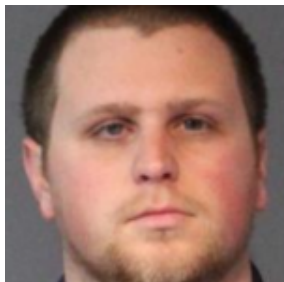


Heavenly kids' instructor faces child porn charges

A Heavenly Mountain Resort children's ski school instructor was indicted April 5 on child pornography charges.



Stephan L.
DeGraffenreid

Stephan L. DeGraffenreid, 26, of Gardnerville faces one count of sexual exploitation of a child, one count of possession of child pornography and two counts of attempted sexual exploitation of a child.

He has been let go by the ski resort.

Law enforcement said the illicit photos were on DeGraffenreid's iPod that was found at the ski resort. Officers said more photos were found at his residence.

"We have no reason to believe that the alleged activity has any connection to Heavenly Ski Resort or its guests. The alleged activity is abhorrent to everything that our resort stands for and we remain available to cooperate with the authorities in their investigation, if requested," resort spokesman Kevin Cooper said in a statement.

The FBI, along with Washoe and El Dorado County sheriff's departments are leading the investigation. If convicted, DeGraffenreid faces 15 years in prison for each charge.

Lawyers want Calif. schools to stop asking citizenship-related questions

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

Civil rights lawyers have identified 75 California school districts, including one in El Dorado County, that they believe may deter immigrant families from enrolling their children by asking for information such as Social Security numbers and citizenship status.

California Rural Legal Assistance and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area called on state Attorney General Xavier Becerra to investigate the 75 districts' enrollment practices. Students have "clear legal protections" to attend school, the report said, but they could be "unlawfully discouraged" from doing so when asked for information related to citizenship status.

"Truthfully, it's not who we are and not what we believe," said Superintendent Marcy Guthrie with the Mother Lode Union School District. She was flabbergasted to learn that her district had landed in the lawyers' report showing that students entering her district were asked to share their citizenship status. "I just hung up with the principal of our elementary school. We've already pulled (the forms) down from the website. We're making it right."

The district is small, with just 1,100 students at an

elementary and a middle school that serves students from El Dorado, Diamond Springs and Placerville.

Read the whole story

The problem with U.S. marijuana DUI laws: science

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

Gagan Singh rolled a “fat blunt” before he hit the slopes at Lake Tahoe on a sunny Wednesday morning.

By the end of the day, he needed a refill, so he drove to Reno and stopped at one of the local medical marijuana dispensaries. With his Patagonia jacket and bleached-blond man-bun, Singh was eager to head to his hotel and smoke.

The only reason he wouldn’t be smoking while driving to the hotel was because he believes Nevada cops are stricter than the ones in the Bay Area.

“Yeah, I roll my blunts while I’m driving. I smoke while I’m driving,” said Singh, 26, who owns a logistics business and a “party bus” in Oakland, Calif. “I don’t get high after two blunts. I just get tired and lazy.”

With the passage of recreational marijuana in November, Nevada is grappling with questions of how to handle the issue of driving while stoned. And while driving high is still illegal, determining what exactly constitutes “high” is not as easy as it sounds.

Read the whole story

SLT finances in the black; raises for workers

By Kathryn Reed

With more money rolling in than originally planned for this fiscal year, the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday opted to invest in the city and its employees.

The city has \$721,000 more in tax revenue than anticipated from when the 2016-17 budget was approved in the fall.

Hotel, sales and property taxes are the three main sources of cash for the city. The hotel tax is up 7 percent from the previous year, though that is down from the 15 percent spike a year ago. The hotel tax is \$250,000 above projections, property tax is up \$200,000 and sales tax is \$125,000 higher.

Councilman Tom Davis said to expect transient occupancy tax collections to be down significantly in February because “we had too much weather.”

Debbie McIntyre, chief financial officer for the city, said the city is being cautious as things move forward. This spring could be more of a true shoulder season compared to the past few years. This is because the South Shore ski resorts will be closing this month, but all that snow has the mountain biking and hiking trails off-limits. This may mean fewer people will be coming to town until summer sports are playable, so to speak.

A significant amount of discussion centered on the overtime pay for the fire department. While OT is budgeted, an additional \$220,000 is needed. This is the first time since at

least 2011 when Jeff Meston became chief that the department has exceeded its overtime budget. The reason is mostly because a couple people are out on workers comp and some are gone on family medical leave.

The three capital improvement projects receiving mid-year funding include:

- Bijou Park Creek (aka Knights Inn) – \$870,000
- Pot holes – \$300,000
- SLT Police Department remodel design – \$30,000.

Also on April 4, the Placer County Board of Supervisors approved paying South Lake Tahoe \$800,000 for some of the tourist accommodation units associated with the Knights Inn.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine questioned whether the 25 percent reserves should be reconsidered, especially when it was not needed during the recession. She likes the idea of being able to tap that fund for one-time expenses.

As the city's operating budget goes up, it means that pot has to keep increasing. It could possibly become more of a flat amount. Many cities do a three-month reserve, which for South Lake Tahoe would be about \$8 million. It would take a four-fifths vote of the council to change the allocation.

The midyear budget adjustment uses \$1,411,582 from the undesignated reserves. This in large part is for the Bijou-Knights Inn project.

Included in the revise was a salary increase for employees.

This is the final year of three-year contract the city has with its four bargaining units. A contingency said if the city coffers were flush for two years, the employees could reopen the contract to discuss salaries.

The council agreed to give everyone a 2 percent raise that is retroactive to March 11. The city manager and city attorney are not included in this and will be evaluated separately later this spring.

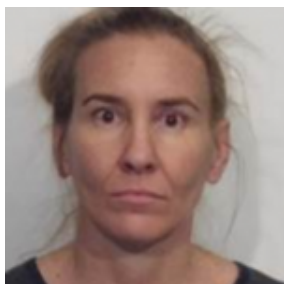
The money to pay for these increases will not impact the General Fund for this fiscal year or in 2017-18. The city set aside money in the last two years when the memorandums of understanding were adopted three years ago. That pot is at \$724,000.

A problem that will be rearing its head is the ongoing pension costs that the city has no control over.

"These pension costs are the problem. Let us negotiate," City Manager Nancy Kerry said. The Legislature would have to change the law to let jurisdictions change CalPERS.

The city's unfunded CalPERS liability will be a separate agenda item at a future meeting. This will include the possibility of trying to pay down the debt a bit, possibly with the undesignated reserves.

6-year sentence for SLT woman in fraud scheme



Karen Rae

Chapon

A South Lake Tahoe woman is on her way to prison for committing mortgage and insurance fraud.

Karen Rae Chapon, 47, was sentenced April 4 by Nevada's Ninth Judicial District Court Judge Thomas Gregory. She is the owner of Tahoe Weddings and Events at Zephyr Cove.

Last August she admitted to filing travel claims with two forged death certificates and fraudulent invoices.

Chapon was sentenced to six years in prison, but would be eligible for parole after two years.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. water conservation increases in Feb.

It's easy to use less water when Mother Nature provides it. Such was the case for Californians in February.

The state Water Resources Control Board on April 4 said residential water use in February was down 25.1 percent compared to 2013. That is the base year the state uses.

In 2016, the savings rate was 11.9 percent.

Even though this has been one of the wettest winters on record, Gov. Jerry Brown has not lifted the drought-emergency declaration. However, that could change any day.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT attempting to fix some dilapidated roads



Roads in South Lake Tahoe are crumbling at a rapid rate.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

The obstacle course known as dodge the pothole will eventually go away – at least in the city limits of South Lake Tahoe.

An additional \$300,000 was allocated for roads at Tuesday's City Council meeting to deal with the nearly 400 potholes. And with water still covering some roads and more runoff coming,

the damage is not done.

The money is coming from revenues being higher than what was projected when the 2016-17 budget was approved last fall.

Because everything is still wet and the water table high in many locations, the work can't start until things really dry out.

What will be different with this fix is that the road will be cut out and filled, as in a complete fix and not just a patch. A 4-foot-by-10-foot area will be dug out to a depth of 6 inches.

Jim Marino, assistant public works director, said it is imperative to get the pot holes done as soon as possible because it is going to be a busy construction season between what the city and Caltrans have planned.

The money was part of the April 4 midyear budget adjustment. Sierra Nevada Construction was already under contract to do \$1,602,947 worth of repairs last fall but the cold temperatures prevented that work from occurring. The amended contract is for the maximum amount allowed without having to rebid the project or have separate contracts.

Potholes on Sierra Boulevard will be fixed, but nothing substantive will be done to that road because it is slated for a massive overhaul in either 2018 or 2019. That will be a complete streets project, with it looking somewhat like Ski Run Boulevard.

"The city's Public Works Department is adept at milling and repairing potholes and minor to moderate roadway surfacing, however, the magnitude of the impacts from this winter are above the production capability of in-house staff combined with all the 'normal' spring roadway tasks such as striping, sign work, curb and gutter repair, sweeping, etc.," the staff report says.



With water still covering some roads and more weather coming this weekend, the full extent of road damage is not known. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Beyond the potholes, sections of town will see significant improvements to streets. Those projects include:

- The No. 2 lane of Lake Tahoe Boulevard from Glorene Avenue to Viking Way
- Glenwood Avenue from Woodland to North Rancho
- Fairway-Glenwood Avenue from Johnson Boulevard to Cloverdale
- South Avenue from Fourth Street to Melba
- Eloise Avenue from the cul de sac to Dunlap Drive
- Primrose-Chonokis from Glenn Road to Montreal Avenue
- Tahoe Island Drive from Third Street to Peter Avenue
- Aloha Drive from Venice Drive to the cul de sac.

“This winter showed what we are so susceptible to without a dedicated roadway program,” Marino told the council.

He has been an ardent advocate for annual spending of between \$2 million and \$3 million for roads. The council acknowledges the problem, but has yet to do anything substantive.

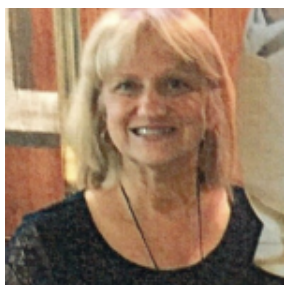
The city is hoping for emergency storm relief dollars that could be used to enhance or build drainage basins where needed.

Bike trails will also see upgrades this construction season. They include:

- El Dorado Beach to Alta Mira site – it will essentially be a whole new path
 - Campground class 1 path
 - 15th Street trail to bridge
 - Trout Creek (Meek's) to Edgewood Circle.
-

Woman missing from South Lake Tahoe motel

A woman staying at Motel 6 has not been seen since the afternoon of April 3.



Pamela
Suwinsky

Pamela Suwinsky left the South Lake Tahoe motel on Monday between 1 and 3:30pm on foot. She left behind her dog, purse,

cell phone and car. She did take her ID and credit cards.

Suwinsky is 62, white, about 5-feet-2, 130 pounds, and has blonde hair and green eyes. She lives in Sacramento.

The night before she went missing she fell in the parking lot and cut her lip and chipped her tooth, according to officers. She was last seen wearing a dark jacket and pants.

Anyone with information is asked to call 530.542.6100.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

California faces \$860-million repair bill for roads

By Joseph Serna, Los Angeles Times

There were many dramatic images from California's extreme winter: interstates flooded, bridged buckled, highways covered in mud, snowbanks blocking key highways.

In Topanga Canyon, the lasting memory for many locals was the massive boulder that blocked Topanga Canyon Boulevard in January after one fierce rainstorm. The huge rock became a popular spot for selfies and social media posts.

The boulder has been removed, but the storm has left a costly legacy in the canyon and on roads across California.

Officials estimate it will cost more than \$860 million to repair the state's roads, bridges and highways damaged from this winter's storms.

Read the whole story

Nevada forester abruptly resigns

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada State Forester and Firewarden Joe Freeland resigned on Monday, nearly six months after an escaped burn by the state triggered a large wildfire just south of Reno.

Freeland's resignation was accepted by Bradley Crowell, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The resignation is effective immediately.

The *Reno Gazette-Journal* has reached out to NDF to confirm the reason for Freeland's resignation. The state announcement did not mention the Little Valley Fire or any potential role it might have played in Freeland's resignation.

Crowell, however, says that the agency is still in the midst of a comprehensive review of NDF policies and procedures, which was requested on Feb. 15. Additional details about the review will be made available but no specific time frame has been set, according to Crowell.

Read the whole story