Placer deputy in medically induced coma

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A Placer County Sheriff's deputy is in a medically induced coma after striking his head on a beam during a training exercise.

Deputy Austin Harper was on duty helping with police dog training last week when his head struck a steel support beam in a vacant commercial building, according to a post on the sheriff's Facebook site.

Before working for the sheriff's office, he was a police officer in Truckee.

Read the whole story

Profits increase for El Dorado Savings

El Dorado Savings Bank reported second quarter profits of nearly $2.9 million, which represented a $79,832 increase compared to 2015.

"Earnings for the first six months of 2016 totaled $6,465,488, compared to $5,795,045 in 2015. The continued strong profits reflect the stable performance of the loan and investment portfolios," CEO George L. Cook Jr. said in a statement.

El Dorado ended the quarter with $2.05 billion in total assets and savings deposits of $1.83 billion.

The Placerville-based financial institution ended the first half of 2016 with one foreclosed property on the books.

The bank operates 35 branches, 31 in California and four in Northern Nevada.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Forecast: Wildfire danger to increase in Nev., Calif.

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Forecasters expect worsening fire conditions across Nevada and California for at least several more weeks.

That's according to the latest National Wildland Fire Potential Outlook released on Monday.

The forecast, from the National Interagency Fire Center, attempts to gauge the potential for wildland fires based on temperature, moisture and fuel availability predictions.

For Nevada and California forecasters expect a continuation of conditions that have already produced enough fire to make skies hazy throughout the region.

Read the whole story

Conner, South Lake Tahoe reach settlement

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner has agreed to drop her lawsuit against the city.

In December, Conner filed the lawsuit seeking to have the censure imposed on her in October by her four council colleagues be overturned. The censure came about because the council believed Conner's behavior toward staff was unprofessional and that she was a bully who needed to be controlled.

JoAnn Conner

Also named in the lawsuit was City Manager Nancy Kerry. She is one of two employees who the council actually directly oversees. A councilmember suing her employee in California was unprecedented.

The two sides met in June to mediate the dispute after a couple hearings in El Dorado County Superior Court.

"It's not signed yet, so whomever is discussing it, is in a violation of what is intended to the agreement and could cause the deal to fail," Jacqueline Mittelstadt, Conner's attorney, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Aug. 2.

Conner was also asking to have the judge rule that the ban on her speaking to city staff be illegal. Protocols since Conner has been on the council always said the elected officials were not to go to staff they don't actually manage. This is to avoid political favor and not have employees be micromanaged. After all, the council's job is to set policy, not manage people other than the city manager and city attorney.

Other items in the suit pertained to Conner wanting to email any staff member. This was after Kerry mandated all of Conner's emails go through her or the city attorney. Kerry set this policy based on what she determined to be inappropriate correspondence.

Kerry also took away Conner's key card allowing her access to city offices. Council mailboxes were moved so the need for councilmembers to go into a key card area was eliminated.

Conner also wanted the court to weigh in on when a policy about parades should be heard (Conner in the past has put on a parade in the city limits) and wanted the judge to make her colleagues assign her to committees.

The council at its meeting Aug. 2 met in closed session. Afterward it was reported that a settlement had been reached. Specifics have not been released. When the deal is signed, the details will be made public.

One detail is that no money will be exchanged.

Kronick, Moskovitz, Tiedemann & Girard was hired by the city to handle the case. The council allocated $100,000 and to date has spent $87,450.

It isn't known how much Conner has spent on this case. Mittelstadt has to charge her $400 an hour because that is what was billed to the city for the censure hearing that legally had to be reimbursed to the plaintiffs. Government Codes 87460 and 87461 regulate monetary gifts/loans for political officials. Legally Mittelstadt cannot reduce her fee to Conner or waive any of costs. Previously, Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News* that Conner was on a payment plan. Conner has posted on social media a desire to establish a legal defense fund of sorts.

Hundreds of Calif. recycling centers shut down

By Darcy Costello, AP

SACRAMENTO – More than a fifth of California's recycling redemption centers have closed in the past year, stripping consumers of easy access to recycling and limiting their ability to collect the deposits they made when purchasing bottles and cans.

More closures may follow, as the state's subsidy payment program, meant to help centers survive market fluctuations, has failed to keep up with rapid decreases in the value of plastic, glass and aluminum. The payment formula, advocates say, is too slow to cover the real costs of recycling.

The Legislature hasn't been able to agree on a solution to prevent further closures or solve the program's problems.

California is one of 10 states to charge residents a refundable fee, or deposit, when they buy bottles and cans. Consumers can then claim those deposits at redemption centers.

The nonprofit Container Recycling Institute fears lower numbers of redemption centers will lead to reduced recycling statewide and an inability for consumers to get their money back. They estimate that closures have inconvenienced roughly 3 million California residents.

“The extent that consumers give up and put containers in trash or recycling bins, those are people who were denied the opportunity to get their refund,” said Susan Collins, the group’s president. “And we know that is affecting consumers to the tune of tens of millions of dollars.”

So far, redemption center closures don’t appear to have lowered the number of total recyclables the state collects through buy-back centers and curbside pickup. Beverage container recycling rates fell by a percentage point in the second half of 2015, the most recent figures available, compared to the same time a year earlier.

Advocates expect the rate to drop further in 2016 and are concerned rural areas that don’t operate curbside pickup will start to see the impact of redemption center closures.

Lawmakers say the state’s three-decade-old recycling program needs a major redesign. The business model no longer matches the reality of state recycling rates and the fund used to pay out refunds has suffered in recent years.

Historically, the state has operated around 2,100 centers, said Mark Oldfield, a CalRecycle spokesman. More than 450 centers closed in the year that ended in June, eliminating hundreds of state jobs; today there are 1,773 centers and more are expected to close in the coming months.

“If regular California consumers find it too difficult and inconvenient to redeem and recycle their containers, they may begin to view the program as a tax,” said Mark Murray, executive director of Californians Against Waste, an advocacy group. “Why am I paying this CRV tax at the grocery store without a path for me to conveniently get my money back?”

Measures intended to protect the centers from market fluctuations are not working, Murray said. The state’s formula for allocating subsidies to the centers fails to keep up with real time pricing and includes a minimum three-month lag.

That gap means the centers haven’t received sufficient state payments to make up for the income they’ve lost from the sharp decline in scrap value. Since 2012, the centers have been underpaid by more than $50 million, Collins said.

Even when prices rebound, recycling centers are unlikely to earn that money back. “Once you come up with a number like that, it’s woefully obvious why so many centers couldn’t take it anymore and had to close,” she said.

Of the 10 states with mandatory deposits, only California and Hawaii have a responsive payment formula for redemption centers. Others have a set handling fee in state law, which can sometimes mean lower payments for operators, but also offers more stability, as they don’t experience the volatility of scrap values that comes from selling recyclables on the open market.

The state Assembly last month approved a quick-fix measure to curb the closures that the Senate didn’t take up.

Instead, a deal reached by Senate leaders and Gov. Jerry Brown’s administration helps retailers concerned about the closures’ impact on their operation — without addressing the problems of struggling recycling centers.

For recycling, there is no state more important than California, the source of two out of every 11 beverage containers recycled in the country, Collins said.

“It would be a blow of enormous proportion to the nation’s beverage container recycling rate if (California) were to continue to decline,” she said. “It would have a real impact on the industry.”

Caesars selling online games to Chinese consortium

By Daryl Loo and Keith Naughton, Bloomberg

Caesars Entertainment Corp. surged as much as 11 percent after agreeing over the weekend to sell casino-style online games unit Playtika Ltd. for $4.4 billion to Chinese investors led by Shanghai Giant Network Technology Co.

The sale could give Caesars, the Las Vegas-based casino operator, more cash to help reach a settlement with bondholders of its largest division, which filed for bankruptcy in January 2015. Caesars acquired Playtika in 2011 via a separate unit, the Caesars Interactive Entertainment arm, which remains the owner of the World Series of Poker and real-money online gaming businesses.

Caesars is the parent company company of Harrah’s Lake Tahoe and Harveys at Stateline.

Read the whole story

Don’t expect rules around shell companies to tighten

By Tim Johnson, McClatchy News Service

Who made the United States into a refuge for secretive shell companies?

Dean Heller

Look toward Congress to find politicians who helped turn Nevada into a major home for shell companies, which can be used to evade taxes and hide illegal assets from around the world.

Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., now a member of the Senate Finance Committee, was a strong advocate while Nevada's secretary of state for a 2001 state law that broadened legal protections for shell companies, allowing owners to remain secret.

The change made incorporating a company easier than getting a library card and helped spur the registration of thousands of shell companies in Nevada.

Read the whole story

Luxury home sales in Tahoe increase

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Luxury home sales in the North Lake Tahoe and Truckee areas took off in the first half of 2016, more than doubling numbers reported in the first six months of 2015, according to the regional office of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage.

Multiple Listing Service data showed 131 single-family homes and condo-town houses selling for $1 million or more in the January-June period, up from 65 in the first half of 2015. Most of those, 117, were single-family houses.

The biggest increase in this year's single-family house sales came in the $1 million to $2,499,999 segment, with 79 transactions, up 114 percent from 37 sales a year ago.

Read the whole story

SLT altering VHR, massage, cab ordinances

By Kathryn Reed

Tweaking ordinances will be the order of the day for the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Aug. 2

The second readings of the vacation home rental, massage and taxi ordinances are on the agenda.

The changes passed unanimously at the first reading last month, with Councilman Tom Davis recusing himself from the VHR discussion because of his affiliation with the Tahoe Keys rental agency.

After getting an earful from owners of multifamily dwellings who are using some or all of the units as vacation rentals, the city back-pedaled with its desire to ban them. Instead, the council will allow the existing units to carry on indefinitely assuming they meet the criteria.

What changes is that no new multifamily parcels may join the vacation home rental market.

Changes to the massage ordinance came about because people suspect some of the $35/hour establishments have hired people who are not licensed to do the work.

While Police Chief Brian Uhler says there is evidence of human trafficking at these places, no proof has been provided by the department.

Massage therapists will have to fill out an application with the police department. All therapists already had to have a city business license, so now there is redundancy and more paperwork for all involved. Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News* there is not an additional fee for this application process. However, the staff report from the July 19 meeting says, "The city will recoup the costs of licensing through license application fees."

Therapists must also be licensed through the state. The state mandates therapists have 500 hours of training.

The initial proposal was to give people several months to comply. But after some discussion, including input from massage therapists, that idea was abandoned.

"Either they have a license or they don't," Davis said. "This will bring about the legitimacy we are looking for."

When it came to the taxi ordinance the goal was to put that industry on a level field with the likes of Uber and Lyft. The problem is the city can't regulate those ride share businesses because it is the state Public Utilities Commission that has that obligation.

The only way the city can regulate the ride share drivers is by demanding they have a business license.

The council opted to relax rules pertaining to taxis in town as a way to make the work environment fairer.

The city will no longer:

· Inspect all cabs on an annual basis;

· Manage the operator license process;

· Conduct background checks on drivers.

These services brought in $17,000 to city coffers.

Entire Nevada Supreme Court recuses itself

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — The entire Nevada Supreme Court recused itself from hearing an appeal between a lender and a developer because of ties the developer has to another company building a new courthouse in Las Vegas.

It’s not unusual for judges to recuse themselves from cases to avoid conflicts of interest, but having the entire Supreme Court step aside is rare.

A three-judge panel instead was appointed to consider a petition filed by RA Southeast Land LLC, which sought to compel a jury trial to hear some of its claims in a complex dispute with City National Bank over the sale of 23 acres in the Summerlin area in 2010.

Read the whole story