

Fire damages South Tahoe vacation home

A vacation rental partially went up in flames Saturday night in South Lake Tahoe.

The kitchen and living room of the two-story house at 1361 June Way was engulfed in flames and smoke when firefighters arrived.

“An aggressive interior attack limited the damage to heavy fire damage to the kitchen and living room, with moderate to heavy smoke and heat damage to the rest of interior of the house,” a press release says.

The occupants of the house were out to dinner when the fire started. No injuries were reported.

The cause of the blaze is under investigations.

Lakeview Commons inches closer to reality

By Kathryn Reed

The \$6 million question is: When will the state have that sum to give to the California Tahoe Conservancy so South Lake Tahoe can go forward with the Lakeview Commons project?

It’s possible the state will try to sell bonds this spring before the governor’s May budget revision comes out. Bond sales last fall were less successful than what those on the

receiving end had hoped for so people are guarded about showing enthusiasm and optimism about the next go-round.



Picnic areas
will be
improved at El
Dorado Beach.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Lakeview Commons is the beautification project at El Dorado Beach that has been in the planning stage for about seven years. Once the money is in hand, the city is ready to go out for bid. All the permits have been secured. Money to pay for the project is the stumbling block.

The CTC board on Friday approved spending the \$6 million on this project when the cash is available. The money will come from Proposition 84 bond sales and Lake Tahoe license plate fees.

Because bids are usually only good for 90 days, the city wants to wait until the money is secure before finding a contractor.

“The timing is critical,” Assistant City Manager Rick Angelocci said after the vote. “It’s possible we could get it all done in 2011.”

With a limited building season in the Lake Tahoe Basin, awarding a bid in summer would amount to only two months of work being able to be completed before the rule of no more moving dirt takes affect Oct. 15.

Lakeview Commons is the first phase of what is also known as the 56-acre project. The rest of the acreage is on the other side of Highway 50 and includes Campground by the Lake.

On the lake side, improvements could be phased in depending on how much bond money flows to the CTC.

The deteriorating retaining walls will be replaced. A cantilevered pedestrian walkway will be constructed that will almost parallel the bike trail.

“When it is built it will be the icon of the South Shore. You will feel like you are floating above the lake,” Peter Eichar, with the CTC, told the board.

A concession stand with rest room and storage for non-motorized boats will be erected.

Improvements will also be made to the street level.

Access to the beach will meet the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations.

Much of the work to be done is on El Dorado County property that is leased by the city. The memorandum of understanding between the governments had to be amended and was finally approved by their respective elected officials this month.

Sensors put more eyes on Sierra snowpack

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

As five blizzards pounded California's high country last week,

people across the state tracked the swiftly growing snowpack without leaving their offices or homes.

A remarkably accurate network of sensors fed estimates to state officials who posted them on a Web page that the public can easily use to track the snowpack, California's biggest source of water.

Read the whole story

Official route for Rubicon Trail adopted

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County officials this week took a critical step toward resolving recreational and environmental management problems that have plagued the historic Rubicon Trail.

The Board of Supervisors this week designated an official route for an approximately eight-mile stretch of the 22-mile trail that extends from Georgetown in El Dorado County to Tahoma at Lake Tahoe in Placer County.

Read the whole story

El Dorado Savings Bank posts

profit

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

While loan loss provisions cut into the profits of other regional banks, Placerville-based El Dorado Savings Bank kept humming right along in 2009.

The bank this week reported a profit of \$10.7 million in 2009, a 12 percent increase over \$9.5 million in 2008. For the fourth quarter, ended Dec. 31, it had net income of \$2.1 million, up from \$553,703 in the year-ago period.

Read the whole story

Troubled Intrawest sells Squaw Village to ski resort

By Kathryn Reed

Intrawest unloaded its third property in two months on Friday with the sale of the Village at Squaw Valley to Squaw Valley Ski Corp.

"It is something that has been ongoing for a while and is not related whatsoever to what our parent company is going through," Ian Galbraith, spokesman for Vancouver, British Columbia-based Intrawest, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Intrawest built the North Lake Tahoe village, with the first phase opening in February 2002 and the second phase opening in December 2003.



The Village at
Squaw Valley
was sold Jan.
29.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

This will be the first time in more than 30 years that the ski resort has owned a lodging facility. With the village come 285 one-, two- and three-bedroom condos, 20 retail shops, six restaurants and a spa. Click map to see the layout of the village.

No officials from the ski resort or the village returned calls Friday.

Nancy Cushing, CEO of the resort, said in a press release, "When we opened in 1949 we ran a small 50-room lodge that was occupied during the Olympics in 1960; it grew in size but our operation of this property ceased in 1979. And so, the acquisition of the Village represents an exciting and greatly anticipated opportunity."

None of the managers at various businesses at Squaw Village wanted to go on the record Friday.

On the Granite Chief Sport Shop website a post from Dec. 29 says, "We've been aware that the talks between Intrawest and Squaw started up again in October, but wholly smokes, this time the lid was kept on pretty tight. I've had my nose all over the valley trying to sniff out some details and I got nothing."

“As many of you know Granite Chief had been cleared to move to a better location in the village, then all of a sudden everything stopped. At first we all thought things with Intrawest had stalled because everyone was working on the Copper Mtn. deal, [Intrawest owned Copper sold to Powder Corp]. As it turned out the brakes were put on bringing all future plans for Village merchants to a screeching halt because Squaw Valley Ski Corp reopened negotiations to purchase the Intrawest Village. The word; it’s a done deal. What isn’t clear is when Squaw will take over operations. Some say February but the most recent scuttlebutt points to January.

“Well, we all knew it was going to happen, but the big surprise is that the talks hit the table so soon after last spring’s negotiation fell apart.

“I think most merchants had a good relationship with the Intrawest team so on one hand we are sorry to see them go. On the other hand we all want to be a part of a growing Squaw Valley. This could be a very good New Year!”

The store is not saying who posted the information.

Squaw Valley Ski Corp. has not always had a great reputation. Some merchants worry the village will begin to look like other buildings the resort owns – like Olympic House, Gold Coast, High Camp and the Cornice Cantina.

“I really don’t see any good (in the sale). They aren’t known for putting money into anything,” one manager told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Squaw Valley and Intrawest are privately held companies and therefore the dollar value of the transaction is not being disclosed.

Galbraith said the deal with Squaw is part of Intrawest’s philosophy to own villages where it owns resorts. Intrawest

owns eight ski resorts and a beach-golf resort in Florida.

Intrawest, owner of Whistler Village and Whistler Blackcomb the site of many of next month's Olympic alpine ski events as well as the luge-bobsled-skeleton events and Whistler Village, made headlines last week when it was revealed the company's assets will be auctioned off Feb. 19 if a deal with its lenders is not struck.

When news broke Intrawest issued a press release Jan. 20 saying it's "business as usual" at all of its resorts.

Galbraith restated that message on Friday, adding, there are a lot of rumors and speculation circulating that are not necessarily true. But he did not elaborate.

The fact remains that Intrawest is financially unstable.

Intrawest had to refinance a \$1.7 billion loan in October 2008. An extension was offered last October. The current troubles for Intrawest involve missing a \$524 million loan payment.

"Refinancing discussions are still ongoing with lending groups," Galbraith said.

Intrawest was founded in 1976.

"On October 26, 2006, private equity funds managed by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC (NYSE:FIG) successfully completed the acquisition of Intrawest. The total value of the transaction, including the existing debt of Intrawest, was approximately US\$2.8 billion," Intrawest's website says. "Intrawest's shares were de-listed from the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE: IDR) and the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX: ITW) as a result of the acquisition and the subsequent privatization of the company. Currently, Intrawest is a portfolio company controlled primarily by private equity funds managed by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC."

This all transpired at the peak of the real estate market.

On Thursday, it was announced that Intrawest sold Panorama Mountain Village resort in British Columbia to Panorama Mountain Village Inc., a new company run by developer Rick Jensen. The price was not disclosed, but reports are that it was less than the \$100 million Powdr Corp. of Utah paid Intrawest for Copper Mountain in November.

“There are no other sales in the works that I’m aware of,” Intrawest’s Galbraith said.

N. Nevada spigot dries up for Vegas water users

By Ashley Powers, Los Angeles Times

The Nevada Supreme Court dealt a huge blow Thursday to Las Vegas officials’ controversial plan to siphon water from the state’s rural north, saying that a faulty application process invalidates the south’s claim to tens of thousands of acre-feet of water.

Starting in 1989, Las Vegas-area water officials “anticipating a massive population boom in thirsty southern Nevada” asked the state water engineer for groundwater rights in a number of rural valleys. Critics panned the proposal to channel water, via a 300-mile pipeline, from ranching to casino country as an Owens Valley-like grab. A number of people filed formal objections.

Read the whole story

Snowpack 15 percent above normal in Sierra

By Don Strickland

Manual and electronic readings today indicate that water content in California's mountain snowpack is 115 percent of normal for the date statewide. This time last year, snow water content was 61 percent of normal statewide.

"Today's snow survey offers us some cautious optimism as we continue to play catch-up with our statewide water supplies," said DWR Chief Deputy Director Sue Sims. "We are still looking at the real possibility of a fourth dry year. Even if California is blessed with a healthy snowpack, we must learn to always conserve this finite resource so that we have enough water for homes, farms, and businesses in 2010 and in the future."



Frank Gehrke
with DWR at
the Dec. 30
snow survey at
Phillips
Station.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Lake Oroville, the principal storage reservoir for the State Water Project (SWP) is at 33 percent of capacity, and 50 percent of average storage for this time of year. Lake Shasta, the principal storage reservoir for the federal Central Valley Project, is at 56 percent of capacity, and 82 percent of average for the date.

DWR's early allocation estimate was that the agency would only be able to deliver 5 percent of requested SWP water this year, reflecting low storage levels, ongoing drought conditions, and environmental restrictions on water deliveries to protect fish species. The agency will recalculate the allocation after current snow survey results and other conditions are evaluated.

Results of today's manual survey by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) off Highway 50 near Echo Summit are as follows:

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	69.3 inches	20.3 inches	96
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	62.6 inches	20.3 inches	106
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	78.2 inches	22.9 inches	117
Tamarack Flat	6,500 feet	67.8 inches	20.2 inches	106

Electronic sensor readings show northern Sierra snow water equivalents at 129 percent of normal for this date, central Sierra at 101 percent, and southern Sierra at 119 percent. The sensor readings are posted [here](#).

DWR estimates that fishery agency restrictions on Delta pumping adopted in the past year to protect Delta smelt, salmon, and other species could reduce annual deliveries of State Water Project water by 30 percent.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has championed a comprehensive water plan that he recently signed into law. The package would safeguard the state's water supply through conservation, more surface and groundwater storage, new investments in the state's aging water infrastructure, and improved water conveyance to protect the environment and provide a reliable water supply.

Snow water content is important in determining the coming year's water supply. The measurements help hydrologists prepare water supply forecasts as well as provide others, such as hydroelectric power companies and the recreation industry, with needed data.

Monitoring is coordinated by the Department of Water Resources as part of the multi-agency California Cooperative Snow Surveys Program. Surveyors from more than 50 agencies and utilities visit hundreds of snow measurement courses in California's mountains to gauge the amount of water in the snowpack.

Don Strickland works for the Department of Water Resources.

Incline woman accused of stabbing husband 200 times

By Jaclyn O'Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

A 72-year-old Incline Village woman who was arraigned Thursday is accused of stabbing her elderly husband up to 200 times in a rage that was possibly motivated by her mental anguish over her husband's onset of dementia and worries about money, according to the warrant charging her with his murder.

Mary Arlayne Baymiller was brought back to Reno Wednesday following her extradition from Fresno, Calif, where she was arrested last week for the murder of her husband, Charles Alan Baymiller, 73.

[Read the whole story](#)

Lawsuit challenges clear-cutting in Sierra

By Margo Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times

Will clear-cutting forests increase global warming? That's a contentious issue as California, which is seeking to slash its carbon footprint, wrestles over rules to manage the state's private forests.

(Thursday) the Center for Biological Diversity, a Tucson-based environmental group, filed lawsuits against the California Department of Forestry in seven California counties to halt logging plans for 5,000 acres across the Sierra Nevada and Cascade regions. The group contends that the agency approved the projects without properly analyzing carbon emissions and climate consequences under the California Environmental Quality Act. "Clear-cutting is an abysmal practice that should have been banned long ago due to its impacts on wildlife and water quality," said Brian Nowicki, CBD's California climate policy director. "Now, in an era when all land-management decisions need to be fully carbon-conscious, there is no excuse to continue to allow clear-cutting."

[Read the whole story](#)