

Stateline event center relying on higher bed tax

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Hotel guests in Stateline are going to help fund the special events center that is going to be built on the front parking lot of MontBleu at Highway 50.

The Tahoe Douglas Visitors Authority board this week approved raising the Douglas County lodging license fee. Now the county commissioners must OK the increase. That board is likely to hear the issue in December. This does not have to go to the voters.

The current fee is 3 percent. It would increase to 4 percent. Hotel guests also pay a 10 percent transient occupancy tax. The total 14 percent, if approved, would be the same rate guests would be paying in the redevelopment area of South Lake Tahoe if Measure P passes in November.

All of the money collected in Stateline would stay at the lake specifically for the planning, construction and operation of the facility.



The parking lot at MontBleu could become an

events center. Photo/LTN

In January the county created a **redevelopment area** that basically encompasses the casino area to Kahle Drive. With Edgewood Lodge and Tahoe Beach Club being built, this will bring added revenues to the county to help raise money for the entertainment venue.

Originally the event center had been envisioned for the other side of the street and was going to be a 6,000- to 7,500-seat indoor-outdoor venue. After further study the MontBleu site was deemed best. It will be totally indoors, seating between 4,000 and 5,000 people.

The actual land is owned by Edgewood Companies.

Douglas County, Edgewood Companies and the casino properties have been talking about a performing arts center at Stateline for years. The casino showrooms cannot hold that many people and the Harveys outdoor facility is seasonal.

"The community recognized that group activities benefit tourism. And it is consistent with the transition of the economy from a gaming based model to a resort destination, recreation based model," Lew Feldman, attorney for TDVA, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

As of today, TDVA would own and operate the facility. The goal is to drive more people to Tahoe, especially in the off-season.

Also at the Oct. 12 board meeting \$12,060 was allocated for a parking analysis.

Board members Mike Bradford (representing Lakeside Inn) and Nancy McDermid (Douglas County) were appointed to the subcommittee to deal with the entertainment venue issues. They have the authority to spend up to \$100,000, though that could be multiple \$100,000 expenditures. Allocating money for a

design fee will likely be an immediate need after the parking study is done.

‘Ferguson Effect’ making officers fearful

By Derek Hawkins, Washington Post

A Chicago police officer who was savagely beaten at a car accident scene did not draw her gun on her attacker – even though she feared for her life – because she was afraid of the media attention that would come if she shot him, the city’s police chief said.

Chicago Police Department Superintendent Eddie Johnson said the officer, a 17-year veteran of the force, knew she should shoot the attacker but hesitated because “she didn’t want her family or the department to go through the scrutiny the next day on the national news,” the *Chicago Tribune* reported.

Johnson’s remarks, which came at an awards ceremony for police and firefighters, underscore a point law enforcement officers and some political leaders have pressed repeatedly as crime has risen in Chicago and other major cities: that police are reluctant to use force or act aggressively because they worry about negative media attention that will follow.

The issue has become known as the Ferguson effect, named after the St. Louis suburb where a police officer shot and killed an unarmed black teenager in August 2014. The shooting set off protests and riots that summer and eventually gave way to a fevered national debate over race and policing. Many law enforcement officers have said that the intense focus on

policing in the time since has put them on the defensive and hindered their work.

Read the whole story

AT&T working on restoring service in SLT

AT&T reportedly lost at least one tower in the Emerald Fire, which caused Meyers and a large swath of South Lake Tahoe to be without phone and Internet service on Friday.

AT&T could not be reached to find out when service might be restored.

In addition to landlines being out, cell phone service was spotty at best for AT&T customers on Oct. 14.

The fire burning near Cascade Lake on the South Shore started about 1:30am Oct. 14 and is at 80 percent contained.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Meyers Creek to be restored

El Dorado County is in the process of restoring the Meyers Creek in an effort to improve the ecosystem and watershed management.

A \$1.1 million grant from the California Tahoe Conservancy was

the last piece of financing needed to go forward. Another nearly \$1.4 million has been secured from the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and from stream environmental mitigation funds via Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

The site has the Upper Truckee River to the west, Lake Tahoe Golf Course to the northwest, Highway 50 to the south and Pioneer Trail to the east.

About 9 acres of meadow habitat and stream environmental zone along Santa Fe Road and Highway 50 will be restored.

The amount of stormwater reaching the river and lake will be reduced, and the clarity of that water will be improved. This will be done by stabilizing channels and installing infiltration basins.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

LT Boys & Girls Club in search of new home

By Kathryn Reed

Proposition 51 could turn out to be a mixed blessing for entities in South Lake Tahoe.

If it passes, Lake Tahoe Unified School District intends to reopen Al Tahoe Elementary School next fall. If that happens, the Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club will be on the street.

This is why the nonprofit is in the hunt for a permanent home.

The statewide proposition is a \$9 billion school facilities

bond. LTUSD is expecting to receive \$1.4 million.

With enrollment increasing in LTUSD, the district needs more space. Al Tahoe closed after the 2003-04 school year because of declining enrollment and budget deficits.

“It will start as a K-2 school and build from there. It will be a STEM school. However, if Prop. 51 does not pass, we will likely not open the school,” Shannon Chandler, spokeswoman for LTUSD, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The funds are necessary to do significant upgrades at the site, including a boiler system which could cost upward of \$400,000.”

The Boys & Girls Club, which has more than 500 members and averages 300 kids a day, had hoped to be able to be part of the new South Lake Tahoe recreation center if Measure P passes in November. But the building of that structure would be a few years off.

The organization this month received a check for \$50,000 from Rob Katz, CEO of Vail Resorts, to help with finding a permanent location.

“The club is backing Measure P on the city ballot to fund recreation as that is currently our best bet of a new home. But for the integrity of both the rec center and the club we would still like to have dedicated space of our own paid for by the club and in close proximity to the rec center – and utilize the rec center for daily sports, recreation, large group activities, etc.,” Jude Wood, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The club keeps growing. In 2015, it grew by 125 percent. Last summer there was a waiting list. So, even if Al Tahoe were to continue to be an option, the reality is the club could use a bigger space.

The nonprofit is the only afterschool program on the South Shore for youth 5 and older. Two-thirds of the families fall

below the California poverty line.

It costs \$100 a year per child to attend for a year, though many qualify for a discount based on their income.

Besides needing space for activities, the club wants room for school related activities such as being able to conduct science experiments as well as a kitchen because meals are part of the offerings. More than 27,000 free meals are served a year, plus an additional 54,000 free evening snacks.

Hard Rock entities under one umbrella

For the first time in more than 35 years Hard Rock hotels, casinos and cafes are being operated by the same company.

Hard Rock International this month completed the acquisition of casino and hotel-casino rights in the Western United States, including Lake Tahoe, from BREF.

It is not expected that there will be any changes to the hotel-casino or café in Stateline. However, hotel-casino owners Jon and David Park chose not to talk to *Lake Tahoe News*. It means the local owners now have the licensing agreement with a different company.

Originally separated from the Hard Rock International's portfolio more than three decades ago, the rights acquired in this deal reunite Hard Rock International's global territory for casinos and hotel-casinos.

Jim Allen, Hard Rock International's chairman, did not respond to multiple inquiries from Lake Tahoe News.

EDC's CalPERS obligation tops \$280M

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County's unfunded obligation to CalPERS now exceeds \$280 million.

Auditor-Controller Joe Harn this week let the Board of Supervisors know the debt grew by \$51 million in one year.

"The most recent report of our financial position with CalPERS is as of June 30, 2015. Since CalPERS investment earnings for the year ended June 30, 2016, were dramatically less than estimated, our unfunded obligation will exceed \$300 million in our next CalPERS actuarial report," Harn told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Further, CalPERS has informed the county that six years from now the required annual payments to CalPERS will be \$13 million per year higher than they are now. Balancing the county's budget and providing critical public safety and road maintenance services will become much tougher in the future because of our unfunded obligation to CalPERS."

While *Lake Tahoe News* reached out to CAO Don Ashton and Supervisor Sue Novasel, it was spokesman Creighton Avila who responded by saying, "While El Dorado County has been proactive in reducing retiree health costs by removing this benefit for all new employees resulting in a capped retiree health unfunded obligation, the unfunded CalPERS liabilities continue to be a concern for the county and many jurisdictions across the state." (Retiree health benefits have nothing to do

with CalPERS.)

The county has no plans for how to deal with the growing problem of funding a defined benefit for employees.

However, it would be more expensive for the county to withdraw from CalPERS.

Part of the escalating debt is the result of CalPERS giving all member agencies low cost estimates in the 1990s. Against the advice of Harn, supervisors in 1999 and 2000 accepted CalPERS' numbers and offered county employees dramatically enhanced retirement benefits.

"It should be noted that South Lake Tahoe and South Tahoe Public Utility District and just about all of our surrounding counties have more lucrative and expensive retirement plans than El Dorado County does," Harn said.

80% containment in fire near Cascade Lake



The Emerald Fire burns on Cascade Ridge Friday morning just before daybreak. Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

Updated 7:10pm:

By Susan Wood

CAMP RICHARDSON – The Emerald Fire burning near Cascade Lake is 80 percent contained. It has burned more than 200 acres.

According to Kit Bailey, U.S. Forest Service local fire chief, “We have stopped the forward progress.”

The fire, though, is unpredictable. At one point the flames were going toward Lake Tahoe even though the wind was pushing it in the other direction, Bailey told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It started near Highway 89 at Spring Creek tract about 1:30am Oct. 14 and ran hard toward Lake Tahoe. Flames reached Lake Tahoe on a beach north of Camp Richardson, according to

CalFire. However, the fire as of 10:20am was only burning on the mountain side.



A firefighter keeps a watchful eye on the blaze along a fire line near Highway 89 north of Spring Creek tract on Oct. 14. Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

It is burning west of Spring Creek near Cathedral Road. Evacuations have been ordered for Spring Creek, Cathedral, Fallen Leaf Lake's west shore, Cascade Properties and Cascade Lake. Five hundred people are on mandatory evacuation orders, while another 500 have voluntary orders. While an evacuation center has been set up at the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Center, people are being told to drive north on Highway 89 toward Tahoe City. Rideout Community Center located at 740 Timberland Lane in Tahoe City has been opened for evacuees.

Highway 89 is closed from Fallen Leaf Road to Bayview Campground, and the evacuation area north of Bayview has been

released. The highway will remain closed until hazardous trees can be cleared, this could be a day or two.



From the vantage point of Baldwin Beach, hot spots continued on the western and eastern sides of Cascade Ridge, though large flare ups appeared to be diminishing as rainfall continued about 7:30am. Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

One of the big issues with suppression is that no aircraft can fly because of the strong winds. Visibility is also a concern because the rain, smoke and low clouds are a problem.

Fire officials have been hoping the rain will give them the relief they need to help put this out. Right now they are building a line around the fire.

“The rain has been extremely helpful and has stopped it significantly,” South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Fire trucks are parked at the residences of Cascade Lake. No houses have been threatened.

“There was a lot of big firefighting going on last night,” Lake Valley Fire Chief Tim Alameda told *Lake Tahoe News*. However, he added, what isn’t helping is “there is no shortage of dead trees.” Ironically, that is what the Lake Valley board discussed at its meeting Thursday night.

Lee Webber of Antioch, who was celebrating his birthday by camping at Camp Rich with his family, was on standby to decide whether they would evacuate. “Last night the wind was rough,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

While this fire was going, South Lake crews got called at about 3:30am Oct. 14 to a brush fire Meeks Lumber. It is another one of the “suspicious” fires that has been confounding firefighters.

– Kathryn Reed contributed to this story.

KMS sale in jeopardy; county-TRPA involved

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The conversion of Kingsbury Middle School into affordable housing is in jeopardy because the county has not completed the area plan that encompasses the site and the allowable number of vehicle miles has been drastically reduced per Tahoe Regional Planning Agency rules.

Patrick Taylor in July entered into an agreement with Douglas County School District to purchase the 22-plus acre site with 36,000-square-feet of space for \$3.25 million, which included paying half the utilities – \$25,000 – for a year.

At this week's board meeting the four who attended (Ross Chichester, Neal Freitas and Cindy Trigg were absent) deliberated for some time about what to do with the due diligence period ending the following day, Oct. 12. All four had to agree for any motion to pass. Ultimately they agreed to extend the period one month to Nov. 16, one day after their next meeting.

But based on how slow government works in the basin, there is no way all of the issues will be resolved in that time period.

"For the Kingsbury Middle School site, TRPA previously determined that the vehicle miles traveled was limited to 286. This is based on TRPA code provisions that deal with previous uses. Since the school had been closed for over 60 months, the higher vehicle trips originally associated with the school use was no longer recognized by TRPA," Mimi Moss, director of Douglas County Community Development, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Any increase in the VMT will now require a change to the area plan, including additional environmental study and traffic analysis."



The halls of Kingsbury Middle School have been vacant for eight years. Photo/LTN

At the school meeting Oct. 11, Superintendent Teri White said the allowable VMT was 1,500 when KMS was open. The school site has been sitting empty since students left at the end of the 2007-08 school year.

Because there was a 1½ year delay by the county in submitting the area plan to TRPA some of the technical data needs updating. The Tahoe Douglas Area Plan was most recently sent to TRPA on Aug. 24, with TRPA sending it back to the county with comments on Sept. 23. The county is working to address the bi-state regulatory agency's concerns.

Ascent Environmental is the consultant helping the county with the planning document.

A sticking point between the county, school district and KMS buyer is who will pay for all the necessary studies to move the project forward.

"The county is in discussions with our environmental consultant regarding additional timelines, costs, and area plan changes based on our recent discussions with the school district. Ultimately, the new buyer would be responsible for the cost," Moss said.

Traditionally the county would pay for the environmental review of the area plan as a whole and the developer would pay for the analysis of impacts associated with his project. The traffic analysis is also necessary because the property use is changing from a school to housing.

Taylor told the DCSD board he isn't going to put another penny into the project (he put up a \$15,000 deposit) until the VMT issue is resolved.

Board member Teri Jamin, who was once the head planner for the city of South Lake Tahoe, advocated for extending the due diligence period two months if a non-refundable deposit could be secured from Taylor so he would have some skin in the game.

Board member Robbe Lehmann said, "If they want to buy it, it should be as is."

Board member Tom Moore said, "We are gambling to a certain extent because we don't know how it would change in value based on the perception of zoning."

The district is paying about \$5,000 a month for the upkeep of the site, which includes utilities.

Taylor is the first person to come forward with an offer on the site. That is what has some board members nervous, is that it will sit vacant for another eight years. But some board members are reluctant for the district to expend money when the zoning and VMT issues are not their problem.

Vehicle miles traveled, while always an issue in Tahoe, has been getting more attention of late with projects inside and

outside the basin.

At the July meeting of the Regional Plan Implementation Committee of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency there was a lengthy discussion about the topic. VMT for the TRPA has more to deal with air and water quality than congestion. But it's gridlock that impacts drivers – locals and tourists.

"We can't build road capacity therefore the only thing we can do then is restrict car use," RPIC member Bill Yeates said.

There was talk of needing to think outside the box as well as work on basics like offsite parking and a reliable transit system.

That discussion will affect the KMS site if and when the affordable housing project goes before the TRPA.

Carson City fire fully contained



A wildland fire on Oct. 13 burns in Carson City. Photo/Reno Fire Department

Updated 11:40pm:

A wildfire that started at 5:30pm on Thursday in Carson City has been fully contained. The actual acreage burned had not been reported.

While several structures were threatened and residents had to be evacuated in south Carson City, no buildings were lost.

Crews are expected to be at the Clear Creek Fire site through the night, especially with the forecast for high winds.

The area had been under a "red flag" warning because of high winds associated with the storm that is headed this way.

Highway 395 remained open Oct. 13, but several roads were closed.

The fire was burning east and south of the intersection of highway 50 and 395, blowing toward the old Indian School.

Electricity was out in the neighboring area.

No cause has been determined.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*