

WHS 4-day school week to continue another year



By Kathryn Reed

On a 7-0 vote Tuesday, the Douglas County school board agreed Whittell High School should continue with its four-day school week next school year.

This is the first year the 7-12 school in Zephyr Cove has had the shortened school week.

"I think it's a really good example of a school making structural changes to meet the needs of the community. (With) 80 percent of students in sports and traveling long distances, those are all the reasons we felt a four-day school week was the appropriate structure for our school," Principal Sue Shannon said.

The board was hoping to have some concrete data in terms of test score performance, but that information isn't available. Standardized tests are being taken this week, with results available in June.

In April, the board is expected to rule on two modifications Whittell would like to implement next school year. One is to have school on the Fridays of the weeks that include a Monday holiday so classes are in session four days. This will occur five times in 2010-11.

The other change is to take the five days in June for snow days and incorporate them as needed into the April and May

calendars.

Surveys of teachers, students and parents were taken to see what they think of the schedule.

The school met with parents before the board meeting. Although only a few showed up, those who did were in favor of keeping the status quo.

“Will we cover the same curriculum? That was my biggest question,” Shannon said.

Seventy percent of the teachers said they are at the same place they were a year ago, while 30 percent are ahead of schedule. Shannon said teachers are able to go deeper into the content because the students are in class. Whereas in the past, so much time was spent on review to account for those who had been absent because of a sport.

On average, students missed 35 periods last year because of athletics. That average is down to seven this school year.

Of the students surveyed, 98 percent said stay with the four-day school week.

The statistics class conducted the survey. One of the questions was whether grade point averages had changed. Fifty percent said it had gone up, 7 percent reported a decline and 43 percent said there was no change. Of course all the variables involved in those changes are not accounted for.

The board is still calling this a pilot program. Even if the board were to make it permanent, the district needs to apply to the state each year for the alternative calendar.

South Lake Tahoe city attorney resigns

By Kathryn Reed

Jacqueline Mittelstadt is moving on – this time by choice.

She gave notice Wednesday. Her exact last day still needs to be negotiated, but it will be a matter of weeks.



Jacqueline
Mittelstadt

Mittelstadt came on as South Lake Tahoe's city attorney in June. Three months later on a split decision the City Council began the process to fire her for reasons that remain murky and were not fully aired in open session.

Two months down the road, in early November, the council reversed course and decided to keep Mittelstadt as assistant city attorney and bumped Patrick Enright into the city attorney's seat.

What direction the council will take now is unknown. This had been the first time two city attorneys were on staff. Mittelstadt said there is more than enough work to keep two attorneys busy.

Enright was not available for comment. Mayor Kathay Lovell and Mayor Pro Tem Hal Cole were not aware of Mittelstadt's impending departure until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

"The city seems more divisive then I've ever seen it. It comes from the top down," Cole said. "There is a morale problem in the City Council and I see that trickling down into the whole organization. It seems like personality becomes more important than policy."

Mittelstadt sat down with *Lake Tahoe News* on Wednesday to talk about her brief stint here. She said many have encouraged her to stay until after the election in November when three seats are up on the council. But she isn't willing to take that gamble.

Asked what she would do if she were mayor or city manager for the day, Mittelstadt said, "I would invite disagreement, open dialog, be forthright in what I say. My actions would be consistent with my words. Above all, I have the philosophy of doing the right thing, what is in the best interest of the community."

She simply said, "I don't fit into the culture here."

Mittelstadt says there's nothing she would have done differently that could have avoided the brouhaha last fall.

"I followed the direction the City Council gave to me and that's what city code required me to do," Mittelstadt said.

Financial issues about the use of out outside counsel, whether contracts were in place, whether bids for this work were sought, and how City Manager Dave Jinkens could hire outside counsel without the city attorney or council knowing all came to light upon investigations by Mittelstadt and Enright.

Life for Mittelstadt unraveled from there. Like Cole said, personalities seemed to become more dominant than policy.

She says there is a need for outside counsel because of their specialties. But she also said the city was in the habit of paying \$30 per email from an attorney.

Mittelstadt has a number of job offers on the table. She won't say if it's public or private practice she is looking at or where.

She leaves with a heavy heart, having made friends, joined Soroptimist, and having fallen in love with the beauty of Lake Tahoe.

Windy Washoe Valley on NDOT's radar

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Commuting between Reno and Carson City, Ann Slater thinks of Washoe Valley as "the Twilight Zone or hell, depending on the day."

That's because the scenic valley is prone to nasty weather "particularly wind gusts with the strength to topple big rigs."

"I can feel it blowing the car around. It's spooky," said Slater, 54. "I don't drive next to trucks. I stay as far away from them as I can for that reason" that they might blow over.

Read the whole story

Gaming win down in January, but better than expected

By David McGrath Schwartz, Las Vegas Sun

Gaming revenues dropped 3.2 percent in January compared to the same month a year ago, a figure that was better than expected. Nevada casinos reported a gaming win of \$883 million in January, with casinos on the Las Vegas Strip down 3 percent.

But that could be good news.

January 2009 had both Chinese New Year and Super Bowl weekend, both big gambling events. Those events this year fell in February. Because of that the state's Gaming Control Board had expected a double-digit decrease in January, said Frank Streshley, chief of the Gaming Control Board's tax and license division.

Read the whole story

Vail Resorts profits below expectations

By Denver Business Journal

Vail Resorts Inc. posted a smaller profit in its most recent quarter Wednesday, falling short of analysts' expectations.

The Broomfield-based ski-resort and hotel operator again cited a dropoff in real estate closings as a factor.

Vail Resorts (NYSE: MTN) reported results for the three months

ending Jan. 31, which it regards as its fiscal 2010 second quarter.

It posted attributable net income of \$40.7 million, or \$1.11 a share, down from income of \$60.5 million, or \$1.65 a share, in the same quarter a year earlier.

Read the whole story

Forest Service moving forward with Angora Fire restoration

 **By Rex Norman**

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is seeking public comment on a proposal that would allow planting of conifer seedlings in the Angora Fire area this spring.

An environmental assessment for comprehensive restoration of the Angora Fire area will be released by mid-March, and the agency has previously analyzed reforestation as part of this project. However, the Forest Service is seeking to expedite a decision on reforestation to allow for the planting of 745 acres, of which 450 could occur in April 2010.

Typically, forests place orders for conifer seedlings to nurseries about one and a half to two years before they expect to plant. Accordingly, the Forest Service submitted an order for planting in the Angora Fire area, which will be delivered this spring, before a decision on the larger project is signed. The Lake Tahoe Basin has a very short time frame in which soil moisture and temperature are favorable for planting.

In the previous two rounds of public participation, the public supported reforestation with a mix of native conifers – including Jeffrey pine, rust resistant sugar pine, incense cedar and red fir – as proposed by the Forest Service. In areas of the forest that burned at high severity, little to no natural regeneration of seedlings has occurred. In many areas, early planting will help prevent regrowth of less desirable species, such as white fir, as well as competition from shrubs.

The Forest Service plans to plant 200-250 trees per acre to account for seedling die-off, which is expected to be 30 to 40 percent within the first three years due to factors such as transport stress, storage conditions, planting technique, poor planting sites or lack of sufficient water and nutrients. While crews will plant trees in an even pattern, seedling mortality will eventually result in a mosaic of tree densities throughout the project area. Seedlings could incur higher mortality (50-60 percent, including natural mortality) in areas slated for removal of dead tree and surface logs to reduce future fire severity, although fuels reduction projects will be designed to minimize seedling damage.

To increase the seedlings' chance of survival, crews will remove competing vegetation for up to 3 feet surrounding the seedling during planting and as needed during future years. The seedlings will be 1-year-old and about 6 inches high when they arrive. The Placerville Nursery supplies the seedlings, which are collected from a seed source appropriate to the elevation and site characteristics of the fire area.

This proposal includes some changes in areas proposed for planting. The Forest Service determined that 220 acres originally included in the Angora Fire Restoration proposal could be planted under an existing Urban Lot EA.

Field assessments revealed that another 270 acres were not appropriate for planting, because they are in riparian areas,

the ground is unsuitable for planting, they have sufficient numbers of live trees, or they are good prospects for natural regeneration. However, 135 acres not part of the original proposal have been identified as requiring planting.

The Forest Service requests comments on the proposal by March 22, 2010. The proposal is available at the Forest Supervisor's office at 35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe or by clicking [here](#), then clicking on the link for land and resource management and then projects. For more information, contact Rita Mustatia at (530) 543.2677.

Rex Norman works for the U.S. Forest Service.

Bleak numbers force tourism officials to rethink message

By Kathryn Reed

A \$300 million decline in gaming revenue at Stateline from 1990 to 2009; the number of employees on the South Shore from 1990 to 2008 going from 13,000 to 7,000; hotel occupancy on both sides of the state line dropping from 57 percent to 43 percent between 2006 and 2009 – these are just some of the facts and figures officials on the South Shore must contend with when looking at the local economy and what to do to turn the rising tide of bad news.

The PowerPoint presentation was prepared by the Tahoe Douglas Visitors Authority with the help of Ward Bullard who works for Harveys-Harrah's casinos at the lake. It was first shown to the Douglas County Commission, with the South Lake Tahoe City Council shown the slides this month.



Tourism officials plan to promote the outdoors of Lake Tahoe, with less emphasis on gaming.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, gave the presentation to the council along with her annual report.

With many of the Stateline casino workers living in South Lake Tahoe, what the casinos are doing directly impacts employment levels of city residents and social agencies they may lean on for help.

“In case you think we’re unique here, the same thing is going on at tribal casinos,” Chaplin told the council.

She talked about layoffs at the Indian casinos just west of Lake Tahoe, how their market is shrinking, that they are fighting each other for the same customer, and how their buses to import customers are not working well.

Chaplin said the area that may prove to be a greater threat to the South Shore in the near term is Las Vegas.

“From the Bay Area you can hop on a plane and get a room for less than \$100 a night. You didn’t have that a couple years

ago,” Chaplin said.

Still, it wasn’t all doom and gloom from the region’s tourism leader.

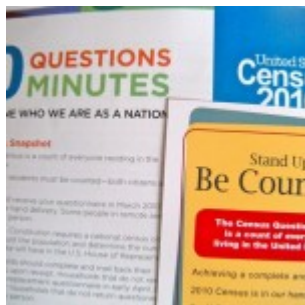
In Chaplin’s report about how the LTVA did in the last fiscal year, she pointed to the 16 percent increase in attendance at July’s annual celebrity golf tournament, 11 percent increase in traffic to the visitors centers, securing a Nevada Commission on Tourism grant, public relations having a 40-to-1 return on investment, and ending the year with 1,000 bucks in the bank.

As the summer advertising rolls out, it will have more to do with promoting the passion of locals, the events that attract young at heart adults and families of all ages, and the South Shore more holistically than it has been done in the past.

Chaplin pointed to the number of amenities Lake Tahoe has that other destinations can never have – the lake itself as one, and the varied experiences available in a relatively small area.

“We recognize our iconic location,” Chaplin said. “We need to capitalize to let people know how much we love this place and that they can too. Gaming is still important, but it’s going through a metamorphosis. We need to broaden our appeal beyond skiing and gaming.”

Census takers out in force gathering information



By Kathryn Reed

Census workers are making the rounds in Lake Tahoe and throughout the United States.

It's that every 10-year thing where households are asked 10 questions.

Those coming by verify your address, the type of residence (single family or something else), the ZIP code, and if you get your mail at a post office box.

Then they hand you an envelope with 10 questions for each person living in the residence.

The Census has been going on since 1790. It was started to figure out how many men (because women didn't have such positions back then) from each state would be in the House of Representatives.

That's still a main reason the Census is conducted. But the results also have a monetary value.

Every year, the federal government allocates more than \$400 billion to states and communities based, in part, on Census data. Census literature states. Census data are used to determine location for retail stores, schools, hospitals, new housing developments and other community facilities. Census data determine boundaries for state and local legislative and congressional districts.

The Census Bureau protects people who are not here legally. It is important for everyone to fill out the forms so the services needed in a particular area can be provided based on

the populations living there.

Beyond the 10 questions, a small percentage of the population will be asked more detailed socio-economic questions.

All of the questionnaires are to be mailed back by April 1 â€” known as Census Day. (No joke.)

For the households that donâ€™t send the form back, Census takers will knock on their door in May, June and July.

The Census Bureau has until the end of the year to give the president the results. A year from now the Census Bureau will give states information about redistricting.

For more information about the Census, [click here](#).

South Tahoe elementary makes list of low-performing schools

By Diana Lambert, Sacramento Bee

Four Sacramento-area schools have made the list of the state's lowest-performing schools.

The California Department of Education released the list of roughly 200 schools this morning. The schools on the register are in the bottom 5 percent of the state's lowest-performing schools, based on how students have scored on state tests, and will have to undergo dramatic reforms.

In Sacramento County, they are Oak Ridge Elementary in Sacramento City Unified and Natomas High School in Natomas

Unified. Woodland Senior High School in Woodland Joint Unified in Yolo County and Bijou Community School in Lake Tahoe Unified in El Dorado County also are on the list.

Read the whole story

Hate crime trial begins today in '07 attack at El Dorado Beach

By Kathryn Reed

The trial for a former South Lake Tahoe couple charged with a federal hate crime starts today in Sacramento.

Joseph, 56, and Georgia, 52, Silva were residents of the South Shore when they were arrested in July 2007 on charges of physically assaulting and yelling racial slurs at Vishal Wadhwa and his wife, Ayesha Wadhwa.

The Bay Area victims are Indian American. The suspects are Caucasian.



El Dorado
Beach in South
Lake Tahoe

became a crime
scene in
summer 2007.

The victims were in Tahoe visiting, enjoying popular El Dorado Beach when the attack occurred. All of their wounds are not completely healed, sources told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The U.S. Department of Justice in March 2009 issued a press release after the suspects were indicted. It says, "The two-count indictment alleges that on the evening of July 14, 2007, Joseph and Georgia Silva committed a bias-motivated assault on another couple at a public beach in South Lake Tahoe, Calif. The Silvas allegedly first verbally confronted the Indian-American couple using derogatory racial and ethnic slurs. The Silvas then allegedly assaulted the couple, including striking one of the victims with a shoe and tackling and striking the other repeatedly on the head. One victim suffered significant facial injuries including fractured facial bones."

The incident occurred at El Dorado Beach. At the time, the Silvas had houses in South Lake and Fairfield. They now call Fairfield home. Georgia Silva worked for Barton Memorial Hospital at the time, while her husband wasn't employed.

Charges related to their finances might be filed in the future, according to sources close to the case.

If convicted of both federal counts, the Silvas could each spend the next 20 years in prison and be fined up to a half million dollars each.

Both have already spent some time behind bars related to this case. In September 2008, Georgia Silva was sentenced to one year in El Dorado County Jail and Joseph Silva six months. They had pleaded no contest to misdemeanor assault charges.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury dropped the hate crime enhancement at the state level. The FBI

and then Justice Department disagreed with that decision and subsequently leveled the federal charges against the Silvas.

Jury selection begins today, with testimony expected as well. It's possible all the witnesses could be called before the end of the week.

The prosecution has 20 witnesses – including the people who broke up the fight, witnesses to the fight, South Lake Tahoe police officers, a doctor and others.