

Millions of dollars in unclaimed money in Nev.

By Mike Higdon, Reno Gazette-Journal

"You may have extra cash this holiday season and not even know it," according to the Nevada State Treasurer.

Nevada's Unclaimed Property Division has nearly \$900 million in property waiting to be claimed by its owners or their descendants.

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SLT trying to get a handle on vacation rentals



Large homes like this one being built near Heavenly Mountain Resort's Cal Lodge to be used as a vacation home rental is adding fuel to the heated issue in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Of the 140 citations South Lake Tahoe has issued to vacation home owners, 68 were for renting without a permit.

The illegal operators are ordered to immediately stop advertising their rental. While they can go through the permit process to come into compliance, it's not a slam dunk to get approved. And once cited, the city keeps an eye on the property to monitor for repeat infractions.

In the last fiscal year the city conducted 24 audits to see if people were paying the amount of transient occupancy tax they were supposed to. The city has collected \$58,592 in the last year in previously unpaid TOT.

"We collect TOT on the honor system. We can audit them when it seems like they are underreporting," Maureen Stuhlman, who handles vacation home rental enforcement for South Lake Tahoe,

said.

Stuhlman and Kevin Fabino, who runs the Community Development department for the city, gave an update on the VHR situation to the City Council last week.

In July during the last VHR presentation, 1,858 VHR permits existed. Today, that number is 1,149. About 426 of those permits are for time shares. One-hundred and thirty have expired since the summer. The city expects another 150 to be considered expired in the next month.

When the new ordinance was enacted in October 2015 an inspection component was added. The criteria have scared some people.

The city has made a concerted effort in the last four months to address expired permits; trying to surmise if people are renting illegally or have gotten out of the business.

"I would say 95 percent of those inspections have been completed," Fabino said. "It has been a huge undertaking to address expired permits. At one time there were 700 to 900."

Fabino said his department is trying to gather better data, but that the city's antiquated system has made it difficult to do so.

Another change in the permit process is allowing people to object to the house becoming a VHR. A zoning administrator reviews any challenges. Part of the criteria is looking at how the rental would impact the character of the neighborhood.

"For us it is a real balancing act," Fabino said.

Jerry Goodman was the only member of the public who spoke at the Dec. 13 meeting. He has a number of vacation rentals on his street and has been a vocal opponent of VHRs. At Tuesday's meeting he stressed that the character of a residential neighborhood would always be changed because these are not

residents staying the night.

Another aspect to the VHR is that High Sierra Patrol started working Dec. 16. Now the city is being proactive instead of reactive. Before it was all about responding when a complaint was called in. The people will now regularly patrol areas known to have problem houses. They won't interact with the guests, but instead will call an issue in to the community service officer who will respond to the residence.

\$1.17M to help Nev. erase rape kit backlog

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – A panel of lawmakers Thursday accepted a \$1.17 million federal grant to continue to chip away at the backlog of thousands of untested rape kits in Nevada.

The Legislature's Interim Finance Committee authorized the use of the National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative funding for the attorney general's office and local police agencies to continue the effort, even as some lawmakers expressed frustration at the pace of the effort.

So far, the state has received nearly \$5 million in grants and settlement funds earmarked for the endeavor statewide. That funding is in addition to a separate \$2 million grant received by Southern Nevada law enforcement for rape kit testing.

Read the whole story

A tale of two droughts in California

By Matt Stevens, Los Angeles Times

When California water officials assess the drought, the first place they look is the northern Sierra Nevada mountains.

Rain and snowmelt from the area feed into a complex system of rivers, canals and reservoirs that send water across the state. And by almost all measures, the drought picture in Northern California has dramatically improved over the last two months, as a series of storms have helped replenish the state's two major water projects. So far this season, rain levels in the northern Sierra are 180 percent of average, with 23.5 inches of rain falling – and more on the way this week.

But the story is more grim in Southern California, which remains historically dry. Now water officials must figure out how to deal with the disparity and its implications for managing the drought. While Southern California still gets some water from the Sierra, about 50 percent of its supply comes from local sources such as groundwater and reservoirs.

Read the whole story

Funding spurs Hwy. 50-Pioneer Trail roundabout



This is what the Pioneer Trail-Highway 50 roundabout in Meyers could look like.

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County is moving forward with plans to construct a roundabout at the intersection of Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail in Meyers.

The county was just awarded a grant for \$2,932,840 from the Federal Highway Administration's Highway Safety Improvement Program. This was less than the requested amount of \$3,450,400.

"Right now we need to find some more money before we really dig in on this project; and we have to find it pretty soon," John Kahling, the county's deputy director of engineering, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The project will not move forward unless we are able to identify approximately \$600,000 in additional funding."

The entire project is estimated to cost \$4 million.

Other possible funding sources include state transportation block grant dollars, federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds, state maintenance funding, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency mitigation funds.

The Board of Supervisors is expected to officially accept the federal grant after the first of the year. That will then start the three-year time clock for the county to have begun construction. If that deadline is not met, the money has to be returned.

While the bulk of the work affects the state highway, the county is taking the responsibility for the project.

"The county is the lead on this project because Caltrans does not currently have any plans for improving the intersection, and the county feels that improvements associated with safety, increased throughput, and pedestrian and bicycle use are appropriate," Kahling said.

Caltrans, though, will be involved in this project. (The state agency is the lead for the roundabout going in just west of here at the intersection of highways 50 and 89.)

"Local agencies often take the lead in interchange projects, especially when they're able to obtain funding. Caltrans will be the oversight agency on the project and ensure that the design plans meet our standards. Once construction begins, traffic management plans also will need to be approved by Caltrans," Steve Nelson, spokesman for Caltrans, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The exact number of lanes for the roundabout remains to be determined.

Today the crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists is dangerous based on where the crosswalks are, how trails connect and the lights. The roundabout will be designed to incorporate non-motorized travelers.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, “Roundabouts have fewer conflict points. A single lane roundabout has 50 percent fewer pedestrian-vehicle conflict points than a comparable stop or signal controlled intersection. Conflicts between bicycles and vehicles are reduced as well.”

Scientists tie extreme events to changing climate

By Chelsea Harvey, Washington Post

A report published Thursday as a special edition of the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society provides some of the best evidence yet that climate change already has a hand in our worst weather. It points to a variety of extreme weather events in 2015 that were likely influenced by global warming, from heat waves in Australia to heavy rain in China to raging wildfires in Alaska.

The report, examining research on two dozen weather events, was compiled and edited by scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as the Met Office Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research.

Climate scientists have long predicted that the progression of climate change would bring about changes in both the severity and frequency of extreme weather events around the world. In recent years, a new area of climate science has begun to emerge, one that seeks to figure out the likelihood that any given event was influenced by climate change.

Read the whole story

Tourists questioned in illegal shooting in Meyers

Gunshots heard in Meyers this afternoon led officers to track down some guys from Stockton who were target shooting.

“It wasn’t that far from houses,” El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Matt Underhill told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The men were firing off rounds at the end of Lost Lane at about 4pm Dec. 16.

Detectives are still investigating the incident. Underhill said two of the men had prior felonies that prohibited them from engaging in this activity.

Names of the suspects have not been released.

Lake Valley Fire Protection District has an ordinance prohibiting the discharge of weapons as a fire precaution in almost all areas of its jurisdiction. It is enforceable year round.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Environmentalists challenge Squaw’s expansion

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

A Nevada City advocacy group has filed a legal challenge to Squaw Valley's expansion plan, saying Placer County violated the California Environmental Quality Act by approving the development last month.

County supervisors approved construction of hotels, condominiums and housing of up to 1,500 rooms, up to 300,000 square feet of commercial space and a "mountain adventure center" of 90,000 square feet at the famed ski resort.

Sierra Watch, which was instrumental in organizing community opposition to the plan, filed the legal challenge Wednesday in Placer Superior Court.

Read the whole story

Nev. 6th-fastest growing private sector in country

By Associated Press

Nevada has the sixth fastest-growing private sector in the country in another sign that the state has rebounded from the recession.

The Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation said Tuesday that the state's job growth rate was 3.2 percent at the middle of 2016.

That puts Nevada's rate behind only Utah, Idaho, Florida, Oregon and Georgia.

State economist Bill Anderson said the news is significant considering Nevada had the lowest growth rate in the country in 2009, when it was -10.1 percent.

Nevada's growth rate has been as high as second-fastest in the nation in 2014 and third-fastest in 2015.

Lawmaker: Trump win brings Yucca Mountain closer to opening

By Bristow Marchant, Tribune News Service

With Donald Trump moving into the White House and former Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid heading back to Nevada, Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., is optimistic the Yucca Mountain nuclear-waste repository soon could be back on the federal government's agenda.

The South Carolina Republican told the Columbia Rotary Club on Monday that the president-elect's transition team has distributed a survey to Energy Department personnel about the long-delayed facility in southern Nevada that could host nuclear waste now held in South Carolina – something Nevada's Reid, the Senate's minority leaders, long opposed.

"We've already put \$1.5 billion into permanent storage there," Wilson said, adding he hopes the retiring Reid "goes (home) to his just reward in Las Vegas."

Read the whole story