

Tahoe lodging officials ramp up guest services

By Kathryn Reed

Walking in they didn't say much. They were timid, shy and apprehensive. They didn't want to say the wrong thing.

When English isn't your first language it's easy to feel intimidated about speaking to others who have spoken it their entire lives. But not communicating can be detrimental in the work environment for the employee, consumer and business owner.

Communication with hotel staff can make the difference between having an experience worth writing a good or bad review. Interaction with staff, especially bosses, can be the difference between becoming a supervisor or staying in a dead-end job.



Housekeeping staff on the South Shore are better equipped to communicate with guests after a three-day course. Photo/Pat Leonard-Heffner

Twenty-four housekeepers from four South Lake Tahoe properties

last week were immersed in a three-day session at Lake Tahoe Community College to become more proficient at English.

“We got to take them from zero to 100. We got to gain their trust and get them excited about learning English, to feel valued, important and smart,” instructor Ronna Timpa told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Timpa, who is based in Las Vegas, has been doing this type of work for 24 years.

“When employees feel valued by their company, they are more likely to give better guest service and give better service over all,” Timpa said. “It’s likely the room is going to be little bit cleaner, they are going to go out of the way to help guests.”

The 24 hours of instruction came about from the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association wanting to do something so frontline staff could better interact with guests and staff. Conversations with Lake Tahoe Community College started. Coursework for credit would take too long to put together, so that’s how it became a community education offering.

The lodging association and individual properties paid for the training.

“It helps me as a property by helping the consumer. If the consumer, our guests can communicate with our staff, if they are able to say ‘Hi, how are you?’, make good eye contact, that is good service and that is what puts hotels above other hotels,” Jerry Bindel, who runs Lakeland Village, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “A guest doesn’t want to have to fight to communicate the things they need. They want to say they need this and we give them what they like.”

Internally, Bindel knows better communication will come from housekeeping being able to tell maintenance what is needed and to hear what the front desk has to say.

The lodging group has been talking for a few years about doing something like this, but knew it would take an outside entity. The college was the logical party to take this on.

Guest services had been taught before through LTCC, but that was to people who spoke English as their first language. This is the first time to teach front line staff whose native tongue is Spanish. They were taught phrases pertinent to the industry – how to understand basic requests and what possible responses could be.

It was also an opportunity to learn how to interact with people, to be more outgoing. What they learned are life skills, not just work skills.

“This was training that they need for life. They learned how to communicate with customers, co-workers and bosses,” Timpa said. “We talked about their job now, their job in the future and how to get there.”

Another component of this training that is still to be developed is to have supervisors be taught some basic business skills like writing appropriate emails and how to deal with problems involving guests and co-workers.

Ultimately, Bindel foresees about the half the staffs of most lodging properties going through these trainings.

Calif. court rejects tiered water rates

By Meghann M. Cuniff, Orange County Register

An appellate court on Monday declared San Juan Capistrano's

water rate system illegal, questioning the validity of the longstanding tiered rate model that's used by agencies across drought-stricken California to encourage water conservation.

But the 29-page ruling, which has been anxiously awaited by municipalities and water districts throughout the state, emphasizes that rates that increase as usage increases are "perfectly consonant" with state law so long as the rates correspond with service costs. That just didn't happen in San Juan Capistrano.

The judges also declared legal San Juan Capistrano's method of charging all water customers for recycled water even though the service wasn't available to everyone, which reverses part of the August 2013 ruling from now retired Orange County Superior Court Judge Greg Munoz that declared the city's entire rate structure illegal.

Read the whole story

Miwok tribe picks smaller shooting range

By Stephen Magagini, Sacramento Bee

Responding to a barrage of protest from neighbors and local residents, the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, owners of Red Hawk Casino, have scaled back plans to put in a public 29-lane outdoor gun range south of Highway 50 and instead develop a small gun range "open only to tribal members and their guests."

The decision to go smaller was met with relief by opponents,

some of whom live 100 yards from the proposed range on Shingle Springs Drive. But they remain concerned about sound and safety issues, said community organizer Damon Tribble, a web designer whose daughter attends second grade at a school 1,000 yards from the shooting range.

“We appreciate this gesture by the tribe, and we think this is a step in the right direction,” Tribble said, noting the tribe, as a sovereign nation, can do what it wants on the 2 acres of tribal trust land it owns – and El Dorado County government and courts can’t do anything about it. But Tribble said he and other neighbors wish the tribe would relocate the gun range to a place “that’s a lot more wild and remote.”

Tribble and his core group of 15 activists have launched a website, a Facebook page and YouTube videos featuring maps, sound studies and guns being fired at the range site.

Read the whole story

Wild horse advocates disagree on contraceptives

By Scott Sonner, AP

United in their belief wild horses should remain free to roam public rangeland across the West, groups working to protect the mustangs are increasingly at odds over whether contraception should play a role in the decades-old dispute over efforts to reign in the natural size of the herds.

The American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign – made up of

more than 60 groups, including the Humane Society of the United States, Animal Welfare Institute and In Defense of Animals – has been willing to accept treating mares with the anti-fertility drug PZP as a more humane alternative to gathering and shipping mustangs to costly holding facilities.

“The use of birth control, in the form of the PZP vaccine, was recommended by the National Academy of Sciences and is in line with public opinion and taxpayer interests,” campaign spokeswoman Deniz Bolbol said.

Leaders of two dissenting groups who recently won a court order blocking a roundup in Nevada are harshly critical of the national coalition, accusing some members of abandoning the mustangs’ best interests.

The New York-based Friends of Animals and San Francisco-based Protect Mustangs say recent studies show use of the contraceptive, which keeps the horses from reproducing for two years, is having an unnatural impact on the herds’ social structure.

U.S. District Judge Larry Hicks in Reno agreed in February when he blocked a roundup based partly on BLM’s reliance on a 5-year-old study that largely ignores newer data suggesting contraception prompts some mares unable to become pregnant to leave in search of stallions in other bands.

“We champion the herd’s freedom and will prevent special interest groups from using them as pharmaceutical lab rats for drug research,” Protect Mustangs executive director Anne Novak said.

Friends of Animals President Pricilla Feral stepped up the criticism last month.

“They may want to stick their head in the sand and use this as a fundraising opportunity, but the harsh reality for wild horses is that research shows PZP has long-term detrimental

effects on wild horses,” she said.

The Humane Society has the patent on PZP, and Feral and others argue they benefit financially from its use.

Holly Hazard, senior vice president of the Humane Society of the United States, said internal dissent is nothing new but acknowledged the “tone and tenor is ramping up.” She said the claim her group pushes PZP to raise money is “ludicrous.”

“We have been working with PZP for 20 years,” she said. “We believe it’s the best hope for getting the wild horse management challenges under control.”

The BLM estimates there are 49,209 wild horses and burros roaming free in 10 western states – half in Nevada. The agency maintains that’s nearly twice as many as the range can sustain. It reported in February there were 48,335 animals in holding facilities with a total capacity of 50,209.

Hazard said the groups share the same “pure vision of what we’d like to see – which would be horses remaining on the range, untouched by man.”

“But if the only argument you can make is they should be left free on the range, I say that they are not now and will not ever be – at least in the reasonable future,” she said. “We want a solution. We don’t want to rattle our saber toward a victory that will never come.”

Boca Reservoir water flow cut

off

By Associated Press

With the start of summer two months away, the Truckee River's level already is dropping around Reno after flows into it from a Sierra Nevada reservoir were halted last week.

Federal Water Master Chad Blanchard said he needed to begin closing Boca Reservoir's floodgates on Thursday because of its low water levels stemming from the four-year drought.

"We're out of water and we're ramping it down," he told the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. "It's something we've never seen before. We've never run out this early before."

It's the earliest the flow has been cut off since record keeping began more than a century ago, he said. The previous earliest date was June 5, 1992, during the height of another drought. Last year, the flow from Boca was cut off July 31.

"It's way beyond what we imagined we would see," Blanchard said. "We're in uncharted waters, or uncharted lack of waters."

The Sierra snowpack has been well below average the last four winters, with the most recent one the worst yet. The Truckee River basin's snowpack on Thursday was 15 percent of average for the date. The Lake Tahoe basin's snowpack was even worse: zero.

Tahoe dropped below its natural rim in October, cutting off its flow into the Truckee. Tahoe is not expected to rise above its natural rim this year. The Truckee flows more than 100 miles from Tahoe to Pyramid Lake, about 30 miles north of Reno.

Boca Reservoir impounds waters of the Little Truckee River, a major tributary of the Truckee. The reservoir is located in

the Tahoe National Forest near Truckee, California.

With the flow out of Boca halted, river levels will quickly drop and the Truckee will be fed mostly by scant natural snowmelt from its other tributaries.

The Truckee's summer flows now will only come from reservoir storage dedicated to the Pyramid Lake Paiute tribe to maintain its fisheries and to the Truckee Meadows Water Authority to provide water for the Reno area.

The authority has asked its customers to cut water use by at least 10 percent.

El Dorado County political operative arrested

Updated April 21 2:43pm:

A one-time worker for the El Dorado County's Republican Party who has worked on numerous political campaigns has been arrested on felony willful infliction of corporal injury of a cohabitant charges.

Rodney Stanhope, 47, is married, but the alleged victim was not his wife. The Placerville resident was arrested earlier this month.

Stanhope was a paid consultant on the failed Mike Owen for county auditor campaign in 2014. Stanhope also worked on the campaigns of disgraced former Supervisor Ray Nutting, Sheriff John D'Agostini, Rep. Tom McClintock, and Assemblywoman Beth Gaines. In 2011, Stanhope represented Gaines at a campaign function.

Most recently, Stanhope was working with the Dave Pratt's 2016 supervisorial campaign.

This is not Stanhope's first run-in with the law. In 2009, a Central Valley couple sought a restraining order to stop Stanhope from, among other things, harassing their 14-year-old daughter. In 2012, a Pollock Pines woman sought a restraining order to stop Stanhope from sending her threatening text messages.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Study: Wildfires release more greenhouse gases than thought

By Jenna Iacurci, Nature World News

It turns out that California wildfires release more greenhouse gases than previously thought, according to new research.

According to the study, from 2001-10, annual carbon losses from forests and wildlands in California represented as much as 5-7 percent of state carbon emissions.

Interestingly, the state's Global Warming Solutions Act, or AB 32, says that by the year 2020 California has to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels. But these findings, published in the journal *Forest Ecology and Management*, suggest that goal may be easier said than done.

Read the whole story

Teen killed by train near Truckee

By Associated Press

A 13-year-old boy was hit and killed by a train Sunday evening while walking along tracks near Truckee, about 20 miles west of the California-Nevada line.

KXTV in Sacramento reports California and Nevada officials found the boy's body after responding to reports of a pedestrian incident near Interstate 80.

Anthony William Schafer of Sun Valley died at the scene. Foul play is not suspected.

The California Highway Patrol says the incident shut down eastbound lanes on I-80 for a few hours.

Drought will be profitable for some businesses

By Erik Sherman, Fortune

There will be businesses, new and old, that find water shortages can produce profits. As droughts become more common

throughout the world, these 9 industries may thrive.

It's crunch time for water, with shortages presenting one of the top global risks over the next decade, according to the World Economic Forum.

This is a problem that is current, not only future. Look beyond California's multi-year punishing drought. The U.S. and Brazil face historic water crises, even though between them the two have a fifth of the planet's freshwater reserves. And China faces a huge potential crisis within 15 years, according to a report by The National Intelligence Council (NIC), the federal agency that provides analysis to America's intelligence community.

You can't live without water, and doing business is pretty tough as well. "Water is fundamentally mispriced around the world," Clinton Moloney, a managing director of PwC's sustainable business solutions practice told Fortune. "The social cost is not built into the price that companies pay." There's always something else that can be done with water, and when there's concern about having enough to drink and grow necessary food, what has been a cheap resource could quickly get far more expensive.

Read the whole story

Calif. releases revised water consumption rules

By Adam Nagourney, New York Times

LOS ANGELES — In case there was ever any doubt, forcing a 25

percent cut in urban water use by Californians in the fourth year of a searing drought is not going to be easy.

That became clear Saturday morning when, after a 12-hour delay, state regulators took their second crack at a draft of community-by-community water reduction rules intended to cut urban potable water use by 25 percent statewide, as ordered by Gov. Jerry Brown this month. This latest version came after the State Water Resources Control Board was confronted with 250 comments complaining about the first rationing proposal, and it reflects, in part, its effort to credit communities that had a record of conservation while stepping up pressure on big water users.

The original set of four tiers, with cuts ranging from 10 percent to 35 percent, has been expanded to nine tiers, with cuts ranging from 4 percent to 36 percent. The amount of water that communities would have to conserve was reduced for some, like Los Angeles and San Francisco, and was slightly increased for others, like Beverly Hills.

Read the whole story