

Fallen Leaf Lake concessionaire quits after less than 1 month

By Susan Wood

With the new concessionaire opting out, it's back to square one for the seemingly endless circle of political debate over who will run the general store and marina at Fallen Leaf Lake.

Rick Firkins, a caterer with a business based in Albuquerque and home in Christmas Valley, sent the Community Services District board a letter of resignation less than a month after the panel selected him to run the hub of the mountain village outside South Lake Tahoe.

The issue has divided the community, consumed hours in meetings during the last year, led to threats and ousted John and Ruth Rich after 14 years because of an impasse in contract negotiations.

When the board selected Firkins as the concessionaire, the Rich family said they plan to focus on other personal matters and Firkins was preparing for upgrades at the lakefront store and cafe. That vision was short lived when he learned the turmoil he was about to enter.

"I have concluded that the Fallen Leaf venture would cause irreparable damage to my business, my family and most probably, my sanity," Firkins wrote, adding: "It has become clear to me that my ability to succeed in this endeavor has been irrevocably compromised by those who have essentially dragged my name through the mud with their vicious emails."

The sentiment resembled former board President Dana Clark's letter of resignation in January because he said he has chosen

to invest his time in “positive events.”

Firkins continued: “Good burgers, (barbecue) and ice cream will not fix the vicious divide in the Fallen Leaf community, and the air out there is too toxic for my taste.”

(Click letter to read the full text.)

CSD Board President Mike Kraft expressed disappointment in Firkins decision.

“Unfortunately, his letter has a familiar ring,” Kraft said an email to community members, referring to tumultuous environment created between the Rich family supporters and others who want to make a change.

Kraft went on to solidify the board’s commitment to finding a new concessionaire. The matter will be discussed in upcoming meetings. One is scheduled for later this month. Those interested in the job may submit a letter to pmiller@fallenleaflakecsd.org, the address of the clerk of the board.

Kirkwood’s Cohee likely to buy Sierra Summit resort

By Kathryn Reed

Tim Cohee’s dream of owning a ski resort may be realized in a matter of days.

Long known as the voice of Kirkwood Mountain Resort’s ski report, as well as president 13 of the 17 years he’s been at the Lake Tahoe area resort, Cohee and a group of investors

have put together a deal to buy Sierra Summit Mountain Resort.



Tim
Cohee

The resort is 65 miles northeast of Fresno on Highway 168. It has 1,679 vertical feet, with a base elevation of 7,030.

“People should not jump to the conclusion I will leave Kirkwood and run (Sierra Summit) on a daily basis,” Cohee told *Lake Tahoe News* on Friday.

The paperwork was supposed to be signed March 5. This was the second delay. Now the deal is supposed to be consummated March 12 assuming all of the kinks can be ironed out. Escrow on the multimillion dollar deal would close April 30.

Snow Summit Ski Corp. is the seller. When they acquired the operation in 1981 they abandoned the China Peak name.

Cohee is used to owning businesses far from where he lives. He has owned a couple ski shops in Wrightwood in Southern California for a handful of years. He checks in on them and the house he owns about once a year.

Like most deals of this magnitude, there are a lot of moving pieces. For one, no paperwork has been signed. If it does go through, Cohee and his partners have someone in mind from outside of the Lake Tahoe area who could run the resort and therefore not require him moving there. Plus, he said the staff in place is good.

Cohee has been in the ski industry for 36 years, all but five of them he’s been in management.

Cohee doesn’t expect to have a conversation with the ownership

and management team at Kirkwood regarding his role at that resort until all is done with the Central California resort.

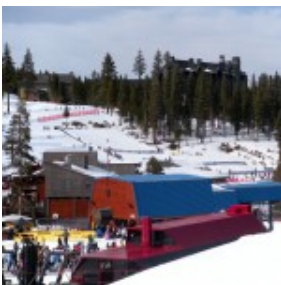
Cohee envisions Sierra Summit, which may revert to its old name, to be a feeder resort of sorts for Kirkwood. The two could have season pass deals.

Flatlanders reinvent themselves in Lake Tahoe

By Shanna McCord, Santa Cruz Sentinel

LAKE TAHOE – With new jobs hard to find, some of the unemployed are heading to the mountains to look for work, even if the work only lasts as long as the snow.

Lake Tahoe ski resort officials say they've seen a significant surge in the number of applicants this winter, many overqualified, for positions such as lift operators, parking lot attendants, ski instructors and chefs.



Northstar-at-Tahoe had no problem finding qualified employees this

season.

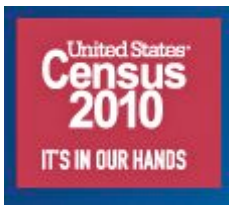
Photo/Kathryn

Reed

People with graduate degrees and years of professional experience laid off from their “real jobs” have been willing to move to the snow, live with roommates and work for minimum wage.

Read the whole story

Regional concerns regarding Census count



By Gus Thomson, Auburn Journal

With 2010 census packages due to be delivered to every household in the nation starting mid-month, concern is mounting that Placer and surrounding counties may lose out in the count.

A projected \$38 billion in federal funding is tied to census totals in the six-county area surrounding Auburn over the next decade.

But if the count is lower than the actual total number of residents, Auburn and the surrounding Sacramento region could end up with less than its share.

Auburn City Councilman Kevin Hanley is working with the

Sacramento Area Council of Governments to get the word out to residents about the importance of filling out the census form. Census Day is April 1.

Read the whole story

Andoh out of BlueGo, STATA board not talking

By Kathryn Reed

John Andoh no longer has a job in Lake Tahoe.

For the last two years he has been transit administrator for the South Shore's bus system. On Friday, the attorney for the South Tahoe Area Transit Authority told Andoh to pack his things and be out by 5pm.



John Andoh

Andoh said his initial reaction was an “enthusiastic, great.”

“I’ve been advocating for executive leadership since July of last year,” Andoh told *Lake Tahoe News* while he was still on the clock. “The agency was getting too big to warrant a person like me at the top.”

When Andoh was hired it was as an associate planner. His

background is in transit and planning projects for those entities.

In his short tenure he has had to handle restructuring the entire system, working with one agency that abruptly left and bringing in another to operate the bus system known as BlueGo, watch the budget grow from \$422,000 to \$5.9 million per year, and consolidate seven contracts into one.

“It’s definitely been a good experience,” Andoh said.

He will continue on with the part-time work he’s done for a couple of Bay Area cities while he’s been in Tahoe. He is also in the running for two transit coordinator positions – one in Southern California, one in Washington.

He was given two weeks severance pay.

According to Andoh, Transit Resource Center, the people the STATA board listened to in closed session last week per the city of South Lake Tahoe’s request, will operate the system in the interim. He described the company as a consulting firm that does short range transit plans.

Nancy McDermid, chairwoman of the transit board, deferred comment to board member Stacey Dingman. This, McDermid said, was so a uniform message was presented.

Apparently the board’s united message is silence. Dingman didn’t return calls, nor did South Lake Tahoe’s representatives Bruce Grego and Rick Angelocci.

South Lake Tahoe City Attorney Patrick Enright did not return a phone call, as it is a furlough Friday for the city. So the question as to whether the meeting was noticed properly can’t be answered, nor is it known if out of closed session the board properly reported out its actions. Nor is it known what direction STATA is going in, how long the firm Andoh mentioned will be on board, or what cost savings if any are part of the

changes.

Dugard family healing process captured by ABC

By Alan B. Goldberg and Sarah Netter, ABC News

The home video shows a portrait of a healing family – a mother and her two daughters baking cookies, riding horses and laughing together.

After sustaining years of abuse, Dugard discusses her long recovery.



Jaycee Lee
Dugard

It's the first glimpse at the freedom kidnap survivor Jaycee Dugard has enjoyed since her rescue last summer from the backyard lair where she was held captive for nearly two decades.

"Hi I'm Jaycee. I want to thank you for your support and I'm doing well," Dugard said in her first public statement since the arrest of her alleged captors. She is seated, dressed in a black shirt and jeans and a pink baseball cap, and feeding two spaniels.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County's fiscal state looking brighter

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Good news is relative and El Dorado County officials took some satisfaction this week that the county is in better fiscal shape than some neighboring jurisdictions.

After months of layoffs, furloughs and cuts in services, staff members said the county should be able to avoid further layoffs this fiscal year, despite projected budget shortfalls in the District Attorney's Office and Development Services Department.

General fund revenue is expected to exceed budget by \$1.4 million when the fiscal year ends June 30.

Read the whole story

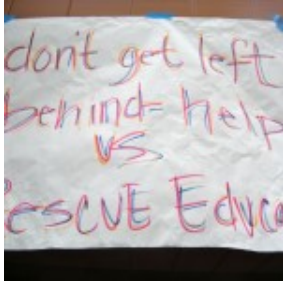
Lake Tahoe students, teachers protest education cuts

By Kathryn Reed

Students, educators and concerned citizens on Thursday took to the streets up and down California and in many other states to

protest the spigot being turned off on education spending.

“I was supposed to transfer a year ago. I had to stay here,” said Rachel Sa-Onoy, president of Lake Tahoe Community College’s student council.



A sign at Lake Tahoe Community College on Thursday.

Not enough sections of required classes were offered to allow Sa-Onoy to accumulate the needed credits to transfer to a four-year college.

She and more than three dozen protesters, mostly students, carried handmade signs as they made their way through the main building of the South Lake Tahoe school Thursday afternoon to show their frustration with lawmakers.

This is just the prelude to March 22 when a group of LTCC students heads to Sacramento with compatriots from across the state to give legislators an earful about spending cuts.

Each campus within Lake Tahoe Unified School District also planned protests on Thursday. Some cars in faculty parking lots said “save our schools.”

California is facing a \$10 billion budget deficit. Everything is getting cut. K-12 and community colleges are what’s affected in the Lake Tahoe Basin in California.

But the cuts at the university level affect local students because the cost of higher education keeps skyrocketing.

To compensate for last year's cutbacks the University of California raised tuition 32 percent. The California State University system upped its fees, too. The cuts were \$813 million to the UC system, \$564 million to the CSU.

It was apparently a dismal day for California education. Washington let Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger know the state didn't qualify for part of the \$4.3 billion Race to the Top grants.

Sacramento will be forthcoming this spring with more concrete figures for the next fiscal year, but no one is anticipating it will be something to look forward to.

Tahoe City snowshoer found alive

By Reno Gazette-Journal

A snowshoer missing since Tuesday in the Castle Peak area of Donner Summit, was found about 12:45pm, the Nevada County Sheriff's Department reports.

Initially information is not clear but Kevin Bradstreet Davis, 28, of Tahoe City is alive and being taken to a hospital for treatment, the sheriff's department reported. His condition was not immediately available.

Read the whole story

Tahoe water agencies ask Congress for \$5 mil.

By Kathryn Reed



Water officials know that just because Congress has been forthcoming with money in the past for fire suppression projects, doesn't mean it will happen again.

But with more than 80 percent of the Lake Tahoe Basin belonging to the federal government and bipartisan support from the California and Nevada delegations, the odds are increased the next \$5 million installment will be approved.

Dennis Cocking with South Tahoe Public Utility District and Jim Jones, a STPUD board member, spent the better part of last week in Washington trying to secure money for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

A few years ago public water agencies in the basin formed a partnership to better leverage money from Congress. It was determined \$100 million was needed to upgrade the various systems to provide adequate fire suppression, have the inter-agency ties keep water moving around the lake and have the ability to improve storage capacity.

Knowing that dollar amount would be shot down quickly, the agencies put together a four-year plan of action that started in 2008 totaling \$40 million. Because Congress asks for

matching dollars, it means \$20 million from the feds and \$20 million locally.

The feds have come through with \$5 million in each of the last fiscal years. What the Tahoe folks were asking for last month was the next \$5 million for fiscal year 2011.

"Fire is a nonpartisan issue," Cocking said. Still, he doesn't expect a decision until next year because of the midterm elections in November.

The problem is for nearly 100 years the Forest Service suppressed fire in the Lake Tahoe Basin. This led to overgrowth and no thinning. That coupled with the water districts being formed decades as municipal agencies without firefighting capabilities has led to the insufficient infrastructure.

The money that has come to Tahoe is divvied up among the agencies based on connections.

Because not all the money gets spent in one year, projects involving federal appropriations are ongoing. The limited building season in Tahoe also necessitates infrastructure improvements take a couple years because not all can be finished between May and October.

While in Washington, Cocking and Jones also attended the Association of California Water Agencies conference.

Bigger-picture water issues are discussed there.

Some in South Lake Tahoe have criticized the district, especially Jones, for spending money on travel.

Cocking defended the district's annual travel expenditures of between \$8,000 and \$10,000 for conferences and trips to Washington and elsewhere.

"When you come back every year with a couple million dollars,

it pays for the plane tickets and nights in a hotel," Cocking said.

He said an analysis done last year on the cost of such travel in relation to state and federal funding that was then secured shows a return on investment in excess of 2,000 percent.

On another note, Douglas County is working to consolidate its many water districts to provide consumers with a more efficient and cost-effective program.