

Park brothers fire Hard Rock management team



Hundreds turned out for the January opening of Lake Tahoe Hard Rock; since then the crowds have been lackluster. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

The Park brothers have fired the management team that was running Lake Tahoe Hard Rock.

Warner Hospitality, which 18 months ago was brought in to operate the remodeled-rebranded Horizon, has been a failure, **according to employees**. The Parks finally agreed.

No one from Warner, the fired firm based in Las Vegas, returned a call.

Brothers David and Jon Park, who own the Stateline hotel-casino, deferred comment to their PR team, the Bauserman Group

based in Reno. However, they were not available.

Two veteran casino executives have taken over the management reins at Lake Tahoe Hard Rock. Rick Stevens is president and COO of the Navegante Group. The company provides managerial and development services to the gaming industry. Founder Larry J. Woolf is well known on the South Shore. In 1984 he took the failing Caesars Tahoe (now MontBleu) and in one year turned it into a profitable property.

Jim Roets most recently worked in Las Vegas in gaming operations and casino marketing, but is said to be “a long time Northern Nevada gaming consultant,” according to a press release.

Together the two will be responsible for getting the Hard Rock onto solid ground after what has been a shaky start from its January opening. Besides disgruntled employees, the property still doesn't have a working pool and hasn't settled with the contractor who did the \$60 million in renovations. Plus, there is the guest relations piece that needs improving.

The Parks say they intend to be more involved from here on out.

High court declines appeal over Calif.'s top-two primary

By Associated Press

The Supreme Court is turning away a challenge from minor political parties in California that claim they are essentially excluded from general election ballots because of

the state's top-two primary system.

The justices on Tuesday rejected an appeal from the Green and Libertarian parties, among others.

California voters approved the new primary system in 2010. The top two candidates advance to the general election, regardless of political affiliation. The idea was to fight polarization and encourage primary candidates to appeal to a wider pool of voters.

But minor parties say their candidates almost never are on the ballot in November, when millions more people vote than in the June primaries. The parties say the new system violates their constitutional right of political association.

Poll: Growing majority calls drought 'extremely serious'

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

After four years of relentless drought, more Californians are worried about water shortages than ever, despite El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean that are boosting hopes for a wet winter.

A Field Poll released Tuesday showed that 76 percent of registered California voters now call the state's water situation "extremely serious," up from 66 percent in May and 60 percent in April 2014.

During one of the state's other historic droughts, in 1977, when rainfall totals were similarly low, just 51 percent

called the situation “extremely serious,” although that drought only lasted two years.

Read the whole story

SNC student found safe

Sierra Nevada College student Dianne Thacher, who had been reported missing days ago after traveling to Santa Barbara, has been found.

She is back in Incline Village.

The Washoe County Sheriff’s Office has confirmed that she is safe, not injured and that there was no foul play associated with her disappearance.

Deputies said Thacher allegedly met a male acquaintance from Lompoc when her vehicle received a flat tire. Her cell phone battery died shortly afterward. Thacher reportedly stayed with the male acquaintance for several days at various locations in Santa Barbara County. When she left to return home, he saw the media coverage indicating that she was a missing person and contacted the sheriff’s office.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. retracts plans to have violent criminals be firefighters

By Don Thompson, AP

SACRAMENTO — California corrections officials on Tuesday dropped a plan to include prisoners with violent backgrounds in the nation's largest and oldest inmate firefighting unit, a day after the proposal was first reported by the Associated Press.

The state still plans to expand the program to include inmates who have up to seven years left to serve on their sentences, instead of the current five years, Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation spokesman Jeffrey Callison told the AP.

But as for considering inmates who have been convicted of violent crimes, "We will not be changing that," he said. "We're not looking to expand the list of crimes that inmates have committed when considering who is eligible for fire camp service."

The story drew nationwide attention as California endures four years of drought and a deadly fire season. Public safety concerns were raised by critics including the union representing state firefighters who oversee the inmates while they are fighting fires.

However, Callison denied that the publicity killed the proposal.

"Nothing was finalized, and even without the stories who knows what might have emerged?" he said.

The department continues to search for ways to increase the pool of potential firefighters, he said. The number has been

falling in recent years because lower-level offenders are being sent to county jails instead of state prisons.

Currently about 3,800 inmates assist professional firefighters in California, but that is down from about 4,400 in previous years.

The department considers only inmates with no history of violent crimes, but had proposed adding inmates convicted of violent offenses such as assaults and robberies if they had attained a minimum-security classification after years of good behavior.

Corrections spokesman Bill Sessa had told the AP the proposal was in the final review stage within his department. It had not yet been sent to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which said it also would have had to approve the changes.

The two agencies formed a committee this summer to consider how to keep the firefighter program adequately staffed. The committee is considering using inmates with longer sentences left to serve, said CalFire spokeswoman Janet Upton, but had not been asked to consider using inmates with violent backgrounds.

"They listened to the public sentiment, which is very well appreciated," said Mike Lopez, president of the union representing state firefighters who oversee inmates at fire scenes. "It sounds like now they're taking a step back and reevaluating their process, which is a good thing."

The AP reported that even firefighters serving time for nonviolent crimes have committed in hundreds of assaults and batteries, along with weapons possessions, indecent exposures and other crimes in the last 10 years. Officials said the rate is much lower than in higher-security prisons.

The inmate firefighters are guarded by a few correctional

officers while in the state's 43 unfenced camps, but while fighting fires are overseen only by unarmed CalFire captains. They use hand tools to build fire breaks through terrain that is inaccessible to bulldozers, and made up about one of every five state, federal and local firefighters battling recent blazes.

Experts: Wet winter would hurt Tahoe's clarity

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe's clarity will take a serious hit if El Nino materializes this winter.

That was the message delivered Tuesday night by a panel of stormwater experts.

Winter is coming – Is Lake Tahoe Ready? was the subject of the talk hosted by the League to Save Lake Tahoe on Oct. 13 at Lake Tahoe Community College. No, was the simple answer.

While predictions of a grand El Nino keep being reinforced by weather experts, the fact is the Lake Tahoe Basin is on the northern end of the weather system's path. Today the chance of a significant El Nino for this area is a little more than 30 percent.

It was also pointed out that El Ninos have meant extreme wet and extreme dry winters for Tahoe. Which it will be is not ascertainable by the experts' models.

"If we have a big year, we'll see the effects of that. That doesn't mean we won't recover," said Alan Heyvaert with the

Desert Research Institute in Reno. "If we have a big rain year, we will see the lake degrade."

While public landowners throughout the basin have put in a billion dollars worth of stormwater systems in the last 15 years, they are for the most part designed for the 20-year storm. That means if something more extreme arrives, the systems may overflow, causing untreated water to reach Lake Tahoe. This in turn degrades the clarity.

For Russ Wigart, who heads El Dorado County's stormwater program, he is more concerned about the 100-year runoff than the 100-year storm.

Wigart and Jason Burke, stormwater manager for South Lake Tahoe, each went over the slew of systems in place to keep sediment from reaching this alpine lake. They agree more than 70 percent of the particles clouding the lake comes from the urban environment. Wigart at first said 90 percent of that 70 percent is from roads, with commercial properties the next largest contributor, then residential sites. Then he waffled and said there is no exact breakdown of what makes up the 70-plus percent.

Even so, the bulk of the infrastructure being put in is to treat what is flowing off the roads. This is done through stormwater basins, sweeping the streets – particularly after brine or decomposed granite (a traction substance) has been applied in winter.

It wasn't until the late 1990s that people started to realize roads are conduits for bringing gunk to the lake. It has been in the last handful of years since the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board put in the total maximum daily load mandate that jurisdictions, state departments of transportation and others started to make road runoff such a priority.

Even to this day no one knows how many outfalls there are into

Lake Tahoe. Heyvaert said there are 170 that have been documented. Pipes carrying the dirtiest water are getting filtration systems first.

Suit: Nestle using expired permit to grab Calif. water

By Geoffrey Mohan, Los Angeles Times

Environmental groups sued the U.S. Forest Service on Tuesday, alleging that the agency has allowed Nestle Waters to draw water from a creek in the San Bernardino Mountains under a permit that expired more than 25 years ago.

The company, owner of the Arrowhead bottled water brand, has drawn millions of gallons from the west fork of Strawberry Creek under a permit it apparently acquired in 2002.

At a time when residents have been asked to cut back water use during the record-setting drought, the diversion for commercial bottling to consumers once again has put Nestle in the cross hairs of the state's water squabbles. The company faces scrutiny over its water withdrawal activities elsewhere in the state.

Read the whole story

Calif. may allow inmate firefighters with violent pasts



Inmate crews were used on the Washington Fire near Markleeville this summer. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Associated Press

California officials are considering allowing inmates with violent backgrounds to work outside prison walls fighting wildfires, and the idea is generating concerns about public safety.

The state has the nation's largest and oldest inmate firefighting unit, with about 3,800 members who provide critical assistance to professional firefighters. That's down from about 4,400 in previous years, however, and so prison officials are looking for ways to add inmates.

Now, only minimum-security inmates with no history of violent crimes can participate. Starting next year, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is proposing adding inmates convicted of violent offenses such as assaults and robberies, if their security classification level has been

reduced after years of good behavior.

Officials also are seeking to allow inmates who have up to seven years left on their sentences instead of the current five. Arsonists, kidnappers, sex offenders, gang affiliates and those serving life sentences for murder and other crimes would still be excluded.

“All it does is enlarge the pool of inmates we look at, but it doesn’t change the nature of the inmate that we put in camp,” Corrections spokesman Bill Sessa told the Associated Press. “We still are not going to put an inmate in camp that has a violent attitude.”

The changes are pending final approval within the Corrections Department. They still have not been sent to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which says it also must sign off.

The proposal comes at a time when the overall prison population is smaller and drought has created the potential for explosive wildfires like the ones that recently roared through the Sierra foothills and communities north of Napa, in Northern California.

Mike Lopez, president of the union representing state firefighters who oversee inmates at fire scenes, supports a robust inmate program but worries about what the proposed changes could bring.

“Any acceptance of criminals with a violent background calls into question the security of our membership,” he said, adding, “at what risk is CalFire willing to go to get those inmates?”

SNC student missing after trip to SoCal

By Jack Perry, Providence Journal



Dianne Thacher

A sheriff's office in California is asking for help in finding a 23-year-old college student from Rhode Island.

Dianne Thacher's family has not heard from her since Oct. 5, and the family reported her missing Oct. 11, according to the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office.

Thacher, who is from South Kingstown and a student at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village, was reportedly in the Santa Barbara area to meet friends and was last seen checking out of a motel on Oct. 6.

[Read the whole story](#)

Sierra's slopes cleared of

debris, ready for snow



Crushed empties no longer litter the slopes of Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – It might behoove skiers and snowboarders to adopt the hikers' mantras of "leave not trace" and "pack it in, pack it out".

More than a ton of trash (2,047.6 pounds to be exact) was removed from the slopes of Sierra-at-Tahoe on Sunday. This was the ninth year the ski resort near Echo Summit put a call out to people to rid the woods of debris. A record number – more than 400 – showed up.



James Gasper of Camino, who has been picking up trash at Sierra every year, says the beginner slopes have the most garbage.

It was a family event on Oct. 11 for the Atchisons of Roseville. Sierra is where they regularly ski.

"It's paying it forward to Tahoe," is how Sierra Atchison put it. She was there with her husband, Anthony, and their kids Sidney, 14, and A.J., 10.

"I love this mountain. I want to give back for everything they do for us," Charlie Plamondon told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The senior at El Dorado High School was with a bunch of his ski-snowboard teammates picking up trash. Sierra is where they train and race.



A lift ticket more than 20-years-old – based on it saying the resort's original name – was found under the West Bowl lift.

John Rice, the resort's general manager, said the cleanup day started as a way for young riders to see what the mountain looks like this time of year when empties are tossed from a chairlift. He told *Lake Tahoe News* this event really hits home and gets people to think twice.

Still, empty beer cans were the dominant items scattered under West Bowl chairlift. Bottles – some intact, some shattered – also littered the slopes.

People had a choice to do an easy, moderate or more advanced route – with West Bowl being the advanced. Everyone rode up Nob Hill chairlift and then dispersed from there.

One guy said it takes six pairs of eyes on any given area to make sure it is pristine. It's easy to miss tiny scraps of paper and plastic do-dads whose purpose only the owner knows.



More than 2,000 pounds of trash were carted off the slopes.

Rylan Thomas, who is out from Roanoke, Va., working for the U.S. Forest Service, hauled in the most garbage for one person, at least by weight. On Dogwood he found a cog for a ski lift. It weighed 95 pounds. He rigged a system with ropes, his belt and PVC pipe to drag it halfway down the mountain.

Two of the nastiest items were a tampon applicator and underwear.

More common debris included parts of bindings and ski poles.

Skis and snowboards that were lost are now recovered. If they aren't claimed, they go the finder.



Kyle Smaine, who rides for Sierra, chills in the chair he found.

A couple oldies but goodies were a Sierra Ski Ranch lift ticket – the name of the resort prior to 1996. A Northstar-at-Tahoe name badge from a guy from Brazil was located. Sierra and Northstar were sister resorts until five years ago this month.

Kyle Smaine, who in January won his first World Championships in halfpipe as a skier for Sierra, appropriately spent the day in the terrain park off Bashful. Instead of flying through the features like he might do in winter, he helped remove some unwanted ones – in particular an Adirondack chair that had seen better days.

Now the resort is waiting for Mother Nature to cover the slopes with white stuff in hopes of having a full ski season.