

Tahoe Tot Spot changes hands



Coral Bloch tests her skills at Tahoe Tot Spot. Photo/Chris Bloch

Tahoe Tot Spot was recently saved from closing its doors.

Julie Paradysz, who a year ago this month bought the South Lake Tahoe business from Amy Thompson, sold it to Jen and Chris Bloch. Paradysz was planning to move out of the area the first week of the month. It was on Feb. 18 she received the offer from the Blochs.

The Blochs relocated to South Lake Tahoe three years ago from the Bay Area in search of more trees and less cars. They have two kids, ages 3 years and 8 months. Chris Bloch is a fire captain with Contra Costa County Fire Department and Jen Bloch is a licensed clinical social worker with El Dorado County Mental Health and volunteers at the Tahoe Warm Room. They are keeping those jobs, “just committing to drinking a lot more coffee”, they said.

They were professional rock climbers pre-parenthood and aspire to climb again.

“We love the Tahoe community and wanted to be a part of it by

keeping Tahoe Tot Spot open and increasing enrichment activities for our valuable youth,” they told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Immediate changes include being open seven days a week from 10am-2pm for open play.

For more information, go **online**.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

LTVA ad campaign to focus on the water

By Kathryn Reed

Is it all that tap water? Or maybe being immersed in the lake – even if it’s only ankle deep? Perhaps just being near it? Whatever it is, people who come to Tahoe seem to be transformed into another being – someone more fun, adventurous and outdoorsy.

That’s the message behind the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority’s new ad campaign called – There Must be Something in the Water.

While the final ads have not been devised, the concept is showing someone in their normal, every day work life, perhaps sitting in a cubicle and then seeing them playing in Tahoe. From ordinary and mundane to fun and vibrant – all because of the waters of Lake Tahoe.

“This doesn’t have any animation. It has outdoor scenery or indoor entertainment,” Carol Chaplin, LTVA executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It won’t have that fanciful imagery (of the last campaign). It is much more straightforward.”

Still, it is designed to be a bit humorous and quirky.

The board approved the concept last month, with the nearly \$900,000 contract with Duncan/Channon of San Francisco OK'd this month.



Paddle boarding at Lake Tahoe will be featured in summer ads for the South Shore. Photo/LTN file

Summer shots will include people paddle boarding, parasailing, biking and ziplining. Nightlife will also be included, and is something that can be used year-round. Skiing, a family playing in the snow, and potentially dog sledding will be used next winter.

This will be the second year the South Shore tourism bureau will focus on San Diego in addition to the traditional Bay Area-Sacramento market. One reason for San Diego is half those people tend to drive here and then they stay longer than those who can make it here in four hours or less.

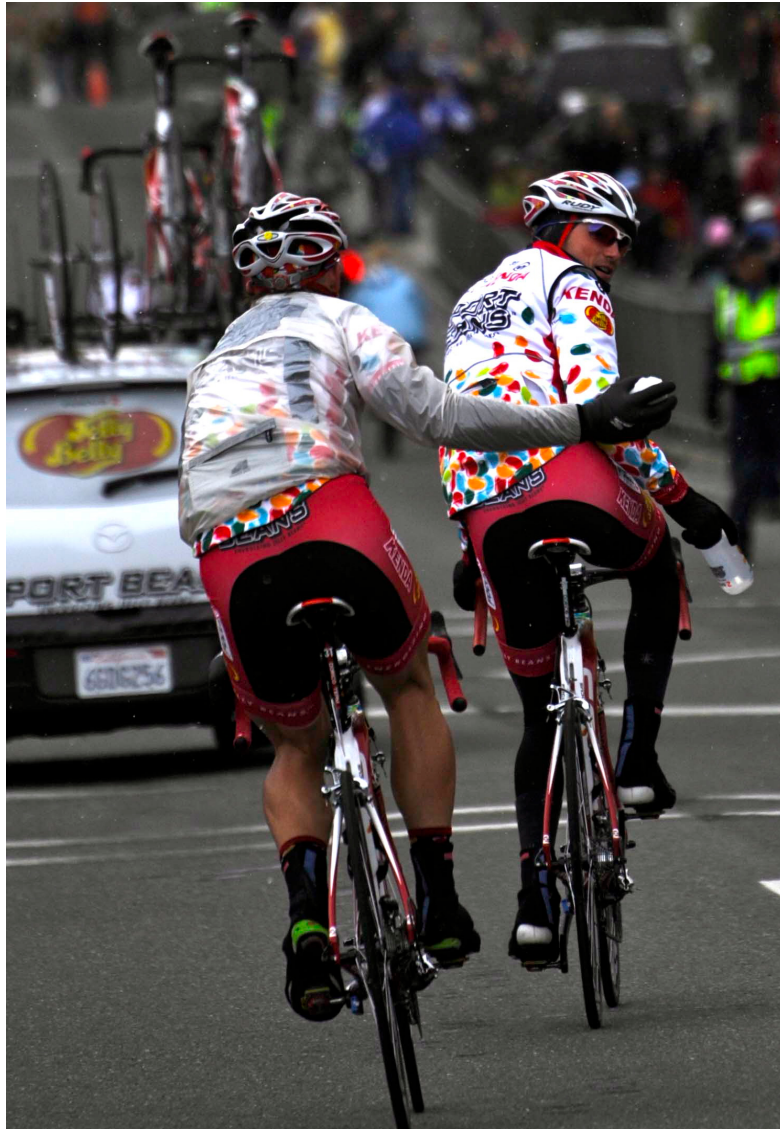
Ads will run online where they can be targeted to people interested in Tahoe and what it has to offer, during select

Giants and A's baseball games on Comcast, radio and on billboards.

There had been criticism of the previous campaign that used animated characters and no actual pictures of Lake Tahoe. Some of the board members said it was time to change the visuals, the ad agency agreed and that's how the There Must be Something in the Water campaign came about.

The LTVA is cognizant there may be concern using the tagline in light of the turmoil in Flint, Mich. Still, considering the purity of Tahoe's water and this being a gambling destination, the powers that be are confident the message will resonate with potential visitors.

While LTVA tends to support events more than stage them, the agency is involved in some of the bigger undertakings. The fireworks will be back on Fourth of July and the Sunday of Labor Day weekend. A vendor is being sought now.



Promoters hope Amgen cyclists won't be able to have a snowball fight like they did in 2011, when snow canceled the local leg. Photo/Lisa J. Tolda

A huge chunk of time of being devoted to the Amgen Tour of California bike race that features the women starting and ending the first leg at Heavenly's California Lodge and the men ending stage 4 at the lodge. Both will be May 19. The women's can be seen online and the men's will be televised.

Much like the American Century Championship celebrity golf tournament in July, both cycling events will be opportunities to showcase the lake, especially with the women riding the 72 miles around it.

For viewers – in person or on a screen – it will also be a chance to see athletes who may be competing this summer in the Olympics.

The LTVA is also an integral part of the annual golf tournament at Edgewood Tahoe. Another seven-year contract was signed last year, so American Century and NBC are on board at least through 2022.

Something new this year that LTVA will be involved in is the restaurant week in September. Sample the Sierra, an event run by the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, is moving from Labor Day to mid-month and will now include a restaurant week.

While locally there has been a restaurant week in January to tie in with what California tourism officials do, it has not taken off. In large part this is because it's already a busy time of year.

"We felt that putting it with Sample the Sierra, it might help both of those events and create some synergy," Chaplin said.

A public relations campaign by Stateline's Weidinger Public Relations will complement the ads in trying to get media to write about the area and the events. Their efforts have also been focused on a renaissance theme for the area – how the economy is improving and new venues are opening.

Chinese firm snatches Starwood from Marriott

By Chris Isidore, CNNMoney

The proposed merger to create the world's largest hotel chain is off – at least for now.

Starwood Hotels and Resort said Friday it was pulling out of a deal to sell to Marriott International after determining that a \$12.8 billion all-cash bid from an investment group led by Chinese insurer Anbang Insurance Group is superior. In November Starwood agreed to a \$12 billion cash and stock purchase by Marriott that had been due to close by the end of this month.

Marriott has five days to decide whether to top this new offer, and it says it will consider doing so.

Read the whole story

Roadwork delays West Slope developments

By Ben van der Meer, Sacramento Business Journal

Winn Communities is looking for an extension on entitlements for three housing projects in El Dorado County. But it's not because of lagging confidence in the market, or even a lack of labor.

Rather, the company wants to complete needed road infrastructure first, said George Carpenter, a company vice president.

Carpenter said the three projects all got their tentative maps approved in 2005, before the housing meltdown of a few years later.

Trees deal with climate change better than expected

By Tatiana Schlossberg, New York Times

The bend-don't-break adaptability of trees extends to handling climate change, according to a new study that says forests may be able to deal with hotter temperatures and contribute less carbon dioxide to the atmosphere than scientists previously thought.

In addition to taking in carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, plants also release it through a process called respiration. Globally, plant respiration contributes six times as much carbon dioxide to the atmosphere as fossil fuel emissions, much of which is reabsorbed by plants, the oceans and other elements of nature. Until now, most scientists have thought that a warming planet would cause plants to release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which in turn would cause more warming.

But in a study published Wednesday in *Nature*, scientists showed that plants were able to adapt their respiration to increases in temperature over long periods of time, releasing only 5 percent more carbon dioxide than they did under normal conditions.

Based on measurements of short-term temperature responses in this study and others, the scientists expected that the plants would increase their respiration by nearly five times that much.

Read the whole story

Gaming regulators OK licensing for Caesars CEO

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The Nevada Gaming Commission unanimously approved the licensing of Caesars Entertainment President and CEO Mark Frissora on Thursday despite two new issues raised since the state Gaming Control Board's favorable suitability hearing for him earlier this month.

Frissora, the former top executive for Hertz Global Holdings, spent more than an hour taking questions from commissioners about his departure from that company as well as two new concerns.

Commissioners questioned Frissora about two issues: a U.S. Bankruptcy Court-ordered report issued Tuesday that said Caesars and its private equity backers could be on the hook for \$5 billion in damages; and a matter raised in a public-comment period about problems that former company executives have experienced with their pension funds.

Read the whole story

Calif. pension obligations nearly \$64 billion

By Associated Press

California has nearly \$64 billion in pension debt that eventually must be paid to current and former teachers and state workers – a figure more than \$20 billion higher than previous estimates, state Controller Betty Yee reported Friday.

Yee disclosed the higher pension liability for the first time in California's comprehensive annual financial report, using a new calculation aimed at more accurately reporting the government's financial responsibilities. It reflects the state's unfunded retirement debt as of June 30, 2015.

The "net pension liability" reflects the state's unfunded retirement costs as of June 30, 2015. California had previously reported a different figure, the "unfunded actuarial liability," which was \$40 billion a year earlier.

Under requirements of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, state and local governments nationwide are using the new calculation to report their unfunded pension debts. They also must now be included on the balance sheet alongside other government debts, such as bonds, claims, judgments and long-term leases.

As a result, California ended the year \$175 billion in debt, up from \$119 billion the prior year.

The new rules will increase transparency, Yee said in a statement, "which will in turn focus local and state governments on ensuring they adequately plan for these important long-term obligations."

Yee said she expects other employment-related benefits, such as retiree health care costs, to be reported in future years, further driving up the deficit on California's balance sheet.

The new reporting requirements allow state lawmakers and local government leaders to make more informed decisions about pension benefits, said state Sen. John Moorlach, R-Costa Mesa, a certified public accountant who has been publicly highlighting pension costs as they're reported by local governments.

"I'm embarrassed that my profession failed to make this requirement 30 years ago," Moorlach said. "Now most states are in pension-plan debt up to their eyeballs, and the problem is ubiquitous."

The financial report said California collected \$117 billion in revenue during the last fiscal year. That was up 12 percent from the previous year, mostly from a sharp uptick in personal income tax collections. The general fund had enough cash at the end of the fiscal year to pay for 20 days of operations, up from 16 a year earlier, the report said.

Enforcement campaign shows drivers are speeding

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office issued more than 200 speeding citations during a three-week, multi-agency Joining Forces traffic safety campaign in late February and early March.

From Feb. 19 through March 7, deputies joined with the Reno Police Department, Sparks Police Department and Nevada Highway

Patrol for a high-intensity enforcement campaign focusing on speeding. The campaign is part of ongoing efforts by Nevada law enforcement agencies to increase public safety through the state's Joining Forces program.

Sheriff's Office patrol staff assigned to this event initiated a total of 301 traffic stops. Although a driver may be stopped for one violation, several other violations may be observed during the subsequent investigation making it possible that a driver may be issued citations for numerous violations.

The total number of violations cited and warnings issued during this event was 421. Most of those citations, 220, were issued for speed violations.

Violations cited include:

- 220 speeding
- 27 cell phone use/distracted driving
- 51 failure to show proof of insurance
- 20 driver's license related violations
- 28 motor vehicle registration violations
- 9 vehicle equipment violations
- 4 violations for running a red light
- 1 failure to yield right of way
- 2 felony arrest
- 1 drug arrest
- 11 other violations.

Audit: Caltrans maintenance

spending doesn't match need

By KCRA-TV

Caltrans is under the microscope after a state audit showed the agency spent \$250,000 to develop a new road maintenance budget model and then abandoned it.

The audit, released Thursday, said the new budget model for the maintenance division, which was created with help from a consultant in 2009, would have allocated money based on what areas needed it most.

"However, we found that the maintenance division abandoned this approach, and instead has based funding allocations to the 12 Caltrans districts on a simple average of historical spending. . . , despite reporting to the Legislature that it was using a more sophisticated method," state Auditor Elaine Howle said in the audit report.

Read the whole story

Sexual hostility hiding within national parks, forests

By Kathryn Joyce, Huffington Post

On an early Friday morning in late June 2006, Cheyenne Szydlo, a 33-year-old Arizona wildlife biologist with fiery red hair, drove to the Grand Canyon's South Rim to meet the river guide who would be taking her along the 280 miles of the Colorado

River that coursed a mile below. She was excited. Everyone in her field wanted to work at the Grand Canyon, and after several years of unsuccessful applications, Szydlo had recently been offered a seasonal position in one of the National Park Service's science divisions. She'd quit another job in order to accept, certain her chance wouldn't come again.

The June expedition—a nine-day journey through the canyon on a 20-foot motorboat operated by a boatman named Dave Loeffler—would be her last chance that summer. When Szydlo asked a coworker what Loeffler was like, the reply was cryptic: “You’ll see.”

Travelers eat and sleep together, and, due to the lack of cover, must often bathe and go to the bathroom in full view, using portable metal ammo cans outfitted with toilet seats. Commercial river guides often say that no one can claim their privacy on the river, so fellow passengers should offer it instead. In Szydlo's recounting of the trip, Loeffler didn't adhere to this code.

We're used to hearing stories of sexual harassment in the Army, the Navy, or within the police force; 25 years after the Tailhook scandal, when scores of Marine and Naval officers allegedly sexually assaulted some 83 women and seven men at a military convention, there's a general cultural understanding of what women face in traditionally male-dominated public institutions. The agencies that protect America's natural heritage enjoy a reputation for a certain benign progressivism—but some of them have their own troubling history of hostility toward women.

In 2012 in Texas, members of the Parks and Wildlife Department complained about a “legacy” of racial and gender intolerance; only 8 percent of the state's 500 game wardens were women. In

2014, in California, female employees of the U.S. Forest Service filed a class-action lawsuit—the fourth in 35 years—over what they described as an egregious, long-standing culture of sexual harassment, disparity in hiring and promotion, and retaliation against those who complained. (That lawsuit is still pending.) And this January, the Department of the Interior’s Office of Inspector General announced that it had “found evidence of a long-term pattern of sexual harassment and hostile work environment” in the Grand Canyon’s River District, a part of the Park Service.

Read the whole story