

Lawsuit over CalFire fee progressing

The challenge to California's fire fee is moving forward.

Sacramento Superior Court Judge Shelleyanne W.L. Chang last month granted the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers' Association's motion to notice a class of litigants who want to abolish the fee being assessed on people living in state responsibility areas. Those in Meyers are paying the annual CalFire fee.

Everyone in these areas where the fee is mandated will be part of the class-action lawsuit unless they opt out by March 7.

The plaintiffs also want the fees paid to date to be refunded.

The state believes the fee is constitutional.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

All schools open, expect slippery roads

Douglas County School District is on a one-hour delay today because of the snow.

Washoe County schools are on a two-hour delay.

Roads are slick. For chain requirements and other details about the highways, click on the state icons on the Home page of *Lake Tahoe News*.

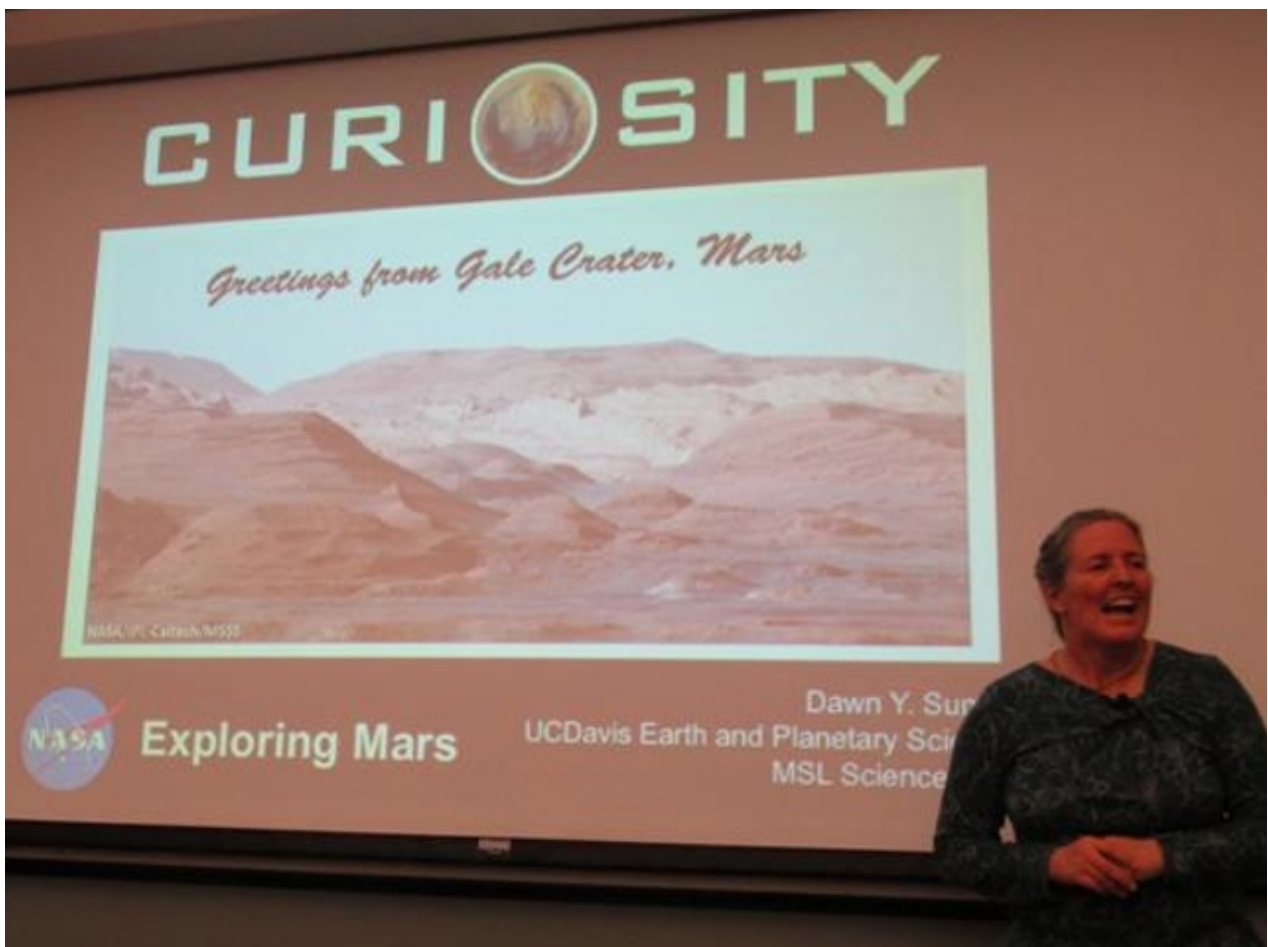
For those going into the backcountry on Feb. 1, the danger

level is moderate, according to the Sierra Avalanche Center.

High temperatures for the next two days are not expected to reach freezing. There is a slight chance of snow in the basin on Tuesday and Wednesday.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Scientist reveals Mars' secrets to Tahoe crowd



Dawn Sumner talks Jan. 28 about Curiosity's mission on

Mars. Photo/Denise Haerr

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – Looking a bit like the desert of southern Utah, the landscape seems familiar. But this is another world.

Curiosity, a six-wheeled robot about the size of a car, is providing scientists with new insight about the composition of Mars as well as photographs of Earth's neighbor.

"There are layers of rock that are a lot like the Grand Canyon. We can read it like a history book of the environment," Dawn Sumner explained during a talk at Sierra Nevada College on Jan. 28.

Sumner is a professor at UC Davis and a member of NASA's Mars Science Laboratory. Her team is handling the rover named Curiosity that landed on Mars on Aug. 5, 2012, after being launched Nov. 26, 2011. It is estimated there is enough power to last another six years. The robot is 10-feet long, 9-feet wide and 7-feet tall. It weighs 1,982 pounds.

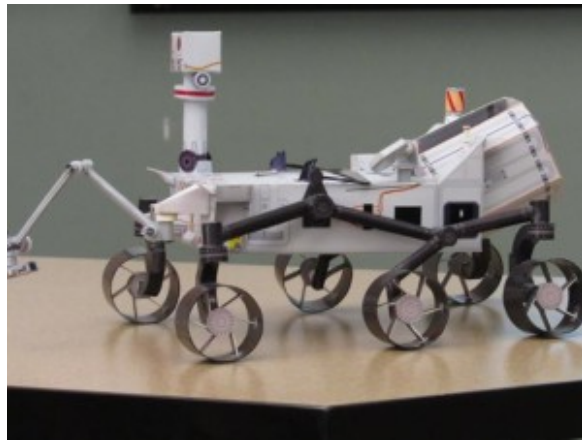
It is equipped with a ton of software that allows scientists to program various tests as new data is acquired. The robot is able to drill into rocks, vaporize them, siphon dirt, use a laser and travel across rugged terrain. The mineral composition, chemistry and isotopes are part of the data collection.

The main mission is to see if the planet can support small life forms and potentially humans.

Gale Crater near Mount Sharp is where Curiosity is spending its time.

A challenge for those on Earth – it is an international group working on Curiosity – is the time difference. Days on Mars are 39 minutes longer than on Earth, so that is a

consideration for when work is done and data is transmitted.



A replica of the rover Curiosity. Photo/Denise Haerr

For now, scientists have seen no evidence of carbon.

Organics have been located in samples that Curiosity has collected. Round pebbles like what are found in a stream are a new discovery.

“The only way to get rounding is in a stream or waves washing on a beach,” Sumner explained. This is how scientists know there was once water on this planet.

An alluvial fan has been mapped, which also suggests water flowed there.

“It flowed from the rim of the crater to just east of our landing site,” Sumner said.

Identifying the various rocks is a goal of the mission. Gypsum is one identifiable mineral. Measuring the force that it takes to drill into the rocks is one way to tell how hard or soft the rock is.

Mars, which is known as the red planet, gets this coloring because of oxidation. Where there is oxidation organic compounds are not likely to be found. However, Curiosity has

been able to brush away some of the dirt on rocks. A gray color is unveiled. This, according to Sumner, means it is not oxidized.

“There are some rocks that we think are part of a delta system,” Sumner said.

Right now Curiosity is on the edge of black sand dunes that are actively moving. Sumner described them as pristine.

This week the goal is to sample the mud next to the sand dunes.

Plenty of questions remain to be answered. Being able to study the matter in labs on Earth instead of having the rover run tests and send back data would be more ideal and precise.

More missions are planned for Mars, with a launch date set for 2018 for another rover to study earthquakes on this planet. In 2020 a rover will launch that is designed to bring back samples. The first trip to Mars was the Viking in 1976.

Police: Botched drug deal led to killing

South Lake Tahoe police detectives believe a drug deal gone wrong led to Saturday night's shooting death of Dennis Michael Wright Jr.

The 40-year-old from Amador County was shot at least once in the chest on Jan. 30 at about 7:45pm in the parking lot of the Beverly Lodge. He died shortly thereafter at Barton Memorial Hospital.

Officers said Wright and his friend Kendra Ghiorso, 45, of Amador County were in town to deliver at least 100 pounds of marijuana.

"We recovered 100 pounds," police Lt. Brian Williams told *Lake Tahoe News*. How much may been sold prior to the shooting or if any was stolen by the suspects is unknown at this time.

Ghiorso told officers several men came and went during their interaction. One of the buyers reportedly discharged a handgun multiple times in the area of the motel parking lot, striking several vehicles.

"Ghiorso was struck violently in the head with an unidentified solid object, and believes she was possibly pistol-whipped. She sustained a significant, though non-life threatening, head injury," officers said in a press release.

There is no identifying description of the suspects, other than they are men, white and black, and in their 20s. A description of the vehicle the suspects left in is not available.

Inside the vehicle driven by Wright and Ghiorso detectives found two handguns and ammunition.

Anyone who may have information is asked to call 530.542.6100 or Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Avalanche deaths soar in the

West

By Doyle Rice, USA Today

Several “big and dangerous” avalanches took a toll on skiers, snowboarders and snowmobilers in the western USA this month, making January the deadliest month on the mountains since 2008.

January is typically the month with the most avalanche fatalities in the U.S., but this January proved worse than normal, with 11 people killed, according to the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, which tracks fatalities and accidents nationwide. Last weekend, avalanches killed four people. Overall, 14 people have died in snow slides this winter, all in the western U.S.

The 11 fatalities in this month is the largest number of deaths in January since 2008, when 19 people died in avalanches. Last year, one person died during a warm, practically snow-free January.

Read the whole story

Water an issue as Nev. lures manufacturing firms

By Megan Messerly, Las Vegas Sun

When electric car company Faraday Future was thinking of building a manufacturing plant in Southern Nevada, it needed water.

Its operation would require 630 acre-feet of water, or about the amount it takes to water one golf course, said John Entsminger, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority. With Faraday projected to directly create 4,500 jobs, the calculation was easy for officials.

Allocating water rights was one of the subjects investigated by a state panel of experts last year, who sent a list of short-term and long-term recommendations for dealing with the drought and Nevada's water supply to Gov. Brian Sandoval in November.

The panel's chairman, Leo Drozdoff, director of the state department of conservation and natural resources, said the panel was important in bringing stakeholders together to try to find common ground. Some of the recommendations could come before the Nevada Legislature in 2017.

Read the whole story

2 Tahoe skiers safe after skiing out of bounds

Two skiers are being escorted out the wilderness tonight after having skied out of bounds at Mount Rose Ski Area.

Washoe County sheriff's search and rescue team was alerted to two men needing assistance at about 4:30pm Jan. 30. At about 9:30pm they were located and being taken out of the woods.

“They are both in good condition,” Deputy Jeff McCaskill told *Lake Tahoe News*.

They are on the Slide Mountain side, and will come out via Davis Creek.

“Boundaries are in place for a reason,” McCaskill said.

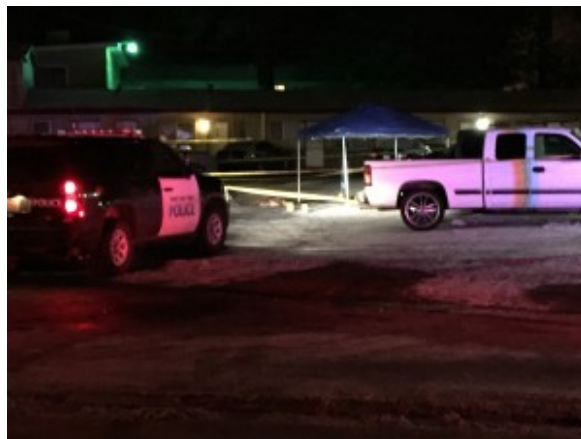
He expressed the extreme danger the two skiers placed themselves in as well as the rescue team, especially with the threat of an avalanche.

“Before you cross some of those boundary lines you might want to consider others and yourselves,” he said.

It is not known if the skiers will be cited.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Man shot to death in South Lake Tahoe



A man was shot and killed Jan. 30 at the Beverly Lodge in South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/Darcy Baker

One person has been shot to death in South Lake Tahoe and the suspects are on the loose.

Police officers were notified about 8pm Saturday that shots had been fired at the Beverly Lodge on Highway 50. When they arrived they found a man laying in the parking lot.

He was transported to Barton Memorial Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

Sgt. Travis Cabral said the man, whose name, age and hometown have not been released, was not staying at the hotel.

No one at the hotel on Jan. 30 would comment other than to say the police were there.

"We don't have a suspect in custody right now," Cabral told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Right now we have two or more suspects involved."

He added that it's possible the suspects and victim knew each other. A description of the suspects was not immediately available.

The type of gun involved and the number of shots fired is not being released at this time.

Officers would not say if this was gang related.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Officials: Major Zika outbreak unlikely in Nev.

By Pashtana Usufzy, Las Vegas Review Journal

Health officials say a disease believed to have caused a major increase in birth defects among Brazilian-born babies is unlikely to flourish in Nevada, though travelers could bring it to the state.

As of Thursday, 31 cases of Zika virus disease have been confirmed in the United States, but all are related to travel outside of the country, Southern Nevada Health District Disease Investigation and Intervention Specialist Tony Fredrick said. There are no known cases in Nevada.

Cases have been reported in 11 states, the District of Columbia, 20 countries in South and Central America, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Read the whole story

Nev. tax increase opponents not letting up

By Megan Messerly, Las Vegas Sun

A contingent of Nevada conservatives remains undeterred in its efforts to repeal a portion of Gov. Brian Sandoval's \$1.5 billion omnibus tax plan passed during the last legislative session, even as those repeal efforts remain tied up in the

courts.

Lawyers from a coalition supporting the tax plan filed an appeal with the Nevada Supreme Court this week, asking the court to reconsider a ruling made by a lower court judge last month in favor of repeal supporters.

But that isn't stopping Republican State Controller Ron Knecht and others involved with the RIP Commerce Tax PAC from continuing to push ahead in gathering signatures to get the measure on the ballot.

Read the whole story