

Former IT director sues El Dorado County

By Kathryn Reed

An El Dorado County employee has filed a lawsuit against the county, interim chief administrative officer/human resources director, district attorney and auditor-controller.

Kelly Webb, one-time director of Information Technology for the county, in the suit alleges her First Amendment rights were violated, that she was discriminated against because of her age and gender, and that she was harassed.

Webb started working for the county full time in May 1985. She was appointed acting IT director by then CAO Terri Daly on March 15, 2011. This appointment came with a substantial pay raise. On July 23, 2013, she became permanent IT director at the direction of the Board of Supervisors.

Two days later, Auditor-Controller Joe Harn sent an email to Daly that said, "I believe that section 210.a(3) of the County Charter requires a formal recruitment for the IT director position." The appointment also violated the Brown Act because it was not on an agenda.

According to the lawsuit, Webb doesn't know why the IT directorship was revoked.

Lake Tahoe News asked Human Resources Director Pamela Knorr, District Attorney Vern Pierson and Harn to respond to the allegations in the lawsuit. Neither Knorr nor Pierson responded. Pierson also has the role of chief technology officer.

"I have read Ms. Webb's complaint and I can't figure out exactly what I have allegedly done. When she was acting IT

director she worked directly for the Board of Supervisors, not me, not the DA. IT director is an at-will position. If the Board of Supervisors wanted Ms. Webb to be IT director, they would make her IT director. It's the board's call," Harn told *Lake Tahoe News*. "When the Board of Supervisors appointed Ms. Webb IT director in July of 2013, I did write the CAO and inform the CAO that the appointment violated the County Charter (the law). That's just me doing my job. Ms. Webb has been an analyst for a long time in the CAO's office. She should have known the County Charter and realized her July 2013 appointment was invalid."

County Counsel Robyn Drivon told *Lake Tahoe News*, "The county of El Dorado has just recently received this suit and is in the process of assigning it to counsel for review and response."

"The facts are:

- Ms. Webb has worked for the county of El Dorado for many years.
- She served for three years as the Interim Information & Technology Director.
- Ms. Webb did not meet the minimum educational qualifications for the permanent IT director and therefore, was returned to her prior employment position as a CAO analyst.
- There are no facts to support Ms. Webb's allegation that her disqualification was based upon gender or age."

Even in the lawsuit Webb admits she does not have the education requirements for the IT job: "Plaintiff realized that she did not even meet county's minimum qualifications for the principal administrative analyst position, even though she had on or about Feb. 12, 2014, plaintiff finally met with (Human Resources Director Pamela) Knorr regarding the ageist

comments (District Attorney Vern) Pierson had repeatedly made, and the ominous tone he took about plaintiff's future employment as county IT Director. Much to plaintiff's dismay and disappointment, Knorr brushed aside Pierson's actions, and chalked up plaintiff's concern over these issues as plaintiff 'over-reacting' and being 'overly sensitive.' Rather than doing the HR director's job and investigating obvious, unlawful ageism, Knorr made plaintiff feel like a mere complainer without a valid complaint," the suit says.

During the time period Webb said she was being harassed and discriminated against there were also negative things coming out about her. The state Controller's Office issued a negative audit report in August 2013 about IT's cost accounting and the knowledge level of IT's management.

A 2014 survey of county employees found that 41 percent of the IT employees were dissatisfied with their employment.

In the suit, Webb is asking for:

- economic damages in an amount according to proof;
 - for punitive damages against the individual, non-entity defendants only;
 - for general damages in an amount according to proof;
 - for costs of suit, including but not limited to reasonable attorneys' fees;
 - for prejudgment interest in an amount according to proof;
 - for such other and further relief as the court may deem proper.
 - a trial by jury.
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A private equity gamble involving Caesars gone wrong

By William D. Cohan, Fortune

There have been so many truly extraordinary twists and turns in the saga of Caesars Entertainment over the past eight years that it's hard to pinpoint exactly when the whole thing went off the rails. After all, an \$18.4 billion bankruptcy filing at one of the biggest gambling empires in Las Vegas tends to result in a lot of finger-pointing. But for symbolism alone, nothing can beat the evening of Nov. 17, 2012.

That was the night that David Bonderman, the billionaire founder of private equity firm TPG Capital, threw himself a 70th birthday party. It made sense for Bonderman to have it in Vegas. He and his wife had planned a lavish celebration with 1,000 of their closest friends. Actor and comedian Robin Williams would serve as the emcee, with music legends Paul McCartney and John Fogerty rocking out. Bonderman had also agreed to make a \$1,000 donation in the name of each guest to the charity of his or her choice, and every attendee would receive an iPod filled with the private equity mogul's favorite tunes. It was the kind of event for which top-tier casinos are made.

And Bonderman just happened to be part owner of one. In 2008, TPG had joined with Apollo Global Management, the buyout firm led by former Drexel Burnham Lambert banker Leon Black, to take Caesars private. Four years later, Caesars was straining under its heavy debt load, and the two private equity shops stood to lose the bulk of their \$6 billion equity investment. By having his gala at Caesars Palace, the company's crown jewel, Bonderman could have made a high-profile show of support.

Instead, Bonderman took his celebration to the Wynn Resort, Caesars' biggest Vegas rival.

Read the whole story

Few states ready for fallout if court rules against Obamacare

By Noam N. Levey, Los Angeles Times

Millions of Americans could soon lose health insurance when the Supreme Court decides the latest challenge to the Affordable Care Act this month, but states have made few concrete plans to deal with the potential fallout, and they may get little help from Washington, President Obama warned Monday.

"If somebody does something that doesn't make any sense, then, it's hard ... to fix," the president said, suggesting his administration can't do much if the justices side with the health law's Republican critics.

When the court rules this month, the justices may eliminate insurance subsidies in as many as 37 states that use the federal HealthCare.gov marketplace established through the health law. The law's challengers argue that a strict reading of the statute makes those subsidies available only in states that established their own marketplaces, rather than having the federal government operate the marketplace for them.

A state could restore the aid if it runs its own marketplace, as California and 12 other states and the District of Columbia

already do.

Read the whole story

Reno bids farewell to famous divorce bridge

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO — Reno is bidding a bittersweet farewell to an iconic 110-year-old bridge made famous by newly divorced women — and a Marilyn Monroe character— who walked from the courthouse to cast their past and their wedding rings in the river below.

The “Wedding Ring Bridge,” also known as the “Bridge of Sighs,” became a symbol of Reno as the “Divorce Capital of the World” until other states relaxed their divorce laws in the 1960s.

The legend of divorced women walking a block from the Washoe County courthouse to the bridge over the Truckee River dates to the 1920s. Photographs, postcards and Hollywood movies depict the scenes — the most famous with Monroe in the 1961 film “The Misfits.”

Major demolition work is scheduled for the bridge, which will be replaced by a span critical for flood control.

The classic double-arched, concrete span is officially named the Virginia Street Bridge and was designed by architect John B. Leonard. Iron rails and ornate lamp posts adorn the bridge.

Historic preservationists had been pushing for its protection even before its addition to the U.S. National Register of

Historic Places in 1980. Ten years ago, they celebrated its 100th anniversary with a re-enactment, tying ribbons to plastic rings and throwing them over the side.

“We were still trying very hard to save it at that point,” said Alicia Barber, an author and historian who was a Reno Historical Resources commissioner at the time.

“It’s played a central role in the city for more than a century,” she said. “It wasn’t just the divorce trade. It really anchors the civic heart of Reno.”

City planners eventually decided they couldn’t afford the nearly \$40 million in necessary repairs. Preliminary demolition work began a week ago and the bridge was closed June 2.

“A few people were down there last weekend to take one last trip over it,” said Jeff Bean, a vice president for the contractor, Q&D Construction.

The bridge was built in 1905 on the downtown site where the first permanent wooden structure crossed the Truckee River in 1860.

Kerrie Koski, the city’s project manager, said the bridge’s structural integrity ranks among the worst in Nevada. She said there wasn’t any feasible way to make it safer and still meet flood control objectives on the river that tumbles out of Lake Tahoe 40 miles upstream.

Reno has experienced significant floods at least once a decade since the 1950s. The biggest flood came on New Year’s Day in 1997 and caused \$1 billion in damage across six counties, \$700 million in Washoe County.

In 2005, the center pier supporting the bridge again became a choke-point where trees and other debris dammed up, flooding the casino district. The new “bowstring truss” bridge –

expected to be completed next May at a cost of \$18.3 million – will be supported by arches above.

Researchers at the University of Nevada's Special Collections Department are gathering historical accounts from individuals nationwide for an extensive multimedia online exhibit about Reno's 20th century divorce trade.

Many mention the bridge tradition, which apparently was referenced for the first time in a 1927 brochure, said Barber, who's assisting project co-curator Mella Harmon, an historian and adjunct assistant professor of anthropology.

Cornelius Vanderbilt told the tale in his 1929 novel, "Reno," which was made into a movie in 1939. A scene features a woman tossing her ring after a "quickie divorce." In "The Misfits" shot in Reno in 1960 with co-star Clark Gable, Monroe played a depressed, divorced woman who contemplated doing the same before changing her mind.

"The big question is not whether rings were thrown into the Truckee River," Barber said, "but whether it began as a fictional story or really started as a spontaneous act."

It's uncertain how many women actually tossed their rings off the bridge, unlike Monroe's character.

New accounts include a woman who "thought that everybody just threw their wedding rings into the river so she did," Barber said. "She said her lawyer waded into the water and plucked it back out again and told her she needed to protect her assets."

Mt. Rose Highway pot dispensary raises concerns

By Terri Hendry, KRNV-TV

Plans to build a medical marijuana dispensary off the Mount Rose Highway is raising opposition.

Now, one of the owners and investors of the proposed dispensary is speaking out.

Hugh Hempel says he plans to attend a meeting set from 5:30 to 7:30pm June 10 at Galena High School to answer questions and address concerns.

Washoe County Commissioner Bob Lucey said his phone has been ringing off the hook.

He said, "I have had hundreds of calls from upset citizens in regards to the location of the dispensary. They are not opposed to medical marijuana, they're just upset about the location."

Read the whole story

Sandoval not running for Reid's Senate seat

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Gov. Brian Sandoval announced Tuesday he will not run for Harry Reid's Senate seat.

Sandoval made known his intentions to remain as governor, at least for now, following the conclusion of the 2015 legislative session on June 1.

In a statement, Sandoval said: “In 1984, Nevada Senator Paul Laxalt gave me the opportunity of a lifetime to serve as a legislative intern in his office in Washington, D.C. Coming from humble beginnings, the experience changed my life and charted me on a path of public service. It never occurred to me then that I would someday have an opportunity to be a candidate for the United States Senate.

“I have said many times that it is an honor and a privilege to serve as Nevada’s chief executive and that I love my job. My heart is in my responsibilities as governor and continuing to build the New Nevada. My undivided attention must be devoted to being the best governor, husband and father I can be.”

Read the whole story

Tahoe working to get homeless out of the cold

By Kathryn Reed

Putting a roof over people’s heads from Nov. 1-April 30 is the goal of a small coalition of people on the South Shore who are making strides to create a warm room.

Marissa Muscat, who has taken on the role of project manager, is spearheading the efforts to create a nonprofit that would be in charge of the homeless center.

The goal is that it would operate from 7pm-7am, be for men and

women, allow pets, and that it would be within walking distance of a bus stop. It would accommodate 20 people in a space no smaller than 700-square-feet.

“The warm room will also work to break the cycle of homelessness by providing clients with connections to community-based services including subsidized housing, food-clothing resources, counseling, financial management, health care, empowerment, and other services as needed,” the draft proposal reads.

Mental illness, substance abuse and gambling problems are some of the issues facing local homeless people. Many are also veterans. Warm room committee members want to ensure people know what resources are available to them. They also recognize some people are resistant to change.



Proponents are working to provide homeless people a place to stay on the South Shore during the winter.
Photo/LTN file

Advocates are looking for a fiscal sponsor. Live Violence Free’s board of directors is contemplating being that entity. This would help the warm room be able to go after grants as it works to establish itself as a standalone nonprofit.

“Fiscal sponsors provide a link to the community and fiscal oversight, and may be able to assist in acquiring liability

insurance and filing taxes. The local faith community has been supportive and is participating in this project. The Red Cross has agreed to provide blankets, staff training, and cots for clients," the proposal says.

Statistics show that the homeless situation in El Dorado County is increasing. The 2015 U.S. Housing and Urban Development count identified 247 homeless in El Dorado County, with 38 of them living in the South Lake Tahoe area. According to the warm room committee, local agencies believe the county homeless rate is closer to 600.

At a committee meeting last week some of the nuts and bolts of creating a warm room were vetted – such as discussing what the center should look like (it could be multiple places and not be at the same venue each night), creating intake forms for clients, security, the need to look at city codes, fundraising, getting volunteers, and being ADA compliant.

Besides creating the nonprofit, the committee is actively searching for a site or sites that would accommodate the seasonal warm room. Two toilets and a sink are needed, along with electricity, heat and trash removal. Showers would be optional. Storage for clients' belongings would be ideal.

It's estimated it will cost at least \$20,000 to keep the warm room open for six months. And that is operating with a cadre of volunteers.

For more information about the warm room or to help with the project, contact Marissa Muscat at tahoewarmroom@gmail.com.

Quality U.S. pot changing the drug wars

By Peter Robison, Nacha Cattán and Benjamin Bain, BloombergBusiness

The street lieutenant fidgeting in a Ciudad Juárez pizza parlor deals drugs for Barrio Azteca, a gang that emerged from Texas prisons in the 1980s to control a chunk of illegal shipments from Mexico into the U.S. Southwest. Think No Country for Old Men—secret nighttime drops, murders, and a lucrative sideline in human trafficking and prostitution. Meeting with a reporter while his heavyset boss circles the block, the Juárez dealer is preoccupied with his hottest new product: handcrafted American-made pot.

He marvels at one medical marijuana operation he visited in Arizona. “There are tanks with a system that at a certain hour releases oxygen, water, and light like clockwork,” says the man, who asked that his name not be used for fear of arrest or reprisals from other gang members. Connoisseurs in Juárez are noticing, he says; they’re starting to demand Purple Haze or Kush from American dispensaries. Gang members bring the quality stuff back from the U.S. The prices are higher—about 200 pesos per gram, compared with 50 pesos for his usual product—but then so is the quality. “There’s much more novelty, more variety,” he says.

With marijuana now permitted in some form in 23 U.S. states, the usual flow of pot from south to north has slowed and, to a growing degree, reversed. This was never imagined as a benefit of Nafta. Now, the expanding U.S. pot industry is transforming the drug distribution patterns of the notorious cartels—forcing them to deal more exclusively in heroin, for example—and leading to both cultural and economic change in Mexico’s own consumption of marijuana. Two opportunities may

arise: a business boom for legal pot producers in the U.S. and the chance to concentrate the drug war on far more deadly substances.

Read the whole story

50-year sentence for murder of ex-LTBMU chief

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Andy Harris came to the courtroom Friday with a lengthy prepared statement: a tribute to Robert “Bob” Harris, the former U.S. Forest Service supervisor for the Tahoe basin and the father he loved and idolized.

In his written text, the son was also going to ask the judge to show no mercy for his stepmother, Colleen Harris, 73, the woman who had “murdered my dad in cold blood.”

But after stepping up to the court lectern, Andy Harris, a Grass Valley attorney, couldn’t compose himself to read. His voice stammered. He began to weep. He junked the script and just started talking.

Colleen Harris would show no emotion minutes later when the judge sent her to prison for 50 years to life.

Read the whole story

Panel: California water losses are huge

By Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times

A panel of water experts on Sunday mapped out the challenges California faces in meeting future demands for water at a time when water sources are under stress and future supplies appear uncertain.

The panel, speaking at the *Los Angeles Times* book club, agreed the problems are serious and multifaceted: groundwater reserves underneath California's Central Valley are estimated to have been depleted by 125 million acre-feet since the first wells were drilled more than a century ago and as water demand is forecast to outstrip supply coming from the Colorado River in the coming decades.

"What we're really looking at is about a 20 percent problem of our supply being lost to climate change and over demand, and that's huge," said Jeff Kightlinger, general manager of the Metropolitan Water District, at a discussion of the book "Cadillac Desert," by Marc Reisner.

Read the whole story