

Cave Rock accident snarls traffic

A single-car accident has traffic congested in the Cave Rock area this afternoon.

A vehicle going west on Highway 50 crashed for unknown reasons. Nevada Highway Patrol as of 1:45pm March 4 said travel going west would be limited to one lane until the tow truck arrives.

No one was injured in the crash.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Heroin overdose deaths in U.S. tripled in 3 years

By John Tozzi, BloombergBusiness

More than 8,200 Americans – an average of 23 people each day – died of heroin overdoses in 2013. That's according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and it's the latest evidence that the nation's heroin problem is becoming more severe.

The rate of overdose deaths in 2013, the CDC report states, is almost triple what it was in 2010.

The growing heroin problem follows a decadelong increase in the abuse of prescription opioids such as oxycodone and

fentanyl, which are chemically similar to heroin. Many more Americans continue to die from overdoses involving these kinds of prescription pills than heroin.

But opioid-related deaths have declined slightly, while the rate of heroin deaths has increased since 2010. That was the year the OxyContin, a widely prescribed painkiller, was reformulated to make it harder to abuse.

Read the whole story

Nev. tries to capitalize on medical tourism

By Jennifer Rachel Baumer, Nevada Business

Until recently, the term “medical tourism” largely referred to Americans traveling out of the country looking for affordable healthcare. Until recently, the term “medical tourism” largely referred to Americans traveling out of the country looking for affordable healthcare in technologically advanced but less expensive venues, from Mexico to Thailand and parts in between.

Now the term is starting to come home, often referring to domestic travel of American citizens within U.S. borders, traveling to find the best healthcare available.

In addition, until recently the best healthcare in the country didn't include Nevada. When ranked according to the number of hospital beds per 1,000 people, or physicians or nurses per 1,000, Nevada ranks 47th, which isn't care worth leaving home for.

However, things are changing by building off a new quality of healthcare and one of Nevada's core strengths: an incredibly business-friendly environment.

In Northern Nevada, medical tourism is still in the foundational stage.

Read the whole story

Nev. bill would regulate e-cigarettes like tobacco

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Use of electronic cigarettes and liquid nicotine would be regulated the same as tobacco under a bill introduced in the Nevada Senate on Monday.

Senate Bill 201 introduced by the Senate Finance Committee seeks to include e-cigarettes and “vaping” under Nevada's Clean Indoor Air Act, which was passed by voters in 2006.

The law prohibits smoking in most public places, including schools, day care facilities, restaurants and indoor work places. There is an exception for gambling areas of casinos. Violations are a misdemeanor.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe to regulate long-term motel rentals

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe wants to put motels that are being used as long-term housing under a microscope to ensure they comply with health and safety codes.

There are 120 hotel-motels in the city with about 5,000 rooms. Of those, 58 establishments have 1,300 rooms that are not being used for traditional tourist accommodations. That equates to 26 percent of the rooms in the city.

"They are not high-quality transitional housing," Shawna Brekke-Read, Development Services director, told the City Council on March 3.

The draft Single Room Occupancy ordinance was before the council for discussion and input on Tuesday. The goal is to get these establishments to pay transient occupancy tax or be part of the new ordinance that is expected to be adopted this spring.

Using motels as housing is not regulated nor do the units face any inspections because there are no laws on the books that would allow this to happen. That is all about to change.

Problems at these dwellings are varied.

The staff report says, "Commonly, long-term hotels-motels lack a kitchen or safe cooking facilities, the electrical service is inadequate for the electrical demand, hot water heaters are broken or missing, sanitation is poor, smoke detectors are missing or faulty plumbing is problematic, and units are infested with pests."

But not everyone believes all of these motels should be cast

as squalor. Ted Long, a local attorney who used to be on the City Council, represents 60 units managed by Tahoe Rents.

"All the landlords I know want to do the right thing," Long told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We don't need a special ordinance for hotels. The people who are going to be hurt, despite the good intentions, are the people who live there."

Long said the city is lumping all long-term rentals into the same category and adds that is not fair. He would prefer the motels fall under the multi-family dwelling ordinance that covers six units or more.

While the proposed ordinance would require the hotel rooms to be more like an apartment, Mayor Hal Cole stressed, "We are not turning hotels into apartments." He said the ordinance creates hybrid-housing units that will be regulated.

Plus, if these hotels were to be apartment conversions, it would require the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to be involved. It would also negate the city's ability to collect the hotel tax.

It was agreed that requiring laundry facilities on each floor is not a good idea based on overflows being common when people cram two loads into one washer.

Another issue for Long and some of the landlords who attended the meeting is having to provide one off-site parking spot for every unit. Outside council chambers they talked about how many of their tenants don't even own a vehicle.

The council (Tom Davis was out ill) agreed to soon conduct a workshop about the proposed ordinance with the goal of attracting more owners and tenants. It was proposed to do so somewhere other than the airport since buses don't go there and transportation may be an issue for people living in these establishments.

Also needing clarification is whether sewer permits will be needed to accommodate possible required changes.

Richard Solbrig, general manager of South Tahoe Public Utility District, told *Lake Tahoe News* sewer permits are needed “when the plumbing facilities in a structure are expanded/added, not just rearranged or replaced with new fixtures. Typically in a private residence, it is the addition of a new bathroom. A new sewer unit costs \$4,950. Any expansion of plumbing facilities in a structure does trigger a building department permit, and part of that permit process is a sign-off by the district.”

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In other action:

- Council meetings have not been available to Charter customers because the city and cable provider are squabbling over use of the building where the city’s equipment is stored. Meetings may be watched online via the city’s website.
- The city is revisiting its arts and crafts fair regulations for 2016. The council directed planning commissioners to refine what juried shows would look like as well to provide more specifics regarding uniform booths for vendors.
- The March 17 meeting will include an in-depth discussion about what to do with the city’s dilapidated streets.
- At the April 7 meeting as part of the midyear budget discussion the council will talk about how best to spend the nearly \$1 million surplus from the 2013-14 budget.

S. Tahoe retailers abide by tobacco sales law

Out of 142 retail stores surveyed during the past two months in El Dorado County, 32 sold tobacco to underage youth.

The majority of stores that sold tobacco to kids were located in the unincorporated areas of the county, but nearly every community had at least one store that sold. The only exception was South Lake Tahoe where no store engaged in the illegal activity.

The Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey was conducted Feb. 13 in South Lake Tahoe and on Jan. 10 on the West Slope by El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, Placerville and South Lake Tahoe police officers, and Tobacco Use Prevention Program staff.

Trained youth volunteers between 14-17 entered retail stores and attempted to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products. The legal age to buy tobacco is 18. Merchants who sold tobacco to youth received citations from law enforcement; those who did not sell tobacco were thanked by law enforcement.

Tobacco retailers are required by law to check identification, verify age and post state mandated age-of-sale warning signs. Tobacco and tobacco products must be behind the sales counter or in a locked display.

A similar youth purchase survey conducted in 2012 in El Dorado County found that 11 percent of retailers sold tobacco to kids.

"We aren't sure why the sales rates have gone up so much in this most recent survey compared to only a few years ago," Christy White, project director for the El Dorado County Tobacco Use Prevention Program, said in a press release. "We have conducted education to merchants numerous times over the

past ten years, but stores often have frequent clerk and owner turnover. It is a continual challenge to ensure they are aware of, and following, the law.”

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Chronic DUI offender found guilty

A six-time DUI offender is likely going back to prison.

Michael Ramirez, 43, of Concord was convicted Feb. 26 in El Dorado County Superior Court of two counts of felony driving under the influence and three counts of driving on a suspended license. He had been arrested in the county last summer on the driving under the influence charge.

According to the district attorney’s office, Ramirez had four prior driving under the influence convictions, including a prior felony driving under the influence conviction. In the last 10 years he has been in prison twice.

Sentencing is scheduled for April 6.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Limited snowfall takes toll on water supply

By Kathryn Reed

While there is still lingering snow on some lawns in the Lake Tahoe Basin, the fact that it is barely measurable in most places is indicative of the winter that has barely existed in the Sierra.

The lack of snowfall continues to be illustrated with each snow survey. On Tuesday morning representatives of the state Department of Water Resources were at Echo Summit taking samples of snow to determine the water content. The 6.7 inches of snow contain 0.9 inches of water, representing 5 percent of average for this time of year.

The situation keeps getting worse. Statewide the water content was 50 percent of average in December and 25 percent in January.

On Tuesday, 103 electronic sensors found Tuesday's snow water equivalent to be 5 inches or 19 percent of the March 3 multi-decade average. This is nearly a record. In 1991, the statewide water content was 18 percent of average. But that same year there was the Miracle March, which brought more precipitation than normal.

But there is no moisture in the forecast for Tahoe in the next week. And highs are expected to return to 60 degrees by Sunday.



Skiers and snowboarders on
March 1 welcome fresh snow
at Sierra-at-Tahoe.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

If there had not been a storm in the last week, today's numbers have would be even worse. And while the storm brought a foot of snow or more to many Tahoe area resorts much to the delight of skiers who were in search of that rare powder day this winter, it will have little impact to the state's fourth dry season.

While parts of Northern California are faring well when it comes to rain totals, this will not help them much in the summer. This is because it is the snowpack in the Sierra that sustains municipalities and farms downstream, supplying about 30 percent of California's water needs. Without a snowpack to melt, it will be a trickle that flows into reservoirs. That in turn means less water to be doled out to users.

Already farmers and some Bay Area water districts have been told to count on little or no water allocations from the federal system. Those users will then be tapping into the groundwater, which is already severely depleted in some areas.

Adding to the concern is that users are not conserving as well as they had been earlier this winter. The state Water Resources Control Board on March 3 announced a steep decline in water conservation from 22 percent in December to approximately 8.8 percent in January in year-over-year water

use comparisons.

The state Water Board on March 17 will consider renewing an emergency regulation supporting water conservation that was adopted last July. It restricts outdoor water use and authorizes penalties for water waste.

Court: Sex offender housing restrictions unconstitutional

By Lydia O'Connor, Huffington Post

The California Supreme Court ruled Monday that a state law barring sex offenders from living within 2,000 feet of a school or park is unconstitutional.

The ruling immediately affects only San Diego County, where the case originated, the San Francisco Chronicle reported, but will “almost certainly apply to other densely populated counties.”

The housing restriction known as Jessica’s Law passed by voters in 2003 aimed to create predator-free zones. But it unfairly infringes on registered sex offenders’ personal liberties, Justice Marvin R. Baxter wrote, and has “severely restricted their ability to find housing in compliance with the statute, greatly increased the incidence of homelessness among them, and hindered their access to medical treatment, drug and alcohol dependency services, psychological counseling and other rehabilitative social services available to all parolees.”

Read the whole story

Costco switching from Amex to Visa

By Associated Press

Costco says it struck a deal for Citi to be the exclusive issuer of its co-branded credit cards, with Visa replacing American Express as the card network.

The deal is subject to Citi buying the company's co-branded credit card portfolio, Costco said.

Costco and American Express ended their partnership after failing to reach an agreement on renewal terms. American Express said earlier this month that the relationship, which goes back 16 years, is set to expire March 31, 2016. Costco says the deal with Visa and Citigroup Inc. would take effect the next day.

The company said it would provide its customers with information about the transition in coming months.

Costco Wholesale Corp., based in Issaquah, Washington, has 474 locations in the United States and 88 in Canada.