

Snowboarder White buys stake in Mammoth

By Hugo Martin, Los Angeles Times

“The Flying Tomato” has gone from carving the slopes to owning them.

Olympic gold medal snowboarder Shaun White has taken a minority stake in the company that runs Mammoth Mountain and recently spent \$38 million to buy Snow Summit and Bear Mountain, the Southern California resorts where he perfected his ollies, rail slides and back flips.

As a part owner of Mammoth Resorts, White will help oversee the operation of more than 4,000 acres of skiable land in California, visited by more than 2 million skiers and snowboarders each year.

“It’s like a homecoming to me,” White said.

Read the whole story

Taxes being collected on water rebates

By Kurtis Ming, CBS-13

Jumping at the state’s water rebate program, Alvin Somers ripped out his lawn, and put in drought resistant plants and woodchips. California’s Save our Water program rewarded him with a check for \$1,300.

“The idea was terrific,” Somers said.

The state offered rebates of up to \$2,000 to put in drought resistant landscaping. Several cities, including Sacramento and Los Angeles have similar programs.

But many who participated in the State’s program are getting surprised with a letter stating they may owe federal taxes on it. If your rebate was \$600 or more, the letter reads, “We have been instructed by the Internal Revenue Services (IRS) that in order to comply with federal tax rules, you must... file a 1040 form registering your rebate for federal tax purposes.”

Read the whole story

\$4.5M award to Amtrak upheld in deadly Nev. truck crash

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO – A federal judge has refused to grant a new trial for a Nevada trucking company ordered to pay more than \$4.5 million in damages to Amtrak after a truck slammed into a passenger train at a rural highway crossing in 2011, killing six people.

Conductor Laurette Lee, 68, of South Lake Tahoe was one of those who died.

A U.S. District Court jury in Reno returned the verdict in September 2014 against the Battle Mountain-based John Davis Trucking.

The jurors concluded the truck driver who was killed along with five people on the California Zephyr was primarily to

blame for the fiery crash in Northern Nevada's high desert about 60 miles northeast of Reno.

Lawyers for the trucking company argued in a motion for a rehearing that Judge Howard McKibben should have instructed the jury to consider evidence suggesting a faulty signal and crossing gate could have contributed to the collision on Highway 95 just south of Interstate 80.

McKibben ruled Monday the verdict – which also awarded more than \$210,000 to the Union Pacific Railroad for damage to the tracks – was a reasonable one.

John Davis Trucking “received a fair trial,” McKibben wrote in a four-page order, adding that the company's motion was “comprised largely of arguments it has already raised – some repeatedly – and which the court has already decided.”

“The verdicts were not contrary to the clear weight of the evidence, the damages were reasonable and supported by the evidence and there is no basis for concluding that the jury was presented with false or perjurious evidence,” he said.

The National Transportation Safety Board concluded in December 2012 that the probable cause of the accident was an inattentive trucker with a history of speeding violations driving an empty tractor-trailer with faulty brakes.

The California Zephyr bound from Chicago to Emeryville was three hours behind schedule when it left Salt Lake City on June 24, 2011. It was going 77 mph in Nevada's Forty Mile Desert when it approached the crossing north of Fallon, the NTSB said.

With the whistle blaring, the engineer initiated the emergency brakes about 450 feet from the crossing, the agency said. Rubber skid marks on the highway showed the truck driver hit his brakes 300 feet from the tracks but skidded nearly the length of a football field into the second car behind the

engine. The truck embedded in the side of a crew car, which ultimately was destroyed by the fire that also charred a passenger car behind it.

The driver, Larry Valli, 43, of Winnemucca, was killed along with the train's conductor and four passengers.

Nevada follows national trend in families seeking alternatives to public schools

By Ian Whitakern, Las Vegas Sun

It's National School Choice Week, which seems like an appropriate time to take stock of how the school choice movement is doing in Nevada.

In two words: Pretty good.

School choice activists, buoyed by local conservative advocacy groups like the Nevada Policy Research Institute, have been particularly muscular in the Silver State recently following the state's adoption of education savings accounts, which provide state funds for students to attend private schools. Similarly, enrollment and demand for charter and magnet schools also has been high.

Read the whole story

Douglas County grapples with solar regulations

By Anne Knowles

GARDNERVILLE – Douglas County is revising its ordinance for solar facilities after two large-scale projects failed to gain approval last year amidst public protest.

County officials this week wrapped up a series of 10 meetings with participants from the county's towns and general improvement districts as well as business associations including the Carson Valley Agricultural Association.

The goal is to gather feedback to craft an ordinance that reflects the county's different constituents who are at odds over the issue, including ranchers who want the option of selling or leasing their land to plant developers and some county residents who say they don't want Carson Valley's pristine landscape spoiled by acres of solar panels.

The county, like all in Nevada, is required by state law passed in 2013 to allow, with reasonable restrictions, solar energy installations like the two applied for and rejected last year.

Those projects were the 320-acre plant on Bentley Ranch land proposed by E.On Climate and Renewables, which was denied a special use permit by the county's Planning Commission, and a 20-megawatt operation on 260 acres off Muller Lane.

The latter project was granted a special use permit, but it was appealed by Muller Lane homeowners Steve and Mary Walker to the Board of County Commission, which upheld the appeal.

Greenstone subsequently sued the county and the case is making its way through the court.

After reviewing the feedback, Douglas County planners will rewrite the ordinance and post it to the county web site by Feb. 2. The ordinance then goes to the Planning Commission on Feb. 9 and before the county commission at its March and April meetings, according to Hope Sullivan, planning manager.

Sullivan and Cynthea Gregory, deputy district attorney, led the recent public and private meetings, including the final gathering Jan. 25 at the Douglas County Community Center here.

About 40 people, all residents, attended the meeting, which included background on the issue, but focused on hearing public comment.

Nearly everyone spoke and there was broad consensus on a few ideas, while others were shot down as infeasible.

Several people suggested an ordinance so cumbersome that it would deter any solar development in the valley.

"We must request the BOCC to make this so difficult that it never happens," said one woman. "We can't allow solar companies to come in and ruin this beautiful valley."

But state law prohibits "unreasonable restrictions," and any ordinance must be legally defensible, meaning it would hold up under court scrutiny.

"Any restriction must have a rationale," Gregory told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting.

Jim Slade, a county resident, suggested the utility selling the power generated by the solar installation be required to sell to Nevada customers and not to consumers in California.

The idea that developers are trying to exploit Nevada's less onerous environmental regulations to serve customers in

California came up often during last year's battles over the projects.

But Gregory said that was unconstitutional. The dormant commerce clause, a clause implied by the Commerce Clause that gives the federal government the power to regulate interstate commerce, says states cannot discriminate against one another.

"I support solar and renewable but they do need an (special use permit)," said Slade. "I think it should not be in RA-5, RA-10 or A-19. It should be in FR-19. It shouldn't be within half a mile of homes. Others would say one to two miles. I like a lot of things Churchill did. We should use that as a template."

There was broad consensus at the meeting to exclude the three zones Slade mentioned, which are all designations for agriculture.

Currently, photovoltaic solar facilities are allowed with an special use permit in those zones as well as in LI for light industrial, PF for public facilities and FR-19 and FR-40 or forest and range.

Churchill County has the most restrictive ordinance of surrounding counties, according to Sullivan. It says studies and environmental assessments including effect on wildlife and water, and plans for closure and removal may all be required.

Sullivan said the Planning Commission and BOCC will receive all of the public comment before the revised ordinance is voted on, most likely at the BOCC's April meeting.

DEA hired TSA to take cash from luggage

By Nick Wing, Huffington Post

A Department of Justice watchdog officially condemned the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration this month, following a report that the agency had recruited a Transportation Security Administration security screener to search bags for cash that the DEA could confiscate.

The very existence of such a partnership highlights much broader concerns about the controversial legal practice known as civil asset forfeiture, which critics say contorts law enforcement priorities and props up a system of policing for profit.

In a summary of its investigation, the DOJ's Office of the Inspector General concluded that the agreement "violated DEA policy" on a number of levels. While the OIG determined that the TSA informant never provided any actionable information to the DEA, it concluded that the plans to pay the agent out of the cash he or she helped seize "could have violated individuals' protection against unreasonable searches and seizures if it led to a subsequent DEA enforcement action."

Read the whole story

Girl survives fall from

Sierra-at-Tahoe chairlift

A young girl on a school trip to Sierra-at-Tahoe fell from the Grandview chairlift on Wednesday morning.

The skier was taken by ambulance to Barton Memorial Hospital after the 11:30am incident on Jan. 27.

“From everything we understood she is in good health,” Steve Hemphill, spokesman for the resort, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He did not know if the safety bar was in use at the time of the fall. The girl fell between towers three and four. The height between the varies. The exact distance she fell is unknown.

She was riding with someone else on the four-seater express lift. What led to her falling is being investigated.

Ski patrol responded immediately and the lift continued to operate. The incident was treated like an on-mountain injury.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Calif. snowpack deepest in five years

By Veronica Rocha, Los Angeles Times

California’s current snowpack is the deepest it has been in five years – a modest, yet encouraging milestone in a period of prolonged drought.

Readings of the Sierra Nevada snowpack on Tuesday showed water

content statewide was 18.7 inches, or 115% of the historical average for that date, according to the California Department of Water Resources.

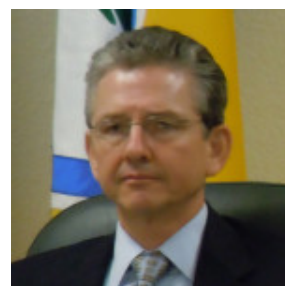
Water officials say the good news is that California's snowpack and reservoirs have benefited from El Niño rainstorms. But they warned that it was too soon to determine whether winter rains were enough to make any major dent on the California's drought.

Read the whole story

EDC denies settlement with Santiago, Briggs

By Kathryn Reed

Norma Santiago and Ron Briggs, the former El Dorado County supervisors who think they should have been paid more when they were in office, could not reach an agreement this week with their former employer.



Ron Briggs



Norma Santiago

The Board of Supervisors in closed session on Jan. 26 turned down their settlement offer.

The former electeds believe they are owed cost of living adjustments and money for not taking time off as a manager, which individually could equate to nearly \$100,000.

The county's stance is that per the state Constitution a salary increase for the board must be done by ordinance. This never happened.

Santiago and Briggs have combined their cases into one, with both using the same attorney. Both left office in January 2015.

The county is being represented by outside counsel.

Judges in El Dorado County have recused themselves, so Judge Charles Wachob in Placer County has been assigned the case.

Both sides have February and March deadlines to file necessary documents, with a hearing set for May 13.

Nevada may expand gun

background checks

By Megan Messerly, Las Vegas Sun

Advocates of gun control raked in \$3.6 million over the last two years to place an initiative to tighten background checks for gun purchases and transfers in Nevada on the November ballot and ensure it passes.

The initiative is part of a broader national push to establish universal background check laws state by state after an effort to do so on the federal level failed in 2013. Mostly recently, Washington passed an expanded background check law through the ballot initiative process in 2014, and Oregon's legislature approved a similar law last year.

In total, 18 states have enacted background check laws that go beyond what federal law requires. Nevada is poised to become the 19th.

Read the whole story