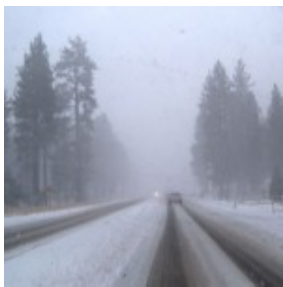


Survey: Travelers coming to South Shore for Turkey Day

South Shore businesses could expect up to a 31 percent increase in visitors during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, according to a survey conducted by Strategic Marketing Group of South Lake Tahoe.

Of the 35,000 people who were sent the survey, 806 responded. The reason they are coming – to sightsee, gamble, eat well, shop and ski.



Survey says
Highway 50
will be more
crowded next
week.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

“We’re hopeful this sample proves to be an accurate snapshot of the overall picture,” Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, said in a statement. “The trend for increased tourism is a positive message for the entire South Shore, especially as we move into what’s expected to be a solid winter season. Hopefully, the tide is turning.”

The survey also discovered that a like number, or 33.9 percent of all respondents are planning additional trips of one night

or more to South Shore during the coming year compared to the same period a year ago, while 55 percent indicated plans for the same number of visits.

Snow sticking – resorts ready to open



By Kathryn Reed

White “that’s the word for the day in Lake Tahoe now that the winds have calmed down.

Snow is rapidly accumulating at lake level, with it coming down even harder on the ski slopes. About 1.5 inches have fallen at the South Shore as of 4pm Friday. This is good news because Squaw, Northstar and Heavenly are expected to open Saturday.

Heavenly had to delay it’s opening a day because of high winds. Those same winds shutdown Mt. Rose on Friday.

Winds have knocked power out in parts of Northern California and Northern Nevada. And where the lights are on, they are often flickering.

Gusts of 80mph grounded flights at Reno-Tahoe International Airport Friday afternoon.

Slick roads are being blamed for a fatal accident on

Interstate 80. Spin-outs were seen on both sides of Spooner Summit between Carson City and Lake Tahoe Friday afternoon.

Check with Caltrans or NDOT for road conditions, or click on the icons on *Lake Tahoe News*™ Home page.

Forecasts called for a chance of snow all weekend.

Be sure to read *Lake Tahoe News* each morning for the ski report from Curtis Fong, The Guy from Tahoe.

Realtors need a do-over vote

By Kathryn Reed

The 2010 officers for the South Tahoe Association of Realtors is a done deal. But the directors, well, that's another story.

A fax machine with no ink is being blamed for the re-vote.



Michael
Phillips

An email to association members says, "Please be advised that the Election Committee has met and reviewed this year's election. As you may be aware, the ballots for this year's election were mailed out on a Friday, and a number of members faxed their completed ballots to the STAR office over that

weekend. When staff arrived on Monday morning, they immediately saw that there was a problem with the fax machine. It was out of ink, and two of the ballots were completely illegible, with 7 more were very difficult to read, or partially illegible.â€

Itâ€™s not quite like Florida in 2000, but with more than 10 percent of the 87 ballots that were returned not being readable, the committee elected to have a do-over. Two votes separated fourth and fifth place.

Five people are contending for four director seats. Each is a three-year term. On the slate are Pamela Francis, Judith Hanson, Janin Inman, Michael Mulligan and Kathy Southern. The vote should be tallied the night of Nov. 25.

The association has eight directors who serve staggered terms.

This yearâ€™s installation dinner will be Jan. 8 at Edgewood Tahoe.

The 2010 officers, who ran unopposed, are: Michael Phillips, president; Amanda Adams, president elect; Jill Stanton-Bricker, vice president; and Jill Teakell, secretary-treasurer.

Experts: Don't get excited about El Nino

By Susan Wood

Alarmists and the apathetic beware: one thing is clear when facing a tropical phenomenon like El Nino this winter – weather is not an exact science.

With a moderate El Nino predicted to bring average temperatures and slightly more precipitation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and 2010 Old Farmer's Almanac have at least agreed in forecasting a season of extremes with snowfall and rain events quickly giving way to warm and dry California conditions.

The latter has led to a three-year drought in the state and Lake Tahoe falling below its natural rim for only the seventh time in the 109 years that records have been kept. Since Oct. 1 when the water year starts – it dropped below the 6,222-foot mark twice. This week the lake level fell almost a quarter inch.



Consecutive drought years make the need for piers obsolete at Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared this another drought year.

Even with a rare post-Columbus Day storm that drenched the region and brought the lake level up by 2.6 inches over the 120,000 acres, the drought-like conditions returned and allowed evaporation of all that water that equals 8.7 billion gallons.

These extremes have climatologists, ski resorts and even basic weather watchers scratching their heads.

“There are certainly more variables, or I should say, extremes. But it’s been that way since the ‘70s,” said Gary Barbato, the National Weather Service hydrologist stationed in Reno.

The “Almanac” reports a winter of shoveling in December and power outages in January followed by an early quick thaw at the end of February into March.

Another water official is concerned about the frequency of the dry years and the intensity of the storms when they do show up.

“Tahoe can weather one year, but it’s harder with three, and we’ve had three in a row,” California Department of Water Resources hydrologist Morris Reuss said. “We’re hoping for a fairly decent water year.”

The average rise and fall of the lake level over the year may measure 3 feet. But when the loss totals 6 or even 9 feet over a three-year period, the pressure is applied to Mother Nature to make up the difference. And when she does, it’s sometimes too much, too fast. The runoff carries debris, sediment and silt into the watersheds. This movement into Lake Tahoe presents a whole other billion-dollar problem called lake clarity.

The Western Regional Climate Center has categorized the lake level drop as “not common, but not impossible,” said Reno climatologist Kelly Redmond, who just returned from a conference in Denver highlighting the properties of drought. The roundtable discussions included the possibilities of displaced populations in an “old-style” drought similar to, but not equal to, the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

A report issued from NOAA this week noted October as having

the sixth warmest global (land and ocean) surface temperature since 1880. The combined temperature measured 1.03 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th century average of 57.1 F.

“With climate change, we expect a drying out of the Southwest and a wetter Northwest,” Redmond said.

Redmond, a resident expert on El Nino, indicated NOAA has remained rather “noncommittal on Lake Tahoe” facing any big winter.

“It should be slightly more wet, but not by much,” he added.

To put it into perspective, El Nino is a tropical weather phenomenon that originates off the shores of South America in which sea surface temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean show a warming trend around Christmas “hence the “Christ child” Spanish name for the weather phenomenon. According to NOAA, the current El Nino has prompted ocean temperatures to rise 11 degrees Fahrenheit. This rise creates weather disturbances and storms that can slam California.

El Nino’s above average precipitation focuses on weather in the Southwest section of California, with the Lake Tahoe Basin teetering on the cusp of a rainy South and a dry Pacific Northwest.

Indeed, certain El Ninos “usually considered strong ones as in 1982-83 and 1986-87 “have produced abundant snowpack in the Sierra Nevada.

Whether it measures up to the anticipation from the scores of Tahoe die-hards who showed up in full force over the past week at Pray for Snow parties remains to be seen. “El Nino” flew off the tongues of skiers and boarders eagerly waiting winter as much as the beer, snacks and snow calls.

Either way, today’s forecast is a good start.

A winter storm warning was issued by the National Weather Service starting at 1pm and ending at 10pm Friday. Moderate to heavy snowfall measuring 8 to 16 inches along the Sierra Nevada crest above 7,000 feet and 3 to 8 inches is forecast at lake level. Near zero visibility is expected due to strong wind, which could make for hazardous driving conditions.

The calendar says winter starts Dec. 21, but Tahoe says it's here now.

CalPERS chief wants to clean up scandal plagued agency

Publisher's note: *Alfred Villalobos, who lives on the South Shore of Lake Tahoe, has done work with Apollo, the private equity firm that owns Harrah's Entertainment. Apollo is tied to the CalPERS scandal.*

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

CalPERS' president, promising to clean up an influence-peddling scandal at the big pension fund, raised the prospect Wednesday of publicly reprimanding board members and employees who violate ethical standards.

"We won't let the actions of a few stain or tarnish the 77-year history of our organization," board President Rob Feckner said in an interview with editors and reporters at The Bee.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System has been scrambling to deal with disclosures that former board member Alfred Villalobos has earned more than \$60 million obtaining CalPERS deals for his investment clients. CalPERS, which made

the disclosures itself, has commissioned a “special review” of Villalobos and other so-called placement agents, and has endorsed legislation requiring agents to register as lobbyists.

Read the whole story

Apollo doubles down on Harrah's casino debt

By Josh Kosman, New York Post

An owner of Harrah's Entertainment, America's biggest casino chain, is doubling down.

Private-equity firm Apollo Management is buying bonds in the debt-swamped business so it has more power in the event of a debt restructuring, even if its large equity stake is wiped out.

Meanwhile, Apollo's fellow owners, PE powerhouses Blackstone Group and TPG, are not reinvesting, sources said. Apollo and TPG have roughly equal stakes in the casino company, while Blackstone's is smaller.

This is a change from early 2009 when Apollo and TPG bought Harrah's loans with a face value of \$2 billion at a discount, in order to reduce the debt in the company.

Read the whole story

Council acts on travel, city attorneys, pot, lodging fees

By Kathryn Reed

On a 4-0 vote Tuesday, the South Lake Tahoe City Council said no to sending Finance Director Christine Vuletich to Monterey for training.

The \$785 expense was put on a city credit card prior to the meeting, though staff said it is refundable.

"The \$785 is not as important as the procedure. That policy we debated pretty vigorously and (it) should be followed," Councilman Hal Cole said.

The policy he is talking about is that requests for training or conferences by staff be made in advance, not after the registration and payments are sent in.

City Manager Dave Jinkens said he is the one who wanted Vuletich to attend the conference to learn more about what the state is doing in terms of taking away money from cities throughout California.

"I've looked at the schedule of speakers and don't think anything will be brought forward that hasn't already been brought to the city," Councilman Bill Crawford said.

Cole, who is on the finance committee, also seemed exacerbated that the warrants the council requested be put in their packets each meeting have not been. Warrants are essentially the bills that have been paid.

Councilman Bruce Grego was absent from the meeting.

In other action on Nov. 17 the council:

Approved the contracts for Patrick Enright and Jacqueline Mittelstadt, now city attorney and assistant city attorney, respectively. Councilmembers Cole and Crawford commented on them just a bit – mostly about the fact they can't comment on the negotiations that led to the settlement agreement with Mittelstadt. "This had nothing to do with corruption. It has nothing to do with a cover up," Cole said.

Heard a presentation about raising the fee lodging guests within the city limits pay. The money is for the Tourism Improvement District. A vote is expected at the Dec. 8 meeting, with implementation of the fee on Dec. 18 so holiday travelers will be paying more. The money collected goes toward marketing the South Shore.

Agreed to a temporary moratorium on medicinal marijuana establishments until the city crafts an ordinance dealing with this type of business.

State moves Garrido's parole agent after repeated threats

By Roman Gokhman, Contra Costa Times

ANTIOCH — The parole agent who supervised kidnapping and rape suspect Phillip Garrido has been moved to a different location after numerous threats against him and his family, the state corrections department said today.

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Spokesman Gordon Hinkle said the agent and his family were moved shortly after Jaycee Dugard was discovered and Garrido and his wife, Nancy, were arrested Aug. 26.

The move was “due to security concerns that the department had,” Hinkle said.

Read the whole story

SLT balances budget, infuriates employees

By Kathryn Reed



For weeks several council members have harped on wanting the budget to be brought before them – notably Hal Cole and Jerry Birdwell who make up the finance committee.

Finally, it was on Nov. 17. In a matter of seconds it was a done deal.

No discussion.

No comments.

Nothing but a 4-0 vote. Councilman Bruce Grego was absent.

It all seemed a bit surreal.

Most of the discussion Tuesday centered on the seven bargaining units in the city that had been negotiating with staff to amend their contracts to help bridge a \$3.4 million budget gap.

During those discussions Councilman Bill Crawford asked how without all the unions agreeing to cutbacks could the city come up with a balanced budget. Finance Director Christine Vuletich said she would explain it when the budget was before the council.

But she never had to because a vote was taken and that was that.

The last time the city discussed the multi-million dollar budget in any depth was at the Sept. 29 workshop.

What happened in last 49 days is unknown. *Lake Tahoe News* has requested the final budget to be provided now that the council has approved it.

In years past approval of South Lake Tahoe's final budget was a lengthy process with councilmembers going over it in a deliberate manner. Without their scrutiny of it in public, the public doesn't visibly know how thoroughly they have dissected it.

Considering staff and councilmembers have less than a stellar image with those who live in the city limits and surrounding area, to not have any discussion on such an important document is almost shocking.

In an era when questions keep being raised about how money is spent and who has discretion to spend it, it would have seemed logical for details to have been provided even if no one was left in the audience to ask the questions.

The summary document that was provided lacks details – as would be expected.

The summary does explain in generalities how the \$3.4 million deficit was overcome.

Nearly \$600,000 comes from ongoing savings from three frozen positions, four temporary people filling jobs, the

Redevelopment Agency paying the bulk of the city attorney's salary, one layoff, and \$80,000 in miscellaneous savings.

About \$1.4 million is saved in furloughs and equivalents.

Reserves were depleted by \$1,446,792 to bring the savings to \$3.42 million.

In the 2009-10 budget (the fiscal year started Oct. 1) expenses total \$101,498,655, with revenues projected to be \$102,352,148 for a net revenue of \$853,493.

The general fund, which is the core operating budget for the city, is projected to have \$28.99 million in revenues. However, expenses are tallied at \$30.49 million.

Besides passing a budget more than a month late, the council managed to seemingly upset the majority of its employees who are represented by unions. This is because the three groups that renegotiated their contracts – South Lake Tahoe Employees Association, South Lake Tahoe Administrative and Confidential Employees Association, and South Lake Tahoe Safety Management Committee – thought every group had to come up with a deal by Nov. 17.

It was the deadline. The deadline the council said it wanted a budget for 2009-10. Staff came through without all the bargaining units needing to amend their contracts.

The groups which didn't reach a deal were South Lake Tahoe Firemen's Association, South Lake Tahoe Police Officers Association, South Lake Tahoe Police Supervisor Association, and South Lake Tahoe Police Association (non-sworn employees).

It was the firefighters who came out in force Tuesday. They filled the back of the room, many standing because all the seats were filled. They were visibly and audibly disgruntled with the city – accusing the city of negotiating in bad faith.

The city negotiating team is made up of City Manager Dave

Jenkins, Vuletich and another finance department employee, Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti, and Human Resources Director Janet Emmet.

Most of the councilmembers felt like they were caught in a “he said, she said” situation. Because of this, either Cole or Birdwell will sit in on future negotiations. The council agreed 4-0 to this procedural change.

This is unusual. Elected officials usually trust staff and are not part of a negotiating team. This is a clear signal the council has lost faith in city leadership.

Scheduling is a main issue the police and fire personnel want addressed. Both groups believe by reworking the schedules it will save the money the city was seeking.

On a 3-1 vote the council accepted the amended contracts with the unions that had signed off on them. Though it should be noted the votes to approve the amendments were not unanimous by the workers.

Cole voted no because he didn’t agree with the amendment stating staff and unions would go back to the tables within in six months. He wanted it sooner.

Firefighters said they are wary of returning to the table anytime soon because they don’t trust the city’s negotiating team.

Prescribed burn near Cave

Rock

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will begin prescribed fire operations in the Cave Rock and Lakeridge areas starting Nov. 17 as weather and staffing allows.

Residents and travelers can expect to see smoke from prescribed fire project areas.

Other fire protection agencies, state and local, may also be conducting prescribed fire operations during this period.

This and other prescribed fire projects are designed to reduce wildfire risks to communities and critical resources. Smoke management is part of every prescribed fire burn plan, and efforts will be taken to reduce actual or potential smoke impacts on community areas.