

Casinos look to video games to draw millennials

By Laura Parker, New York Times

Forget slot machines and money wheels. American casinos may soon look more like video game arcades.

In February, Nevada and New Jersey passed legislation allowing for the introduction of skill-based games in casinos as a way to draw in younger players. Imagine “Angry Birds” and “Candy Crush” machines next to a high-stakes poker table at Bellagio.

The idea is that one day, different types of skill-based games will exist on casino floors, including games that look and feel more like console video games, from shooters to racing games.

They could be games where single players go against the house, cooperative games like blackjack, or player versus player games like poker. Eric Meyerhofer, the chief executive of Gamblit Gaming, a California company that makes skill-based games for casinos, said the biggest attractions could even be well-known franchises like “Call of Duty.”

“It won’t be a sea of slot machines. You’ll see smaller, more intimate areas with specialized themes,” he said.

Read the whole story

Ex-detective loses case against EDC

A six-day trial ended with El Dorado County winning a discrimination case brought forward by retired sheriff's Detective Rick Fitzgerald.

It took the eight jurors in U.S. District Court in Sacramento three hours to deliberate before rendering the verdict.

Fitzgerald filed the complaint in January 2013. He said he was the victim of age discrimination, retaliation and constructive termination from his job. He worked for EDSO from Feb. 23, 1991, to Sept. 7, 2012.

Also named in the suit were Sheriff John D'Agostini and former Undersheriff Rich Williams. They, too, were exonerated.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

DUIs don't keep Meyers out of education

By Kathryn Reed

Jeremy Meyers, the disgraced ex-superintendent of El Dorado County Office of Education, was hired this week to work even closer with children.

The Black Oak Mine Unified School District board in Georgetown on July 6 voted 4-0 (Darcy Knight was absent) to hire Meyers on a 90-day contract to be principal of Golden Sierra Junior

Senior High School. This is a 7-12 school.



Jeremy Meyers

In May, Meyers was sentenced to 110 days in jail after being arrested on driving under the influence charges twice in five months in 2015. Both were misdemeanors. He pleaded no contest to the first offense and guilty to the second.

For the first offense he was sentenced to five days on home arrest. The second driving under the influence charge came with the jail time, four years of formal probation and having to install an alcohol device in his vehicle.

However, the only time Meyers actually spent in jail was when he was initially arrested the second time. Still, he has served his sentence. The brief time in jail counted toward time served, the bulk was alternative sentencing. The two main forms of alternative sentences are community service and being confined to one's home with a monitor. *Lake Tahoe News* was not able to ascertain Meyers' specific sentence or how he was able to fulfill the 110 days when the sentence was rendered May 25 – just 44 days ago.

The county board was not able to fire him because the superintendent is an elected position. Meyers told the board the only way he would leave is if they paid him through June 30, 2016. He was gone in November with two checks – \$114,821.55 was essentially his salary, with another \$10,930 for the value of his medical, dental and life insurance for that same time period.

In hiring Meyers, the Black Oak Mine board overlooked the fact that both of his arrests came in the middle of workdays, with his blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit.

Meyers has never issued a public apology for his behavior.

"That is shocking, but not surprising as poorly as that school board runs their district," Mike Patterson, California Teachers Association board member, said of the hiring. Patterson represents certificated personnel on the state board.

"I was at one of the their school board meetings last year. The current board has done such a horrible job. They pretty much forced the automotive and construction teacher to resign," Patterson told *Lake Tahoe News*. "A lot of other teachers have resigned and found other jobs where they are more valued and more fairly compensated."

Meyers can take this job because his convictions were not felonies and he never lost his credential.

"Normally when there is an issue with a credentialed person it is the school district or county school board that notifies the California credentials department," Patterson said. "Being that he was the county superintendent, I'm sure no one at the county office notified the state there was an issue, which in and of itself should be an issue."

Black Oak Mine is struggling to keep people at all positions. This has to do with why Meyers has a short-term contract. Enrollment has also been declining as parents seek better opportunities for their children, including schools with more advanced placement classes.

Since mid-April Superintendent Robert Williams has been out on stress leave, with no indication of if or when he'll return. Elizabeth Haines, who formerly worked for the district, has been brought in to be the substitute superintendent.

Brian Spears lasted one year as principal of Golden Sierra Junior Senior High School. That is why there was a vacancy Meyers could fill.

The board, though, has voted to ultimately consolidate the superintendent and principal positions into one job. That can't happen as long as the current superintendent is on the payroll. But it might mean Meyers would have the opportunity to extend his contract.

Truckee man faces manslaughter charge

Bryan Sperlin, 24, of Truckee was arrested July 8 on voluntary manslaughter charges.

Police officers said he was involved in a deadly assault that occurred in the downtown Commercial Row area of Truckee on June 18. Jesse Hill, 39, of Chico died of his injuries at Renown Medical Center in Reno on July 3.

Hill was found unconscious on the sidewalk in front of the Pastime Club on June 18 at 11:05pm. Truckee police officers said Hill and Sperlin began arguing earlier in the evening at the Tourist Club bar. Hill left the Tourist Club and was later standing in front of the Pastime Club. As Sperlin was entering the Pastime Club he and Hill began a second argument that led to the physical altercation, officers said.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Commission denies Martis Valley West project

By Kathryn Reed

In a split vote, the Placer County Planning Commission said no to the developer who wants to build 760 units on 6.6 acres near Brockway Summit.

Sierra Pacific Industries owns the land, with Mountainside Partners the developers. The development would be just outside the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Commissioners on July 7 voted 5-2 to deny the project. Their biggest issues were traffic and evacuation plans in the event of a fire or similar emergency.

This meeting was a continuation of the June meeting that was also standing room only and a bit contentious. People had signs that read "Deny Martis Valley West."

Only the developer, their reps and county staff spoke in favor of the project.

"The Martis Valley West project reflects a truly unique combined conservation and development plan that relocates future development to an area adjacent to existing development, significantly reduces the amount of allowable development and serves to complete a remarkable conservation vision," Blake Riva, managing partner with Mountainside Partners, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We believe the project should be approved based on its merits. We look forward to the Martis Valley West project proceeding to a vote of the Placer County Board of Supervisors later this summer."

The ultimate decision will be up to the Board of Supervisors. A meeting date has not been set.

"Today's vote is great news for everyone who loves Tahoe" Tom Mooers of Sierra Watch said in a press release. "It's not necessarily the end of the road for the project, but it's a clear indication that it has no place in North Lake Tahoe."

This has been a closely watched project by people in Lake Tahoe even though the project is in Truckee's boundaries. Highway 267 is a link between the two areas and is already congested.

Besides more vehicles on the roads, air quality is another concern. So is the ability to get to safety in the event of an emergency.

First responders who spoke had some concerns about the ability to get everyone out.

"There's no question in my mind that first responders can pull off an evacuation of any area in the basin if they were called to do so," said John McEldowney, program manager for the Placer County Office of Emergency Services. "I'm not saying it's going to go perfectly, but I have full confidence in our first responders to get it done."

The League to Save Lake Tahoe has come out against the project.

"A vote to approve this project is a vote against the lake," Shannon Eckmeyer with the League to Save Lake Tahoe told commissioners.

Many would like the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to weigh in even though it is outside its jurisdiction. This is because the project will impact the basin.

Politics of gaming to highlight Global Gaming Expo

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

When the doors open to the world's largest gaming convention in September in Las Vegas, it should come as no surprise that politics will be high on people's minds.

The three-day Global Gaming Expo, known in the industry as G2E, begins at the Sands Expo and Convention Center on Sept. 27, about three weeks before Las Vegas hosts its first-ever presidential debate and five weeks before voters go to the polls to select a new president.

Where the candidates stand on gaming industry issues will be a prime topic at the convention and trade show, which is expected to attract more than 26,000 people from around the world.

For Geoff Freeman, president and CEO of the sponsoring American Gaming Association, the politics of gaming will be one of many highlights for the show, which is getting an overhaul of sorts.

Read the whole story

SLT on quest to redefine itself via recreation



This is a rendering of the preferred alternative for Regan Beach. Drawing/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – People need to decide if they want the status quo or to make the investment.

That was the overriding message South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry delivered July 6 to Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe.

Pictures told the story as much as her words. A collage of where the city has been, where it is and where it could go filled the screen.

She is a proponent of doing things and not just developing a plan that sits on a shelf. Kerry also credited leaders in the city and community, as well as partner agencies for helping create a vision for what the South Shore as a whole can become.

The city is on the cusp of truly embracing recreation as its economic engine. To do so will require more investment in infrastructure. It has started to do so by adding playfields near Lake Tahoe Community College that will be ready for action in a year.

Two major improvements would be replacing the more than 30-year-old recreation center and overhauling Regan Beach. The community has weighed-in at multiple meetings about each site to the point conceptual drawings have been developed and preliminary budgets sketched. It could take \$30 million to build the rec center people envision.

It would be twice the size of what is there now. This would include four basketball courts that could be transformed into meeting space, a new swim center that offers activities for all ages – and not just serious swimmers, exercise equipment not held together by duct tape, a bay door that would open to outdoor recreation, and more.

There is also talk of having the local Boys & Girls Club be partners so those youth would have a place to play.

The renderings Kerry provided are like nothing that is currently available in the basin. It would be state-of-the-art, with modern technology, aesthetics that are modern and mountain, and functionality for a variety of sports.

To pay for it the city is putting a tax proposal on the Nov. 8 ballot to raise the hotel tax by 2 percentage points. The local lodging association group already backs this idea.

The caveat is that the additional money raised will go toward recreation – and only recreation. It will take 66 percent of the voters to make this happen.

The city would then seek bonds to actually pay for the rec center, with the transient occupancy tax paying that debt.

If voters say yes, construction could begin in 2018. It would likely be a two-year build-out.

Also to be funded from the TOT hike would be Regan Beach.

Rise in poverty threatens Nev. education system

By Ian Whitaker, Las Vegas Sun

A top-to-bottom reorganization of the Clark County School District. A program that allows the state to take over struggling schools. The most sweeping school choice program of any state in the country.

Nevada suffers no shortage of programs concocted by lawmakers to improve education, but will any of them make a difference? Not if Nevada continues to see some of the worst child poverty in the country, argue some experts.

Even though the Silver State did manage to rise out of last place in this year's Kids Count education rankings, the state is faring even worse when it comes to the number of children living in poverty.

Read the whole story

Study: Wind main cause of California droughts

By Science Daily

Droughts in California are mainly controlled by wind, not by the amount of evaporated moisture in the air, research has found.

The findings were published in *Geophysical Research Letters*, a journal of the American Geophysical Union, on June 30. The research increases the understanding of how the water cycle is related to extreme events and could eventually help in predicting droughts and floods, said lead author Jiangfeng Wei, a research scientist at the University of Texas at Austin's Jackson School of Geosciences.

"Ocean evaporation provides moisture for California precipitation but is not the reason for droughts there, although the ocean evaporation is slightly lower during droughts," Wei said.

The researchers analyzed 30-year data sets that recorded precipitation, ocean evaporation, surface wind speed and atmospheric pressure on and near the west coast of the United States. These are all factors that influence the water cycle in California. One of the difficulties of studying the water cycle, Wei said, is that the water sources for precipitation cannot be directly observed, so the team also used a mathematical moisture-tracking method and high-resolution model simulations.

Read the whole story

Challenge to Placerville courthouse project fails



Many say the courthouse in downtown Placerville has outlived its usefulness.
Photo/LTN file

By Joann Eisenbrandt

It took a year for Placerville Historic Preservation League to be told it lost the challenge to stop the El Dorado County courthouse project in Placerville from proceeding.

San Francisco County Superior Court Judge Garrett L. Wong on July 1 denied the writ that was submitted by the group in July 2015 that challenged the Judicial Council's approval of the New Placerville Courthouse Project.

The project will relocate Superior Court functions on the West Slope into one new three-story, six-courtroom, 88,000-square-foot facility next to the existing county jail off Forni Road in Placerville. Currently, court services are split between downstairs in Building C at the county Government Center on Fair Lane and the historic courthouse on Main Street in downtown Placerville.

Since 2002, all California courts have been under the management of the state, overseen by the Judicial Council.

The Judicial Council chose not to comment.

This council is the lead agency on the Placerville courthouse project and is responsible under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for preparing an environmental impact report (EIR) outlining any potentially significant environmental impacts of the project and proposing mitigations for those impacts.

A list of “immediate and critical need” projects was created by the state once funding became available for renovations of existing court facilities or relocation and consolidation. This project is on that list.

It made that list, the EIR states, because Building C and the Main Street Courthouse fail to meet current standards for security and other court services. The Main Street Courthouse, built in 1913, has issues with its water system, asbestos, mold, limited handicapped access, an aging elevator, the lack of secure holding areas for in-custody defendants and no secure parking for visiting judges. Consolidating services in a location next to the exiting jail would allow for secure and more efficient transfer of those in custody for judicial proceedings and provide an overall cost reduction, the EIR explains.

The Placerville Historic Preservation League does not agree with the EIR’s conclusions that consolidating court services in a new Forni Road facility is the best or even the most cost-effective alternative, but it focused its challenge to the EIR on one main point. “The EIR failed to adequately disclose, analyze and/or mitigate the project’s economic impacts to the businesses in historic Placerville on Main Street,” their request for a writ of mandate states. “That will lead to urban decay and blight.”

The Main Street Courthouse, the Preservation League contends, is an essential component of the downtown Placerville economy

and brings significant financial benefits to Main Street businesses from the steady stream of courthouse visitors and jurors, and from the courthouse staff and the staff of other court-related entities on Main Street such as the District Attorney's Office and private attorneys' offices. If court services leave Main Street, so will the money they bring to downtown, is their contention.

In his July 1 decision denying the writ, Judge Wong wrote, "Petitioner has not met its burden in this case. Substantial evidence supports the Judicial Council's conclusion that moving the courthouse operations from Main Street to their new location less than two miles away would not cause downtown Placerville to fall into urban decay."

Depending on how a writ challenges a public agency's CEQA document, the court uses different standards of review. In this case, since the Placerville Historic Preservation League challenged the Judicial Council's factual determinations, such as the methodology employed, the significance of the conclusions reached and the amount and type of analysis in their final EIR, the "substantial evidence" standard of review of the writ's allegations was applied.

Under this standard "the Judicial Council's determinations are given substantial deference and are presumed correct. Petitioner bears the burden of proving otherwise." The court assumes that the Judicial Council followed the law and did not "prejudicially abuse its discretion."

CEQA is focused on significant physical impacts to the environment, not economic ones. Economic or social changes are evaluated by CEQA only if they result in physical changes as well, such as the "urban blight" and physical deterioration of an area filled with unsightly, abandoned, boarded-up buildings left behind after a large number of business failures.

Wong determined that this would not happen to downtown

Placerville, stating, "Even assuming downtown businesses rely on the courthouse for 5 to 20 percent, or up to 30 percent of their income, absent from the records is any evidence that such a loss in income would cause long-term vacancies leading to physical deterioration of the downtown and urban decay."

The Placerville City Council had several meetings on this issue and eventually wrote a letter to the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) supporting the Forni Road location. Wong's decision mentioned this letter from then-Placerville Mayor Patty Borelli, quoting from the document that there was "overwhelming support for the current proposal to relocate the court operations and repurpose the historic courthouse in downtown."

Wong also pointed to the creation of a Blue Ribbon Committee by the city of Placerville and El Dorado County to find ways to "repurpose" the courthouse for other uses. The Judicial Council put out a request for proposals for a consulting firm to work with the Blue Ribbon Committee to analyze what would be realistic new uses for the historic courthouse building. According to Placerville City Manager Cleve Morris, the Blue Ribbon Committee last met in November 2015 and no future meetings are scheduled.

Kirk Smith, spokesperson for the Placerville Historic Preservation League, told *Lake Tahoe News* he has "serious problems with the (court's) decision." Smith pointed to what he sees as deficiencies in the administrative record provided by the Judicial Council to the court which prevented the Preservation League from submitting additional evidence on the economic impacts of removing court services from the Main Street building. Smith also noted that the Blue Ribbon Committee has rarely met and expressed doubts that an economically-viable suitable re-use for the courthouse could easily be found. "No adequate replacement could ever be built in time to take up the loss created by closing it."

Smith challenged the accuracy of the “overwhelming support” for the project in the letter from Borelli to the AOC, noting that more than 60 Main Street merchants submitted a petition to the Judicial Council expressing their desire to retain some court services on Main Street and outlining the negative impacts removing them would have on the continued viability of their businesses.

Of the denial of the writ, Smith said, “It will be appealed.”

According to Placerville Historic Preservation League Attorney Don Mooney, if an appeal were filed, it would be to the First Appellate District Court of Appeals in San Francisco. The last day to file an appeal is Aug. 30.