Meet the millionaires who bought Burning Man’s Fly Ranch

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

The millionaires who helped the Burning Man Project buy Fly Ranch for $6.5 million include a cofounder of Airbnb, a cofounder of Cirque du Soleil, an Iranian photographer and one of the first investors of Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram.

On Thursday, Burning Man organizers announced the names of the donors who helped the organization fulfill a 20-year dream of buying a slice of hot springs heaven in Northern Nevada, just outside of the Black Rock Desert. The 70,000-person Burning Man arts gathering, coming up Aug. 28 to Sept. 5, is on the desert playa for a week each year.

Burning Man organizers for several years have been trying to seduce “cultural collaborators” who might be interested in helping the San Francisco-based arts nonprofit purchase the 3,800-acre property. The property will eventually become a year-round experimental arts haven where the art-centric culture of Burning Man will thrive via to-be-determined outlets.

Read the whole story

Report: Calif. least business-friendly state

By Kevin Smith, San Gabriel Valley Tribune

If you think California is a tough place to do business, you’re not alone.

A report from CNBC confirms what scores of companies have long suspected – California is the least business-friendly state in the nation.

CNBC’s 10th annual America’s Top States for Business study places the Golden State at the bottom of the list for 2016. California was also found to be one of the costliest places to do business, with a favorability ranking of 49 out of 50.

California’s educational system also ranked low on the scale, landing at 38, and the state’s network of roads and bridges, waterways, rail lines and other infrastructure was ranked the 33rd worst in the nation.

Read the whole story

AG’s Office drops case against EDC auditor

By Kathryn Reed

There was so little evidence to support any wrongdoing by El Dorado County Auditor-Controller Joe Harn that he wasn’t even asked to defend himself.

“I never spoke to anyone from the Attorney General’s Office. I was never informed by the attorney general that I was under investigation,” Harn told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I don’t know exactly what they would be investigating me for.”

Joe Harn

This week the county released a press release saying in full, “The 2014-15 El Dorado County Grand Jury requested an investigation into the allegations and findings of its report in Case GJ-14-12. The office of the California Attorney General has concluded its investigation into the allegations, which were raised in the report, regarding the conduct of the El Dorado County Auditor-Controller Joe Harn with no charges being filed.”

That report in part talked about how the county as a whole was dysfunctional. It also called Harn a bully.

The District Attorney’s Office opted for the state to do the investigation so no one could claim there was any conflict.

“The specific allegations are confidential,” Michael Ciccozzi, county counsel, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

However, the county prior to the grand jury report had been doing an investigation on Harn that was started by Human Resources Director Pamela Knorr. She brought in Ken McHold with the law firm Prentice, Long & Epperson to conduct the investigation on a contract not to exceed $60,000.

That investigation, too, went nowhere.

Knorr and McHold knew each from their days working for Placer County. Knorr has used him before to go after auditor-controllers in other counties she has worked for when the keeper of the finances had told her they won't be a party to illegal or unethical behavior.

The irony about this particular grand jury report is that it found Knorr's department to be the most dysfunctional and yet no one has investigated her or the Human Resources Department.

Golden age of antibiotics comes to an end

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

On May 18, a team working at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research here had its first look at a sample of the bacterium Escherichia coli, taken from a 49-year-old woman in Pennsylvania. She had a urinary tract infection with a disconcerting knack for surviving the assaults of antibiotic medications. Her sample was one of six from across the country delivered to the lab of microbiologist Patrick McGann.

Within hours, a preliminary analysis deepened concern at the lab. Over the next several days, more sophisticated genetic sleuthing confirmed McGann's worst fears.

More ominously, the gene's presence on a plasmid – a tiny mobile loop of DNA that can be readily snapped off and attached to other bacteria – suggested that it could readily jump to other E. coli bacteria, or to entirely different forms of disease-causing organisms. That would make them impervious to colistin as well.

It was a milestone public health officials have been anticipating for years. In a steady march, disease-causing microbes have evolved ways to evade the bulwark of medications used to treat bacterial infections. For a variety of those illnesses, only colistin continued to work every time. Now this last line of defense had been breached as well.

Read the whole story

Report: Trump aides considered Sandoval for VP

By Seth A. Richardson, Reno Gazette-Journal

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's top advisers wanted him to consider Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval as a possible vice-presidential pick, according to an article in the *New York Times* magazine.

The article written by Robert Draper and published Wednesday details the selection process Trump undertook before finally deciding on Indiana Gov. Mike Pence. Trump's aides floated a few names, including Ohio Gov. John Kasich, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and Sandoval, according to the article.

But there was one big hang-up that kept the idea from getting off the ground: Sandoval's support for Kasich late in the primary.

Read the whole story

Summer on steroids with record temps

By Tom Randall, Bloomberg

Last month wasn’t just the hottest June on record—it continued the longest-ever streak of record-breaking months: 14.

The start of summer in the Northern Hemisphere gave us the hottest June since 1880, according to data released Tuesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That follows the hottest May, April, March, February, January, December, November, October, September, August, and July. Before June 2016, June 2015 had the monthly record, as did May 2015.

Last year’s massive El Niño warming pattern in the Pacific Ocean is over, but unprecedented heat remains across the planet. The extremes of recent months are such that we’re only halfway into 2016 and there’s already a greater than 99 percent likelihood that this year will be the hottest on record, according to Gavin Schmidt, who directs NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies. NASA and NOAA maintain independent records of the Earth’s temperatures, but they both agree that last month was a scorcher.

Read the whole story

KMS sold – affordable housing to replace school

By Kathryn Reed

More than 500 affordable housing units could begin to be built on the South Shore in 2017.

Patrick Taylor of Cave Rock is in escrow to buy the former Kingsbury Middle School and Wells Fargo Bank properties, both of which are in Stateline.

"Everyone who has lived here a long time knows there is a lack of affordable housing," Taylor told *Lake Tahoe News.* "Our goal is to help the community grow in the right way and provide housing opportunities for the workforce that is affordable."

Where Kingsbury Middle School sits today affordable housing may rise. Photo/LTN

The school site has been sitting empty since students left at the end of the 2007-08 school year. The Douglas County School District board in January 2012 voted to put it on the market for $4 million. When there was first talk of consolidating the lake schools the superintendent at the time said the 22-plus acre site with 36,000-square-feet of space could fetch $9.5 million.

Taylor, through his company Lake Parkway, is buying it for $3.25 million. This includes paying half the utilities – $25,000 – for the next year. The board this month granted him a 12-month escrow so he could get everything together – including converting the land use designation, getting financing, and permits.

"A change from school use to housing is dependent on the Tahoe Douglas Area Plan being accepted and adopted by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. I hope to bring the plan, which has already been approved by our board, to TRPA in the next month," Mimi Moss, director of Douglas County Community Development, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Affordable housing is in such short supply that South Lake Tahoe might dedicate one-half cent of future sales tax collections to housing. The council in November will be asking voters to approve raising the tax, with a second question seeking input as to where to spend the new revenue. Housing will be one option.

The Stateline Wells Fargo could

become a mixed use commercial-residential development. Photo/LTN

As this week's council meeting the electeds also agreed to enter into a $71,500 contract with Michael Baker International to develop a socio-economic impact study regarding vacation home rentals. The electeds want the firm to make it a broader study and not be just about VHRs.

Councilman Tom Davis is hoping the report will actually define what affordable housing is beyond the legal definition.

"This is way bigger than affordable housing. It is all housing. People in all income groups are having trouble renting in South Lake Tahoe and the whole South Shore," Councilman Austin Sass said.

Employers are having a difficult time hiring people in positions across the spectrum because of the limited and expensive housing stock. Heavenly now has work for people year-round, and Edgewood Lodge could employee 300. Those are just some of the new jobs, let alone the added workforce since the economy has turned around.

For Taylor, he expects the old bank location to be developed first; possibly in 2017. The number of units will range from 56 to 151 depending on if an outside partner is brought in.

He plans to keep the drive-through lanes because they are grandfathered in and no new ones can be added per a TRPA rule. The bottom level will be commercial.

"I'm in negotiations with In and Out Burger, but have not finalized anything," Taylor said. He would like another lane for a coffee chain, and the other for a pharmacy.

He said nine-stories is allowed there, but he intends to build seven.

"If there are only 56 units, they will probably be all three bedroom, 3.5 baths so that way multiple tenants or generations of family can live there. It is designed for workforce housing," Taylor said.

All will be deed restricted, with specific income requirements for people to be able to live at either development. These will be condos that people could buy or rent.

At the KMS property, Taylor intends to build a variety of floor plans that will include garages, though no more than three stories, with 412 units max. Construction won't begin until 2018 at the soonest.

A traffic study will contribute to how much actually gets built. Taylor anticipates a light going in at Lake Village Drive that would stop drivers heading east on Highway 50 as people turn out of the development.

Another future impact to that intersection will be **Sierra Colina**, which will have 13 single-family residences and 34 duplexes on the neighboring18-acre site.

The buildings at KMS today will be demolished. It's possible law enforcement will use it as a training facility where things could be destroyed before the official razing begins.

Kayaker drowns on South Shore

A 43-year-old kayaker died at Lake Tahoe on Tuesday.

Paul Anthony Aguirre of Rio Linda was paddling with family near El Dorado Beach on July 19 when he became separated. Family members found his kayak floating several hundred yards off shore just before 5pm. His life jacket was inside.

Timber Cove Marina located the victim floating in the water and without a life jacket. The man was unconscious and not breathing. He could not be revived.

South Lake Tahoe police officers said the initial investigation indicates the kayak capsized in the 13-15mph sustained winds. White caps were the norm throughout the day. The water temperature in this area was 69 degrees Fahrenheit.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Small fire burning in Desolation Wilderness

Update 8:28pm:

Helicopter crews are using Lake Tahoe to scoop up water to put out a blaze in Desolation Wilderness.

While the fire was reported Wednesday morning near Azure Lake, crews were still making drops as late as 5:30pm July 20.

U.S. Forest Service officials say it is less than one-half acre. In addition to the helicopter drops, a three-person helitack crew is on the scene. The cause is under investigation.

Crews in Truckee kept a fire near Hirschdale to 2 acres on Wednesday. It started about 6pm.

“Resources have contained the fire to 2 acres, but with terrain and winds it had potential to grow to 9-10 acres,” Truckee Fire Protection District staff said. The fire is currently under investigation.

These fires come a day after after there were two 1-acre fires near Montreal Road in South Lake Tahoe. Crews were still mopping those up on Wednesday. A spot fire erupted overnight underneath Heavenly's gondola between towers seven and eight.

"The are in patrol status. The are looking for hot spots," Lisa Herron with the USFS told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Campfires are illegal in Desolation Wilderness.

"Illegal and unattended campfires cause over 90 percent of wildfires in the Lake Tahoe Basin and increased fire danger due to the ongoing drought and warm summer weather is a big concern at Lake Tahoe," according to the Forest Service.

Fire restrictions in the basin took effect July 1 and in the Eldorado National Forest they begin July 21. This means wood and charcoal fires will be restricted to designated recreation sites and other fire related activities will be prohibited until the end of fire season. Gas or propane fires are allowed with a permit.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

CalPERS posts worst year since 2009

By James Rufus Koren, Los Angeles Times

California's largest public pension fund made a return of less than 1 percent in its most recent fiscal year, the fund's worst performance since 2009.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System said Monday that its rate of return for the year ended June 30 was just 0.61 percent. What’s more, Ted Eliopoulos, the pension fund’s chief investment officer, said the poor year has pushed CalPERS’ long-term returns below expected levels.

CalPERS assumes that, in the long-term, it will earn investment returns averaging 7.5 percent a year. If the fund fails to meet that goal, the state’s taxpayers could be forced to make up any shortfall in pension funding.

Read the whole story