

Burn ban in Truckee Meadows

Nasty air in the Truckee Meadows has prompted Washoe County officials to ban the use of wood stoves and fireplaces.

The last time officials issued such a burn ban was in 1994.

People with breathing problems are advised to stay indoors. Strenuous outdoor activity is also being frowned upon in that area.

More information can be obtained by calling (775) 785.4110.

Attorney faces new court test to represent Nancy Garrido

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

It all began with a couple of slugs of Jack Daniel's whiskey on a leisurely Friday afternoon.

The bar tab at the Cold Springs Golf and Country Club came to \$10.50, Gilbert Maines says, and he has sworn statements from the bartender and another club member that he was never drunk, loud or out of line.

But the events of that day, the Friday before Halloween, so far have overshadowed the pending court case against Phillip and Nancy Garrido, the accused kidnappers of Jaycee Lee Dugard.

Read the whole story

Nevada gaming revenue slump continues

There is no bright spot in the figures released today by the Nevada Gaming Control Board regarding October's gaming revenue.

Stateline casinos saw a drop of 24 percent from October 2008 compared to October 2009.

Statewide, casinos won about \$800 million from gamblers in October, down 11.6 percent from a year ago.

This is the 22nd month in row Nevada casinos have recorded a year-over-year decline.

October revenues dropped more than 10 percent on the Las Vegas Strip, 16 percent in Reno and downtown Las Vegas, and 19 percent in Laughlin.

El Dorado County residents still without power

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Pacific Gas & Electric crews overnight restored electricity to another 2,300 of the utility's customers in the mountains of El Dorado County.

However, about 6,700 customers remain without power four days after a winter snow storm hit at low elevations, forcing tree limbs onto power lines in various parts of the county. In the Placerville area alone, 2,800 customers were still without power.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe moving out of record cold territory

By Kathryn Reed

Cold doesn't even begin to describe what it feels like outside.

The record low temperature for Lake Tahoe on Dec. 8 was smashed. The new record of 13 below zero beat the previous record set in 1994 by 10 degrees.



A sailboat almost disappears in the inversion layer sitting on Lake Tahoe Dec. 9.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

However, on Dec. 9 the record wasn't even close to being broken. It only got down to minus 7 at the lake. The record of minus 29 degrees was set in 1972.

Reno recorded minus 6 on Dec. 9, while the record for that date of minus 16 was set in 1972.

Temperatures for Lake Tahoe are supposed to gradually get warmer starting Friday. Normal for this time of year is highs in the low 40s and lows about 18 degrees.

The lows tonight are forecast to be above zero as the snowstorm that is predicted to roll in this afternoon brings warmer temps with it. The highs for today and Friday at the lake are expected to range from the mid-20s to the mid-30s.

It's not unusual for Carson City, Carson Valley and Reno to be colder than the lake this time of year.

“What happens this time of year is the cold air is heavier so it sets in the valleys longer,” explained Rudy Cruz, weather service specialist with the National Weather Service in Reno. “What you see in the winter is inversion at the lower levels. It can trap that dirty air until we get some winds to mix everything in the atmosphere.”

Another storm is expected to roll into the region on Saturday into Sunday.

Steve Wysong, SLT city treasurer, dies

Steve Wysong, South Lake Tahoe's city treasurer since 1990, died this morning.

Services are not known at this time.



Steve Wysong

For a more complete story about Wysong, [click here](#).

"I've known Steve for many, many years. He was one of the exceptionally wonderful beings," Tom Davis said this afternoon.

Stateline casino turmoil: Bill's closing, MontBleu staff cuts

Publisher's note: *Updated as of 8:19pm Dec. 14.*

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Bill's Casino in Stateline will cease to exist as

of Jan. 4 when the world's largest casino company closes one of its smallest gaming venues.

Letty Garay, who has been a slot host for 19 years at the casino, said the nine employees were told about the closing on Monday. Seven work part time and two are supervisors.

The casino, which opened in 1987, once employed about 200 people. Before it was Bill's, it was Barneys Casino.



Bill's Casino
in Stateline
is empty Dec.
9. It will
close Jan. 4.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

On Wednesday, it was hard to find an employee or patron to speak with.

Walking the casino floor, Garay appeared to be the only employee on duty. The bar was closed. A sign said go next door to Harrah's if you need change or to cash a check.

Garay, who lives in South Lake Tahoe, doesn't know what she will do next. She plans to take the severance pay.

Bill's officials said employees have the choice to be relocated or take the money.

Garay wasn't surprised about the closing. "I understand with the economy," she said.

It has been the Y in South Lake Tahoe with its boarded up buildings that was the eyesore of the South Shore. Now the east end of the South Shore may look no better with a vacant casino joining the bankrupt concrete-rebar site known locally as the "hole in the ground" (one day it might be a convention center-hotel-retail complex).

Tourism officials don't believe plywood will be used to shutter Bill's – realizing the image it provokes and how nasty it looks in South Lake Tahoe.

The one good thing about the would-be convention center is it looks like a construction site and doesn't scream economic strife like empty buildings do.

Casino officials are optimistic the closure will be good in the long run.

"One of the key things I think is between Harrah's and Harveys we can work more on positioning to make them stronger as we move through and get through the current recessionary problems," casino spokesman John Packer told *Lake Tahoe News*. "When we get out of the recession, it will be key to be in the right position."

Only three people were playing slots Wednesday afternoon at Bill's. TVs and the one-armed bandits made noise, but it still had the feel of a ghost town. It was almost sad. This casino that has operated for than 20 years has been slowly dying, much like all of Nevada gaming.

Harrah's Entertainment owns Bill's, Harrah's and Harveys at Stateline. Harveys was acquired in 2001.

Bill Harrah started the company in Reno 70 years ago. On Jan. 28, 2008, Harrah's Entertainment was acquired by affiliates of private-equity firms TPG Capital and Apollo Global Management.

Bill's Casino had been completely remodeled in 2006 and went

smokeless in December of that year.

In July 2008, the casino eliminated all of its table games and with it, 28 employees.

The corporate website says, "Harrah's Entertainment is focused on building loyalty and value with its customers through a unique combination of great service, excellent products, unsurpassed distribution, operational excellence and technology leadership. We concentrate on building loyalty and value for our customers, employees, business partners, and communities by being the most service-oriented, technology-driven, geographically-diversified company in gaming."

It might need to rewrite that statement.

Lake Monster Tattoo has one of its shops inside Bill's. Owners Reed and Nerissa Murin had planned to consolidate into their store at the Y in South Lake Tahoe before getting the official word from management at Bill's about the closure.

They have had the casino shop for four years.

"We've seen it coming for a long time," Reed Murin said.

The couple said that while the casino floor has lacked patrons, their shop and Bar 24 have stayed busy in these lean times.

The phone at Bar 24 has been ringing off the hook for more than a week. It is not known how many employees lost their job there.

Bill's used to be the spot where locals would hang out. It had a more laid back feel than the big four.

Like all the casinos at Stateline, Bill's used to be packed. It would be wall-to-wall people on weekend nights. When other casinos had \$5 blackjack tables, people were hovering at Bill's \$2 tables waiting for a seat.

There was a time when Bill's didn't have doors. The entrance – on both ends of the casino corridor were open 24 hours day. It wasn't quite gaming al fresco, but it had that funky, Tahoe feel.

Packer remembers in the early days of the casino when people filled the sidewalks outside of Bill's and the other casinos. He also acknowledges in recent times it has seemed like employees have outnumbered customers at the small facility.

Bill's clients are considered "retail customers" – ones who just show up. No player cards were issued, which in turn meant not knowing the players by name or address. This meant they could not be marketed to to lure them to Lake Tahoe with specials.

In the late 1980s the upstairs McDonald's was popular with locals and tourists craving junk food. Various restaurants have come and gone from what was Bar 24.

What will happen to the property is not known. Harrah's Entertainment owns the building and land.

"Once it is closed, we will look at our options," Packer said. "We will button it down. The parking lot will be used as overflow for Harrah's. The building itself will be closed."

MontBleu layoffs

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving 27 people were laid off from MontBleu casino in Stateline. The casino still has more than 600 employees.

The pit is closed during the graveyard shift because the casino floor looks like a cemetery at that time of night – no one walking around.

The reservations desk is open only from 11am-7pm

Many of the lost jobs are people who earned \$7 or \$8 an hour.

But also out of work is the director of casino operations. The director of food and beverage has been replaced.

Tropicana Entertainment out of Las Vegas owns MontBleu. It renegotiated its lease with Edgewood Companies (formerly Park Cattle) earlier this year. It now expires in 2028.

Indian gaming's role

Indian casinos have increasingly been the nemesis of Stateline and Reno gaming halls. But even they are having to layoff workers. Red Hawk in Shingle Springs just laid off more people.

Tom Davis, who last month was laid off from MontBleu and is a former mayor of South Lake Tahoe, said at the Dec. 8 City Council meeting, "It's the Indian wars now."

Billboards throughout the Central Valley are for the Indian casinos in Jackson, Shingle Springs and Roseville. On Highway 99 between Sacramento and Turlock not a single Tahoe or Reno casino is advertised. Interstate 80 and Highway 50 west of Sacramento have limited advertising for Nevada casinos.

Workers at Thunder Valley in Roseville agreed this week to join the Teamsters union. But unions are no guarantee of a job.

Thousands in Placerville in deep freeze

Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The deep snow blanketing Placerville and its surrounding

foothills continued to cause disruptions Tuesday, with thousands of residents going a second day without power and heat.

The snow that fell Sunday and Monday brought down trees and limbs throughout the foothills, and in some cases power lines with them. By Tuesday afternoon, a few thousand PG&E customers in El Dorado County remained without power.

Don Davis, spokesman for Marshall Medical Center, said the hospital relied on its generators after the electricity went out. But about 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, the generators failed as well. The county Office of Emergency Services supplied portable generators until hospital generators were restored.

Read the whole story

Vail Resorts posts second consecutive quarterly loss

Denver Business Journal

Vail Resorts Inc. Tuesday posted a wider loss for the second consecutive quarter, with the Colorado ski resort and hotel operator attributing a slide in revenue to the timing of real-estate closings.

Broomfield-based Vail Resorts (NYSE: MTN) reported results for the three months ending Oct. 31, which the company regards as its first quarter.

It cited a quarterly net loss attributable to the company of \$41.2 million, or \$1.14 a share, versus a \$34.5 million loss, or 93 cents a share, a year earlier.

Read the whole story

Mandatory commercial garbage service for South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed



Mandatory commercial trash pick up in South Lake Tahoe is closer to becoming a reality.

The City Council on Dec. 8 voted 5-0 to direct staff to come up with an ordinance that would require every business in town pay for garbage service. Right now it is voluntary.

South Tahoe Refuse has 610 collection accounts and more than 400 customers who haul the trash themselves to the transfer station.

Residences already have mandatory garbage pick up in the city limits. That bill includes being able to put out an unlimited number of cans or bags on a weekly basis.

Commercial customers are not expected to be offered the same deal.

As it is now, commercial businesses pay based on the size of the dumpster and how many times STR empties it, or by how much is dumped at the station.

Some businesses are notorious for having overflowing trash containers. The ones behind Ross are often full, with debris flowing into open space.

Bad business operators are the impetus for the change.

Enforcement is an issue Assistant City Manager Rick Angelocci said would need to be worked out as the ordinance is written.

With mandatory garbage service, Angelocci said the city would then have the power to tell businesses that let garbage spill out that they must use the next size container to hold everything.

The nuisance abatement program South Tahoe has now is a bit cumbersome and with the city losing a community service officer, enforcement is a huge issue.

With residential customers who don't pay their bill, a lien can be put on the property. If commercial service becomes mandatory, liens often are not an option because so many business owners are leasing the space and there is nothing to put a lien on.

One reason South Tahoe Refuse likes the idea is being able to recycle more waste from commercial businesses.

Without knowing the fee structure, it's hard to know how this is going to affect STR's bottom line.

City staff will also have to work out how this will be equitable for businesses. A small massage business does not produce much waste, while a restaurant is one of the biggest producers of garbage.

Another issue is that many landlords combine garbage " and water " into the rent. Whether mandatory commercial service will increase what a landlord pays is not known. Therefore it is not known if this will be another financial burden on small business owners or just a means to keep the town clean, with

more waste being recycled.

How the fee structure will work for a standalone entity vs. a strip mall that may have one dumpster for multiple businesses is not known.

The ordinance will be brought to the council in early 2010.