Law would make ski helmets mandatory

By Kathryn Reed

With the steady increase in helmet use by skiers and boarders, it's hard to know if making usage mandatory is necessary. But that is exactly what one California lawmaker wants to do.

State Sen. Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, introduced legislation Thursday to require anyone on the slopes younger than 18 to wear a helmet. This would be similar to the bicycle helmet law that took affect in California several years ago.

"Helmets are designed to reduce the severity of head injuries, but they are most effective at providing protection from a direct blow to the head at speeds of 12mph or slower," according to the National Ski Areas Association.

While this national group advocates helmet use, studies have proved that in most fatalities on ski slopes that a helmet would not have saved that person's life based on the severity of the impact.

Actress Natasha Richardson died of a head injury following a fall during a lesson at Quebec's Mont Tremblant ski resort last year. She was not wearing a helmet. Helmets weren't being discussed when Sonny Bono died at Heavenly Mountain Resort in 1998 after running into a tree.

Athletes making a living on the slopes now all seem to wear a helmet. One-time Olympic hopeful snowboarder Kevin Pearce was reported on Thursday to be in serious condition with a severe brain injury at University Hospital in Utah from a fall last month.

In the United States, 48 percent of skiers and riders wear a

helmet and 77 percent of kids 9 and younger do, while 66 percent of those ages 10-14 do, according to the NSAA.

The organization's research shows that as one's ability increases, the likelihood of that person wearing a helmet goes up.

"California's ski slopes are perhaps the last area of recreation where we do not have basic safety standards in place for children," Yee, who is a child psychologist, said in a press release. "Despite repeated warnings from public health experts, professional athletes, and ski resorts, each winter brings news of hundreds of unnecessary tragedies for the failure to wear a helmet. With this legislation, we can significantly reduce instances of traumatic brain injury or death for such a vulnerable population."

The Canadian Standards Association recommends alpine skiers and snowboarders wear helmets because they can reduce the risk of head injury by 60 percent. Ten months ago the agency approved standards for helmets. Now it's up to manufacturers to meet those specs.

In October, Vancouver-based Intrawest and home to next month's Olympics, issued a statement encouraging skiers and snowboarders wear helmets at its North American resorts. The headgear is mandatory for kids in its learn to ski programs. Next season helmets will also be mandatory in the company's freestyle terrain parks.

This is the first season all Vail Resorts (which owns Heavenly) must wear helmets while on the job.

South Tahoe teen accused of arson

A 14-year-old Meyers boy was taken into custody Jan. 14 on suspicion of felony arson.

Because of his age his name is not being released.

El Dorado County sheriffâ€™s deputies went to 3574 Memory Lane early Monday on a suspicious circumstance call. They found a broken window andÂ smokeÂ pouring from what was supposed to be an unoccupied second home.

Lake Valley firefighters extinguished the fires inside the house.

â€œInvestigation revealed that multiple fires had been purposely set throughout the residence in an apparent effort to cause extensive damage. Continued investigation revealed suspect shoe print evidence at the scene,â€ sheriffâ€™s Lt. Les Lovell said in a press release. â€œThese prints indicated a single arsonist was most likely the responsible party.â€

Investigators followed leads that led them to the suspect.

â€œâ€¦ the mother allowed a visual inspection of shoes her son wears. One set of shoes matched the shoe prints found at the arson scene,â€ Lovell said. â€œWhen confronted with this evidence, the boy admitted to being at the site of the arson.â€

Below level snowpack better than last year in Nevada

Reno Gazette-Journal

The winter snow pack accumulation is generally better than a year ago but still below average, government officials report.

The National Weather Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service issued a report Wednesday that detailed the water supply outlook for Nevada and the eastern Sierra.

It says snow pack accumulation got off to a promising start in December but by mid January has fallen below average.

Read the whole story

Fluctuating enrollment tests school



By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – A transient population is something Whittell High School is learning to deal with.

Principal Sue Shannon addressed the Douglas County school board on Tuesday, saying the transient population went from 14

to 20 percent and she expects it to keep climbing. She believes it has a lot to do with the economy and people coming and going as jobs come and go.

She said the problem is many of these students are credit deficient. Eight students are scheduled to start at the school next week and more than half are lacking the credits they should have.

Bright spots in her presentation included talking about how the accreditation process went well last fall and that 92 percent of the 2009 graduates went on to a two- or four-year college.

Shannon plans to address the board again in March to ask for modifications to the four-day school week that was instituted this school year.

This is the second year the school has been a 7-12 campus. Shannon believes this is a benefit to the students and had good things to say about the K-6 Zephyr Cove Elementary being down the road.

Some students from ZCES come to WHS for band, gym and math.

Creating a culture at Whittell where students have ownership and accountability is working, Shannon said. This yearâ€™s seniors were freshmen when she came on board.

Since Shannon has been at the school students now must take four years of science. If they donâ€™t want to, the student must present their case with their parent to school officials.

New classes this school year include pre-engineering, applied economics, applied algebra two and expanded science offerings.

Shannon said itâ€™s always a constant struggle for a small school to offer a variety of classes. She said with a third of the teachers not being full time, it allows for more flexibility in the schedule.

South Tahoe redevelopment may cost other entities millions

Updated Jan. 16 5:40pm: *The meeting with the city staff and STPUD board has been moved to Feb. 18.*

By Kathryn Reed

To some it might like look like a shell game. Or maybe it's robbing Peter to pay Paul. Or maybe it's all on the up and up.

The problem with projected redevelopment areas is that nothing is guaranteed.

South Lake Tahoe believes it will generate $178 million in tax increment in the 45 years that the latest project area is slated to be on the books.

South Tahoe Public Utility District believes $54 million in property tax dollars are at risk if the plan is approved by the City Council.



The area in blue is the proposed redevelopment area in South Lake Tahoe.

El Dorado County, although it won't put a dollar figure on potential lost revenue, knows it will be hit the hardest if the plan goes through.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District and Lake Tahoe Community College receive property tax money, too, but with how laws are written the state would have to backfill any dollars that are lost. Where the state comes up with that money when it is facing a $20 billion deficit is difficult to pinpoint.

Other agencies to be impacted are the local cemetery district, county Office of Education, county Water Agency, and county Abatement District.

If the redevelopment area is approved, then the property tax these entities receive is frozen instead of going up 2 percent each year. The city's Redevelopment Agency gets that money.

But the city contends in the long run everyone will be better off. This is because if the value of properties goes up in the redevelopment area, property taxes are higher and therefore every entity shares in the growth.

The city is projecting 7 percent growth in the 3,100-acre redevelopment area that covers much of Emerald Bay Road and then goes down Highway 50 to Glenwood Way.

"Because you have more growth you have more property tax paid. Those agencies will get more over time," said Gene Palazzo, city redevelopment director.

He compared it to putting money in a retirement account, that at first it doesn't amount to much, but over time the pot grows.

South Tahoe PUD wants to see more concrete numbers. Palazzo and City Manager Dave Jinkens are scheduled to speak to the STPUD board on Jan. 20.

"We don't want to be seen as obstructionists if the community

feels this is good," STPUD spokesman Dennis Cocking said of the redevelopment plan. "That ($54 million) is all essentially capital improvement dollars. By law it cannot be used for wages. If we lose property tax dollars, it has to be made-up elsewhere."

The district has limited revenue sources – ratepayers, property taxes, borrowing money or issuing bonds, and state and federal grants.

The district could raise its connection fees, but with so little construction going on, that might not amount to much.

The 127-page draft EIR and all the documents related to the proposed redevelopment area are at www.ctcip.org.

The City Council is expected to take action on all the documents in early March. Meetings will be scheduled before then to gather public input, according to Palazzo. He has spoken to the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority board and will be at the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association meeting Thursday at 9:30am at Tahoe Bowl.

Meetings are also scheduled for Feb. 11 at 2 and 6pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

One of the benefits to redevelopment would be to use some of the tax increment money on improving the dilapidated Lukins Brothers Water Company. Palazzo, though, said this is not designed to be the sole source to fix the ancient infrastructure of the company whose 953 customers are mostly off Highway 89.

Lukins also services businesses at the Y and doesn't have adequate fire flow.

"We can't get new commercial in there if don't get (Lukins) upgraded," Palazzo said.

Lukins has a franchise agreement with the city that the city

hasn’t managed well considering it didn’t insist the company reinvest money in capital improvements.

Some city residents question having taxpayer dollars pay for upgrades to a private company. People are also questioning if the city is going to such lengths for a private business to cover itself legally so Lukins customers don’t sue the city for not protecting them through the franchise agreement.

It’s unknown if the city would be held responsible if a catastrophic fire occurred that Lukins water supply could not handle.

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors plans to hear from city staff at the Feb. 2 meeting.

“There’s a very strong view among counties in general that redevelopment is not helpful because of the way it works with redevelopment agencies reaching in and grabbing a percentage of property tax,” said Mike Applegarth, EDC senior administrative analyst. “I don’t think anybody has been able to assess the overall benefits or burdens of redevelopment.”

Applegarth said for the current fiscal year the county budgeted zero growth in property tax and said it is likely to go negative. This is because people are reappraising their property and it’s coming back lower than what they paid, and houses are selling for less than what the previous owner paid.

He isn’t sure if the board will take a position on the city’s proposal.

“Tax increment financing is an obscure way to make infrastructure improvements,” Applegarth said.

Deb Yates, chief financial officer with Lake Tahoe Unified School District, knows how the rules are now that the state will backfill any property tax dollars the district could lose in redevelopment. But those dollars come from the state’s

education pool of money, which keeps dwindling.

“We don’t know in these times how the state is going to deal with the current budget. This would certainly add a little bit to the state issues as far as education goes,” Yates said.

Palazzo said the city’s goal is to create a financing tool.

But is it a hammer to clubber other entities in town?

The city will try to answer that question and others in the coming weeks.

Security changes at STHS

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District’s board of education on Jan. 12 terminated Larry Brown.

Brown, 63, had been a security guard at South Tahoe High School. He was arrested in November on charges of furnishing marijuana to a juvenile – a 16-year-old female student at the school. He had been on unpaid leave since his arrest.

South Tahoe High now has one full-time security guard and can draw from a pool of others when need be.

Jim Watson, district Human Resources director, said the state budget will determine how many security guards the district employs in the futures. In the past, the district has had three plus the school resource officer whose salary is shared by the police department.

South Lake Tahoe police Officer Aaron Crawford started as the school resource officer this week, with it being a full-time

position beginning next week. Officer Scott Willson just retired from the department.

On Jan. 12 Crawford was already tested. He took two boys into custody who had been fighting, according to Principal Ivone Larson.

Larson said she is excited to have Crawford at the school.

Sam Borges 1924-2010

By Kathryn Reed

Sam Borges, the man who built Borges Sleigh Rides, died Jan. 11, 2010. He was 85.

Mr. Borges died peacefully with his family beside him.

Born in Albany, N.Y., on Jan. 21, 1924, Mr. Borges was industrious from an early age. He moved with his mother and younger sister to California when he was 5. As a teenager he bought some cows in the San Joaquin Valley and started an early career as a dairyman and farmer.



Sam Borges

In 1955, Mr. Borges moved to San Jose, when it was still an agriculture community, and sold tractors.

It was in 1958 that he and his young family started to make annual pilgrimages to camp at Camp Richardson. He moved his family to South Lake Tahoe in 1965.

Mr. Borges got a job working for Dillingham Corporation helping to build what is now the Tahoe Keys. He was a backhoe operator and was responsible for putting many of the sewage lines in.

Something he remembered from a conversation he had with a casino executive before moving to Tahoe full time was that the South Shore needed a winter business for non-athletes.

It was 1967 that the sleigh business started. He worked at it part time for several years until it became his full-time job. From a postcard of a sleigh he was able to weld together his first sleigh.

â€œHe found out horses eat all year-round so he decided letâ€™s get the carriage rides going,â€ his son, David Borges, said.

A handful of years ago, another son, Dwight, took over the sleigh business.

Mr. Borges had a way with animals; he could practically talk to them and understand what was going on with them.

He was a wonderful storyteller. Anyone on a sleigh ride would be riveted by one of his stories.

He was even known to entertain the entertainers who were in town at one of the showrooms. Bob Hope joked that he wanted a private ride, but with it being Christmas Day, Mr. Borges did not oblige the comedian.

Ray Charles has a Christmas album with him holding the reins of the sleigh.

Several times the Borges horses were featured in the Rose

Parade.

Last year his daughter-in-law, Dianna Maria de Borges, published a book titled â€œSleigh Rides in Lake Tahoe: Memoirs of Sam Borges.â€

Mr. Borges and his wife, Rosie, were both national water ski champions. He was on skis last summer gliding across Lake Tahoe. The two traveled much of the world together.

â€œHe was fun to be around, he loved people,â€ David Borges said. â€œHe could converse with anyone, at anytime.â€

In 2002, Mr. Borges was chosen by the community to run the Olympic torch en route to the Salt Lake City Games.

Mr. Borges is survived by his wife of 60 years, Rosie, of South Lake Tahoe; sons Don, David and Dwight, all of South Lake Tahoe, and Dean of Carson City; seven grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Services are pending.

USGS studying Sierra groundwater

By Walt Cook, Union Democrat

U.S. Geological Survey hydrologists will host a public meeting Thursday to discuss the Sierraâ€™s groundwater resources, a source of drinking water for many county residents.

The event is scheduled from 1-3pm at the Tuolumne Utilities District headquarters, at 18885 Nugget Blvd., off Tuolumne

Road, Sonora. The meeting is being conducted by the USGS and the State Water Resources Control Board.

Specifically, hydrologists will discuss the initial results of a study of untreated groundwater from wells and springs throughout the Sierra Nevada. Their full report is expected to be completed in a year.

Read the whole story

Winter weather returns to Lake Tahoe



Updated 1:15pm Jan. 12

By Kathryn Reed

Highway 28 was closed for about three hours this morning between Highway 50 and Sand Harbor while the Nevada Highway Patrol worked a fatal accident.

NHP officials have not returned calls so further details of the accident are unknown.

A 27-hour winter storm warning is set to end Wednesday morning at 10am.

In that time itâ€™s possible 1-4 inches of snow will fall at lake level, with 3-8 inches above 7,000 feet.

Winds woke people up around the region early this morning. The National Weather Service in Reno said they were getting calls from people in the Reno area this morning.

At Lake Tahoe Airport in South Lake Tahoe a gust of 53mph was clocked at 2:29am and 47mph was registered about 30 minutes later.

A tree knocked down a power pole on Mountain Trout Drive in the Tahoe Mountain area of South Lake Tahoe about 2 this morning, which cut power to 3,200 Sierra Pacific Power customers.

By switching to an alternate circuit power has been restored to all customers except those living on that street. Power is supposed to be up by noon, according to the power company.

Crews are also busy on the North Shore trying to get power to 25 customers near the Truckee airport. A tree through a line made it go dark for about 60 customers in south Reno this morning.

The Weather Service says todayâ€™s storm and the one forecast for the weekend are mild blips in the world of weather.

â€œThis little system going by is like an introduction to the pattern that we will see most of next week,â€ Rudy Cruz, Weather Service specialist, told *Lake Tahoe News* this morning.

When asked about this being a dry January, he said not to worry based on what the weather models are showing for the second half of the month.

This is good news for ski resorts that have gotten some rain in the last week. With it snowing and raining lightly this morning at lake level, it should mean the resorts will all be getting some freshies.

Temperatures will be mild for the next couple of days, which could bring some rain to lake level. Expects winds to stick

with us for a couple days.

Some Sierra highways have chain controls. Check road conditions by clicking on the state icons on the Home page of *Lake Tahoe News*. Highway 50 between South Lake Tahoe and Carson City is slushy this morning.

Nevada casinos stop slide; Stateline still in trouble

While the statewide numbers are showing improvement, Stateline casinos continue to spiral downward when it comes to revenue.

Nevada stopped its 22-month skid to post a 4.35 percent gain from November 2008 to November 2009. This amounts to $873.2 million dollars that Nevada casinos won from gamblers in November, the state Gaming Control Board said today.

Stateline casinos, though, had the largest decline â€“ 26.67 percent. North Las Vegas casinos posted the biggest increase at 20.72 percent.