Calif. government not planning for retirements

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

California state government continues to struggle with plans for replenishing its aging workforce, according to a new report released Monday, chiefly because departments talk a good game but largely fail to follow through.

Nearly 41 percent of state employees are age 50 or older, State Auditor Elaine Howle noted in her assessment, yet the Department of Human Resources has been slow to assess what departments are doing to plan for the next generation of employees.

And three departments first reviewed in 2009 – the Office of Emergency Services, Caltrans and the Department of Social Services – have made some progress but need to do much more.

Read the whole story

STPUD board to vote on budget, rate hikes

By Kathryn Reed

The public was all but missing from Thursday night's public hearing regarding the 2015-16 South Lake Tahoe Public Utility District meeting.

Two people attended the meeting, with one person getting a tutorial in how the district works based on the one-on-staff dialogue he had.

The board is expected to approve the budget at the May 21, 2pm meeting. Water rates are slated to go up 6.5 percent and sewer rates 6 percent. Combined this would add $14.45 to residential quarterly bills starting July 1.

Last year the board went through the Proposition 218 process that gives the public a chance to protest proposed rate increases. Not enough people protested the five-year rate increase plan that was eventually adopted. This set the maximum percentages the board may raise rates.

It was clear from the few comments that were made May 7 that the board is not in agreement about what is going on.

Board member Jim Jones would like to reopen the Proposition 218 process because he believes the rates should be raised even more in order to keep the infrastructure working.

Board member Randy Vogelgesang worries that any increase will adversely impact ratepayers, especially those on fixed incomes.

Board members Kelly Sheehan and Chris Cefalu were silent. Board member Duane Wallace was out sick.

Paul Hughes, chief financial officer, said if the rates are changed from what is on the table, then it will be up to staff to figure out what gets cut.

EDC leader has history of costing taxpayers

By Kathryn Reed

Pamela Knorr is proving to be a financial liability for her employers – aka the taxpayers. First it was Alpine County, now it is El Dorado County.

On July 3, 2012, Knorr signed a five-year contract to be CAO of Alpine County at a rate of pay of $11,757 per month. She also received a $400 a month car allowance and access to the county credit card presumably for county business. The contract said Knorr would be entitled to 18 months severance pay if she were terminated.

Pamela Knorr

She and the board agreed to this even though months earlier she believed the sheriff and county auditor were harassing her.

Knorr on April 11, 2013, filed a claim against the county alleging harassment that dated to April 2012 – three months prior to signing the long-term contract.

Knorr's claim states the Alpine County sheriff initiated a criminal investigation of Knorr in an effort to harass, retaliate and intimidate her. The claim also states that the auditor harassed and retaliated against her and that Knorr “was subjected to unwanted harassing conduct by men who harassed, attempted to coerce, threatened, intimidated, and discriminated against (her) for being a women in a leadership position.”

The claim says county counsel and the Board of Supervisors in April 2012 were notified of the alleged harassment.

Alpine County and Knorr settled that dispute for $10,000.

Her last day with Alpine was Aug. 2, 2013. She was paid $80,145.50 on Aug. 7, 2013, and another $80,145.50, on July 1, 2014, as severance per the contract.

Janet Dutcher, Alpine County assistant CAO, told *Lake Tahoe News* that Knorr agreed to take less than what the contract called for and to have it split in two payments.

Knorr did not return *Lake Tahoe News’* phone call.

Knorr is not done with Alpine County. A former Alpine County employee who worked for her when she was CAO has sued her. Robert Levy, former undersheriff of Alpine County, in the 19-page lawsuit alleges Knorr along with three supervisors at the time and a private citizen violated his civil rights, conspired to do so, discriminated against him based on age, failed to prevent discrimination and retaliation, violated the Public Safety Officers’ Procedural Bill of Rights Act, and defamed him.

“Her theory was a younger, cheaper workforce was better,” Jeanette Viduay, investigator with the Watts Law Office, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Knorr is 44 years old.

She was not unemployed for long. El Dorado County hired her in September 2013 as Human Resources director.

El Dorado County’s recruitment for Knorr’s position was for the shortest amount of time allowed by county policy, which is unusual for such an important job. Terri Daly was CAO at the time. Daly and Knorr share a close friend and mentor, Yolo County CAO Patrick Blacklock. Blacklock is the former CAO of Amador County. Daly and Knorr are former Amador County employees.

Daly’s employment as El Dorado County CAO was terminated in November 2014. She received a $150,000 settlement. Knorr replaced Daly as CAO at that time.

As the top official in El Dorado County, Knorr as chief administrative officer is not taking actions to remedy the budget debacle her predecessor, Daly, created. Daly went on a hiring spree, which is the same as a spending spree. Each month the county is spending $1.3 million more than it is taking in. A $10 million surplus has been exhausted.

The five members of the Board of Supervisors, who are Knorr’s bosses and who earlier this year gave her the one-year contract, have not mandated the spending be stopped. While it is the board’s responsibility to set policy and then for Knorr and other staff to carry out the policy, there is a bit of tug-of-war over who has responsibility over the budget. Ultimately, though, it will be the electeds who vote on the budget, so it is their responsibility to OK how much is spent on what.

Brian Veerkamp, chair of the Board of Supervisors, did not return a call.

While Knorr’s contract for CAO is for one year, she is also still head of the Human Resources Department. This means that anyone who has an issue with Knorr or others in her department have no recourse. This is the same HR Department that was lambasted this spring by the county grand jury.

Visits to U.S. ski areas fall 5% in 2014-15

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

The snowless winter in California overwhelmed the snowy East to yield the ski resort industry's second worst season in 16 years. Resorts across the U.S. saw visits fall to 53.6 million, according to a preliminary count by the National Ski Areas Association.

While it wasn't as bad as the 2011-12 season, when visits plummeted 16 percent from the previous season to 51 million, visits for the 2014-15 season fell 5 percent. The season finished 3.8 percent below the five-year average of 55.7 million.

Snowfall was down 28 percent across the country, according to early results from the the NSAA's annual Kottke Survey.

Read the whole story

Caesars CEO: 1st quarter best since 2008

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

Caesars Entertainment, the casino giant that controls Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline, reported its first-quarter earnings Wednesday.

Revenue: $2.2 billion, up 8.8 percent from the first quarter of last year.

That includes financial results from the company's division Caesars Entertainment Operating Co., which filed for bankruptcy on Jan. 15. Caesars disclosed the figure in supplemental information May 6, but the company has actually deconsolidated the operating division from its main financial results because of the bankruptcy.

Read the whole story

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4 on sailboat barely survive Lake Tahoe storm; South Shore marina loses rental boat

A rental boat at Camp Richardson capsizes May 7. Photo/Bob Sweatt

By Kathryn Reed

A skipper with 30 years of experience on Lake Tahoe was barely able to make it to shore safely on Wednesday because of the 4 to 8 foot waves.

Mike Young of Incline Village left Obexer's in Homewood about 2pm May 6 destined for Incline Village, but wound up at Camp Richardson about 7pm. By that time all four on board the vessel had their lifejackets on, the Coast Guard had been called and uncertainty was setting in.

"We were pretty close to the East Shore. We saw one little squall coming across the west to Incline and thought it would blow by and we would be good," Young told *Lake Tahoe News*. "But it filled up fast."

Someone on shore alerted Young that the waves were high and the wind was howling so it would best to try to land elsewhere.

Young wasn't worried about whether the boat could handle the storm; he just needed a place to dock.

He called the U.S. Coast Guard when he was off Zephyr Cove.

"They said when you are in trouble, call us and we will send a helicopter," Young said.

The Coast Guard, which is stationed in Tahoe City, said the boat was not in distress. Uncertainty, alert and distress are the three levels of search and rescue, according to the USCG. Because the boat was able to sail, it did not need rescuing, according to USCG protocols.

"We are not allowed to give navigational advice," Thomas Hussey, USCG boatswain's mate second class, told *Lake Tahoe News*. This is because if the vessel does not make it, the Coast Guard does not want to be held liable.

Hussey said it was from Camp Richardson personnel that they heard the boat was going to moor there.

Young said the decision was made to head south because that was the direction the wind was coming from.

He turned the sailboat around. At first shelter was found at a cove near D.L. Bliss State Park. Waves were 3 to 4 feet going across the lake. Then he tried to find a nearby buoy, but was unsuccessful so he headed toward the mouth of Emerald Bay.

A call to Camp Rich was made and people there said it was not windy. But that didn't last.

Bob Hassett, who runs Camp Rich Marina, said in a one-hour period the wind at Lake Tahoe Airport measured 5 mph from the southwest and then it was variable before having gusts of 30 mph out of the northeast.

"That is abnormal," Hassett told *Lake Tahoe News* of the 180-degree change. "Then it churned the lake. The waves were from one direction, wind from another and that is where you have troubles."

By the time Young, who was under motor power for this stretch, made his way to the South Shore resort the wind had done the 180 and he said waves reached 8 feet at times.

Camp Rich employees went out in a skiff to retrieve the four from the sailboat. While Hassett said he doesn't like to put employees in harms way, not helping wasn't an option. Young was appreciative of all the assistance the Camp Rich guys provided.

For now the sailboat is on a buoy; waiting for the weather to clear so it can be sailed to its home part in Incline.

In addition to Hassett's employees assisting with rescuing the four sailboaters, Hassett lost one of his rental motorboats and another was damaged, but is salvageable. New, the boat costs between $30,000 and $50,000.

Still, the marina operator said he would open for business May 15.

MontBleu fire forces hotel-casino to evacuate

Two people were taken to the hospital Wednesday for smoke inhalation and 200 others evacuated from MontBleu casino in Stateline when a fire erupted in the main kitchen.

The cause of the May 6 blaze is under investigation.

"One of their commercial ovens had a fire and it had about 4-foot-by-8-foot flames coming out of the oven," Eric Guevin, Tahoe Douglas fire marshal, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Employees using fire extinguishers were unable to suppress the flames. The fire was contained to the kitchen by Tahoe Douglas, North Tahoe, East Fork and South Lake Tahoe firefighters.

That particular oven is condemned, according to Guevin. The health department will be on scene today.

All of the kitchens at the casino are tied together, with there being one main one and then offshoots for the individual restaurants.

The 200 people who were evacuated about 3:30 Wednesday were allowed back inside the casino and to their rooms within 30 minutes. The elevators were off-limits for about an hour. Casino employees used fans to clear the stairwells and hallways of smoke. Smoke reached the 11th floor.

No one from MontBleu was available for comment.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

100+ weigh in on Meyers Area Plan

By Jessie Marchesseau

MEYERS — More than 100 people packed into the auditorium of the Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School on Wednesday evening for the Meyers Area Plan open house.

Large tables encircled the room offering seven workstations for attendees to visit. Each station represented a key topic related to the plan: design and implementation, transportation, land use, Meyers Advisory Council, recreation, California Tahoe Conservancy asset land, and conservation. The stations were staffed by personnel involved in plan development and offered presentation boards with insight into the particular topic in addition to copies of the original 1993 Meyers Area Plan alongside the most recent draft of the new Meyers Area Plan. Some stations showed colored maps, photos or sediment samples, all with staff to explain, answer questions and accept feedback.

This open house format was a change from previous meetings regarding the plan. It allowed for more direct interaction and conversation between residents and planners.

The Meyers Area Plan meeting May 6 brought out more than 100 people. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

Dave Defanti, assistant director of El Dorado County community development agency, greeted people as they came in, answered questions and encouraged attendees to pick up and fill out comment sheets. He said they chose this type of format because they wanted more interaction with community members and to encourage one-on-one conversation.

Residents' feelings on the meeting format were mixed. Jan Roman-Gonzales was disappointed there were no opening remarks from the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors Chairman Brian Veerkamp or a breakout session with opportunities for public questions and comments as was advertised on the county's website and the postcard she received in the mail. She believed the open house format did not give her and other community members a chance to have their voices heard. (Veerkamp is supposed to be Meyers' point person on the board because District 5 Supervisor Sue Novasel has conflict based on her property she owns.)

Joseph Restaino, on the other hand, liked the one-on-one interaction. He told *Lake Tahoe News* it was a good way for him to really learn about the plan and to get excited about what's happening in Meyers.

At the open house, public input was encouraged in ways other than just speaking aloud. Poster-sized flip boards offered a place for attendees to write down suggestions and comments such as “community garden,” “flashing red light at Apache,” and “leave Park City in Utah.” At another station, people were given stickers to place on a board with various transportation goals and design options to indicate which items were the most important to them. By the end of the night, the winners of the most stickers were buffered or protected bikeways, separated bike paths, economic viability, and pedestrian safety. The items with the fewest stickers were bicycle signals and in-roadway signs.

Brandy McMahon, acting long-range planning manager for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, was staffing the design and implementation station. She said she answered a lot of questions on everything from bike paths to the bug station, but the overall feeling she had for the night’s open house was positive, a change from the tension she felt at previous meetings.

Defanti, McMahon, and Brendan Ferry, principal planner for El Dorado County, all said input from the May 6 open house will be considered for changes to the Meyers Area Plan when the Board of Supervisors meets again next month and in the future. According to Defanti, it could be at least nine months before anything is voted on, so there is still plenty of time for residents to offer their comments either on paper, or online.

Ferry said that while people can’t agree on every little thing, their goal is to please everyone as a whole. “I think the community in general is excited about getting the plan done and implementing something cool in Meyers.”

Most U.S. middle-school kids don’t know how government works

By Laura Colby, BloombergBusiness

More than half of U.S. eighth-graders say Americans believe the U.S. government should guarantee them a job when they grow up.

That’s one of the findings of a federal test of children’s knowledge of history, civics and geography. Only 32 percent correctly answered the question about a belief shared by most people in the U.S. The right response: the government should be a democracy. Eleven percent said citizens favored a single political party and 6 percent, an official religion.

The results of the 2014 test, called the National Assessment of Educational Progress, were released Wednesday as Congress considers replacing the federal testing law known as No Child Left Behind, which President Barack Obama and others blame for promoting too tight a focus on math and reading at the expense of other subjects.

Read the whole story

Drug bust in rural El Dorado County

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A man and a woman were arrested on drug-related charges after deputies searched a trailer near Georgetown.

Deputies came to the trailer in the 5000 block of Reservoir Road in a rural area outside Georgetown Sunday to serve a felony arrest warrant on 28-year-old Lainey Porter.

When they arrived, they found three men inside and Porter running from the rear of the trailer, according to an El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office blog. She came to a halt when a deputy ordered her to stop.

Read the whole story