

Invasive aquatics not a priority with EDC supervisors

By Kathryn Reed

A crash course in invasive species was given to El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday during their once a year meeting in South Lake Tahoe.

A number of non-native aquatic organisms already call Lake Tahoe home. Although this is not a good, what could be worse is if quagga or zebra mussels enter the water.



Quagga mussel

Last week a federal task force adopted a plan to deal with the invasives. Lake Tahoe is one of four entities in the country with an interstate plan to stop the mussels from migrating. This allows the area to receive federal money to help with inspection costs.

It would cost the Lake Tahoe Basin millions of dollars a year if these mussels ever reached the lake. This would be in lost property, damage to water treatment plants, and tourists not coming.

The California Department of Fish & Game's website says, "U.S. Congressional researchers estimated that an infestation of the Zebra mussel in the Great Lakes area cost the power industry \$3.1 billion in the 1993-1999 period, with

an economic impact to industries, businesses and communities of more than \$5 billion. California could spend hundreds of millions of dollars protecting the state's water system from a Quagga/Zebra infestation.

Eradication isn't possible " at least with today's science and technology.

Ted Thayer, wildlife program manager with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, explained what his agency has been doing to prevent the mussels from entering Lake Tahoe.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Ron Briggs sounded like he knew nothing of the mandatory inspection program that was in place for the entire 2009 boating season.

Supervisor Jim Sweeney got hung up on thinking the mussels had something to do with lake clarity.

Supervisors barely discussed an ordinance from Lake County that encompasses Clear Lake and if they would want to adopt something similar. There was talk by some supervisors that they have little interest in paying for prevention and enforcement.

"I'm not going to take a deputy off the street to fight mussels," Briggs said.

This was after Thayer explained some of the consequences that could occur if the mussels enter Lake Tahoe as well as what has happened to the Great Lakes and Lake Mead.

"You can't walk with your toes in the sand on the beach with razor sharp shells. The shells gum up engines of boats," Thayer told the five elected officials who were meeting at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Perhaps instead of having the Tahoe supervisor sit on the TRPA Governing Board, one of the other four should so more supervisors have a better understanding of what is going on at

the lake with aquatic species and other important subjects.

The TRPA website and DFG website have detailed information about the mussels.

Zephyr Cove estate's link to public pension fund probed

By Marc Lifsher, Los Angeles Times

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO – With the fortune he has made using his connections with public pension funds, it's hardly a surprise that Alfred J.R. Villalobos owns a sprawling, 9,100-square-foot home overlooking the emerald-blue waters of Lake Tahoe.

But the way in which Villalobos financed construction of the \$2.7-million mansion is fueling new questions in an investigation by the California Public Employees' Retirement system into the activities of so-called placement agents such as Villalobos.

Read the whole story

STHS security guard arrested;

student involved

By Kathryn Reed

For the second time this calendar year a security guard at South Tahoe High School has been arrested.

The latest arrest was of Larry Brown on Nov. 6. The 63-year-old was pulled over by an El Dorado County sheriff's deputy on a routine traffic stop. The smell of freshly burned marijuana allegedly spewed from the vehicle.

In the passenger seat was a 16-year-old female STHS student.

The District Attorney's Office received the report yesterday and expects to review the case next week and determine what charges are likely to be filed against Brown.

"Possession of marijuana on a highway is a fine only. The other stuff is potentially extremely serious," Hans Uthe, assistant district attorney, told *Lake Tahoe News* today.

The sheriff's report recommends Brown be charged with transportation of marijuana, selling the illegal substance and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Brown has posted bail.

The teenager was released to her parents. She reportedly told deputies the two had been at Pope Beach drinking beer and smoking pot.

The vehicle was pulled over about 3pm last Friday near the Y in South Lake Tahoe.

STHS Principal Ivone Larson deferred comments to the district office. Superintendent Jim Tarwater is out today.

Human Resources Manager Jim Watson said the district is reviewing the case to determine what action will be taken

against the employee. Watson would not say if Brown was on paid or unpaid leave.

This means South Tahoe High is down to two security guards, plus South Lake Tahoe police Officer Scott Willson. Willson is the school resource officer. The other security guards are employees of the school district and don't carry weapons. To be hired, a background check is done. A state certification is also required, which entails 24 hours of training.

Last month Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill that takes effect July 1, 2010, mandating anyone who supervises a school club or is a coach must obtain an "Activity Supervisor Clearance Certificate" from the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Fingerprinting is part of that process, as well as state and federal criminal records reports from the Department of Justice. How this relates to guards is not known.

Such checks can prevent a district from hiring someone with an unsavory past, but do nothing to prevent someone from committing a crime after being hired.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District keeps finding this out.

The other STHS security guard arrested this year was Irma Torres Salazar, 22. She was convicted in the spring on misdemeanor charges of interfering with the investigation of a gang related beating.

Karsten Gronwold was arrested four days before the first day of school in 2006 after teaching in the district since 1990. The former magnet school teacher was sentenced in 2008 to eight years in federal prison on child pornography charges.

Last month he was sentenced to three years in state prison. That sentence for committing a lewd act on a child will run concurrent with his federal time.

A district psychologist had marijuana charges dropped against her in May 2008, but her employment with LTUSD was severed.

Snow covers Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

A blanket of white fluffy stuff is covering the Lake Tahoe Basin.



It's winter in
Tahoe on Nov.
12.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Forecasters were right – 2-3 inches fell at lake level overnight.

Despite the gray skies first thing this morning, the weather guys say to expect a sunny day. Winter could return Friday night – just as everyone gets all dolled up for the annual Sorooptimist wine event at Harrah's Tahoe.

Expect sun for the weekend, with winter returning Tuesday. Highs will be in the 40s, lows in the 20s.

Chains or 4-wheel drive was the norm for most of the highways

in and out of the basin this morning. Road conditions can easily be accessed via the top of *Lake Tahoe News'* Home page.

Ski resorts didn't have snow accumulation totals posted before 7 this morning. But suffice it to say, this storm and the two on the radar screen bode well for resorts like Heavenly that plans to open Nov. 20 and Squaw on Nov. 21.

Sierra-at-Tahoe's annual Pray for Snow Party is tonight at 7 at Murphy's Irish Pub on Emerald Bay Road in South Lake.

Kirkwood's party is at McP's pub near Stateline on Nov. 19.

Nevada tugging at tourists' heart strings



Small, heartwarming moments that make a vacation unforgettable are what the Nevada Commission on Tourism's winter ad campaign hopes to inspire in visitors. The campaign launched this month with a mix of traditional and online media.

“The advertising budget is very small this year, so we are launching a campaign that uses an emotion-evoking image to pique interest, and a complement of TV, print, Internet and mobile media to deliver the details,” Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki and NCOT chair said in a statement. “We advertise heavily online because that is where you get the most bang for your buck, and where travelers go to plan their vacations.”

The “Capture Your Heart” campaign targets winter enthusiasts who take at least one overnight ski or snowboard

trip a year. The target market is upscale, young at heart and outdoorsy. In order to strengthen Nevada's presence in its primary markets, especially its ski-season markets, the ads will run in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, the Bay Area, Dallas, Seattle, Chicago and Phoenix through January.

“These markets are very promising for our Lake Tahoe and Northern Nevada winter activities, as well as for the Mt. Charleston and Las Vegas area,” NCOT Director Dann Lewis said in a press release.

The ad at the center of the campaign shows two hands forming a heart and framing a scene over Lake Tahoe. The tourism commission's research shows that typically it's not a vacation in its entirety that travelers remember, but rather a small sum of the whole. The “Capture Your Heart” campaign focuses on creating an emotional bond between Nevada and the visitor.

Veterans earn their day of honor

By Kathryn Reed

Sacrifice. That was the word that dominated the Veterans Day ceremony in South Lake Tahoe this morning.

Today is a time to honor the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces and those who continue to do so.



Dylan Martin,
9, at the
Veterans Day
ceremony in
South Lake
Tahoe.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

"There is no mission more noble than serving our country," said Bill Kerr, a Marine veteran from World War II and Korea.

More than 80 people gathered under gray skies at the Stella Van Dyke Johnson American Legion Post 795 to recognize all veterans.

Legion Cmdr. Blair Clark pointed out that sacrifice is just part of the job when someone joins the military.

Clark presented John Filas with a plaque in honor of the work he does at the Legion that is always appreciated, but not always recognized.

Filas served in the Marines 69 years ago. He spent a couple days getting the grounds ready for today's ceremony. In the spring and summer he is often out back planting flowers.

All ages attended the ceremony. A busload from Kindertown was there – with handmade red, white and blue hats.

Boy Scouts, too, were there.

Dylan Martin, 9, likes coming to these events. His grandfather

served in the military.

“I like that you get to have a chance to observe veterans. It’s a special time of year. You can have a great time, too,” Martin said as he waited for the festivities to begin.

EDC supervisors make appointments

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday filled a number of vacancies on boards throughout the county.

Jennifer Thornton and Mike Craft were appointed to the Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District. Thornton is new to the board. Craft is an incumbent who has had issues with the Riches, who have been running the concessionaire.

John and Ruth Rich have had the contract to operate at the South Shore lake for 14 years. Some board members want them out. The concessionaire is in a state of limbo. It has been the subject of heated debates all fall that *Lake Tahoe News* has covered.

Other appointments by the supervisors include Debbie Henderson to the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District; Stephen Hyde and Bruce Massie to the Meeks Bay Fire Protection District; and George Wheelon to the El Dorado Irrigation District.

Lakeview Commons struggles to be a reality

By Kathryn Reed

It was hard to know on Tuesday that the Lakeview Commons project in the center of South Lake Tahoe was not before the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors for the first time.

This was the fourth time in three years.



Dirt at El Dorado Beach would be replaced with paving stones if Lakeview Commons comes to fruition.

The long discussion about the 56-acre project that encompasses El Dorado Beach and Campground by the Lake sounded at times like a petty rivalry between the county and the city.

Supervisor Jim Sweeney made it known, “I believe my grandfather was part of the group that got the Board of Supervisor to buy this property.”

He has several issues with the project, though he did repeatedly say he supports the renovation of the area, if only

for environmental reasons.

The five-member board made its once annual trek to Lake Tahoe on Nov. 10. Most of the issues facing the elected body related to the eastside of the county.

At times the questions asked by the board members – four represent the West Slope, one Lake Tahoe – made it obvious Lake Tahoe is not a regular stop for them.

Supervisor Ray Nutting didn't understand how Lakeview Commons could be referred to as the "center of town" as project manager Deb Vreeland called it in her presentation.

The board had no comprehension of how well used the El Dorado Beach area is or how dilapidated it is.

Ron Briggs, chairman of the board, questioned Supervisor Norma Santiago's allegiance to the county at one point when he asked, "Who's the community?" in reference to one of her comments. Santiago is the lone voice on the board for the Lake Tahoe community. Her answer to the question was, "El Dorado County." Briggs implied her loyalties might be with South Lake Tahoe, where she lives.

South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County officials have long squabbled like children. This project – particularly the land involved, Lake Tahoe Airport, the government center on Johnson Boulevard – they are issues that crop up every so often without resolution. Listening to the elected officials it's hard to know this is one county and not two divided by a wall of granite.

The bitterness and childlike behavior between the government entities that are supposed to represent all residents carries on no matter who is in office.

Considering \$1.5 million has been spent on planning the project that will transform the lakefront area, it seemed like

it may go down the drain Tuesday.

Sweeney kept talking policy issues – which is his job. But one has to wonder where he has been. In a three-year period, 28 community meetings were conducted in South Lake Tahoe about the project. Lakeview Commons, aka the 56-acre project, had been before the Board of Supervisors three times before Tuesday and three times before the South Lake Tahoe City Council. This gave plenty of time for policy issues to be hashed out.

The project has been talked about for seven years.

On Tuesday, Sweeney kept harping on how he needed to see a real plan.

What Vreeland presented apparently didn't qualify.

Another bone of contention was the name of the project – Lakeview Commons. Most of the West Slope supervisors took issue with the name – wanting El Dorado to be part of the mix.

Those in South Lake Tahoe – agency and city reps – said the name could be changed.

Another issue Tuesday morning was the lease South Lake Tahoe has on the property owned by El Dorado County. It expires in 13 years. The California Tahoe Conservancy, which will fund the renovation on the lakeside of Highway 50, needs a 20-year agreement in place that states who will maintain the property so grants can be secured.

Officials close to the project thought it was going to be a slam dunk for the board to approve an extension on the lease. Not so.

Finally, a compromise was met.

The issue will be brought up at the Dec. 8 supervisors' meeting for the lakefront part of the project to be separated

from the rest of the plan on the other side of Highway 50.

This will allow the city to proceed the same day with entertaining a motion to go forward with the bid process so construction could begin next spring.

The board toured the site after lunch, which was provided by the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce.

In other board action:

- Supervisors made the Happy Homestead Cemetery District a five-member board. John Poel and Joe Tillson were appointed to terms that expire in January 2013. The three current board members are seated until January 2011.
- Lahontan Water Board's presentation was postponed to Dec. 8 when the supervisors are back in Placerville. Water board representatives will also be before the South Lake Tahoe City Council that day.

Lark resigns as DCSD superintendent

By Kathryn Reed

Douglas County School District needs a superintendent.

Just months after the board extended her contract, Carol Lark, tendered her resignation at Tuesday's board meeting.



Carol
Lark

Neither Lark nor board President Cindy Trigg was available for comment Tuesday night. In recognition of Veterans Day, district offices are closed today so comments may be days away.

The board unanimously accepted Lark's resignation, agreeing to pay her \$135,000 plus \$17,500 in vacation in January pursuant to her agreeing not to sue the district.

The agenda for the meeting in Minden said, "The Board will discuss and may take action regarding the terms of a potential agreement with Superintendent Lark relating to her possible voluntary separation from employment with the District and the termination of her employment contract."

The district is expected to figure out a plan this month for a temporary replacement for Lark, with a permanent hire not likely to be on board for months.

Lark, 64, has not been liked at the lake by parents who continually questioned her leadership and perceived lack of understanding of the differences between the lake and valley.

Her handling of the radon issue at Zephyr Cove Elementary was one of many issues parents took issue with since she was hired in 2006.

Lark inherited a district with consistent declining enrollment. She came on board with the decision to close Kingsbury Middle School already made "though the issue was still a heated battle in her first year. Like most districts in the country, budget cutbacks were the norm in her brief tenure.

Lark's contract was to have expired in July 2011. That agreement was hard fought by the seven-member board which has

often been at odds with Lark. At many board meetings, Lark seldom spoke – an uncommon occurrence by a person running a school district.

Before coming to the district that straddles Lake Tahoe and the Carson Valley, Lark spent two years as assistant regional assistant superintendent of Clark County School District in Las Vegas overseeing 27 schools; immediately preceding her move north she spent a few months as acting regional superintendent in charge of 61 schools.

Nevada casinos still feeling recession

September marked the 21st straight month Nevada casinos posted a decline in winnings from gamblers.

Stateline casino's \$21.8 million take was 10.8 percent less than a year ago.

Statewide, casinos won \$911 million, which is 9 percent less than 2008.

The silver lining is the decline is not a double digit. This is the second consecutive month for that to be the case. Part of this may have to do with the entire Labor Day weekend falling in September.