

Teen dies in car crash near Alpine Meadows

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacrament Bee

ALPINE MEADOWS – An Easter Sunday collision on snowy Highway 89 South took the life of a 19-year-old woman.

Nevada County Chief Deputy Coroner Paul Schmidt said Wenjie Li died of blunt-force trauma when the car in which she was a passenger struck another vehicle.

[Read the whole story](#)

Grego to be subject of special meeting

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Bruce Grego will be the topic of a special meeting this month to ferret out the details, ethics and legalities of him being reimbursed nearly \$1,000 for an attorney to do 3.5 hours of personal work.

Grego contends the work is in the interest of taxpayers because it goes to the heart of him being able to do his job, which is to vote on issues regarding the would-be convention center that is merely concrete and rebar at this point. He says getting the stalled Stateline area project moving is why he ran for office in 2008.



Bruce Grego

At the April 6 council meeting his colleagues agreed to have a special meeting. A date has not been set, but April 15 is being looked at.

"I will reserve my comments for the special meeting," Grego said Tuesday.

For more details about the issue, [click here](#).

Usually council members have the city attorney seek the opinion from the Fair Political Practices Commission as to whether a conflict exists.

The FPPC decision essentially lets Grego and the city decide if a conflict exists. Grego for more than 10 years has represented the Lakeside Park Association. This nonprofit water district or South Tahoe Public Utility District could be the water district for the project.

"... Councilmember Grego will have to consider whether it is reasonably foreseeable that decisions about the Chateau project would affect his personal finances by resulting in increased or decreased income from legal work from Lakeside Park Association of \$250 or more in a 12-month period. Because the Commission does not act as a finder of fact in providing advice, the foreseeability of a particular financial effect is a determination that must be left, in most instances, to the informed judgment of the public official," the FPPC wrote.

The Fair Political Practices Commission's ruling is dated June 4, 2009. It is addressed to former City Attorney Catherine

DiCamillo and not Dennis Crabb, the attorney Grego hired to write the letter on his behalf.

Also at the special meeting will be a discussion on the city budget because expenses are exceeding revenues.

SLT council to vote on smaller redevelopment area in May

By Kathryn Reed

It will be May before a decision is made regarding the future of redevelopment in South Lake Tahoe.

The City Council on Tuesday approved Councilman Jerry Birdwell's motion to have staff bring back the project with the boundaries redefined, any mention of Lukins Brothers Water District removed, and a resolution with El Dorado County and South Tahoe Public Utility District sought.

Councilman Bruce Grego wants the performance bond language to be rewritten to reflect the various size projects that might come forth as well as compensate for inflation during the 40-year lifetime of the proposal.



Consultant Don
Fraser
explains
redevelopment
on April 6.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Councilman Hal Cole recused himself from the proceedings that lasted most of the day because he has property that borders the area.

The city's planning commission will first be tasked with going over the new proposal. That meeting date has not been set. The council is expected to vote May 4.

The redevelopment area will not change near the Y, but now the idea is to have it stop at the Upper Truckee River before hitting Al Tahoe Boulevard, and then leapfrog to include Harrison Avenue.

John Runnels was the first to speak at the public hearing. Representing the Citizens Alliance, he said, "We don't believe the size is helpful or needed."

He would prefer redevelopment were put on hold longer so the Tahoe Valley Community Plan could be approved. That plan is expected to be up for a vote late this year.

Adrian Gooch, a city employee who retired this year and has worked in redevelopment, spoke as a citizen in favor of the project. She pointed out how the county ignored the city's concerns regarding Red Hawk Casino and the financial consequences the Indian casino would have on the South Shore, as well as how STPUD didn't work with the city regarding water hookups.

A mantra on Tuesday was the city needs to do what's best for it. But on the flip side was a drum beat for cooperation and

working together. Several people suggested the plan be put the voters.

City Attorney Patrick Enright said he knows of no city to have done this, but it is possible.

Between the letters and verbal comments on Tuesday the 40 people who weighed-in were in favor of the project by a margin of more than 2-to-1.

Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, South Tahoe Association of Realtors and Heavenly Mountain Resort all favor the project.

Staff and consultants reiterated how the plan that first began percolating in 2005 will not involve eminent domain, no specific projects are planned, no taxes will be increased and that the purpose is to create a funding mechanism for future improvements through tax increment.

What has the county and STPUD alarmed is that once a redevelopment area becomes law, it freezes their allotment of property tax dollars. It's possible if the city's 4 percent growth model comes to fruition, these entities could see increases to the property taxes awarded them. It's also possible they will reap fewer property tax dollars.

There are 10 entities in the city receiving property tax allocations that would be affected by redevelopment. Lumped together, all education gets 34 percent of the taxes, El Dorado county 21 percent, the city 18 percent, special districts 11.5 percent and South Tahoe PUD 11 percent.

Another issue with the county is whether five parcels are in the city limits.

“(Resolution) of the five parcels would not mitigate our concerns,” Mike Applegarth with the county told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It boils down to a significant loss for the county in

tax increment.”

He said the county doesn’t believe the city has proved economic blight exists.

Ken Weitzman, who has lived in the area for decades, said he considers the tax increment collection to be a slush fund that could be used at the discretion of any seated council for their favorite projects without oversight by the citizenry.

Another resident, Michael Cullan, said the city needs to do something, and fast.

“We are spiraling the drain. We need to take action,” Cullan said.

Ex-STHS security guard faces 3 charges

By Kathryn Reed

Larry Brown, the former South Tahoe High School security guard, will be arraigned next month on one felony count and two misdemeanor counts related to his arrest in November involving marijuana and a 16-year-old student.

Brown’s attorney on Tuesday asked El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey to make all the charges misdemeanors. That didn’t happen.

The three charges are related to providing marijuana to a minor.

Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe told *Lake Tahoe News* he

plans to review the taped interviews between Brown and officers. "I want to see how upfront he was," Uthe said.

Brown, 63, no longer works for the school district.

The student was never charged.

The defense had subpoenaed her for the April 6 preliminary hearing but never called her to the stand.

Short sales spur Tahoe-Reno real estate market

The Reno-Tahoe real estate market began the year with signs of growth as home and condominium sales showed significant increases throughout the area, according to the quarterly report by Chase International.

The data compares home and condo sales from January-March 2010 to the same period in 2009.

Sales of single-family homes in Lake Tahoe were up 52 percent and Reno-Sparks saw a 26 percent increase in home sales. Carson Valley experienced a 27 percent jump while Truckee home sales were up 44 percent.

Sue Lowe, corporate vice president of Chase International, notes that the strong upswing in sales is a partial result of short sales and bank-owned properties, federal tax credits for first-time home buyers as well as investors coming back into the market.

First-time buyers hoping to take advantage of the \$8,000-federal tax credit must have their homes in escrow by April

30, with sales closed by June 30. State tax credits are also available.

Reno-Tahoe home sales are following national trends. The National Association of Realtors recently announced that pending U.S. home sales climbed above expected projections to 8.2 percent in February, primarily in response to the home buyer tax credit.

Lowe acknowledges home prices are slow to recover due to the amount of short sales and bank-owned property deals.

For homes priced above \$1 million, the East Shore was up 33 percent, Tahoe City up 100 percent, South Lake Tahoe down 50 percent, Incline Village up 117 percent, and Truckee down 8 percent. Reno/Sparks was down 13 percent and the Carson Valley remained flat.

The less than \$1 million Tahoe market showed significant double digit gains with East Shore up 25 percent, South Shore up 41 percent, Tahoe City up 90 percent, Incline up 64 percent and, Truckee up 55 percent. Reno Sparks less than \$1 million market was also up 27 percent and the Carson Valley up 28 percent.

The condo market was up across the board with Lake Tahoe posting a 143 percent increase in units sold and Reno Sparks posting an 83 percent increase.

Ex-owner of The Block wants to buy resort

Publisher's note: *Eneliko "Sean" Smith was managing partner of*

the now defunct Cedar Lodge and The Block hotels in South Lake Tahoe.

By Art Bukowski, Record- Eagle

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. – A Las Vegas entrepreneur who plans to buy Leelanau County's long-shuttered Sugar Loaf Resort faces multiple criminal charges in California, though he contends he's "not a crook."

Eneliko "Sean" Smith said he plans to spend about \$10 million to buy the resort and open at least a portion of it by July 4. But he faces felony grand theft and embezzlement charges in California's El Dorado County, and is the subject of numerous derisive Internet postings about past business endeavors.

On Monday, Smith said "everybody makes mistakes," and said he remains committed to the Sugar Loaf purchase.

Read the whole story

Skier visits to Tahoe resorts exceed 5-year average

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Sierra ski season is winding to a close the same way it started – with plentiful snow and plentiful business.

Up to 7.5 million skier visits are expected this season, more than the five-year average of 7.4 million, according to the California Ski Industry Association, which represents 28 ski resorts in California and Nevada.



Crowds enjoy the sun at Northstar's mid-mountain lodge.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

While that's short of the record 8.2 million visits of 2004-2005, it surpasses the 6.7 million visits last year and represents significant progress as the country struggles out of recession, Bob Roberts, association executive director, said.

Read the whole story

Ritz at Northstar's temporary closing called normal

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

Three months after opening, the Ritz-Carlton Highlands at Lake Tahoe will close for three weeks to get ready for the summer season.

The luxury hotel opened in December is scheduled to close April 19 and re-open May 10. The closure includes all

services, such as the spa and the Manzanita restaurant.



The Ritz-Carlton at Northstar is closing temporarily.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Hotel officials said the temporary closure has nothing to do with the situation at the Ritz-Carlton at Lake Las Vegas, which will close permanently in May.

Read the whole story

Report on BlueGo's efficiency expected Friday



By Kathryn Reed

South Shore transit officials expect to get a rundown Friday about how the public bus system is operating. Transit Resource Concepts took over the business side on an interim basis last month.

(South Tahoe Area Transit Authority's board meets April 9 at 1pm at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office at 128 Market St., Stateline).

TRC has been tasked with looking at MV Transit's records (they operate the BlueGo buses), financial records, structure of the organization and offer long-term visionary ideas to the board.

"What's missing and lacking and we're searching for is oversight," board member Stacy Dingman said. "We need a really strong leader who can direct the board."

The idea is an executive director will be brought in to run the bus system. Transit administrator John Andoh and STATA parted ways last month. The next leader will have more authority.

Dingman said Andoh was the right person at the time because he knew where buses should go and was able to help the system with scheduling. But in those two years, STATA realized it needs more than what Andoh could give. Andoh, before he left, said an executive director is what the agency needs.

"We need an executive director to tell us what to focus on. I really believe it is a really good problem to have. We realize we need help to make this work for our community," Dingman said.

None of the board members is a transit expert.

Also on the agenda is a staff recommendation to award a bid to Avego to install a fleet management system. The \$150,000 for the hardware and software comes from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The system would be designed to locate where vehicles are and calculate the number of riders.

Dingman said in no way is this system anything like what was proposed early last decade when kiosks all over the area were

supposed to assist riders with finding the nearest bus. That was a fiasco that never worked.

Banks shuffle locations in N. Nevada

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

Reno-based Heritage Bank of Nevada has acquired a vacant bank office in Gardnerville and plans to open its sixth branch there in mid-June.

Heritage officials said Friday they are purchasing the former Colonial Bank building at 1299 U.S. 395 North from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. for an undisclosed price. Alabama-based Colonial failed last August.

Heritage President/CEO Stan Wilmoth said his bank will move from the former Carson River Community Bank near the Carson City-Douglas line, which Heritage took over when that bank failed in February.

Read the whole story