

Unpopular Lake Valley fire chief leaving

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Valley Fire Protection District's divisive fire chief is about to be without a job.

Gareth Harris has had a tempestuous tenure as chief. Twice he had unanimous votes of no confidence from firefighters. Key staff has been looking to leave because the morale is so lousy. Finally, the board had enough.



Gareth Harris

While the official letter sent by board Chairman Bob Bettencourt to staff said Harris is retiring, those close to the situation told *Lake Tahoe News* the chief was told to leave.

Harris' last day on the payroll is Aug. 1, however he will be gone at the end of the month. Bettencourt described it as being "on leave beginning July 1."

When Harris was hired in 2005 from the Half Moon Bay Fire District as battalion chief and fire marshal for Lake Valley he was the first hire at that level outside of the department. But he came with baggage. According to news reports from Half Moon Bay, Harris was accused of harassment by a subordinate that ended in a settlement agreement.

The 54-year-old became chief in summer 2011. Harris replaced popular and well-respected **Fire Chief Jeff Michael**. Michael had been with the Lake Valley department for 32 years. He is being brought back in to be interim chief starting July 1.

Bettencourt in a letter to Lake Valley staff that was obtained by *LTN*, said, Michael's hire is "to assist the district with the issues we are facing at the current time."

Harris has been described as lazy as well as a bully.

Harris was the subject of 2014 El Dorado County **Grand Jury report** regarding selling radio equipment to the department he worked for. California Government Code prohibits employees from having any financial interest in any contract made by them or in their official capacity.

Harris did not return a phone call.

Paddleboarder missing at Lake Tahoe

Crews had to call off the search Friday for a missing paddleboarder at Lake Tahoe because of darkness.

The paddleboarder was last seen June 10 about 3:20pm several hundred yards from Obexer's Boat Company in Homewood.

According to North Tahoe Fire Protection District, the person was with a group, but got separated in the rough water.

The National Weather Service in Reno had issued a lake wind advisory for Friday. White caps were the norm. Wind gusts at times reached 40 mph.

Dive teams and helicopters assisted with the search.

Details about the missing person have not been disclosed.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Martis Valley West proposal leaves planners with more questions

Placer County planning commissioners on June 9 took no action regarding the Martis Valley West project, saying there are too many lingering questions to make a recommendation.

More than 200 people attended the six-hour meeting at Granlibakken in Tahoe City.

The issue will be heard again at a future meeting at the lake, though no date was give.

Sierra Pacific Industries owns the land, with Mountainside Partners the developers. The 760 units proposed to be built are outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin. However, the development is close to Tahoe, near Brockway Summit. The Martis Valley West plan would transfer residential and commercial uses from the east parcel to the west parcel. A high-end resort style campground is proposed for the Tahoe side of the ridgeline immediately adjacent to the west parcel.

Most of the public who spoke opposed the project.

Traffic on Highway 267, fire safety and the ability to evacuate and potential impacts to Lake Tahoe were the

commissioners main concerns.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Reid says Yucca Mountain won't be revived

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., doesn't expect to see nuclear waste stored at Yucca Mountain after he retires and leaves the Senate.

Reid, the Senate minority leader, has spent years using his position to prevent the mountain 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas from becoming a nuclear waste storage site. He's retiring when his term ends after the November election.

"I can't imagine Yucca Mountain's going to come back," he said in a meeting Tuesday with members of the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C. The group traveled to Washington to spend the week visiting the congressional delegation and learning about public policy issues.

Read the whole story

Brown, top Democrats strike

deal on spending plan

By Jessica Calefati, San Jose Mercury News

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature's top Democrats have agreed on a framework for a state budget that makes a generous deposit into a rainy-day savings account and sets aside close to a half-billion dollars for affordable housing, administration sources said Thursday.

Despite a Wall Street slowdown that led Brown last month to release a revised \$122.2 billion general fund budget that had shrunk slightly compared to January, legislative leaders convinced him to increase spending not just for housing, but also for child care and welfare programs.

But Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon weren't the only ones who walked away from the negotiating table happy, the sources said. Brown convinced them to support a \$2 billion rainy-day fund deposit he wanted instead of fighting to spend that money on new programs or services.

Read the whole story

Concealed weapons ruling spotlights Calif.'s role in gun debate

By Maura Dolan and Brittney Mejia, Los Angeles Times

A federal appeals court ruling that gave gun control advocates

a major victory Thursday underscored California's rising importance as a center of legal and political battles over guns.

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decided in a 7-4 ruling that California counties may restrict permits for carrying concealed firearms in public. That decision overturned a 2014 ruling that prompted some California counties to relax their rules.

"It should not be minimized how big a victory this was for gun control advocates," said UCLA law Professor Adam Winkler. "Not only does it affirm the constitutionality of restrictive conceal-carry laws in California's major cities, it also makes it less likely the Supreme Court will step in."

Read the whole story

Calif. leaders working on affordable housing

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

Affordable housing, a back-burner issue at the state Capitol for a decade, has emerged as a central part of talks on a new California budget, with Gov. Jerry Brown, lawmakers and others pressing proposals they want to be part of a final deal.

Brown's revised spending plan, released May 13, includes a Senate proposal to borrow \$2 billion against revenue from the state's mental health services tax on millionaires to subsidize affordable housing projects for people with mental illness.

The Democratic governor also wants to speed up the local land-use approval process for housing projects that include affordable units.

Lawmakers, meanwhile, have introduced measures that would go much further, committing significant general fund money to the problem. The Assembly budget includes \$650 million for various affordable housing programs, and a \$3 billion affordable housing bond for the November ballot passed the Senate with bipartisan support last week.

Read the whole story

2 accused of defrauding Indian casinos

By Lake Tahoe News

Two men have been indicted on charges of stealing from three Indian casinos, including one in El Dorado County.

“Once the defendants fraudulently obtained the identification documents for their false identities, the defendants used the identification documents and false identities to open bank accounts, obtain credit, and create the perception of credit worthiness in their false identities,” the federal indictment reads.

Vivian Wang, 53, of Lilburn, Georgia, and Frank Luo, 48, of Las Vegas are accused of wire fraud. Wang also face an aggravated identity theft charge.

The two are accused of defrauding Red Hawk, Thunder Valley and Cache Creek casinos from August 2008 to August 2014.

The U.S. Attorneys Office claims the duo stole \$1.2 million from the casinos by using false IDs and Social Security numbers to apply for casino credit, or markers. A marker is a cash advance provided by a casino to a patron, and it is often secured by a check from the patron's bank account.

The defendants initially repaid the markers and several credit cards to give the impression of creditworthiness. They even intentionally lost money to gain credit.

Eventually the defendants depleted and closed the bank accounts provided to the casinos in their marker applications to prevent the casinos from recovering the money secured by the checks they had written against those accounts, and they did not pay back the credit card balances.

The two used the money to buy jewelry, precious metals, home appliances, international flights, luxury goods and clothing, according to court records.

If convicted, Wang and Luo face 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for each count of wire fraud. If convicted of aggravated identity theft, Wang faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 24 months in prison consecutive to any other sentence imposed.

Nonstop flights between Reno-Oakland resume

By Associated Press

Southwest Airlines is now offering nonstop flights between Reno and Oakland.

Officials celebrated the launch of the three new daily flights at Reno-Tahoe International Airport on Monday.

Previous nonstop flight service between the two cities was canceled in 2013 when Southwest Airlines dropped six destinations to and from Reno.

Officials have said new economic opportunities and increased tourism have led to the return of the flights connecting Reno to Oakland and the Bay Area.

Tickets are on sale now.

Vail Resorts closes ski season strong

By Motley Fool

Winter is just a distant memory for residents of the Northern Hemisphere, but investors in ski resort company Vail Resorts have waited with anticipation to see how the late-winter months treated the company's key winter business. With the vast majority of its properties seeing their high season in the December to March time frame, Vail Resorts gets a huge portion of its annual revenue and earnings at this time of year.

Coming into today's fiscal third-quarter financial report, Vail Resorts investors were expecting to see sizable growth in revenue and earnings, and the company did a good job of delivering on both fronts.

Vail Resorts' fiscal third-quarter results were roughly in line with the expectations that investors had for the ski

resort operator. Revenue climbed 12 percent to \$647.5 million, which was only slightly less than the \$653 million consensus forecast among those following the stock. Net income jumped at a faster pace of 18 percent to \$157.6 million, and that produced earnings of \$4.23 per share. The figure was \$0.03 per share better than investors had expected, even after having raised their expectations gradually over the past few months.

Read the whole story