

SLT going after vacation home rental violators

By Kathryn Reed

Enforcement, or the lack thereof, is a major complaint of South Lake Tahoe's vacation home rental ordinance.

Temporary relief is on the way. The City Council last week approved funding for a private security firm to work exclusively on VHR issues.

The \$30,800 for the 90-day contract is coming from the Undesignated Vacation Home Rental Fund. This pot of money is accumulated from permit fees.

The security force is expected to start working in mid-December.

"For 80 hours per week, these private security personnel will serve to function as a preventive presence and eyes-ears for the police department," the Nov. 15 staff report says.

Police Chief Brian Uhler, whose department is responsible for enforcement, told *Lake Tahoe News* with nearly 385 permits recently expiring, he's worried people may start operating under the radar.

The city in fall 2015 enacted a beefed-up VHR ordinance in which homeowners must have their rental up to code. Hundreds of people got permits just before the new rules went into place. However, upon renewal this year they would have had to have gone through the new inspection process.

What city officials don't know is why those nearly 400 homeowners did not seek to renew their permit.

The added enforcement, especially during the peak winter

rental period, will allow crews to crack down on illegal rentals as well as legitimate ones violating aspects of the ordinance, like parking, noise and garbage.

The security force will work 80 hours a week. The funding also includes a full time temporary community service officer.

Their specific duties include:

- Patrolling assigned areas and addresses;
- Checking on expired VHRs by address to see if there appears to be illegal renting going on;
- Looking for noise and trash violations;
- Alerting CSO to issues;
- Serving as backup to CSO as needed.

These people are in addition to the community service officer who is working 40 hours a week. The added security will also mean the ability to handle more complaints, especially during peak holiday times.

Uhler said once the contract is up the department will assess how many complaints there were, the impact the security force had and whether retaining them in summer might be appropriate.

Shoddy record keeping as hate crimes increase

By A.C. Thompson and Ken Schwencke, ProPublica

In 2015, the authorities in California documented 837 hate-

crime incidents, charting a surge in offenses motivated by religious intolerance toward Muslims and Jews, while crimes against Latinos grew by 35 percent.

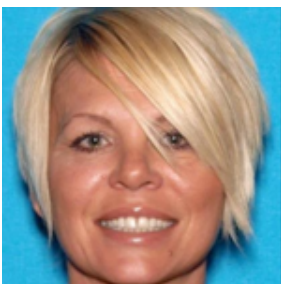
Shortly after Donald J. Trump was elected the country's next president, the Southern Poverty Law Center put up a form on its website encouraging people to share details about potential hate crimes. By the next day, they'd received about 250 reports – more than they're used to seeing in six months.

Then the FBI released its latest national tabulation of hate crimes, data that showed an overall uptick of 6.8 percent from 2014 to 2015. The accounting, drawn from information passed on to the bureau by state and local law enforcement agencies, charted a 67-percent increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County puppy mill operator sentenced

A former El Dorado County resident was sentenced to one year in county jail for felony animal cruelty, operating without a license and 11 other counts related to her sale of puppies imported from South Korea



Ginger Turk

Ginger Turk, 46, was a puppy broker, imported tiny, underage, unweaned, high-priced (\$4,000-plus) puppies from South Korea and sold them over the Internet and in person. Turk operated under multiple business names such as Teacup Puppy Couture, La Chic Puppy Boutique and Beverly Hills Teacups, and used multiple aliases such as Ginger Maree (Hunter), Jen Turk and Jenna Brennan.

Turk sold animals throughout the U.S. and in other countries. She has had multiple complaints from consumers who purchased sick puppies from her.

Part of her sentence that was handed down Nov. 18 includes the prohibition of selling, possessing, transporting or importing dogs for at least 10 years, she is required to pay restitution for the investigation and other penalties. Turk will be on felony probation for five years with searchable provision and required to notify any animal services agency where she resides of her address and any name change.

She will begin serving her sentence Jan. 13.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Voter-approved parole changes hasten end to federal oversight of Calif. prisons

By Dan Thompson, AP

SACRAMENTO – Voters' approval of Gov. Jerry Brown's sentencing reform initiative may give California the long-term solution it needs to end a decadelong legal battle over prison

conditions that twice reached the U.S. Supreme Court and has cost taxpayers billions.

Proposition 57 was pitched as a safety valve to reduce an inmate population that is steadily increasing despite state efforts to shift felons from overcrowded state prisons into equally burdened county jails over the past five years.

The initiative incorporates rules into the state Constitution to speed up how quickly felons can be paroled. It also grants the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation broad discretion to give more early release credits to inmates who complete rehabilitation programs.

California's 34 state prisons are on track to exceed a federally imposed prison population cap of about 116,000 within a year, the Public Policy Institute of California said, unless more is done using tools such as those in the proposition, approved by 64 percent of voters on Election Day.

"It provides the tools, but it does depend on how it's implemented," institute researcher Magnus Lofstrom said.

Law enforcement officials who opposed the measure said it gives bureaucrats too much power. Opponents predict it will put more felons on the street and boost crime rates that already jumped last year.

The Democratic governor and other supporters said the measure will prevent the indiscriminate release of inmates as a way to keep the prison population below the level that federal judges ruled is necessary to avoid violating inmates' constitutional rights.

California has made unprecedented efforts to reduce what once was the nation's largest state prison population, but the judges warned this year that the state must do more to keep prisons from becoming overcrowded again.

The population is increasing despite Brown's 2011 criminal justice realignment law that sends less serious felons to county jails instead of state prisons, and despite voters' approval two years ago of an initiative that reduced several drug and property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors.

Those changes reduced the prison population by more than 40,000 inmates as of July 2015, but it's creeping back up by about 200 inmates a month as the number of serious, long-term criminals grows.

The new parole standards could offset that jump by releasing more inmates earlier. But the greatest flexibility is in how broadly the administration will use its authority to grant credits that result in other early releases.

Corrections officials wouldn't comment other than to note that under Prop. 57, they "must be certified as protecting and enhancing public safety."

Critics fear the open-ended nature of that provision.

"It provides absolutely no limitation on how those credits will be assigned or when they'll be assigned, so at the whim of the head of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation they can decide when to give credits and when not to give credits," said George Hofstetter, president of the Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs.

At least 15 other states give their governor, corrections director or parole board authority to release inmates or reduce their sentences because of overcrowding, according to the Association of State Correctional Administrators.

As an alternative, state officials could decide to increase prison capacity by adding beds, said Drew Soderborg, a criminal justice analyst with the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office.

However, the judges have discouraged a previous stopgap measure by the state of sending thousands of inmates to private prisons in other states.

California is spending about \$800 million this year to house nearly 11,000 inmates in private prisons and to operate new cell houses built for more than 5,300 additional inmates, the state Department of Finance said.

The amount doesn't include the \$3.2 billion spent on prison construction, and it is unclear how much might have been spent without the court order.

Critics said the state now risks shifting the social and financial costs to local governments through increases in crime.

Lofstrom said the success of Prop. 57 depends in part on whether the corrections department can quickly provide programs that will ultimately reduce crime.

The initiative is likely to spark a clamor among inmates for education and rehabilitation programs that could speed their parole.

However, the measure includes no additional money for prison rehabilitation programs.

The Chief Probation Officers of California supported Prop. 57, but the group's president warned in a statement that the regulations must be carefully written if they are to encourage inmates to turn their lives around.

"The hard work starts now," said Amador County Chief Probation Officer Mark Bonini.

Trial date set for Placer deputy slaying suspect

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Trial for Luis Enriquez Monroy Bracamontes was set Friday for next October, but only after the suspect in the slaying of two Sacramento-area deputies briefly objected, telling a judge he preferred an earlier date.

“So for me, it will be better in March,” Bracamontes told Sacramento Superior Court Judge Steve White, adding that waiting for October 2017 – three years after he allegedly gunned down Sacramento sheriff’s Deputy Danny Oliver and Placer sheriff’s Deputy Michael Davis Jr. – is “too long.”

The suspect, a 36-year-old Mexican citizen who was in the United States illegally at the time of the shootings, relented after his court-appointed attorneys, Norm Dawson and Jeffrey Barbour, conferred with him quietly at the defense table in their latest effort to prevent their client from upending the court proceedings.

[Read the whole story](#)

AAA: Millions expected to travel this week

By Associated Press

The slowly improving economy could boost travel over the Thanksgiving holiday to levels not seen in nine years.

AAA forecasts that 48.7 million Americans will travel, the busiest Thanksgiving period on U.S. roads and skies since 2007, the year before the global financial crisis plunged the U.S. economy into a deep recession.

The auto club AAA said that it expects 1 million more Americans to venture at least 50 miles from home, a 1.9 percent increase over last year.

The forecast was assembled at research firm IHS, which said it considered jobs, household net worth, the stock market, prices for gasoline and airline tickets, and other factors.

The researchers did their number crunching in mid-October, about three weeks before the surprising outcome in the presidential election.

The AAA forecast predicts that from Wednesday through Sunday about 43.5 million Americans will take long car trips, 1.9 percent more than last year. AAA expects 3.7 million will travel by air, a 1.6 percent increase. Bus and train trips will grow less than 1 percent, the auto group said.

An airline-industry trade group is a bit more bullish. Airlines for America predicts that air travel will rise 2.5 percent over last year's holiday, although the group considers Thanksgiving travel spanning a 12-day period that began Nov. 18.

Planes are likely to be packed over the holiday, and bad weather or airline computer malfunctions can slow things to a crawl. If the unexpected happens, be ready to react quickly.

Commissioners OK Tahoe Basin Area Plan

The Tahoe Basin Area Plan passed the first hurdle when the Placer County planning commissioners approved the document last week.

Next month the Board of Supervisors will vote on the plan, which also includes the Tahoe City Lodge project. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board will be the last stop in January.

The area plan is a TRPA required document. It will be a guide for development for the next 20 years for most of the North Shore.

The hotel would be the first new lodging facility in Tahoe City in decades. Samir Tuma wants to build 40 traditional hotel rooms near the lake. An additional 31 one-bedroom and 47 two-bedroom suites are planned. The suites would be sold; with the idea most of the time owners would have them in the rental pool for tourists. They would be deed restricted.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Emerald Fire proves effectiveness of forest thinning



Flames from the Emerald Fire are visible on Oct. 14. Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

It doesn't take a wildland fire professional to see how fuel reduction can protect forests and communities.

It just takes a field trip to the site of the Emerald Fire on the South Shore.

Despite burning at the same time and under similar conditions to the disastrous Little Valley Fire, the Emerald Fire was much less destructive.

The Little Valley fire destroyed 23 homes and charred 2,300 acres while doing tens of millions of dollars in damage in western Washoe County. The Emerald Fire was limited to a burn area of 176 acres and was contained within three days.

Although no two fires are the same, a recent walk-through of the Emerald Fire shows how fuel reduction projects by the U.S. Forest Service and others helped minimize damage from the fire and slowed its rate of spread.

Read the whole story

Study: Poverty in U.S. 'deeply disturbing'

By Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times

The United States is one of the richest countries in the world, but it would look dramatically different if its 50 states were organized according to income instead of geography.

If that were the case, residents of the poorest state in the union would have a median household income that's just above the federal poverty line for a family of four. They would also expect to live shorter lives than people in more than half of the world's countries.

It's not a pretty picture, according to the researchers who carried out this thought experiment.

"In essence, there are several developing countries hidden within the borders of the United States – regions defined, in this case, by poverty," they wrote in a study published Thursday in the American Journal of Public Health. "The 'state' of poverty in this country is dramatic and deeply disturbing."

Read the whole story

Mt. Rose truck ramp near Incline completed



The old Mount Rose truck ramp.
Photo/Provided



Mount Rose truck ramp today.
Photo/Provided

Nevada spent \$4.6 million to build what transportation officials say is now a safe truck ramp on Mount Rose Highway.

The truck ramp on the westbound side of the highway in Incline Village has been converted from a rock surface to asphalt. A series of six pre-tensioned drag nets were installed to catch the front grill of runaway vehicles and help safely absorb the impact to slow, then ultimately stop, the vehicle.

Before trucks were not always able to stop and had landed in a

house.

The asphalt will be heated to ensure that snow or ice does not hamper use of the nets during winter months. Two roadside flashing signs and one large overhead digital message sign have also been installed to alert drivers when a vehicle is in the truck ramp.

The original ramp was built in the late 1970s.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*