Break-in at LTCC nets little for burglar



By Kathryn Reed

A gaping hole in the window of the fiscal services department remains four days after a burglar broke into the Lake Tahoe Community College office.

“They pilfered through her drawers,” Sue Niehoff, vice president of Business Services, said of the person who broke into her assistant’s office. “They didn’t get anything of value.”

A couple memory sticks were taken. It’s possible identity theft could have been the motive. Minutes of meetings were on the sticks – nothing that isn’t public information.

Little or no cash is stored in these offices, despite the name of the department.

Someone from the alarm company responded to the call. The alarm was reset by 3:58am.

Lights back on at Tahoe’s

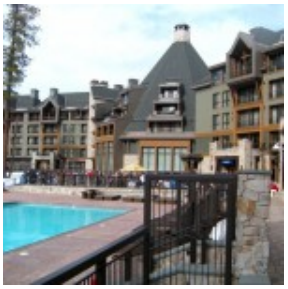
Ritz-Carlton

By Mark Anderson, Sacramento Business Journal

Ritz-Carlton Highlands Lake Tahoe reopened for the spring and summer season Monday.

The resort closed for its conversion from winter to spring a little over a week ago.

The closure was said to be routine, but because the resort just opened Dec. 9, no routine was established.



Ritz-Carlton at Northstar-at-Tahoe reopened May 10, though it still has major financial issues. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The spring closure followed Bank of America hitting the owners of the resort with a notice of default at the end of March.

Read the whole story

Gaming results improve through most of Nevada

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Casinos along the Las Vegas Strip posted their fourth increased win in the past five months in March, buoyed by strong performances in Baccarat and sports betting with the college basketball tournament.

Casinos in downtown Las Vegas, however, registered their 22nd consecutive month of declining gaming win. But casinos in Laughlin ended 27 straight months of lowered win, recording a 2.4 percent increase in March.

The state Gaming Control Board reported today that casinos statewide won $912.1 million in March, computed before business expenses and taxes. That was a 0.66 percent decline from the same month of a year ago.

Read the whole story

Wet weather snarls roads, wilts plants – isn’t unusual

By Susan Wood and Kathryn Reed

Twenty-four hours after the Earth experienced its warmest day on record, Mother Nature cooked up a winter storm for the

Sierra Nevada that showed the extremes climatologists and even the “Farmers Almanac” predicted last fall.

“We could have a very cool May. And if it stays this way, it will be the first one since 1998,” Kelly Redmond, chief climatologist with the Western Regional Climate Center, said Monday.

Although Redmond studies El Nino weather patterns like the moderate one the Pacific Coast experienced this winter, he said he doesn’t think the symptoms of the tropical weather phenomenon are still lingering.



Visibility was nil Monday heading into Tahoe on Highway 50. Photos/Kathryn Reed

“Most of those end in March,” Redmond said.

The region is experiencing a series of fluctuations in temperature and storm cycles. Early May’s normal freezing elevation of 10,800 feet is 800 feet lower than what is usual for Lake Tahoe. As oscillations go, April’s freezing level for Lake Tahoe was 1,000 feet lower in elevation than the normal 8,700 feet. The freezing level is determined by where rain turns to snow.

This pattern made snow more plentiful for a wider region of

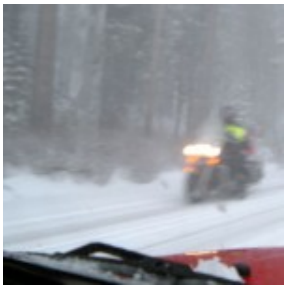
the Sierra Nevada and its foothills, Redmond reported.

“This is unusual. No question about it. But spring’s back and forth from hot to cold is more noticeable when you’re hoping for the opposite,” he said, referring to the summerlike days that have sprinkled the calendar.

On Monday, Reno’s high temperature was 34 degrees; Donner Summit’s 23 degrees; and Incline Village came in at 26 degrees.

Horrible road conditions

The nasty weather had law enforcement and tow truck drivers scurrying to keep up with the calls. Nearly 20 motorcyclists thought it a good idea to head west over Echo Summit only to get stuck on Highway 50 at Twin Bridges.



A motorcyclist in the snow on Highway 50 on May 10.

“It’s not too bright when you know what’s going on with the weather,” California Highway Patrol Officer Jeff Gartner said of the two-wheelers.

A pickup almost landed in the American River off of Highway 50. Another pickup farther east was pulling a sedan out of a snowbank on the north side of the two-lane road.

Highway patrol officials in California and Nevada said early Monday night no major accidents had occurred, just a lot of

spinouts. They said people seem to have forgotten how to drive in the snow.

It was a whiteout on much of Highway 50 on Monday afternoon just outside of Placerville to Meyers.

South Lake Tahoe police officers were hopping as well with spinouts. A scare after school with three missing children ended happily when the Bijou Community School students were located after missing their bus.

Perennials will survive, annuals no

Even though storms like the one Monday that dumped about 4 inches of snow at lake level are not unusual, not all the plant life knows this. Daffodils and other bulbs are likely to spring back, though maybe not as straight as they were on Mother's Day.

"Snow doesn't hurt. It's the cyclical temperatures (that are bad). The wind we had (Monday) morning, then the precipitation, that turns leaves black," explained Ron Zehren of Zehren's Landscape Nursery in South Lake Tahoe. "You can't hurt a bulb. Perennials will take the cold."

It's annuals like marigolds, petunias and zinnias that shouldn't be planted until after Memorial Day.

At Perennial Landscape & Nursery in Tahoe Vista they hold off on ordering the non-frost resistant plants because of storms like the one this week.

Rite-Aid had flowers for sale in its parking lot last week in South Tahoe. They probably didn't make it sitting on the asphalt or if people planted them.

"It's way too early for annuals. You can't fool Mother Nature," Zehren said.

Most nurseries in the basin tell customers not to plant until

June – no matter if it seems like an early spring.

Zehren said the other thing people have to worry about is having plants acclimate to the area. They may be grown in the Central Valley, shipped to the Carson Valley and then put in the ground in Tahoe in a 24-hour period.

“The plant says ‘get me out of here’,” Zehren said of that scenario.

Climate change

Even though May snowstorms are not unusual in Tahoe, including last year, the Western United States has seen more cold spells in the last few years.

However, before labeling the planet’s spring weather as a symptom of the Ice Age, look at other areas of the world to get a grip of climate change in the form of warming. There’s a huge difference between global warming and localized weather.



A truck barely stops before hitting the American River.

“You can’t tell the climate by looking out the window. The whole planet doesn’t work altogether in one direction,” Redmond, the climatologist, said.

Redmond warned the planet is experiencing “more pluses than minuses” in terms of temperature.

“Although it’s been very cool in our neck of the woods, 2010 has turned out to be very warm in the first four months. This one has been the warmest in 30 years of our satellite records. It may turn out to be the warmest in the last 100 years,” he said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s average of its collective temperature readings from around the world on May 9 was 20 degrees below zero. This sounds cold, but it is a few degrees warmer than average.

Scientists have long predicted weather extremes may become more frequent with climate change.

Redmond has seen it all firsthand this year. He was attending a conference in Miami in January when the Southeast had a deep freeze – and no heaters. Last week he was visiting Boston when highs hit the mid-80s.

The word from him – prepare for anything. In Tahoe that means keeping the shovel and rake next to one another.

Plan for Sierra may create jobs, healthy forests



By Marc Benjamin, Fresno Bee

A state agency overseeing the 22-county Sierra region is preparing an ambitious plan to add jobs in mountain communities, keep forests healthy, protect water supplies and

reduce fire danger.

And, to make sure the Sustainable Sierra Nevada Initiative has wide support, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy is working with timber, environmental, biomass and government officials to develop it.

Most agree that forests need thinning to reduce the threat of catastrophic fire, and those forest operations could create new job opportunities.

But balancing forest management with environmental concerns has been a tricky proposition.

Read the whole story

Blast of winter strikes Lake Tahoe

Publisher's note: ***Updated May 10 at 8:28am.***

A second storm system will arrive today and bring a mix of rain and snow to Northeast California and the Lake Tahoe Basin during the morning.

By Monday afternoon it should be just snow falling, with it accumulating at higher elevations. At the lake, about 1-4 inches area expected.

The storm should taper off by evening.

A winter storm advisory is in effect for today from 2-11pm at elevations above 6,500 feet. Four to 8 inches are expected at that level.



Old man winter hasn't left Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Winds will be strong, with gusts in the 40-50mph range. It’s possible another lake wind advisory will be in effect today – as was the case Sunday.

A mix of rain and snow is in the forecast for the Reno-Carson Valley areas.

The National Weather Service is warning on travel may become difficult across the Eastern Sierra and Western Nevada today due to snow or gusty winds. Carry tire chains.

Lows will be in the 20s for the next couple of nights. Highs will be in 30s and 40s.

Spring will return later in the week, with the high Wednesday being in the mid-50s and Thursday’s high in the low 60s.

Allergy season blowing into Tahoe with a vengeance



By Kathryn Reed

Does that sniffling sound from friends, family members and co-workers seem louder, more constant and earlier than years past?

Allergy season is here – in the Lake Tahoe Basin, Carson Valley and seemingly everywhere else.

Physicians' offices affiliated with Barton Health have seen a 27 percent rise in allergy shots for the first quarter of this year compared to 2009.

In the first quarter of 2009, 169 cases of allergic rhinitis were diagnosed compared to 200 cases in the first three months of 2010. This is a 30 percent increase.

Allergic rhinitis is an inflammation of the nasal passages, usually associated with watery nasal discharge and itching of the nose and eyes – in other words, the basic reaction to what you are allergic to.

Reports state 20 percent of the population has allergies. They are caused by an overreaction of the body's immune system.

Veronica Scola, an allergy technician with Alpine Family Practice in South Lake Tahoe, said she started seeing people with seasonal allergy issues last month on the few warm days of April.

"I do think (allergies) are going to be much worse this year," Scola said. "It's a little bit worse than normal because of the weather patterns."

She said the back and forth spring-winter-spring cycle makes pollen worse.

Flora contributing to the problem includes: pines, ash, birch, juniper, alfalfa, grasses, rabbit brush and sagebrush. Trees pollinate in early spring, grasses in summer and weeds in the fall. Allergy season in the basin is from the time the snow melts until it starts to fall again.

As soon as people start raking pine needles from their lawns it stirs up components they may be allergic to.

Michelle Feeney, a family nurse practitioner with Barton Family Medicine, recommends over the counter saline irrigation to her patients.

“You get pollen on your hands, your face, you breath it in,” Feeney said. “The more important thing is to stay indoors on windy days. Wear a mask if you are really susceptible to allergies.”

She said a lot of people forget eyes are affected by allergens and they often water, get itchy and turn red. Some people think they have pink eye, when what they have is allergies.

Scola is a not a big proponent of allergy medicines. She recommends people with persistent allergies to get tested and then possibly get weekly allergy shots.

For a regional pollen report, click here. The pollen hotline is (775) 359.5010, ext. 35.

For a pollen forecast by ZIP code, click here.

State parks-motor fee headed

to November ballot



By Paul Rogers, Santa Cruz Sentinel

A plan to charge California motorists $18 a year to shore up the state parks system’s financial troubles took another step toward the November ballot on Monday when environmental groups submitted about 760,000 signatures to election officials.

Under state law, the campaign needs 433,931 valid signatures of registered California voters to qualify the initiative. Elections officials have until June 24 to certify the measure.

If approved by a simple majority of state voters on Nov. 2, the measure would increase annual vehicle registration fees for California motorists by $18 a year, and allow any car with California license plates free admission to the state’s 278 parks, which currently range from about $6 to $15 per visit. State parks include redwoods forests such as Big Basin in Santa Cruz County, historic sites such as Marshall Gold Discovery park in El Dorado County and beaches like Malibu Creek near Los Angeles.

Read the whole story

Crabb giving up most of his law work to have fun

By Kathryn Reed

Retirement is not a place Dennis Crabb wants to rush to. Instead, the long-time municipal attorney is easing into it.

In June he will have given up all his lawyerly responsibilities except for attorney for Truckee and Happy Homestead Cemetery District.



Dennis Crabb

He is phasing out his job as counsel for Sutter Creek, Clean Tahoe, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, and Tahoe Transportation District. A request for proposal for an attorney for TTD will go out May 14.

Crabb is also wrapping up work for his private clients.

The 62-year-old moved to South Lake Tahoe in 1978 after spending the first five years out of law school as a deputy city attorney in Monterey. He was city attorney for South Lake Tahoe from 1979-95.

“I’ve been trying to cutback for the last two years,” Crabb said. “No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t get below 30 hours a week. You get to the point in your career where you’ve been doing this long enough that it’s time to go have some fun.”

He and his wife, Pat, are ready to explore the world some more. She retired from the South Lake Tahoe branch of the El Dorado County Library two years ago. In September they will be spending three weeks in China.

“We have a whole list of things on the bucket list we both want to do,” Crabb said.

Now they split their time between South Lake Tahoe and Reno. Their home in the Del Webb community makes winters more tolerable. There they have joined the symphony and museum. Pilates and Zumba are regular activities.

“I don’t see ever leaving Tahoe permanently. The community has been very good to me,” Crabb said. “I love a lot of things about it. It would be hard to not be there.”

He along with a handful of other people was instrumental in forming the Tahoe Tallac Association. Crabb was on the board for 20 years, serving as president twice.

He also served a term as president of the former South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce.

Crabb was attorney for South Tahoe when redevelopment was in its infancy – when the Ski Run Boulevard parcel was in bankruptcy and Heavenly Village was initially being talked about.

“I’m proud when I drive around South Lake Tahoe and recognize a lot of good things in South Lake Tahoe that would not have happened without all of my battle scars,” Crabb said.

He calls Truckee, where he has been the town attorney since 1994 when it incorporated, a special place with a philosophy that reflects that uniqueness.

Crabb has also been an integral player in the Sierra Business Council, though not in recent years. He credits SBC for instilling in other agencies the belief that “the environment

and economics in the Sierra are not mutually exclusive, they are the same thing."

He likes looking around and seeing that philosophy taking root throughout the Sierra.

Crabb expects to be fully retired in two years.

"What I have discovered is the people who successfully retire are the ones who transition into it. They gradually work less and gradually fill their time with other activities so when the move finally comes there is no gap," Crabb said. "I've been blessed. I've had opportunities beyond my wildest imagination."

TRPA: Grading season arrives with caution

Construction kicked into gear this week at Lake Tahoe, marking the beginning of the grading season in the basin. To protect from erosion, open digging and grading projects are limited to dry months between May 1 and Oct. 15 at Lake Tahoe.

Regardless of the date, however, grading is limited to times that soil is the most stable and activity is likely to cause the least amount of potential polluted runoff.

With some residual snow on the ground this spring, each site should be examined carefully to make sure conditions are suitable for construction activity, said TRPA officials.

Grading is the cutting or moving of soil for construction of a driveway, parking area, utility line, building or other structure. Grading also includes filling, excavation and

clearing of soil and is not permitted during periods of precipitation or when a building site is covered with snow.

Any project involving more than three cubic yards of soil disturbance requires a grading permit.

For additional information, call the TRPA front desk at (775) 588.4547.