in FOWS, but is not a member.

“We’re not a five-star mountain, we’re never going to be a five-star mountain,” Claudia Williams, a Homewood resident, said after the meeting.

Rob Weston, a small business owner on the West Shore, put an emphasis on economic sustainability at the meeting.

“We have to remember what’s being proposed is a year-round resort – 100 year-round jobs on the West Shore,” Weston said.

He said most of the people at the meeting were NIMBYs (not in my backyard) and CAVE (citizens against virtually everything) because they are against development in Lake Tahoe.

The environmental impact report for the project is expected sometime in September. The public will have a chance to formally comment at that time.

The project is subject to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Placer County oversight. Tirman expects to break ground in 2012 if permits are in hand, building ordinances are complied with, there’s a buoyant economy, and no unforeseen obstacles.

The next meeting of Friends of the West Shore is at 10am July 24 at Tahoe City Public Utility District building at 330 Fairway Drive in Tahoe City. Residents of the West Shore will be able to ask questions and speak directly with TRPA representatives.