Equestrians left without water in payment dispute

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Equestrians say their hot, thirsty horses are suffering because of a dispute between a state agency and an El Dorado County water district.

And while the dispute continues, the state has been trucking in water at a higher cost than what the water district is charging it in late fees, officials said.

Riders who frequent the Olmstead Loop, a popular trail in the Auburn State Recreation Area, recently discovered that water had been turned off at the trail's staging area off Highway 49 in Cool.

Pilot Hill resident Pam Bailie said she had been riding a couple of weeks ago and stopped at the site expecting to water and hose off her horse.

Read the whole story

Stateline lithium exploration company moving south

Stateline-based AmeriLithium Corp. is moving its headquarters to Southern Nevada.

The Henderson offices offer improved telecommunications, boardroom and staff facilities, along with the ability to grow

with the company, according to officials

The new location also offers the added benefits of McCarran International Airport and the Henderson Executive Airport – reducing the time it takes employees to get to the lithium mining sites.

AmeriLithium is in the exploration stages of its three domestic locations Paymaster, Clayton Deep and Full Monty projects. In addition, AmeriLithium's Nevada-based Paymaster Project is adjacent to proven lithium production in Clayton Valley, home to the only U.S.-based lithium producing plant, operated by neighboring Chemetall Foote Corporation, a subsidiary of Rockwood Holdings Inc.

Lithium is a lightweight metal used in a wide range of consumer products – the medical industry uses lithium as an anti-depressant; industrial uses include glass, ceramic and porcelain enamel manufacture; the aviation industry uses lithium in alloys. Of particular interest is the use of lithium for battery production, which has expanded significantly in recent years due to rechargeable lithium batteries being used increasingly in electrical tools and in the rapidly expanding portable electronics market. Furthermore, the next generation of hybrid and electric vehicles are being designed to use high-capacity lithium-ion batteries as environmentally-friendly fuel alternatives while the Obama administration has introduced $5 billion in funding and incentives for the development of a secure, domestic battery industry with special focus on lithium-ion batteries.

Zephyr Cove company plans forest project

John Seelmeyer, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

A Zephyr Cove company says it is studying possible locations in Nevada for creation of forests that can capture and store carbon dioxide.

Privately held Equinox Carbon Equities Inc. says it plans to plant 3,000 trees at a dairy farm in California's Central Valley. The company didn't provide details of the location.

Billy Barnwell, chief executive officer of Equinox Carbon Equities, said the company is managing the project for a unit of INET Global AG of Wil, Switzerland.

The trees would be hybrid of a North American hardwood with the fast-growing kiri species. Barnwell says the hybrid developed by Fresno-based Emerald Energy can grow 50 feet in three years.

Read the whole story

Casino employees working harder for meager tips

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

Minimum wage earners working in Northern Nevada's gaming industry rely heavily on tips for income.

And they'd like to see more people called George come in to

gamble, drink and eat in the casinos of Reno, Sparks and Lake Tahoe.

That’s because George is the nickname casino workers have traditionally bestowed on big tippers.

Yet there are fewer Georges in a region that continues to struggle with the recession, Nevada’s No. 1 ranking in national unemployment and the glut of tribal gaming in Reno’s top Northern California feeder markets.

Read the whole story

Hackers break into Destination Hotels’ payment system

Publisher’s note: *The Resort at Squaw Creek is a Destination Hotel.*

By Robert McMillan, IDG News Service

Hackers have broken into the payment processing system of Destination Hotels & Resorts, a high-end chain best known for its resort hotels in destinations such as Vail, Colorado; Lake Tahoe, California; and Maui, Hawaii.

Guests who recently stayed at 21 of the resort’s 30 hotels may have been victimized by the scheme, which appears to have compromised point-of-sale systems. The company refused to release many details of the incident – citing an ongoing investigation by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation – but in a note posted to its Web site said that it had

“uncovered a malicious software program inserted into its credit card processing system from a remote source.”

Read the whole story

80mph car chase through South Tahoe ends in meadow

By Kathryn Reed

A Ford Mustang GT went airborne as it careened over a fence at the Upper Truckee Meadow after the driver led officers through the streets of South Lake Tahoe at speeds that reached 80mph. The vehicle stopped about a quarter mile in and then the man and woman unknowingly ran right to waiting officers.

The 4pm June 29 incident started with a report of a kidnapping about 3am June 27. The 32-year-old South Lake Tahoe female victim was not physically hurt and was released. It is believed she and the suspect were acquaintances.



Christopher Wadstein was arrested on two felonies and a parole warrant June

29.
Photo/Taylor
Flynn/Mountain
News

The investigation of that crime came up with leads that Christopher Wadstein, 21, of South Lake Tahoe might be the perpetrator. For the past 24 hours local officers have been tracking the parolee.

“He was mobile when we found him,” South Tahoe police Lt. David Stevenson said. “We attempted to stop him at Black Bart and Pioneer Trail. That’s where the chase started.”

Officers chased the suspect through the Sierra Tract, across Highway 50 where at the end of Creekwood Drive the vehicle plowed through the short wood fence leading to the California Tahoe Conservancy meadow.

“This guy was going 60mph. There was no hesitation,” said Curt Murtha, 25, who from his porch saw the chase go into the meadow.

Other witnesses said officers were no more than 30 seconds behind him as they all wound up in the meadow. No skid marks are visible where the vehicles flew around the corner from Springwood to Creekside.

A roofer on Creekside said it was quite a scene to watch.

Other said it was like something out of “Dukes of Hazard.”

Officers were scouring the meadow for anything the suspects may have tossed from the convertible. With Wadstein being called armed and dangerous, they were looking for a 9mm handgun he may have had on him. None was found.

With sweat beads forming on his bald head, the guy complained of chest pain as he sat in the back of the patrol vehicle. He

vacillated about wanting to go to Barton Memorial Hospital. Paramedics eventually took the heavily tattooed Wadstein to the emergency room.

The adrenaline, short sprint and high altitude may have contributed to his chest pain. He was booked into El Dorado County Jail on Tuesday night on a parole warrant, felony kidnapping and felony evasion of officers.

Stevenson didn't know why California parole officials wanted Wadstein back in custody, nor did he have his list of prior convictions.

Also arrested and booked into the South Lake Tahoe facility was Lacey Almdale, 21, of South Lake Tahoe, for obstructing officers.

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, FBI agents, South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team, and El Dorado County probation officers assisted South Tahoe officers.

Dressed all in black, with automatic weapons slung over their shoulder, the SWAT guys were also in facemasks.

"One officer had a gang hit put out on him so we are really concerned for his safety," acting Chief Martin Hewlett said of the hoods.

Eventually, Emerald Bay Towing showed up to cart the vehicle off. The Mustang does not belong to either of the people arrested. It was not stolen, but officers were still trying to figure out how Wadstein and the vehicle owner are connected.

Officers had gone through some of the contents of the vehicle at the scene. A stack of jeans sat on the back. Next to it was what looked like a small overnight bag, plus a small wooden box with unknown contents.

Stevenson said the vehicle is in custody and will be thoroughly gone over today.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder Photos by Taylor Flynn/Mountain News

ngg_shortcode_1_placeholder Photos by Kathryn Reed (Click on photo to enlarge.)

El Dorado Beach beating case ends with 18-month prison term

U.S. District Court Judge John Mendez sentenced a Fairfield couple on June 30 for their roles in a July 2007 beating in South Lake Tahoe of an American citizen who is originally from India.

Joseph Silva, 56, and his wife, Georgia Silva, 52, will be spending 18 months in prison and three years of supervised released.

At the March trial the jury heard that the victim was attempting to enjoy El Dorado Beach when the Silvas confronted and attacked him. The evidence showed that Georgia Silva initially hurled derogatory racial and ethnic slurs at the victim and his then girlfriend. When the victim called the police, Georgia Silva assaulted the victim, knocking him to the ground. At the trial, the jury heard a recording of the call made by the victim to the police and statements the Silvas were making to the victim.

After knocking the victim to the ground, and while Georgia Silva was on top of the victim, her husband kicked the victim in the head. The attack caused fractures to bones in the

victim’s face and he was transported by ambulance to a local hospital. Witnesses to the incident recounted that Georgia Silva also insulted and attempt to spit upon another man of Indian descent.

“This case demonstrates that hate-motivated violence has no place in 21st century America, and such crimes will be vigorously prosecuted and punished,” Thomas E. Perez, assistant attorney general for the Civil Rights Division, said in a press release. “Americans of all races, colors, and ethnicities should feel free to use public parks and facilities without fear of intimidation and violence.”

The case was investigated by FBI Special Agent Chris Campion, with the assistance of Special Agent Brad Bilderback. Officer Rhett Gann of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department also assisted in the investigation and testified at the trial.

Incline wife killer appeals case to federal court

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

After losing an appeal with the Nevada Supreme Court, a former wealthy Incline art appraiser has taken his case to the federal court, and has filed a 250-page challenge to his murder conviction.

Peter Bergna, 57, also asked the federal judge to appoint a lawyer to his case, saying he has no real estate, stocks, bonds or automobiles, and has about $821 in the bank.

“The state’s theory that (Bergna) could/would murder his wife

by staging a vehicle accident which, by its ‘design’ placed himself in mortal danger, is weird,” Bergna said in the appeal, which was ‘ghost written’ by his former lawyer Richard Cornell.

Read the whole story

Drill tests response to hazardous material on Tahoe beach

By Austin Fay

Plumes of smoke wafted across the decontamination zone at Regan Beach.

Mike Mileski, medical group supervisor for South Lake Tahoe Fire Department was coordinating radio traffic when a plume of the nerve agent crossed his path, causing his ranking sergeant to inform him his skin was itchy and he had to lay on the ground and wait for his teammate Sophie Tetlow to provide medical attention. The radio and clipboard he was in charge was passed on to the next in command.

Placing the decontamination zone so close to the hot zone was one of the many lessons learned during the multi-agency hazardous materials drill on June 28.



Hazmat drill in South Tahoe includes all the gear and a decontamination center. Photos/Austin Fay

If the situation were real, this mistake would have put the entire operation at risk.

It’s been almost two years since there was a hazmat exercise in South Lake Tahoe. The goal is to have an exercise annually for personnel in the region to be adequately prepared to isolate and decontaminate victims of a hazardous material incident.

Briefing at the SLTFD headquarters focused on communication safety and accuracy as objectives. Many people who spoke to Lake Tahoe News justified bumps in the road as a result of it being a training exercise.

Fire trucks and ambulances arrived at the section of the beach that was blocked off, while medics in the fire department assessed victims and took control of the scripted situation.

A troupe of 26 actors in makeup was hired, complete with a distraught mother and a belligerent eager-to-help drunk.

Four actors were sent to Barton Memorial Hospital as part of a decontamination exercise. One went by ambulance, the other three were walk-ins reporting exposure to the nerve agent.

One actor “died” from a heart attack that went untreated approximately an hour after the exercise started.

Five agencies took part in the exercise: South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Lake Valley Fire Department, Barton Memorial Hospital, El Dorado County and the Army National Guard Civil Support Team. A real hazardous materials case is nearly always multi-jurisdictional, with civilian and national entities collaborating.

The risk of something like what was simulated Monday morning is low, but “the potential is there, but very minimal,” Marty Scheuerman, SLT division chief said. The chance of a terrorist attack or situation where hazardous material might be present is slight, but merits preparing for the situation.

“Luckily, Tahoe isn’t a huge destination for lots of nasty stuff on trucks, where something like this might happen. It’s mostly consumer goods,” Scheuerman said.

Scheuerman draws on 33 years of hazardous material responder experience in the region and cites the 2007 Angora Fire as a valuable lesson in emergency response.

“There was a need for cooperation during that fire to create a unified command to draw all the agencies and participants under one roof,” Scheuerman said.

Hazardous material was simulated as a blue cooler emitting a plume of white smoke. The smoke, as well as the “injuries,” was in line with an organic phosphate poisoning, or nerve gas. Traffic was reduced to one lane in the Reagan Beach parking lot, while the grassy area on the west end was taped off, designating it the “hot zone.”

“It looks as though the drill’s moving along as planned and we’re learning as we go,” Mark Moss, of the El Dorado County hazmat team, said.

Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District response system is the greatest help and fastest responders as they have more resources to deal with a hazardous material situation, officials said.

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Grand jury buries South Tahoe cemetery with criticism



By Kathryn Reed

A rebuke almost loud enough to wake the dead was issued by the El Dorado County Grand Jury against the Happy Homestead Cemetery District – its board of directors in particular.

In bold the document says, “The HHCD Board of Directors failed to respond to the Grand Jury.”

This civil grand jury, made up of 19 county residents, is tasked with investigating a slew of complaints. Seventeen investigations garnered a report by the 2009-10 El Dorado County Grand Jury. A story about the chaos in South Lake Tahoe can be read here.

Although names are not used in the report, titles are. Usually the person filing the complaint is not identifiable – not so

in the case of the cemetery. The report says it was the county's auditor-controller who had issues with the cemetery on Johnson Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe.

Joe Harn has not paid the bill in question because he doesn't believe it would be legal to do so.

"The Happy Homestead Cemetery District seems to have an unusually intense desire to make payments to Substitute Personnel," Harn told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We'll continue to do our best to ensure we only make lawful payments for the Happy Homestead Cemetery District."

A retroactive $2,272 payment to Coco Kelly as owner of Substitute Personnel, who provided a temporary worker to the district, and a latter $3,000 settlement agreement, are the issues.

"According to testimony received, both of the above actions were encouraged by the HHCD legal counsel," the report says.

Not included in the report is the fact that the board agreed to pay the $3,000 out of the endowment fund.

The grand jury met with the five board members (Joe Tillson, John Poell, Del Laine, John McChesney and Linda Mendizabal) as a group. The district's attorney, Dennis Crabb, is referenced quite a bit by title.

Neither Tillson, the chairman of the board, nor Crabb returned calls.

"The HHCD position with respect to these issues was received in a letter sent after the Board was interviewed by the Grand Jury. The HHCD letter cites two obscure court precedents in support of the contention that a retroactive pay increase should be permitted and that the settlement agreement should be paid," the report says.

It goes on to say, "… retroactive claims that increase

compensation are considered unconstitutional.”

An April letter signed by the grand jury foreman asked the cemetery board for three documents. The foreman asked to be called if the documents did not exist. No call was made. The board didn’t respond at all to the investigating body’s request.

The grand jury wants the cemetery board to explain by the retroactive pay is not an unconstitutional gift of public funds, prove the settlement agreement is legally justified, and why paying either claim doesn’t violate the state Constitution.

Other items covered in this year’s grand jury report:

• A recommendation for the Board of Supervisors to have all elections vote by mail.

• Extreme criticism of how the Board of Supervisors went about trying to obtain property for an animal shelter on the West Slope.

• A suggestion to review and update the county’s fee waiver policy.

• Have a comprehensive assessment of administrative services in county government.

• Each year both jails are looked at. In South Lake Tahoe, the recommendations are to provide better security and surveillance cameras, and a structural engineer should be called out to look at the cause of leaks. The staff was commended for the variety of programs for inmates and the culinary arts program.

• Having the multitude of special districts create websites so constituents can easily access information. Internet access in the county should be increased. The grand jury found 52 percent of households in the county have good to excellent

Internet access; 39 percent have fair to good access; 5 percent have poor to fair access; and 4 percent have no access.