

Study: Hunger, homelessness on the rise

By Ned Resnikoff, Al Jazeera

Many of America's largest cities continue to grapple with rising food insecurity and homelessness, according to a report released by the U.S. Conference of Mayors on Tuesday. The latest iteration of the non-partisan group's annual Hunger and Homelessness Survey found that homeless shelters and food pantries across 22 U.S. cities are struggling to keep up with rising demand for their services.

It is in Washington, D.C., Seattle, and Los Angeles where homelessness was found to have increased the most sharply over the past year. The largest increase came in Washington, D.C., where the number of people experiencing homelessness rose by 28 percent and the number of homeless families went up by 60 percent. Meanwhile, requests for emergency food assistance in the city rose by 27 percent during the same period.

Overall, across the 22 cities included in the survey, homelessness increased by 1.6 percent over the past year, the survey found. The amount of emergency food assistance distributed by those cities increased by three percent. The cities surveyed included Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Read the whole story

Fundraisers pocket nearly half of charity donations

By Teri Sforza, Orange County Register

Commercial fundraisers – the middlemen who hit you up for charitable donations by phone, mail and outside the supermarket – often pocket a big chunk of the dough. And it's only growing: They extracted a stunning 90 percent more money from do-gooders in 2014 as they did in 2013, according to the California Attorney General's latest numbers.

These often for-profit firms raked in \$687.7 million from well-meaning Californians last year. They gave a bit more than half of it to charities – \$371.9 million – and kept \$315.8 million for themselves.

Most kind-hearted donors have no idea that so much of their donation gets waylaid, and some in the fundraising business have harsh words for the charities that employ them.

Read the whole story

Sinatra's old Tahoe casino to reopen in May

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Frank Sinatra's fans celebrated his 100th birthday earlier this month, but there was something missing from the festivities: the Cal Neva Resort & Casino, the Lake Tahoe hotel once owned by the legendary entertainer.

The Cal Neva, closed for renovations since September 2013, was scheduled to reopen on the late singer's 100th birthday, Dec. 12.

But construction has taken longer than expected, and now the venerable north shore property is set to reopen next May 26 with an international hotel operator in charge.

Read the whole story

Economy, snow increase Reno airport traffic

By Marcella Corona, Reno Gazette-Journal

Reno could see the largest crowd of holiday visitors since the recession with the local airport wrangling in a high number of travelers comparable to that of Burning Man, an airport spokesman said Wednesday.

The Reno-Tahoe Airport expects to see more than 12,000 travelers through Jan. 3, spokesman Brian Kulpin said. That means full seats in and out of the airport, he said.

"It looks fantastic," Kulpin said. "We are looking at terrific numbers this holiday season, probably the best numbers we've seen in six to seven years."

Read the whole story

EDC loses lawsuit regarding apartment project

El Dorado County lost a court decision this month involving the El Dorado Hills Town Center Apartments project.

The Board of Supervisors approved the project on Dec. 2, 2014.

Citizens for Sensible Development in El Dorado Hills filed a lawsuit saying the supervisors abused their discretionary authority when it ignored the El Dorado Hills Specific Plan, the El Dorado Hills Area Planning Advisory Committee, and the El Dorado County Planning Commission, in addition to violating the county's general plan, density limits, design standards, and the requirement to mitigate impacts to infrastructure in approving the Town Center Apartments project.

"Legal mulling will need to occur in the near future," Robyn Drivon, El Dorado County's chief attorney, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She likely won't be doing the mulling since she is leaving the job early next month.

The Dec. 18 court ruling in part says, "The court finds that the project at issue is a new project, not a modified one and that substantial evidence exists to support a fair argument of significant traffic environmental impacts due to the project, despite existing or planned mitigation. The court also finds that in approving the project, respondent has not proceeded as required by law under CEQA."

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Field needs to be built to keep SnowGlobe

By Kathryn Reed

The rush this fall to have the documents signed to create the Community Play Consortium had a lot to do with money. Money in regards to the three-day SnowGlobe music festival that starts Tuesday, money from Lake Tahoe Community College's facility's bond, money to be spent on **future fields** and the potential income they will generate.

When talks of creating the consortium started early this year it was uncovered that the deeds for the properties from more than a decade ago were never recorded properly. That has all been rectified.

The parcels include the old Caltrans right-of-way that the California Tahoe Conservancy obtained after the transportation department decided not to build a freeway there, South Lake Tahoe land, LTCC property and a floating acre Lake Tahoe Unified School District has contributed on which a baseball field will be it. It's all in the area of the current community play field in South Lake Tahoe. The old Caltrans parcel is now the city's. Half of the playfield is on it, the other half of the playfield is owned by the college.

The city and LTCC transferred easements to the consortium, not land ownership. Therefore the consortium controls the use of that field and the future fields that are planned to be adjacent to the current one.

The college and city make up the consortium. **LTUSD chose** not to be a part of it.



This will be the last year SnowGlobe uses LTCC's synthetic turf field. Photo Copyright 2014 Carolyn E. Wright

"SnowGlobe was always part of the conversation because the college, city and school district wanted to make sure whoever owns the land that they were properly insured," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Alcohol sales at SnowGlobe have been one of the issues for the parties to deal with.

"It was not a major factor, but it was a factor," LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News* as to why the district is not in the consortium. "I am not a real supporter of SnowGlobe, but will do whatever the community supports."

The district, as is the norm for most K-12 institutions, has a zero tolerance policy for drugs and alcohol on its grounds.

The college has policies in place as well regarding alcohol, but they are more flexible. To get around alcohol being sold

on campus the beer booths have always been on city property – on the asphalt on the mountain side of the set up. The consumption, well, that is allowed everywhere.

“If the field is under the control of the consortium, under the easements our laws don’t apply. That is part of the reason why we were working so hard when we realized the easements were not in effect so SnowGlobe could take place this year,” Kindred Murillo, LTCC president, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Chad Donnelly, SnowGlobe founder and promoter, did not return *LTN*’s call asking how big of a deal alcohol sales are for the three day event that runs Dec. 29-31.

“We don’t have restrictions about selling alcohol. What the city can’t do is make money off alcohol sales,” Kerry said. “The nonprofits that work with SnowGlobe get a percentage of the alcohol sales.”

This will be SnowGlobe’s final year on the field where Lake Tahoe Community College’s soccer team plays. That is because the college intends to replace that field next year at a cost that is likely to exceed \$1.6 million.

The money in part will come from the college, and part from the city via Measure S/R dollars.

“We are looking at a pretty high quality synthetic field. We are looking at some of new techniques that do not off gas,” Murillo said. “That is under investigation, to put in the latest and best and most safe field. That field is so hard and off gassing. We believe it really needs to be replaced as soon as possible.”

Talks are under way with Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to begin work before the May 1 opening of construction season so the field would be ready for the soccer teams in August.

In order to invest bond money into the new field, the college

has to have “reasonable use of that property for the life of the investment,” Murillo said. This means the college’s athletic department and all other programs get first priority on that field.

The city next year is looking to build a field next to it that will be sod. It would be a secondary field and where SnowGlobe could go in the coming years. The city and Donnelly have a three-year contract, with this being year two.

Donnelly was asked what he thought about having to come up with a new configuration, but he chose not to answer that question.

The college is likely to provide parking lots for future SnowGlobes. As to whether anything else would be used is up for negotiation.

“Once we build the new field it will be a better location (for SnowGlobe),” Kerry said. “It will be natural. You can’t damage it like synthetic.” She envisions the possibility of vendors and foot traffic going on the new synthetic field.

That will be up to the consortium – not the college. And right now it’s just the college and city in the consortium.

Study: Poor kids already a year behind at age 4

By Roberto A. Ferdman, Washington Post

Wealthy parents aren’t just able to send their kids to top pre-schools—they can also purchase the latest learning technology and ensure their children experience as many

museums, concerts and other cultural experiences as possible. Low-income parents, on the other hand, don't have that opportunity. Instead, they're often left to face the reality of sending their kids to schools without having had the chance to provide an edifying experience at home.

That might sound foreboding if not hyperbolic, but it's a serious and widespread problem in the United States, where poor kids enter school already a year behind the kids of wealthier parents. That deficit is among the largest in the developed world, and it can be extraordinarily difficult to narrow later in life.

This is one of the key takeaways from a new book about how United States is failing its children. The book, called "Too Many Children Left Behind", is written by Columbia University Professor Jane Waldfogel, a long-time researcher of poverty and inequality. And it will force almost anyone to reflect on the impact of unchecked inequality on children.

Read the whole story

Reno airport files complaint against U.S. Customs

By Jane Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

Officials with the Reno-Tahoe International Airport are decrying the treatment of a 15-year-old girl by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents at the airport when she flew to Reno from Guadalajara, Mexico in November and was

allegedly detained, questioned for five hours and unable to contact family.

On Monday, Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority board chairman Andy Wirth and Marilyn Mora, the president and CEO of the airport, said they filed a formal complaint on Dec. 16 against the federal agency. Both Wirth and Mora said they have been hearing from the local Hispanic community since this summer about alleged mistreatment by federal border protection agents at the airport, which added the direct flight to Mexico about a year ago.

“She was coming to visit her family for the holidays and was treated in a way that should not be tolerated in our airport, our community or in our country,” Wirth said of the 15-year-old girl, whose identity is being withheld by the airport because she is a minor. “The treatment she received was appalling on every level and deeply disconcerting.”

Frank Falcon, a spokesman for Customs and Border Protection in San Francisco, said he had not heard of the situation in Reno until a reporter called him on Monday.

Airport officials noted that they have been receiving complaints of the customs process in Reno since late summer this year.

Read the whole story

Transportation bills change

in Calif. Jan. 1

Several transportation related laws take effect Jan. 1 in California.

Here are a few:

- **Driving Under the Influence (SB 61, Hill):** This law extends the existing Ignition Interlock Device (IID) pilot project to July 1, 2017 for Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Tulare counties. The IID pilot project requires a person convicted of a DUI to install an IID for five months upon a first offense, 12 months for a second offense, 24 months for a third offense, and 36 months for a fourth or subsequent offense.
- **Traffic Amnesty (SB 405, Hertzberg):** Among other things, this law amends the criteria for a person to be eligible for the traffic citation amnesty program. The traffic amnesty program was approved through the 2015-16 Budget Act. A person is eligible for the traffic amnesty program if he or she has not made any payments after Sept. 30, 2015, to a collection program for fines or bail already due. The law also indicates that payment of bail, fines, penalties, fees, or a civil assessment is not required in order for the court to remove the civil assessment of up to \$300 against any defendant who fails, after notice and without good cause, to appear in court.
- **Earbuds or Headsets (SB 491, Transportation Committee):** This law, among other things, makes it unlawful to wear a headset covering, earplugs in, or earphones covering, resting on, or inserted in, both ears, while operating a motor vehicle or a bicycle. This prohibition does not apply to persons operating authorized emergency vehicles, construction equipment and refuse or waste equipment while wearing a headset or safety earplugs.
- **Pedal-Powered Vehicles (SB 530, Pan):** This law expands

the definition of pedicab to include a four-wheeled device that is pedal-powered, has a seating capacity for eight or more passengers, cannot travel in excess of 15 mph, and is being used for transporting passengers for hire. This law sets requirements related to local authorization, operator qualifications and training, financial responsibility, accident reporting, safety equipment, and inspections. The law establishes rules and standards for pedicabs that allow passengers to consume alcohol on board, if authorized by local ordinance or resolution

- Consumer Protection – Starter Interrupt Warning (AB 265, Holden): This law requires a “buy-here-pay-here” dealer to make certain disclosures and notices to a vehicle buyer when a vehicle is sold with tracking and starter interrupt technology installed. This law also requires advance warning be given to the purchaser prior to engagement of the starter interrupt technology, if the buyer fails to make timely vehicle payments. A “buy-here-pay-here” dealer is defined as a used car dealer that assigns less than 90 percent of their conditional sales and lease contracts to third party lenders; and therefore provide direct financing to car buyers.
- Electrically Motorized Skateboards (AB 604, Olsen): This law defines “electrically motorized board,” and restricts their operation on public facilities, requires boards to be equipped with safety equipment, and authorizes cities and counties to regulate their use. It also makes it a crime to operate an electrically motorized board while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In addition, the law limits the board’s operation to individuals 16 years or older, requires operators to wear a bicycle helmet, wear safety equipment to increase visibility at night, and limits their operation to roads with a speed limit of 35 miles per hour or less. A conviction for violating this law is punishable by a fine of up to \$250.

- **Electric Bicycles (AB 1096, Chiu):** This law adds an entirely new definition of an electric bicycle to the California Vehicle Code. An electric bicycle is defined as a bicycle with fully operable pedals and an electric motor of less than 750 watts. The law creates three classes of electric bicycles. Manufacturers will also need to certify the electric bicycles comply with specified requirements. Electric bicycle riders will be able to use roads similar to other bicycle riders, while providing a measure of local control if safety concerns arise on specific paths or public trails.
- **Transportation Network Companies (AB 1422, Cooper):** This new law requires a transportation network company (TNC) to participate in the DMV's Employer Pull Notice (EPN) Program. TNCs provide prearranged transportation services for compensation using an online-enabled application or platform, to connect drivers using their personal vehicles with passengers. The program will provide each TNC with a report showing a driver's current public record, as recorded by the department, and immediate notifications of moving violations, accidents, driver license suspensions, revocations, and other actions taken against the driving privilege. The DMV's EPN program provides employers and regulatory agencies with a means of promoting driver safety through the ongoing review of driver records.
- **California New Motor Voter Program (AB 1461, Gonzalez),** creates an automatic voter registration process for qualified individuals who apply for a driver's license or identification card, or submit a change of address to the DMV. The law will require that DMV implement the New Motor Voter Act no later than one year after the Secretary of State certifies all of the following: the state has a statewide voter registration database that complies with the requirements of the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002 (52 U.S.C. Section 20901 et seq.), the Legislature, has appropriated the funds

necessary for the Secretary of State and DMV to implement and maintain the program, and the secretary of State has adopted regulations to implement the law.

- California Residency Requirement (AB 1465, Gordon): This law will require an applicant for an original driver license or identification card to provide proof of California state residency, starting July 1, 2016, and it will bring DMV into compliance with a federal law requirement. The DMV will need to adopt regulations relating to the procedures for verifying that the applicant is a California resident.

Low water level allows pipe removal at Tahoe



Boy Scouts take the initiative to remove a pipe from shores of Lake Tahoe. Photos/Devin Middlebrook

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By Devin Middlebrook

The low water level at Lake Tahoe is the starkest reminder of the current drought, with piers and marinas reaching out over sand and rocks that are normally hidden from view.

But sand and rocks are not the only objects being exposed by the drought.

Near Tahoe City, a long-abandoned, cast-iron pipe sat just below the surface for decades, having only the occasional run-in with a boat propeller or kayaker. Installed in the early 1900s, the pipe originally delivered drinking water to Tahoe Tavern from Watson Lake to the north. With the receding lake level, the pipe, now strewn along the shoreline, was visible to all that visited the area.

That is where Eagle Scout candidate Cyrus Miller, 16, and the rest of Boy Scout Troop 228 from Danville decided to step in. With a large section of the pipe now exposed, the troop wanted to take advantage of the situation.

"This drought made it a unique and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Miller said. "We wanted to complete a project that made a big impact."



The beach with the exposed pipe.

With this goal in mind, Miller and his troop developed a plan to remove the pipe and return the area to a more natural state. Working closely with local agencies – Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, California Fish and Wildlife Service, California Division of State Lands, Placer County Museums, property owners, NV Energy, Tahoe Tavern, and Tavern Shores – the troop created a comprehensive plan for safely removing the pipe.

Using a few power tools and a lot of determination, the seven scouts cut the lengthy pipe into manageable sections. They then removed these smaller sections from the lakebed.

The sections were hauled away and recycled with a little help from Hansen Management & Maintenance Company of Tahoe City. The scouts then cleaned the project area, making it as though the pipe was never there.



The beach with the pipe removed.

Over the two-day project, the scout troop removed 700 feet of pipe from the lakebed.

At the end of day two, Miller looked over the project area and said, "It is amazing how much of an impact our troop's hard work made."

Several pieces of the pipe were donated to the Placer County Museum; where they will live on to tell the story of Lake Tahoe and its rich history.

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