

Missing Alpine snowboarder found safe

A Bay Area snowboarder who went missing Saturday at Alpine Meadows has been found safe.

The 32-year-old man from Oakland had hiked about three miles to an area known as Diamond Crossing.

His name has not been provided.

The snowboarder was on the back side of the mountain. Placer County sheriff's search and rescue team lead him out of the backcountry on Feb. 18.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Sandoval won't use National Guard for immigrants

By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval said Friday he would not activate the Nevada National Guard to round up undocumented immigrants for deportation.

Sandoval, speaking to the Review-Journal during a break at a Nevada homeland security commission meeting, said he was aware of the report but had not read the memo. The Associated Press detailed a memo draft that was considered by the White House, which called for the mobilization of National Guard troops across 11 states, including Nevada.

The memo proposed to use as many as 100,000 troops to act as immigration enforcers in finding and deporting undocumented immigrants.

Read the whole story

EDC backs off supporting state gas tax hike

El Dorado County's supervisors seem confused about what they want regarding roads and funding.

The elected decided to reconsider their Jan. 24 vote that supported Senate Bill 1 and Assembly Bill 1.

Supervisor Shiva Frenzen was the lone supervisor last month to say no to the bills. Not long after that vote Supervisor Michael Ranalli got cold feet regarding his vote. He represents a very Republican district that is anti-taxes, and groups were already making noise. Ranalli will need those people as he mounts a re-election bid in a year.

The state bills are just starting to make their way through Sacramento. They would raise the gas tax and other fees that drivers would then feel at the pump.

El Dorado County supes' stance now is that because the bills are in their infancy and could change, it's better to hold off on support.

It was CAO Don Ashton who brought the idea of supporting the measures forward because the board had done so last October. At that Supervisor Ron Mikulaco initially brought it to his colleagues' attention. Still, Ashton supports these taxes even

though El Dorado would get back less than half of what gas payers would pay. And this idea was instead of a local tax that would stay in the county and be dedicated for roads.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Residents urged to keep fire hydrants clear

North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District has more than 1,000 fire hydrants in its jurisdiction. With the recent snowstorms and more on the way, it has been difficult to keep all of them clear.

If fire hydrants are located on private property, it is the homeowners or homeowners association responsibility to keep the fire hydrant clear.

Fire personnel are working daily to uncover and clear hydrants. Nevada Division of Forestry hand crews are helping.

Residents and businesses are encourages to clear any hydrant near them. When maintaining a hydrant please try to ensure that a 3-foot clear space is maintained around the hydrant and to the roads edge.

Plenty of California disaster declarations



South Lake Tahoe fire crews this month get rid of ice and water on city streets. Photo/SLTFD

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

This year's heavy rains and the ongoing crisis at Oroville Dam recently prompted Gov. Jerry Brown to do what he and his predecessors have done many times before: ask for federal help.

Once approved, presidential declarations – the most common is a major disaster – open the door to assistance from a range of federal programs, such as money to fix roads or help with living expenses for people thrown out of work.

California knows the programs well.

Read the whole story

Lithium battery causes fire at TC school



Fire investigator at North
Tahoe High School in Tahoe
City on Feb. 17.
Photo/Provided

North Tahoe High School in Tahoe City was temporarily evacuated on Friday after a lithium battery in a student's backpack exploded.

Flames could be seen coming from a backpack that was on the floor of multipurpose room. The floor sustained minor damage.

The evacuation on Feb. 17 was necessary because of the smoke.

It is not known what type of device was in the backpack.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Government intervention likely in Truckee to help find solutions for affordable housing crisis

Publisher's note: *This is one in a series of stories about affordable housing in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee region. All articles may be accessed via the home page under Special Projects, 2017 Affordable Housing.*

By Linda Fine Conaboy

TRUCKEE – With more and more recreational and business opportunities presenting themselves, the Tahoe-Truckee area has become hard pressed to identify enough affordable residential units to accommodate the rapidly increasing need. The situation is reaching a tipping point.

Enter the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, who embarked on a long-term study of the situation, with results becoming available last summer. The report, titled “Truckee North Lake Tahoe Regional Housing Needs Assessment”, contained a comprehensive review of the area’s needs and demographics and was funded by Placer County, Truckee, Nevada County and the Workforce Housing Association of Truckee Tahoe.



Stacy Caldwell, CEO of the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, was one of the speakers at the Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce breakfast this week.

The affordable housing challenge within the region an issue which has been barreling to a point of crisis for years, with the rapid rate of growth within the region seen as the culprit.

The area of study for the report roughly encompassed the West Shore of Lake Tahoe into El Dorado County, Truckee, Tahoe City, Tahoma and Kings Beach as well as the Donner Summit area.

Briefly, the research discovered that:

- 55 percent of the households have incomes classified as moderate or low
- 59 percent of workers commute to their jobs
- 47 percent commute out of the region to their jobs
- 4,000-plus new jobs are expected to be created in the region over the next 15 years
- Almost half spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing; 26 percent spend 50 percent of income on housing
- Rental rates are high, and there is little rental housing available
- 80 percent of the region's 474 below-market housing units are in Truckee, all with full waiting lists.

Caldwell admitted that TTCF's foray into the housing world is "hard stuff." The results of the latest study, she said, can no longer sit on the shelf as previous housing surveys have.

Producing the comprehensive analysis, Caldwell said, involved many partners, including several funding collaborators, a large technical advisory group and BAE Urban Economics, an urban economics and development advisory consulting practice, all of whom conducted surveys, participated in public forums and produced myriad stories for publication.

What they found included the fact that because affordable housing is at a minimum, it's hard to retain good teachers as well as other professionals; that more than half of the houses built within the study area were built before 1979; and that 65 percent sit vacant half of the time.

The median income within the region is \$75,000, making it difficult to purchase an affordable home. Rents are high, resulting in elevated occupancy rates within very small spaces, and more than 12,000 additional units are needed to meet demand.



Truckee is suffering from a housing shortage like the Lake Tahoe Basin.
Photo/Michael Nevins/U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers

"Most mountain communities are facing the same problems," Caldwell said. "We're all learning from each other." She added there is no beginning, middle or end. "We don't want to lead a parade and have no one behind us. This study just can't sit on the shelf. There's widespread momentum now."

Caldwell said the study has commitments from several partners, but she is hoping that Placer County will jump on board with funding as have other entities. "We need a three- to five-year commitment and everyone must be accountable to the plan."

We have seen collaborative engagements, she said. "My hope and vision is that it brings the key decision-makers to the table who can offer up leaders, land, policy and money and show a clear signal to our community that we are taking the housing situation seriously and are committed to accelerated change. That's the mission of my organization."

Tony Lashbrook, Truckee town manager, said the housing crisis is a top priority for Truckee. "The lack of housing is having a real impact on the quality of life for residents. Medical help and education are suffering," he said, "because there's no money; it all goes to housing."

Additionally, Lashbrook said the situation has an effect on the area's business climate too. He added that, "Placer County and the town of Truckee are the 800 pound gorillas in the room who need to be at the table to make this collaboration work."

He told *Lake Tahoe News*, "The town of Truckee has committed to participate in the Housing Council, subject to the participation of Placer County."

The Housing Council Lashbrook referenced was proposed by TTCF. In brief, it requests that Truckee commit \$50,000 per year for three years to launch the endeavor. Placer County has also been requested to make an identical commitment, while Nevada

County and other stakeholders have been asked to participate, although at reduced costs. This information was gleaned from a 2017 document entitled "The Housing Crisis in Truckee".

Additional speakers at the breakfast were Ulrik Binzer of Host Compliance, who is working with Truckee on its transit occupancy tax compliance on short-term rentals, and Hirsh Jain of Airbnb.

A press release from the Truckee Chamber of Commerce says that the short-term rental and the house-sharing market has grown rapidly in recent years, making it hard to ensure that these rentals are paying their transient occupancy tax. They also can create nuisances in neighborhoods as well as remove much needed housing from the available market.

Binzer said his company, a San Francisco-based startup, offers a solution to this problem. "We help local government implement and enforce short-term rental ordinances," he said. "We make sure landlords are playing by the rules."

He explained there are close to 1,150 short-term rental properties in Truckee, with 65 percent of them listed on multiple websites. "It's a very dynamic market," Binzer said.

"Originally, 398 single family residence were not in compliance, and now [with the help of Host Compliance] 32 percent of them have been brought into compliance and are paying their fair share of taxes. The problem is not yet solved, it's a continuing effort."

In the last five years, according to Placer County staff members, vacation rentals have increased dramatically—more than 300 percent in five years—but tax revenues have not kept pace.

Jain, a senior manager for Global Public Policy for Airbnb, provided an overview of Airbnb and discussed the impact of short-term rentals on housing availability.

From its roots in 2008 to its current global impact, Airbnb now has more than 2 million listings worldwide.

“We want to make sure Airbnb pays taxes,” Jain said. “And we want to build open and transparent communication.”

An op-ed in the February issue of Planning magazine said that the dramatic rise of Airbnb and other short-term rental and home-sharing companies has caused cities like Truckee to seek regulations to ease some of the problems caused, especially the impact on affordable housing.

However, Jain said his company is working on ways to promote responsible home sharing. He reminded the audience that people like to stay in a local environment and not in a hotel setting. They spend locally, they stay longer and they’re vitally important to the local economy.

“We want to work with cities,” Jain said. “We are committed to facilitating the process of collecting taxes. We’re eager to work this out. We’re good actors.”

And Caldwell’s take on the area’s housing crisis and the impact of the short-term rental market?

She told *Lake Tahoe News*, “This is a complex issue requiring a sophisticated approach. We all have to be at the table and track the solutions. I’m optimistic because we have more than a handful of partners who have stepped up. We see a blended approach to the solution. There are a lot of dynamics that play into this situation.”

She said that Airbnb does change the dynamic of what’s available on the housing market, but they are also trying to lift the burden. “We need our tourists. They’re a part of the economy.”

2016 Airbnb visits in Nevada top 340,000

By Associated Press

More than 340,000 people passed on Nevada's hotel rooms last year and opted instead to book a place to stay using the home-sharing service Airbnb.

The growth in the short term rental market is good for homeowners who made money from their residences, but it could be a drain on the state's all-important hospitality industry and eventually drive down room rates, according to an industry expert.

Hosts in the state took in \$47 million, with most of the business centering in Las Vegas, figures released this week by the San Francisco-based company show. The number of guest arrivals represents a 151 percent year-over-year growth.

Las Vegas drew a record number of visitors for a third straight year in 2016, attracting 42.9 million tourists. People who opened their homes through Airbnb hosted more than a quarter of a million people and earned \$35.5 million.

Hosts in the Lake Tahoe communities of Stateline and Incline Village welcomed 18,400 and 17,100 guests, respectively.

Mehmet Erdem, an associate professor of hotel operations and technology at UNLV, said the growth of the home-sharing business is happening around the world, not just in Nevada. He said convenience and prices are among the factors that draw visitors to short-term rental services.

"For the people who come here for a bachelor's party, they

could book on Airbnb, but I would bet my money that they are going to stay at an integrated resort," Erdem said. "But if I'm driving to Las Vegas for a soccer tournament and I try to make it a family vacation, I'll probably check Airbnb."

Airbnb is one of several companies that facilitate short-term rentals. Others include VRBO, Homestay and Wimdu.

Erdem said hoteliers could be affected by the home-sharing business if they are eventually forced to bring down their rates. And even with occupancy rates above 90 percent, Erdem said the hospitality industry in the state should keep an eye on services like Airbnb.

"It takes years and years to bring the rates back up," he said.

Airbnb estimates a typical Nevada host earns \$6,600 annually. The company has collected \$500,000 in taxes in Washoe County since 2015.

Ryan Tussing has hosted dozens of Chinese tourists, a Super Bowl party, the filming of two adult movies and many other events and visitors since listing his Las Vegas home on Airbnb. He made \$17,000 in 2016 and hopes to make \$20,000 this year.

Tussing, whose home is about 10 miles away from the Las Vegas Strip, said he believes the success of the home-sharing business is because it is a more personal experience compared to a hotel stay.

"I show all my guests how to park for free on the Strip," he said. "I treat you like you are my friend."

In Las Vegas, regulations on short-term rental businesses include a business license requirement and an annual \$500 permit fee. Unincorporated Clark County – which includes properties near the Strip – does not allow short-term rentals

in residential areas.

Charter has no clue when service will be back

Updated 2:18pm:

For those using Charter Internet, cable and phone services they know they are out of luck right now.

Calling the company doesn't provide much information.

"We don't get an estimated time when it will be fixed because most of the time we don't know what caused it," a Charter representative told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Feb. 17 outage is affecting Lake Tahoe and the Carson Valley.

"A traffic accident has caused damage to our fiber-optic network and is impacting service for Charter customers in the South Lake Tahoe and Gardnerville areas. Crews are working to repair the damage and restore services as quickly as possible," Bret Picciolo, spokesman for Charter, told Lake Tahoe News.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Hillsides are 'weeping,' falling on Calif. highways

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

As the rain and snow have fallen this winter, so have California's hillsides, forcing the closure of major roads through the Sierra Nevada and causing millions of dollars in damage.

The California Department of Transportation estimates that the winter's pounding storms have caused \$400 million in damage to California highways. And the worst may still be coming.

Caltrans officials said they hope to keep Interstate 80 and Highway 50 open throughout Presidents Day weekend, but travelers should be aware the door could shut at any moment as a series of storms dumps more rain on already saturated mountainsides.

[Read the whole story](#)