

5 TVs stolen from S. Lake Tahoe hotel

Five 46-inch flat screen televisions were stolen from the Best Western Station House hotel in South Lake on early Saturday morning.

Hotel workers believe the theft occurred Feb. 7 between 1 and 5:45am. They were taken from rooms that had not been rented.

Police Lt. David Stevenson told *Lake Tahoe News* an employee noticed one of the doors was ajar. It's possible a keycard was used to access the rooms.

Stevenson said detectives are waiting for surveillance video from the Park Avenue hotel to see if the suspects are caught on tape.

Each TV was valued at \$475.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Mountains' well being affects water downstream

By Gene Beley, Central Valley Business Times

California's already over-subscribed water supply could be in even worse shape in the years ahead because of devastating Sierra Nevada wildfires, some of which have been started by arson, say experts in mountain watersheds and their forests.

The California Delta, heart of the state's massive, multi-billion dollar water system, cannot survive without the mountain watersheds, warns John Kingsbury, executive director of the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association of Placerville. And the mountain forests are being burned by larger and larger wildfires.

Water in the Cascades and Sierra Nevada mountains flows into the Central Valley and provides water for more than two-thirds of the state plus two million acres of farmland.

Read the whole story

Eastern Sierra residents return to charred neighborhoods

By Kristin J. Bender and Michelle Rindels, AP

More than 200 residents of two communities ravaged by a wildfire along the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada were allowed to return home Monday to an area that could see more wildfires as the state enters its fourth year of drought.

People whose homes were not destroyed have been allowed back. The owners of the 40 homes that were destroyed by the fire in Swall Meadows and nearby Paradise will be allowed to come and go to salvage what they can, said CalFire Capt. Liz Brown.

Brown said the towns are open only to residents.

Four firefighters were injured battling the wind-driven fire, but the injuries were minor, Brown said.

A three-year drought across California has created extremely dry timber brush that fueled the flames and pushed them all the way up the Sierra slopes to the snow line around 8,000 feet.

The fire started Friday afternoon near a highway on the border of Inyo and Mono counties. It blew up when 50 to 75 mph winds whipped through wooded areas near the two communities for about three hours, Brown said.

Quick evacuations made getting the firefighting started easier. "We are so grateful (people) left when we asked them to," Brown said. "People listened, they left and we are able to focus on the firefighting."

The cause of the fire remains under investigation, and authorities don't yet have a tally of the damage, Brown said.

Firefighters made progress, and they have since contained 95 percent of the blaze that has charred about 7,000 acres. Smoking debris on hillsides does not pose a threat to homes or other structures, authorities said.

This current fire could be contained by Tuesday afternoon, but others may soon follow.

"The threat (of a wildfire) is there all year round," Brown said. "There are just peak periods when it's a little more dry and dangerous."

Although Monday was dry with high winds expected and no rain in the forecast, firefighters are being extra cautious. "When the wind comes up, we are going to be on high alert to make sure we don't have more issues," Brown said.

More than 500 fire crews battled the blaze over the past few days.

Utility workers tended to the charred power poles along the roads in the two towns, and forestry crews sawed at fallen

trees that blocked a main thoroughfare. Nearby, two gutted, gray trucks rested on a driveway that led to a pile of rubble.

Meanwhile, officials running the evacuation center in Crowley Lake said they received an outpouring of support. Pizzas, fresh fruit and a birthday cake collected on a folding table, while a white board filled up with the names and phone numbers of people who had volunteered their homes for displaced people and pets.

Truckee rock slide to take days to clear



The storm brought rocks tumbling down onto Highway 40 in Truckee. Photo/Serene Lakes Property Owners Association

By Associated Press

The California Highway Patrol says about a 3-mile stretch of old Highway 40 near the top of the Sierra Nevada between Truckee and the Sugar Bowl ski resort will remain closed for several days because of a big rock slide.

CHP public information officer Pete Mann told the Associated Press on Monday that the landslide occurred Friday on the old Donner Road that runs parallel to Interstate 80 in some parts near Donner Pass.

Mann says no one was injured but some very large granite boulders remain on the road. He says they will have to bring in large construction equipment to help clear the highway.

Sugar Bowl officials say travelers can still access the ski resort by taking the Soda Springs exit off I-80.

Feds boost drought funding by \$50 mil.

By Fenit Nirappil, AP

SACRAMENTO – The federal government is making available up to \$50 million in drought-relief funds for western states, with the largest portion earmarked for parched California, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Gov. Jerry Brown announced Friday.

The additional funding includes about \$20 million for the Central Valley Water Project for efforts such as water transfers, drought monitoring for endangered species and diversifying water supplies. California is entering its fourth year of drought.

“California is ground zero for the drought. There is no state that is worse off,” Jewell said.

Farmers and local water departments can also compete for another \$14 million for projects to help reduce water use and develop response plans to continuing drought conditions.

The funding announcement came as the first major storm of 2015 moved into Northern California, bringing with it the potential for up to 10 inches of rain in places. It arrived after an exceptionally dry January. Last week’s survey of water in the snowpack, California’s primary water source, found only a quarter of its normal level

The Department of Interior funding is a sliver of previous drought-relief commitments. Last February, President Obama pledged \$183 million, mostly for farmers who lost livestock and food banks to help unemployed agriculture workers. Brown in March signed a \$687 million drought-relief package, including for emergency drinking water and accelerating infrastructure supplies.

Efforts to pass a federal drought-response bill in Congress failed late last year. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and other Republicans say the Obama administration’s approach to dry conditions continues to prioritize fish over farmers and other residents in California.

The State Water Resources Control Board announced this week that Californians cut monthly water use by 22 percent in December, meeting Brown’s call to slash residential water use by 20 percent for the first time. The board may impose further limits on outdoor water use as the state tries to protect supplies, but Brown said he’s not ready for mandatory restrictions statewide.

“I’m reluctant to expand the coercive power of state authority,” Brown said. “In a democracy, it is fundamental that citizens be the driving force. It’s my job to encourage

and inspire and monitor, but before we have, you know, full-scale rationing we have to have a few more problems than we currently have.”

California is only delivering 15 percent of the water requested from the state’s vast reservoir system to farmers and local agencies this year. The Interior Department will announce how much water it will send to Central Valley farmers under a separate reservoir system later this month.

Whooping cough vaccine fails for many

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

As debate simmers nationwide about whether parents should be forced to vaccinate their children, Elk Grove residents have made their choice: Only 80 of the suburb’s 4,500 kindergartners opted out of vaccinations last year, state data show.

Despite those precautions, whooping cough ripped through Elk Grove’s classrooms and cul-de-sacs in 2014. Infection rates within the large Sacramento suburb were three to five times higher than rates elsewhere in the county, local health records show.

The paradox – high infection rates amid high immunization rates – underscores a disturbing truth about the current whooping cough vaccine: It is wearing off after just a few years, and many Californians who thought they were protected instead are catching the disease.

“Children who were vaccinated did not receive the protection desired,” said Kate McAuley, program coordinator of communicable disease and immunization at the Sacramento County Public Health Department. “We had many high-school-aged children who had pertussis. They had received vaccines. The vaccine is lasting two to three years.”

Read the whole story

Traffic stop ends with 2 people in custody

A routine traffic stop ended with two arrests, and firearms, drugs and stolen property being confiscated by El Dorado County sheriff's deputies.

Deputy Jeff Tucker stopped a Nissan Maxima on Feb. 4 at 4:20pm on the West Slope for a possible code infraction. Tucker knew one of the occupants is a member of the Sureno gang in Placerville. The deputy asked to search the vehicle.

A stolen Toshiba laptop computer from Santa Cruz was found as well as mail and bank checks. Rafael Cardoza, 27, of Diamond Springs was arrested on charges of possession of the stolen computer.

Nalana Omega, 31, of Placerville had an unregistered .40-caliber Glock handgun loaded with a high capacity magazine in her purse, according to authorities. In a backpack, a loaded .22-caliber revolver was recovered. The revolver was confirmed stolen from Citrus Heights, according to deputies. Omega was

arrested on charges of possession of a concealed weapon in a vehicle, carrying a loaded firearm, and carrying a loaded stolen firearm. At the jail, it was discovered she had suspected heroin, hypodermic needles and a meth pipe. Charges of possession of a controlled substance while armed, possession of narcotics, and possession of narcotic paraphernalia were added.

The two other occupants of the vehicle were not detained.

– *Read the whole story*

Businesses learn to thrive by sharing

By Kelly Zhou, Orange County Register

Tennis rackets hang from the wall alongside Babolat bags, rows of string and colored grips. The other side of the shop features Bodyglide balm for chafing, Asics shoes and energy gel blocks for long-distance runs.

In the difficult world of small business, Tony Krogus and Aaron Faygenov are taking an unexpected approach to lower costs and expand their customer base.

“It was kind of a no-brainer,” said Krogus, owner of String Tennis Shop. When Krogus first looked for a retail space to open his shop, he only wanted about 500 square feet: enough room to sell equipment, shoes and bags. But the places he found were all 900 square feet or more, meaning he had to offer more clothes and inventory on the floor to fill the

space.

He settled into Blue Lantern Plaza in the beginning of 2012, even though “it was a lot bigger than what I needed, but the smallest I could find.”

Krogius later met Faygenov, who opened Running World on Pacific Coast Highway in 2010, when Faygenov was trying to figure out ways to better market his business.

“We came up with the brilliant idea: Why don’t we offer both services in one place?” Krogius said.

The duo decided to combine forces in early 2014, with Krogius moving into Faygenov’s space and cutting each man’s rent in half.

“This is the perfect synergy for two small businesses, to help each other out without wasting money,” Krogius said.

The owners believe they have the only store in the area operating under such a business model. For the two easygoing, affable business owners, it helps them fight their largest competitor, the Internet – from Amazon to Zappos to Tennis Warehouse.

Read the whole story

Ernie’s restaurant changing hands

After 34 years, Paul and Judy Bruso are selling Ernie’s.

The South Lake Tahoe restaurant on Emerald Bay Road has long

been a favorite for locals and tourists.

Ernie's first opened in 1968. It had a few owners until the 30-year-old Paul Bruso bought it in 1980. One of the biggest changes occurred in 2003 when the Brusos went from renting the building across the street to having a larger building constructed for Ernie's.

Kent Baer and Nathan Bergner will be taking over Aug. 1.

"In the interim, Kent and Nathan will be employed by us as they learn all facets of the business. Judy and I as well as Kent and Nathan believe that this will ensure a smooth transition of ownership as well as a period of adjustment as they work and bond with our excellent employees," Paul Brusso told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Judy and I have been extremely fortunate to own and operate Ernie's for 34 years with the continuous support of our amazing Tahoe community."

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

STPUD plots rate plan for capital upgrades

By Kathryn Reed

Pros and cons of various time lines to complete capital improvement projects were discussed last week by the South Tahoe Public Utility District board.

No action was taken, but the board is on track to go forward with the multi-year rate increase plan for sewer and water customers that was approved last year. Rates will go up another 6 percent on the sewer side and 6.5 percent on the

water starting July 1.

The district looks at projects in 10-, 20- and 30-year intervals.

The three biggest issues facing South Tahoe PUD are installing the state mandated water meters, replacing water lines so there is adequate fire flow and replacing the aging sewer system.

The remaining 7,000 meters should be installed to all residential customers within five years. The district obtained a \$21.5 million zero percent loan from the state to be able to complete the project.

With the projected rate increases going forward, it will take the district 30 years to install all of the water lines to meet today's standards. While inflation is built into budgets when looking forward, it is impossible to know what other rules might come down the pike.

In the next 10 years it means spending \$69.5 million, and \$173.8 million in 20 years. The district has spent \$59.4 million in the last 10 years on water projects.

Staff looked at three alternatives – no water or sewer improvements, appropriate/adequate improvements that would accomplish the goals in 10 to 15 years. This is the least risky choice, but also the most expensive.

The board is going with the third, or delayed, plan. For the water line replacement to be done in a 30-year period, it means rate increases of 6.5 percent through 2017, 5 percent in 2018, 2 percent between 2019 and 2024, and 4.5 percent from 2025-44. The currently quarterly water fee is \$130.25, by 2034 is would be \$288.92, and \$448.67 by 2044 if the increases are approved.

For the \$140.6 million worth of sewer improvements that have

been identified to be completed in 20 years, the rates would have to increase by 6 percent in years 2015-18, 2 percent from 2019-24 and 4 percent from 2025-2034.

The quarterly bill will go from \$100.02 to \$210.49.

Board member Jim Jones advocated for a more aggressive plan to replace the infrastructure. Other board members want a more tempered approach that people would be better able to afford.

Only two people showed up for the Feb. 5 workshop – a former board member and a contractor.

—

Notes:

- There will be a board workshop March 3 at 2pm.
- May 7, 6pm – public hearing.
- May 21, 2pm – public hearing and consider rate approval.
- All meetings are at the district office, 1275 Meadow Crest Drive, South Lake Tahoe.