

South Tahoe teen survives plowing into power pole

By Kathryn Reed

By the looks of the 4Runner it is surprising the driver was released hours after striking a telephone pole on Pioneer Trail and being hauled to Barton Memorial Hospital.

The name of the male teen driver was not being released Tuesday night by South Lake Tahoe police officers. The vehicle had 2010 painted on the driver's side and Tahoe ICE in the back window.



A single-vehicle accident Tuesday evening leaves one injured and power lines strewn across Pioneer Trail.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Pioneer Trail east of Ski Run Boulevard was closed off just past 5pm Tuesday after the single car accident knocked out the power pole that broke at the bottom and sent wires across all

lanes of traffic.

Officers after 10pm said the driver, who was the lone person in the vehicle, was released from the hospital. An officer said the teen driver, a student at South Tahoe High School, might have fallen asleep. Alcohol and drugs are not believed to be a factor in the accident.

Marty Scheuerman, division chief with South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, said witnesses told officials they saw the driver heading toward Meyers, swerve into the other lane, hit the pole, and spin around. The vehicle landed off the edge of the road facing the direction it had come from.

No brake marks are visible.

Joel Kuntz, a journeyman lineman with NV Energy, said six customers were without power after the 5:10pm accident.

He and his colleagues worked to clear the area of debris and danger. For the time being power is being routed on a temporary secondary line. On Saturday, most likely, NV crews will be back – which means traffic controls – while a new pole is erected and the lines are installed to a permanent position.

Officials terminate contract with South Shore bus provider



By Kathryn Reed

MV Transportation is being told to hand over the keys to the South Shore transit operation and to cease operating BlueGo as of noon June 20.

A letter from South Tahoe Areas Transit Authority attorney Michael McLaughlin dated May 28 to MV Transportation says STATA is terminating the three-year contract that was signed June 5, 2009.

The Fairfield-based company took over on an emergency basis when ATM abruptly left. Then it came on board to operate the bus and trolley system with the long-term contract.

Financial issues have plagued the relationship from the get-go. STATA took an \$800,000 loan from MV last year that it was supposed to start to pay back July 1. The loan is for five years.

Nikki Frenney of MV says STATA owes \$1.2 million dating to August for services rendered.

Stacy Dingman, board member and spokeswoman for STATA, says STATA this year has written checks to MV for \$1.2 million, including a \$500,000 payment in April.

Monthly costs fluctuate based on hours of service combined with fixed costs. Dingman did not have those figures.

The attorney's letter says, "Please be assured that STATA has every intention of working with MV toward a mutually-agreeable repayment plan to satisfy its obligations to MV; however, STATA's present financial condition provides no opportunity

for it to obtain a letter of credit or any other security for the debt, as requested in MV's May 21, 2010, letter."

The exact amount owed is in dispute and is off by about a quarter million dollars.

MV last month had threatened to suspend service if the financial situation did not improve, but it did not expect the contract to be terminated.

"Like any business we cannot continue to operate and not be paid. We are paying drivers and servicing the buses," Frenney said. "They are doing business without having the ability to pay for the service."

STATA's stance is there is no way bus service on the South Shore is going to be interrupted.

To keep things rolling, TRC Consultants, which was brought in early this year, will operate the bus system when MV's obligations cease. TRC and LSC, another transportation consultant, are working to get the system solvent, Dingman said.

"They have already found opportunities that will ensure improvements," Dingman said of TRC. She said TRC has had complete access to the books so officials know what they are getting into.

As for being able to pay TRC, Dingman said the money would come from grants that had not been previously secured, cost-savings TRC has proposed and "doing things smarter all the way around."

Cash flow has long been a problem for STATA. The agency gets grants, funding from California, Nevada, the federal government, and money from the member partners. Dingman said bankruptcy is not an option that is being considered.

If the wheels on the buses don't keep going round and round,

it's possible STATA would have to pay back some of the money it has received.

Federal Transit Administration officials at the San Francisco office did not return a call.

Dingman said the contract with TRC had not been signed as of Tuesday afternoon. It will be for no more than one year, as is allowed in an emergency situation.

Changes to routes will need to go through public hearings. In South Lake Tahoe the City Council must sign off on them. Dingman has said those changes are coming. It's a matter of when, not if.

STPUD not done fighting South Tahoe's redevelopment plan

By Kathryn Reed



Officials from South Tahoe Public Utility District and South Lake Tahoe are expected to get together early this month to hash out lingering redevelopment issues.

Even though the city approved another redevelopment area last month, STPUD and El Dorado County are not walking away from the issue.

"We could talk about our plan of attack for the next couple of

months in closed session,” Richard Solbrig, STPUD general manager told the board at its last meeting.

The district has 90 days from May 18, when the city passed the plan, to file a lawsuit to stop it from going forward. (The county has the same deadline.) The board has not decided if that is the course it will take. First, staff from both sides will meet.

The water-sewer district is concerned it will lose a substantial sum of money as property tax dollars go to the city’s Redevelopment Agency instead of to STPUD.

“I hate to use public funds to sue another public entity unless it’s for the public’s gain,” said Dale Rise, STPUD board president.

Solbrig, Rise and board member Chris Cefalu were at the meeting when the council on a split vote went forward with the plan that encompasses 3,100 acres from the airport to the Y to Herbert Street. Solbrig voiced his concerns at the meeting.

Cops ready to paint over work of graffiti artists

By Kathryn Reed

Creating “art” on public structures without permission is illegal. That is why this month crews from South Lake Tahoe Police Department will return the underpass of Trout Creek to its natural color.

A myriad colors fill nearly every space under the Highway 50 structure that covers sand. The side where Trout Creek is

running through at a good clip is partially covered in graffiti. People had good balance, didn't mind getting wet or were in there when the water was lower to reach those walls.



Graffiti fills
the underpass
of Trout Creek
in South Tahoe
beneath
Highway 50.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Even the ceiling has been tagged.

Some of the walls leading into the covered area have been hit with spray paint. These markings are less colorful than the ones below.

Pictures, names, bubbly lettering – to the uniformed eye it all looks tame. A few gang symbols are obvious, but it's not what dominates these slabs of concrete.

It appears to be a place where presumably young people can let loose with their artistic prowess on a large canvas.

It seems to be a game of sorts with officers. Both sides seem to have their color of choice – drab for the officer, colorful for the youths.

"Maybe they will put it on the list of murals to be painted. Caltrans could give them permission just like with the power

boxes,” South Lake Tahoe police Lt. David Stevenson said.

It’s been about a year since community service officers last covered up this area.

“We cover everything that is reported to us. There are no places we just leave,” explained Bob Albertazzi, community service officer. “We cover it up as weather permits.”

Stevenson said, “With the gang staff, we don’t want them to have an outlet for that anywhere.”

When the days and nights are warmer, the underpasses are known hangouts for youths and homeless people. Fires in the area are always a threat.

On this particular day in May the sand is as pristine as any beach on the South Shore. Cigarette butts are the biggest components of litter. A small piece of glass shines. If this is a party spot, the evidence is missing.

In many ways it’s the ideal place to hang – the noise of the highway knocks out anything anyone below is doing, at night it’s dark, what’s going on below isn’t visible from the street level.

But officers know about this place, so it’s not secluded. And the bike patrol has easy access to this and all locations off the beaten path.

“We don’t like people hanging out under there,” Stevenson said.

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Gathering to remember those who died fighting for the U.S.

By Kathryn Reed

Patty Smith has a simple request – fly the American flag every day, not just a couple days a year.

Through tears, the South Lake Tahoe woman talked briefly about her son, Timmy, who died in the Iraq conflict. She talked about the need to remember and honor soldiers every day of the year.



Adam and Aaron
Johnson at
South Lake
Tahoe's
Memorial Day
service.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

The Smith family was in the front row Monday during the annual Memorial Day service at Happy Homestead Cemetery.

Under a mostly cloudy sky, the stars and stripes fluttered in the breeze. Gravesite after gravesite had a flag – symbolizing the vast number of veterans who have called South Lake Tahoe

home.

More than 100 people turned out for the 45-minute tribute to the men and women in uniform who have died fighting for the United States. All ages were represented – some too young to even wear a Scout uniform, some old enough to remember Pearl Harbor.

Members of the American Legion Post 795 Stella Van Dyke Johnson spearheaded the festivities. As tradition would have it, Margo Asti was the soloist, the Junior ROTC presented colors, and the Black Bear Piper Band played Taps.

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Judge: Villalobos' assets to remain frozen in CalPERS case

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

A judge kept intact the freeze on former CalPERS board member Alfred Villalobos' assets Friday, dealing a setback to the man accused of bribing top officials with the pension fund.

Villalobos' gambling habits weighed heavily on Los Angeles Superior Court Judge John Reid, who refused the Lake Tahoe businessman's attempt to unfreeze his real estate holdings, luxury cars and other assets.

Attorney General Jerry Brown is suing Villalobos for \$95 million, saying he bribed officials with the California Public Employees' Retirement System to influence investment decisions. Brown's lawyers said Villalobos has squandered \$68 million already and could dissipate the rest of his fortune

before the state can collect on its lawsuit.

Read the whole story

Vail Resorts buys Bay Area snow-sports website

By Mark Harden, Denver Business Journal

Vail Resorts Inc. said Friday it has acquired Mountain News Corp. (MNC), which operates the snow-sports website OnTheSnow.com.

In a statement, the Broomfield-based ski-resort operator and real estate company (NYSE: MTN) said it will operate Orinda, Calif.-based MNC as a separate business, and that its editorial content “will be maintained separate and independent from Vail Resorts’ five mountain resorts and lodging and real estate businesses.

Terms were not disclosed.

OnTheSnow.com offers news reports, reviews and other information about ski resorts. Vail Resorts says it is the world’s most visited online snow sports portal.

Read the whole story

Delinquent TOT in South Lake Tahoe adds up to \$569,476

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe hotels owe the city more than a half million dollars in taxes and penalties. The properties are deliberately not paying the city the transient occupancy tax they collect.

City Attorney Patrick Enright was back in court this week fighting to get the \$43,000 Inn at Heavenly owes.



Blue Lake Inn just paid its back taxes with penalty to South Lake Tahoe.

The TOT collected by lodging establishments must be handed over to the city within 15 business days after the last of the month.

“Delinquent TOT is an unlawful use of the city’s revenues,” Finance Director Christine Vuletich said.

In May, South Tahoe received \$129,000 in back TOT, penalties and interest on the Blue Lake Inn, and \$75,000 from the Fantasy Inn.

“Both of these, and all of the delinquent TOT, paid significant penalties and interest so it would be beneficial to hotel operators if they paid in a timely manner. For instance, in the Blue Lake Inn case, the actual back TOT and [Tahoe Tourism Improvement District] was about \$75,000, with the remainder in penalties and interest,” Enright said.

Blue Lake Inn was in foreclosure. Wells Fargo paid the city after the bank sold the property.

With Wells Fargo having the loan on the Fantasy Inn, the bank interceded to pay the TOT when the city threatened to close the property.

The Paradise Motel was supposed to send a check on May 25 for \$6,060.96. This breaks down to \$4,092.26 in TOT, \$723 delinquent TTID, and \$1,245.70 in penalties and interest.

Properties involving two members of the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association – Jerry Bindel and Danny Freemon – have been affiliated with properties that are part of the problem. Premier Resorts used to own Lakeland Village. They owe the city \$164,344.17, which include penalties and fees. A lien is on the property. Bindel is not allowed to speak for this company because they no longer own the property he manages.

Freemon is part of the Lake Tahoe Group that has several hotels on Emerald Bay Road, including the Pine Cone Acre Motel that owes more than \$23,000. Freemon did not return a phone call.

“Poor business practices and dishonesty are the primary reasons that hotels and motels become delinquent in paying the city the TOT they have collected, and this behavior has increased with the economic recession,” Vuletich said.

TOT is one of the city’s main revenue sources for the general fund. Some of the things the general fund budget pays for are police, fire, snow removal, streets, and parks and recreation.

“The money is city money that they collect for us as condition of doing business,” City Manager Dave Jinkens said. “... they need to know that city government will pursue them in civil and criminal courts if the facts warrant both civil and criminal prosecution.”

Click on TOT to see the delinquency report as of April 30. With penalties included, the city is owed \$569,476.06.

\$5.5 mil. will restore Tahoe Vista wetlands

Placer County’s cleanup efforts of an abandoned concrete batch plant on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe have been bolstered by the awarding of three grants, totaling \$600,000, toward restoration efforts in the Snow Creek wetlands.

The restoration project, managed by the Placer County Department of Public Works Tahoe Engineering Division, will address water quality concerns in the Tahoe Vista watershed.

The property, known as the TNT Materials plant is located on Gun Club Road in Tahoe Vista and was a materials-based, concrete batch plant facility since 1948. Placer County owns the property, having acquired it in August 2008 with a \$2 million grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

The property consists of eight parcels totaling a little more than an acre. The total restoration will be about 2 acres. Additional public easements between the parcels are owned by the Department of Public Works and create a project area of almost 3 acres.

The plant initially provided paving material for the construction of a road over Brockway Summit (Highway 267) into the Lake Tahoe Basin from Truckee. The property was developed on top of and adjacent to Snow Creek wetlands. The natural course of a tributary to Snow Creek was altered by fill material when the property was built. Cement and aggregate base rock was used to fill the wetlands on the property.

The amount of fill increased annually and the operations encroached further onto the wetlands, likely causing water quality impacts downstream to Snow Creek and Lake Tahoe.

After the removal of structures and storage tanks, the wetlands will be restored.

The three grants are from the U.S Environmental Protection Agency, Brownfields Grants and Land Revitalization program. Additional agencies that have given financial backing to the restoration project include the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Total project costs are expected to be about \$5.5 million.

Truckee DUI checkpoint on Friday

The Truckee Police Department in conjunction with the California Highway Patrol and the Grass Valley Police Department will have a DUI checkpoint on May 28.

Additionally, Truckee PD is participating in the national "Click It or Ticket" campaign, which runs through June 6. The focus of this program is to make sure all drivers and passengers in vehicle are safely and securely seat belted.

The police department's goal for 2010 is to significantly reduce the rates of DUI-involved injury collisions within the Truckee.

Funding for this program was provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.