

Tourism study: South Shore excels at outdoor recreation, lacks quality dining experiences

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Travelers are looking for a deeper connection to their destination than just a Kodak moment. It's as if they want a relationship with the locale and not just a fling.

Being able to deliver what are in many ways intangibles is going to set the South Shore apart from other areas, according to a marketing expert.

In a yearlong survey of visitors (July 2015-July 2016) people were asked a variety of questions to gauge what brought them here, the experience they had, and the money they spent. Other pertinent information was gathered into a Visitor Profile Study by SMG Consulting of South Lake Tahoe for Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Carl Ribaud, principal of the marketing firm, on Nov. 10 highlighted some of the results for the LTVA board.

"I've been looking at different destinations to see the role that local culture plays. I asked a set of questions to find out what people thought they really wanted to get out of a place," Ribaud said.

The tangibles of Lake Tahoe included: recreation, gaming, natural environment, music and food. The subtler attributes people sought were: a friendly and welcoming community, a place where they were comfortable to be themselves and do what they liked, and being in a vibrant, energetic and interesting

area.

According to the survey, 86 percent said the area “has a feel I like.”

However, only 65 percent said the area provided a unique experience. Still, 84 percent found the recreation experience they wanted.



A growing number of people are coming to Tahoe to participate in sports that don't cost money. Photo/LTN file

The area that needs most improvement is dining. This also generated the most discussion at Thursday's meeting.

“We are focused on low-cost offering. We are not very risky in what we offer,” LTVA Executive Director Carol Chaplin said. “We are meat and potato places.”

Ribaudo noted that food more now than ever is a contributing factor in where people travel, and it's not just foodies making this a priority. People are increasing the amount of money they allocate to dining when they travel.

“As a whole we are not seen as having what other destinations have in food and dining,” Ribaudó said.

Survey responses included:

- Has the restaurant choices I like – 37 percent
- Has quality restaurants – 37 percent.

What survey takers praised the South Shore for the most (95 percent) was the scenic beauty.

The survey revealed that 19 percent of the visitors are staying in a vacation rental. It used to be closer to 5 percent.

“My assessment is that the hotel-motel experience has fundamentally not changed on the South Shore. These numbers are only going to go up unless we change the housing stock,” Ribaudó said. “We aren’t giving them much choice with the existing lodging structure. It’s 1950’s stock.”

The last time SMG did a study like this for the South Shore tourism bureau was six years ago. The market has changed. Millennials are traveling, household income of travelers has increased, vacation home rentals are surging, and more people are spending time on free recreation like hiking, biking and kayaking.

“We are really becoming a much broader recreation area than we had been in the past,” Ribaudó said. While people are still coming to the ski resorts and renting boats in the summer, other sports are growing in popularity.

This shows that building biking-hiking trail networks – and promoting them – is paying off with getting people here for those endeavors.

4th time president-elect lost the popular vote

By David G. Savage, Los Angeles Times

For only the fourth time in U.S. history, the presidential campaign has ended with an electoral college winner who won fewer votes than his opponent.

Under the system established in the Constitution, in 1787, the winner is the candidate who wins the majority of electoral votes based on the state-by-state tallies, and that candidate is Donald Trump.

Hillary Clinton will finish second, even though she will have beaten him by more than 200,000 votes in the national popular vote.

The electoral system is a legacy of the Constitution, part of an agreement between states, including Southern states that had more slaves than free men who were eligible to vote.

It was also an era when ordinary people living far from the handful of cities could not be expected to know leading figures of the time who could serve as the chief executive.

Read the whole story

Calif.'s drought divide – rainy north, dry south

By Associated Press

Among the changing red and yellow fall leaves of Yosemite National Park, nature artist Penny Otwell is marveling at the fullest rushing waterfalls and rivers she's ever painted there in autumn. But down in the dry Southern California suburbs, David Cantuna laments the same dead and dying grass in his backyard.

California's historic drought finally is easing in parts of the north, thanks to October rains that were three or more times the norm.

"I've been here 53 years and I've never seen it like this," said Otwell, busy in recent weeks capturing on canvas Yosemite's flooded meadows, brimming rivers and gushing waterfalls that more typically are dry this time of year.

The Merced River "is just bank to bank, which is unusual, and the waterfalls are just – after the rains, they were fabulous," Otwell said as she headed to her studio.

But the five-year drought only is deepening in parts of Central and Southern California, including the 21 percent of the state that remains stuck in the deepest category of drought. In the Orange County city of Santa Ana, Cantuna, a 52-year-old machinist, doesn't even think about turning on his backyard sprinklers anymore.

"The damage is already there," Cantuna says of his forlorn front and back lawns. "There's no reason to use my water right now because everything is dry."

The drought divide leaves California's water managers and

experts striving to finesse conservation messages for two wildly differing situations in the state.

In Southern California, the results have been be wildly differing as well. This fall, the water district in one city, Costa Mesa, hung a banner on its building telling residents they could now water their lawns any day they chose, even as another city, Santa Barbara, banned lawn-watering.

“There’s always a balance in managing the drought message,” said Jay Lund, director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at UC Davis. “Play up the drought too much, and then they see it rain, they think...’Why are they just crying wolf?’”

All of California remains under a state-declared drought emergency. That follows what was the driest four-year span in history in the state. At peak, 100 percent of the state was in drought, and Gov. Jerry Brown ordered 25 percent conservation for cities and towns.

Many farms saw water allotments cut, leading to a rate of groundwater pumping that caused countless rural drinking-water wells to run dry and made the land sink more than 1 foot in parts of the Central Valley. The drought has further imperiled dozens of native fish and other species.

Last month brought a much wetter start to the state’s winter rainy season than usual, after near-normal rain and snowfall in 2015. Officials lifted mandatory statewide conservation earlier this year, but stressed they could clamp down again if the rainy season fails or water use shoots up.

This month the U.S. Drought Monitor’s weekly report said nearly one-fourth of the state was out of drought. That was California’s best showing in three years.

California has the biggest share of its 39 million people in the south, but gets most of its water from the north.

Changes likely for Douglas County sewer board

By Evan Maxwell, Reno Gazette-Journal

A legislative committee that oversees Lake Tahoe issues has endorsed a reorganization of the sewer district that serves Stateline casinos and more than 5,000 residential connections on the Nevada side of the lake.

In taking the action last week, the Joint Legislative Committee that oversees the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency also endorsed introduction next year of a law that could fundamentally alter the way local government is conducted in all but two of the state's counties.

The six-member committee rejected a request by the board of Douglas County Sewer Improvement District 1 to reorganize the district in a way that would permit Stateline casino and resort owners to retain control. Since its organization in 1953, the three-member DCSID board has been composed entirely of executives from the major casinos and from Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course.

Read the whole story

Nev. field trials for skill-

based games draw near

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

Nevada will soon begin testing skill-based games in casinos, one of Nevada's main gaming regulators said last week.

Manufacturer GameCo boasts that its products are the first skill-based games to be approved by any gaming regulator in the United States and are now operating in Atlantic City casinos. And field testing could begin soon on very similar games in Nevada, said A.G. Burnett, chairman of the Nevada Gaming Board.

"If I could guess, I would say in a couple of months we could see something on a field trial," Burnett said. "Maybe sooner. But it depends. I've been in communication with our lab guys and dialoguing with the independent test labs in terms with where they're at. They are in the system, but we all are aggressive and want to get to field trials as soon as possible."

[Read the whole story](#)

Barton may be part of Tahoe ambulance team

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County is looking at redefining how medical care is provided to those who call 911 for an ambulance.

Paramedicine is a growing service throughout the United

States, and is a model being looked at locally. Potentially nurses could be riding in an ambulance. They would have the ultimate say over whether someone goes to the hospital. But at the same time they could provide a higher level of care to the patient compared to what the paramedic or emergency medical technician who currently rides in the ambulance can do.

This is also designed to cut down on the “frequent fliers” using the ambulance to get to the hospital – often times for prescription meds.

The Affordable Care Act has created a conundrum – more people have medical insurance, but the reimbursements don’t cover the cost of doing business.

“Seventy percent of El Dorado County ambulance drives are Medi-Cal or Medicare. They don’t cover all of it. The feds pay a flat amount, which is far less than what an ambulance trip costs,” El Dorado CAO Don Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Ambulance service in El Dorado County is likely to change in the coming years. Photo/LTN file

California law mandates counties provide ambulance service. El Dorado has joint power authorities on both sides of the Sierra to handle the respective service. The West Slope contract

expires in 2018, the Tahoe one in 2019. It's possible the West Slope contract could be extended one year to be aligned with the Cal-Tahoe JPA.

"We are trying to get a structure in place that is more sustainable in the long term," Ashton said. "Once contracts expire, we have several options regarding ambulances."

One idea is to privatize them. While that is on the table for the team to investigate, it is not the option Ashton favors. (It didn't work well in Tahoe in the 1980s.) He envisions ambulance service in the county being more coordinated. This could help with inter-facility transfers and coverage. It's possible the current JPA structures would no longer exist or they could be redefined or even combined into one.

Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe and Marshall Hospital in Placerville could be partners in the JPA. Both medical facilities have expressed interest. For this to happen state law would need to be changed. The county is working on that, with reps from the hospitals having written letters to state lawmakers in support of changing legislation to allow their entities to be included in the ambulance JPA model.

"Barton Health values care team coordination and supports endeavors where we can collaborate with other community partners to deliver consistently exceptional care," Mindi Befu, spokeswoman for Barton Health, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Barton Health is exploring options to have a representative on the JPA board of directors to provide a hospital perspective and assist with oversight in the delivery of emergency medical services. Barton does not plan to operate ambulance services; however, we will continue to work with El Dorado County, the city of South Lake Tahoe, and their partners and contractors to deliver comprehensive, high-quality patient care."

She said this is not being looked at as a revenue stream. But

their involvement has the potential to save everyone money.

Finances are driving the desire to come up with a new model for providing ambulance service. Call volumes are increasing, reimbursements are decreasing and overall expenses are more each year. A team is meeting about once a month to come up with a plan that provides care to residents in a timely, cost-efficient manner. The goal is to be able to roll out whatever the new plan is as soon as the JPA contracts expire.

Others who are part of the reconfiguration discussions said it is possible the hospitals could save money by being in the JPA if they provide the higher level of medical care in field. This is because that would be less expensive than having a patient arrive in the emergency room who doesn't need to be there and then the government or private insurance company not fully reimbursing the facility for the care given.

Corey McLeod, doctor and director of emergency medical services for Barton, has been instrumental in working with the county as it rejiggers ambulance service.

The Tahoe JPA has already changed, with North Tahoe Fire Protection District joining it this fall. That department folded into Meeks Bay a couple years ago, so it's boundaries are from the West Shore to Kings Beach. This is the department where Tim Alameda came from. He is the newly hired fire chief of Lake Valley Fire Protection District. The other JPA member is South Lake Tahoe Fire Department. Lake Valley and South Lake each have two members, with North Tahoe having one.

Having an uneven board for the past couple years has made progress for the Cal-Tahoe JPA difficult. Whatever the future configuration is, many who are involved want to keep an odd number on the board.

Having Barton involved is met with differing opinions from the local fire chiefs. Alameda, while he admits to still getting up to speed on things, sees Barton as a welcome addition.

South Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston wasn't so warm to the idea.

"It seems like it isn't a good idea on the surface; it would perhaps give them too much control on how we do business with taxpayer funds, compared to how they do business. It just doesn't seem like a prudent move to me," Meston told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Democrats take reins of Nevada Legislature

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Tuesday's Blue Wave in Nevada's state legislative races is likely to give Republicans a case of the blues as their brief fling with majority control becomes only a memory.

GOP Gov. Brian Sandoval will now have to work with Democrats to push through his budget and legislative priorities in the 2017 legislative session. Sandoval has worked well with Democrats in past sessions, but much of the GOP agenda in the 2015 legislative session is likely DOA, including education savings accounts for parents to pay for tuition at private and religiously affiliated schools.

It was a complete reversal of 2014's Red Wave when Republicans took control of both houses of the Legislature for the first time since 1985.

Read the whole story

Second lawsuit filed to stop Martis Valley West

The controversial Martis Valley West project is now being challenged by two lawsuits.

Sierra Watch, Mountain Area Preservation and the League to Save Lake Tahoe have joined forces to prevent the housing development in Truckee from going forward. The lawsuit was filed Nov. 10.

On a 4-1 vote this fall, the Placer County supervisors approved the 760-unit project. The conservation groups want a Placer County Superior Court judge to overturn the supervisors' decision.

The developer is Mountainside Partners of Truckee, with the land belonging to Sierra Pacific Industries.

Houses would be built on a ridge bordering the Lake Tahoe Basin. The project is not in the basin, but it will impact the area. That is the overriding concern of litigants – that the impacts to Tahoe have not been addressed.

“The Martis Valley West proposal poses a direct threat to Lake Tahoe and its famous clarity. For years, our groups have attempted to collaborate with the developers and Placer County to find a solution that protects the Lake,” Darcie Goodman Collins, executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, said in a statement. “Asking the courts to enforce the law is a last resort, but the developers have done nothing to address their project’s threats to Tahoe.”

The **other lawsuit** was filed in October by Davis-based

nonprofit California Clean Energy Committee on grounds that environmental review was not sufficient.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Forecast: La Nina is here; may last through winter

By Associated Press

Government weather forecasters say La Nina is here.

La Nina, the flip side of El Nino, is caused by the cooling of the central Pacific Ocean that affects weather patterns worldwide.

Mike Halpert of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Thursday he expects La Nina conditions to be weak and short-lived.

La Nina conditions often bring warmer weather, therefore more rain than snow, to the Sierra. Previous La Ninas have brought flooding to the Tahoe-Reno region.

In the United States, La Nina conditions usually means wetter winters in the northern Rockies, Pacific Northwest and Ohio Valley and warmer, drier conditions in the southern parts, including drought-stricken California.

NOAA says there's a 55 percent chance La Nina will last through winter.

4 finalists selected for LTCC presidency

One insider and three outsiders are the finalists for the position of superintendent-president of Lake Tahoe Community College.

The public may meet the four on Nov. 17. At 9am each finalist will have one hour to make a statement and answer questions, with a lunch break taking place from 12:45-2:30pm. The forums will finish at approximately 3:30pm. A **live stream** will be provided on the college's website.

LTCC's board of trustees will interview the four on Nov. 18. A final selection will be announced Dec. 6.

Candidates are:

- Jeff DeFranco, LTCC vice president of Administrative Services.
- JoAnna Schilling, interim VP of Academic Affairs at Rio Hondo College in Whittier.
- Bryan Reece, VP of Instruction at Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa.
- Matt Wetstein, assistant superintendent-vice president of Instruction and Planning at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton.

The opening was created when Kindred Murillo tendered her resignation earlier this year. She will be departing in February.