Snow piling up; spring may return mid-week

By Kathryn Reed

Most schools in the Lake Tahoe Basin are closed or having a delayed start this morning after about a foot of snow fell overnight.

Besides residents shoveling and blowing out, ski resorts will be digging out too. Sierra-at-Tahoe is reporting about an inch of snow an hour in the last 24 hours. Squaw Valley says it has 14-18 inches of white stuff.



It might be time to take the RV south. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“Spring will try to peak its head out here in the middle of the week,” Rudy Cruz of the National Weather Service said this morning. “It’s not uncommon to produce this kind of snow in April. If it continues in May, it may be a bit unusual.”

Snow will be tapering off as the day goes on. The winter storm warning is in effect until 9am.

Expect Tuesday to be partly cloudy with highs between 35-45 degrees in the basin. Wednesday will be sunny with highs

between 48-58. It will then be partly cloudy Thursday and Friday. A chance of showers is possible on the weekend.

Expect the roads in and around Lake Tahoe to be slick today. Chain controls are a reality this morning.

If the back country is calling, know that the avalanche danger is “considerable” per the Sierra Avalanche Center.

Here is some school information:

• Lake Tahoe Unified School District – closed

• Douglas County schools at the lake – closed

• Lake Tahoe Community College – two-hour delay. The daycare is running normally.

• Incline Village schools – two-hour delay

• Sierra Nevada College – two-hour delay

• Tahoe Truckee Unified School District – open.

Grant designed to reduce DUIs in El Dorado County



Building on the successes achieved in recent years, the Avoid the 6 DUI task force bring more traffic enforcement to El Dorado County. Special DUI enforcement campaigns are as a result of a $321,513.00 grant awarded by the California Office of Traffic Safety to the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

“Our first grant funded event will start Memorial Day Weekend with a multi-agency DUI check point and DUI saturation patrols,” Sgt. Shannon Laney said. “This is a big deal for our community and brings in much needed funding to combat impaired driving, our No. 1 cause of injury collisions in South Lake Tahoe.”

The grant activities will specifically target those who drink too much and get behind the wheel. Additionally, funding will target repeat DUI offenders with warrant/probation sweeps searching for those in violation of court orders and those who have not appeared in court on past DUI arrests. Finally, the Avoid the 6 DUI Campaign will conduct court sting enforcement operations focusing on those who leave the courtroom and drive away on suspended licenses after being ordered not to drive by the judge.

South Lake Tahoe Police Department will administer the grant for the entire county. Funding for the grant comes from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Agencies participating in the ‘Avoid the 6’ task force include: South Lake Tahoe Police Department, Placerville Police Department, El Dorado County Sheriff’s Department, El Dorado County Probation, California Highway Patrol and California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control

“The Avoid task forces have played an integral role in the recent reductions in alcohol-related and other deaths on our roadways, lowering alcohol impaired deaths by more than 20 percent in the last three years in California,” Christopher Murphy, director of the Office of Traffic Safety, said in a press release. “This grant will help make South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County a safer place to visit, live and work.”

California creates another watchdog group for Tahoe



By Kathryn Reed

Another layer of government is encapsulating Lake Tahoe.

In March, members of the California legislative Joint Committee for the Protection of Lake Tahoe were named. The bill was passed last year to create the committee.

Lake Tahoe's two representatives, Assemblyman Ted Gaines and state Sen. Dave Cox, both Republicans from Roseville, are on the panel. Joining them are the man who wanted to create the committee, Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento; along with Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Santa Monica; Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, D-San Francisco; Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Palo Alto; and Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner, D-Oakland.

Members have yet to meet and there is no date for a meeting.

Steinberg chairs the panel.

"The Lake Tahoe region is a vulnerable ecosystem that we must protect while also repairing prior environmental damage," Steinberg said in a press release last year after the legislation was approved. "This committee is essential in this process as it oversees capitol (cq) investments in conservation and restoration measures."

His contention is the state committee will help implement the Environmental Improvement Program that has been operating without him and the others for more than 10 years.

When Gaines was in South Lake Tahoe last week he chatted with *Lake Tahoe News* about the latest layer of government. He isn't sure what all the committee will do, but he wanted to be on the panel to ensure he had input into anything that might affect his constituents.

Gaines said the language is vague in the statute that was passed by the Legislature.

If nothing else, Gaines hopes the committee could help stimulate the economy in the region, while also helping ensure lake clarity remains a priority.

Because the seven members haven't met, it's unknown what their true collective intentions will be or if the the team was merely created for taxpayers to fund a trip to Tahoe for people who don't represent the area.

Lake Tahoe forecast – snow and wind



A winter storm watch is in effect from Sunday afternoon through Monday morning for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The National Weather Service is calling for 6-10 inches of

snow at the lake and 10-18 above 7,000 feet. Winds will be from the southwest at 15-25mph, with gusts up to 40mph, and 70mph on the ridges.

Poor visibility from blowing snow is likely. The Weather Service predicts the worst conditions will be Sunday evening until daybreak Monday. Expect to have to chain up or put your vehicle into 4-wheel drive.

It’s going to be cold, too. The highs will be in the 30s Sunday and Monday, possibly reaching 40 when the sun peaks out Tuesday.

Overnight, it will be 19 Saturday, 18 Sunday and 12 on Monday.

Nevada trying to stretch its tourism dollars

The Nevada Commission on Tourism is updating its strategic plan for attracting visitors by combining cost-effective new initiatives and time-tested programs with proven track records.

Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, NCOT chair, said the agency will target U.S. consumer markets that have large populations with convenient driving distance or easy air access to Nevada and international markets whose travelers have a strong likelihood of visiting Nevada, such as Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Germany.



Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course in Stateline is better known as a destination in the summer. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“In the current national economic climate, many people are still traveling, but spending less and staying closer to home,” Krolicki said in a press release. “Visitor numbers are down, but Nevada is well-positioned as a centrally located, easily accessed western destination where travelers experience unique entertainment and attractions and where dollars still go a long way.”

The plan, which extends through fiscal year 2011, was presented to the commission at its regular meeting in March.

The plan is online here.

It calls for:

• Expanding the promotion of meetings and conventions, weddings and honeymoons, and Nevada’s parks and museums;

• Expanding Web content to appeal to additional niche markets, such as travelers seeking pet-friendly accommodations, and conducting media campaigns for diverse markets, including Asian Americans and Latino Americans;

• Working with Nevada's tourism "territories" to develop sales blitz programs for increasing overnight stays in rural communities.

"Many of our tourism initiatives will emphasize the rural Nevada experience, such as branding the state as a 'free-spirited' destination that offers new attractions and Old West cultural heritage and satisfies visitors' yearnings for an educational, yet relaxing vacation that delivers great value," NCOT Director Dann Lewis said.

NCOT, which promotes tourism for the entire state, is funded by three-eighths of 1 percent of the hotel-motel room tax that visitors pay. The agency's operating budget was cut 41.1 percent from nearly $18 million in fiscal year 2008 to $10.5 million this year.

Grego adamant taxpayers should pay his legal bill

By Kathryn Reed

A $937.50 check to South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Bruce Grego signed by the city manager and city treasurer is not sitting well with Grego's colleagues. How it got approved is unknown. Other council members have said it will be a topic of conversation at Tuesday's meeting even though it is not on the agenda.

(The council meeting starts an hour earlier than normal – 8am – at Lake Tahoe Airport with discussion about how to replace outgoing City Manager Dave Jinkens.)

The check to Grego is for expenses he incurred last year when he was seeking an opinion from the Fair Political Practices Commission as to whether he had a conflict of interest regarding the convention center project or what is generically called Redevelopment Area No. 3.



Bruce Grego

Normally the city attorney reviews potential conflicts. If an FPPC ruling is sought, it’s the city attorney who writes the letter, not outside counsel. Grego enlisted Dennis Crabb of Rollston, Henderson, Crabb & Johnson, Ltd. in South Lake Tahoe to help in his quest. He, not the city, hired Crabb to work with the FPPC to determine if having Lakeside Park Association as a client would be a conflict.

The FPPC said there is no conflict, which has allowed Grego to vote on convention center issues.

Crabb on May 6, 2009, billed Grego $937.50 for 3.75 hours of work. The city wrote a check dated March 11, 2010, as reimbursement to Grego for that amount.

Grego said he submitted the invoice at least six months ago. Why the delay in payment is not known. A copy of the invoice was not available Friday because city offices were on furlough.

However, Grego really tried to get paid last summer, according to an exchange of emails. At that time he was denied reimbursement. Why there is a reversal of opinion is not known.

A memo to Grego from then City Attorney, now Assistant City Attorney, Jacqueline Mittelstadt dated Aug. 20, 2009, says, “Given that the South Lake Tahoe City Code does not authorize a single council member to hire outside counsel, nor allows the City Manager or City Attorney to retroactively hire legal counsel, I replied with the attached memoranda dated July 27, 2009 to Mr. Jinkens. As you can see, I recommended that this invoice be discussed with the City Council Finance Committee so that, if there were an appetite for Council approval of the fees, the matter could plausibly be taken as a consent item. As you can see from the note on the Memo, Mr. Jinkens replied ‘My question is would reimbursement be legal?’ The response is unfortunately, no. The City Code and the purchasing regulations do not appear to allow a retroactive payment for legal fees incurred by a single council member. It would require City Council consensus to return the item to the Council for approval in order to reimburse you for these fees. I did vet the issue with the finance committee and they did not feel they could approve the fees either. Full council consensus and subsequent action would be required. Please let myself or Mr. Jinkens know if you would like this matter to be placed on the Council agenda.”

The finance committee is Councilmen Hal Cole and Jerry Birdwell.

“When I was mayor, Bruce came to me with this bill. I told him that individual council members do not have the authority to spend city money without the consent of the City Council. The City Council did not approve this expenditure,” Birdwell said. “What makes this worse is that Bruce went behind the council’s back to get the city to pay it anyway.”

Birdwell believes Grego must pay the money back to the city.

“To vote is paramount to what we do on the council. I think it was appropriate. It was a moderate charge,” Grego said of the bill. “I think it should be addressed as a public expense and

not a personal expense. Because this matter directly dealt with my ability to vote, that is a legitimate claim for reimbursement."

When Grego spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* on Friday he said Cole's letter to the FPPC was written by outside counsel, with expenses paid directly to the city.

"If I need legal advice, that's what my city attorney is for. I would not seek outside counsel," Cole told LTN. "If I did that, it would be my expense. If (the city) hired someone else, I didn't know it."

Jinkens is out of town. In an email he said, "I am having checked some background information in response to your voice message and will respond when I receive it. I am out of town but will reply this weekend."

He was advised a story would be published Saturday. No response was forthcoming. Therefore it is not known if outside legal counsel was ever really sought in Cole's case, and if it were, what the fee was and to whom it was paid.

(The FPPC ruled Cole couldn't vote on Project 2 because he owns property too close to the proposed project.)

A series of emails dated March 1, 2010, involving Jinkens, his assistant Tina Shannon, Redevelopment Director Gene Palazzo and City Attorney Patrick Enright ultimately authorize the March 2010 check to Grego to be written. Enright did not return a phone call Friday.

"Please have a check processed to reimburse Councilmember Grego in the above amount from the New Plan Area Account" is handwritten by Palazzo on a printed email to him from Shannon.

The email in part from Shannon says, "Dave (Jinkens) told me to process the payment and expense to RDA, as was done with Mr. Cole's opinion."

This would indicate the money being used is from Redevelopment Area No. 2, which the city will vote on Tuesday. With city offices being closed, it's not known how or why the money is from that account.

"You raise a good question 'Why wasn't it billed to the City Attorney's Office?'," Mayor Kathay Lovell said. "The city attorney can seek another opinion. They often do that if they don't have the expertise or it's a time issue."

Neither Lovell nor Cole was aware of the Grego reimbursement until *Lake Tahoe News* telephoned. Birdwell was not issued a copy of the warrants with his April 6 agenda packet. Councilman Bill Crawford was the only council member besides Grego who knew about the issue.

"It looks to me that Mr. Grego and perhaps the city manager's behavior is ethically questionable," Crawford said. "Mr. Crabb sent the bill to Mr. Grego. That was his client, not the city, so I don't think it's correct to reimburse Mr. Grego under those circumstances."

Grego said Crabb did not want to bill the city. Grego didn't have an explanation for why the former South Lake Tahoe city attorney would make that decision. Crabb did not return a phone call Friday.

Grego started the whole process with now former City Attorney Cathy DiCamillo, who no longer lives in the city. He said he didn't like her draft letter to the FPPC. He said he didn't want to wait for her to return from vacation to craft a final version because the vote on the Mello-Roos bonds regarding the convention center was going to be up for a vote.

But the reality is the vote was June 4. This was after DiCamillo had retired. Mittelstadt and Enright occupied her office June 1.

"It's definitely money well spent. The benefit of my actions

are the benefit of the public," Grego said. "I voted to stop the issuance of $25 million of bonds. My vote did matter."

The vote was 5-0.

When Grego was asked how he could keep voting against funding most of the training/education requests from city staff to do their job, he said those moderate charges are different.

"This is something that went to the foundation of why I ran for office and the issues regarding the hole and trying to find a solution," Grego said as to why he believes taxpayers should pay for outside legal advice that is usually handled in house.

Earmarks divide California lawmakers

By Rob Hotakainen, McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON – In Elk Grove, the local congressman is not backing the city's request for $250,000 in federal money for a new teen resource center, one of the city's top local projects.

That's because Republican Rep. Dan Lungren of Gold River, who represents the city of Elk Grove, doesn't support earmarks, the money used to pay for special pet projects back home.



Rep. Tom McClintock

In Calistoga, the local congressman is trying to get Congress to approve $2 million for a new building that would house both a teen center and an art center.

Read the whole story

STHS construction zone about to be teaching center

By Kathryn Reed

An excitement was in the air as more than a dozen people toured the Construction, Arts and Transportation Academy at South Tahoe High School. Between now and April 18 the final touches will be put on the building that will welcome students April 19.

Between the $64.5 million bond approved by voters in November 2008 and the more than $30 million Lake Tahoe Unified School District will receive from the state in matching grant dollars, the facilities in the district are being transformed. Most of the dramatic changes are occurring at the high school, though ever school will reap the benefits of the bond.



STHS Principal Ivone Larson, center, begins a tour of the CAT building. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Angela Swanson, former board member and now consultant for the architectural team, gave the committee an update on state dollars. With bond sales going well in March, $4.3 million should be in LTUSD's coffers in June. Although the state has approved $30 million in matching funds for LTUSD, much of the money is not in hand.

On Wednesday it was the bond oversight committee's opportunity to tour one of the two buildings currently under construction at South Tahoe High. The other building is in the back of the campus called Stadium View because it overlooks the football field.

(Click here for more info on both buildings and some history.)

The committee is tasked with making sure the dollars are spent appropriately. Proposition 39 mandates the district do the projects outlined in the bond proposal. This means as board members change, pet projects cannot be introduced. What can change is an expansion of what's in the bond, which is how the sports medicine building can become a reality.

"This is a building like you've never seen in this district," STHS Principal Ivone Larson told the group as they entered the

CAT building.

Joe Stewart of SMC Contracting was part of the tour.



Contractor Joe Stewart, center, speaks with Josh Mercow and Harold Singer on Wednesday.

“The complexity of the building was a challenge. But ultimately the complexity is the beauty of the building,” Stewart told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The CMU (concrete masonry unit) is structural, but it’s also part of the design.”

The concrete blocks will help with energy costs because of how they retain heat. Solar was looked at, but it didn’t pencil out.

Natural light filters in from the multitude of windows. Studies have been done that prove people learn better with natural light instead of under fluorescents.

“Smart lighting controls the system. It will sense occupancy and daylight harvesting,” LTUSD Facilities Director Steve Morales said. This will save on energy bills.



Views from the art room.

Instructors will be able to control the lighting as well. It’s possible to dim the lights over the students so the focus is on the teaching wall.

Smart boards may be the one item not installed when classes begin after spring break.

Even what the floors are made out of was given careful consideration. A rubber floor with resins that will eliminate the need for them to be refinished are in the construction area. The arts section has a concrete floor with a finish for durability and ease of cleaning.



Construction, Arts and Transportation building at STHS.

It doesn’t look like your typical auto shop or construction learning area. The exterior blends with the environment. It’s neither over-the-top Tahoe architecture, nor the typical institutional design.

The views from where the art students will study are stunning – or perhaps, inspiring, as Larson put it.

Committee member Amanda Adams asked whether the campus could be used as a demo-learning area for locals needing to put in BMPs, the erosion prevention measures.

Morales said part of the revegetation plan was designed by students and will be implemented by them as well.

By being three months ahead of schedule it means Stewart and his guys will be able to start demolition of the little theater the first week of May, with asbestos abatement beginning April 12.



LTUSD Facilities Director Steve Morales explains the intricacies of the building.

A special groundbreaking ceremony for the performing arts-media building will be May 21.

Replacement of the tennis courts should begin July 1, with players able to use them by Aug. 15.

The school board is having a special meeting April 6 to vote on contracts for projects that are in the pipeline.

Snowpack at 106%; water allocations increase

With the Sierra snowpack's water content above average, the Department of Water Resources on Thursday increased its State Water Project allocation to 20 percent.

"As the water picture for this year becomes clearer, we can increase our deliveries to farms and communities throughout the state,"



Lake Oroville on March 21, 2010. Photo/Kathryn Reed

DWR Director Mark Cowin said in a press release. "But the aftermath of three years of drought and regulatory restrictions on Delta pumping to protect fish species will keep this year's allocation far below normal. This underscores, once again, the need to implement long-term solutions to improve water supply reliability."

Manual and electronic snow survey readings from April 1 indicate that statewide snowpack water content is 106 percent of normal for the date. This time last year, the reading was

81 percent of normal.

Results of today’s manual snow survey by DWR off Highway 50 near Echo Summit are as follows:

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	71.5 inches	32.3 inches	97
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	65.7 inches	25.9 inches	92
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	82.9 inches	31.8 inches	102
Tamarack Flat	6,500 feet	missing	missing	missing

Electronic sensors show northern Sierra snow water equivalents at 126 percent of normal for the date, central Sierra at 92 percent, and southern Sierra at 105 percent.

Snowpack water content normally is at its peak the first of April, although DWR makes a final manual survey the first of May, and electronic readings report conditions daily. DWR may be able to increase the State Water Project allocation to more than 20 percent as hydrologists refine runoff projections from today’s snowpack readings and conditions continue to develop.

Lake Oroville, the State Water Project’s principal reservoir, is recovering slowly after three consecutive dry years. Its storage level today is at 47 percent of capacity, 60 percent of normal for the date.

In addition, fishery agency restrictions on Delta pumping continue to reduce the amount of water that can be delivered to contractors and customers in the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, Central Coast and Southern California. The final State Water Project allocation, to be set later this spring, will

partially depend on how the pumping restrictions to protect fish including Delta smelt, salmon and longfin smelt are applied.

In 2009, the State Water Project delivered 40 percent of customer requests.

Lakeside Inn Casino spoof not completely false



By Kathryn Reed

Whoever was the originator of the Lakeside Inn's day-early April Fools' Day joke probably should get a raise.

Facebook chatter on Wednesday was amusing. For those who don't do Facebook or skipped a day, click to know what's going on.

It was prompting calls to the Stateline casino to find out where the truth was. PR folks on the South Shore were helping promote the hype via social networking. A slew of local recognizable names/faces were in on the act – Lew Feldman, Jerry Birdwell, B Gorman and Julie Regan. Even Charles Barkley had a quote.

Having a zipline from the top of the proposed 50-story hotel tower to Emerald Bay sounds like more than your average E-ticket ride. The regulatory process for something like that,

if it were really proposed, might provide for more spectacular fireworks than the ones shot off over Lake Tahoe each Fourth of July.

“The town has been under so much pressure for a couple years now that we think it’s healthy to share the humor,” Mike Bradford, president of the hotel-casino said as to why they created the make-believe development project.

But the truth is Bradford for a long time has thought a zipline from somewhere on Heavenly Mountain Resort to the lake would be an ultimate attraction.

Even though what’s proposed on Facebook is not going to happen – for many obvious reasons to anyone who knows about the rules and regulations at Lake Tahoe – the property does want a face-lift of sorts.

“What we would like to do is some sort of resort spa development,” Bradford told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We will raze all of our rooms and build a whole new facility.”

That is the truth.

The 25-year-old property that is considered a locals’ spot for gaming and dining, doesn’t want to lose that character. But at the same time, it knows gambling is not the primary focus of people living in or visiting Tahoe.

Bradford was at the March 25 Tahoe Regional Planning Agency meeting where he told the Governing Board he wants to transform the Lakeside Inn.

“It’s no secret he would like to do things,” TRPA spokesman Dennis Oliver said. “He wants to remake his business so he can respond to the decline in gaming.”

Lakeside has acquired neighboring properties to the north for a combined 8-acre parcel.

“Gaming will always be an important part of our economic model, but it will be less a part of it,” Bradford said.

Lakeside has 124 rooms – all without much of a view. They are basic, ordinary and cater to the person coming to town to spend their time in the casino. Because that person for the most part does not exist anymore, Lakeside wants to start over.

Views of Lake Tahoe and Rabe Meadow are from the second floor. But none of the current rooms are that high. That will change in the future.

“The economics of hotels are such that simply redoing rooms isn’t cost-effective,” Bradford said.

Bradford said talks are under way with potential developers as well as boutique hoteliers. He foresees the project to break ground in three to five years, with it taking about a year to complete.

The hotel has a summer-only pool and year-round hot tub. But Bradford said they don’t meet the destination resort standards. That will change if his ideas get implemented. And they are likely to be be some of the initial upgrades.

“I envision a facility that has a more recreation focus,” Bradford said.

With the Tahoe Beach Club one day going in at the end of Kahle Drive, Lakeside wants to provide its guests access to that development’s beach club. The current casino is also within easy access of Rabe Meadow and then Nevada Beach. The proposed Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail will be in the area.

Dining options are likely to expand. Room service will definitely be added, Bradford said.

He expects the remodel of the existing buildings to take on a more modern, European Alpine theme instead using all the logs

and rock that are typical of Tahoe.