

Helped wanted signs signal economic growth

By Joyce M. Rosenberg, AP

NEW YORK – If you're looking for signs that the U.S. economy is growing and that the job market is improving, just talk to small business owners.

After cutting back on spending for years, people are splurging again. That's evident at Lady M Cake Boutiques.

Revenue is up 40 percent this year at the New York-based company with more customers paying \$60 to \$85 – three or four times what a supermarket cake costs – for confections made of paper-thin pastry dough and flavored with ingredients like green tea and chestnuts. Business is so good that owner Ken Romaniszyn, who has two locations in Manhattan and one in Los Angeles, plans three or four next year in New York, Boston and Charlotte, N.C. He'll hire 60 new employees to staff the stores, adding to Lady M's current staff of 145.

His cakes, which once appealed mostly to the wealthy, are now attracting a wider range of customers, Romaniszyn says.

"The middle class, they can afford to make a special occasion a little more special," he says.

The U.S. economy is growing at a solid pace. This week, government figures showed that consumers and businesses drove growth to a sizzling 5 percent annual rate last quarter. Fewer Americans are applying for jobless benefits. In the first 11 months of this year, employers have added 2.65 million jobs. That already makes 2014 the best year for hiring since 1999.

A large chunk of the good news can be attributed to improvements at small companies. Reports from payroll company

ADP and software maker Intuit show small business hiring has gained momentum since the summer. The trend looks to continue – surveys by Wells Fargo & Co. and the National Federation of Independent Business show more owners plan to bring in new employees in the coming months.

With revenue up 11 percent this year at her four Squeeze In restaurants in Reno and Truckee, owner Misty Young plans to add nine people to her staff of about 90 next year. She'll also open a fifth restaurant next month in Redwood City, and hire 25 employees there.

Diners are spending an average 35 cents more per meal. When multiplied by the 270,000 people Young serves a year, it gives her an extra \$94,500 in annual revenue, she says. Customers are ordering some of the most expensive items on the menu, like a \$22 crab omelet. They're willing to pay a few dollars more for a premium vodka like Grey Goose in their bloody Marys.

"People are in this 'I deserve it' mentality. They've worked hard and they want to play hard," Young says.

The healthier economy is luring customers back to Spa Lamar for massages, facials and pedicures. Owner Heidi Lamar, who has 35 employees, is hiring to bring her staff back up to 50, the level before the recession.

Customers visit the Scottsdale spa more often, and they're asking for more services. The average bill has soared this quarter to \$122 from \$98, Lamar says. She needs more staffers to handle the increased workload.

"The group we have is getting to the point where they're maxed out," she says.

The increase in business has encouraged Lamar to add new services such as massages for couples. She's also renovating and painting the spa.

Some of the pickup in revenue comes from snowbirds, people who come to Arizona to escape the cold. But area residents are splurging on themselves again, she says.

“They say, ‘we’ve really missed you. It’s good to be coming back again,’” she says.

Marriott wants to block Wi-Fi hotspots

By David Goldman, CNN

Google and Microsoft have joined a growing chorus of businesses that oppose Marriott’s attempt to block guests’ Wi-Fi hotspots in their hotel rooms.

Marriott and the hotel lobby American Hospitality & Lodging Association asked the FCC this summer to allow hotels to deploy equipment that prevents people from turning their phones into Wi-Fi hotspots.

In order to avoid pricey hotel Wi-Fi charges, many guests opt to use their data allotment from their cell phone provider, connecting their laptops to the Internet via their smartphones.

At Marriott connection rates start at \$14.95 per day. For \$19.95, guests get “enhanced high speed Internet” which includes video chatting, downloading large files and streaming video.

[Read the whole story](#)

Gun violence: Suicide more likely than homicide

By Abbie VanSickle, Center for Investigative Reporting

Americans are nearly twice as likely to die from suicide by firearm as they are to be killed by someone else with a firearm, contributing to a rising suicide rate in this country, according to a new study published in the Annual Review of Public Health.

Suicides accounted for nearly two-thirds of deaths from firearms in 2012, according to the study, "The Epidemiology of Firearm Violence in the Twenty-First Century United States." That year, 20,666 people died from suicide by firearm, compared with 11,622 who died from homicide by firearm.

That's one firearm suicide every 25 minutes.

Mass shootings, such as the deadly school cafeteria shooting near Seattle in October, make headlines but account for a small percentage of firearms deaths each year, according to the study by Garen Wintemute, professor of emergency medicine and director of the Violence Prevention Research Program at the UC Davis. The four deadliest mass shootings in this century killed 84 people, the study says.

What makes guns such a common method of suicide? They are lethal and easy to obtain.

Easy access plays a role because suicide often is impulsive, according to research by Matthew Miller, a professor at Northeastern University and co-director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center.

At a conference earlier this month near Boston on medical issues related to guns, Miller cited a Houston study of people who had survived a nearly fatal suicide attempt. For 70 percent of them, the time between deciding to kill themselves and attempting suicide was less than an hour. For 24 percent, it was less than five minutes.

One high-risk group: veterans. Wintemute reported that researchers have found suicide rates rising among both former and current members of the military. Veterans tend to have access to firearms and training in how to use them.

How does race fit into this picture?

For homicide by firearm, black men face a higher risk throughout most of their lives, researchers say, using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System. In 2012, for instance, the firearm homicide rate for black men between the ages of 20 and 29 was at least 20 times that for white men.

But suicide is another story. There, white men dominate, and the gap between them and black men widens with age. Among white men ages 35 to 64, there were 9,063 deaths from firearm violence in 2012. Nearly 90 percent were suicides.

Wintemute's study also found that the U.S. is an outlier among industrialized countries in firearm deaths, with a substantially higher rate of both homicides and suicides.

Those deaths come at enormous cost. In 2010, researchers estimate, firearm suicides and homicides together cost society \$164.6 billion, with suicides representing about 56 percent of that total. The costs include insurance claims, lost wages and lost tax revenue.

Calif. law encourages EpiPens at all schools

By Joyce Tsaijtsai, San Jose Mercury News

A growing national consciousness on the dangers of food allergies is reflected in a state law that goes into effect Jan. 1, recommending schools keep vital medication on hand to prevent student deaths.

The Emergency Epinephrine Auto-injector Act, which was passed in September, recommends that at least one EpiPen injector is stocked at each public school, and at least one staff member is trained to use it. Similar laws have been passed in about 45 states nationwide, according to the nonprofit advocacy group Food Allergy Research & Education. In addition, a federal law was passed last year that rewards states that make it mandatory that schools stock epinephrine by giving them preferential treatment in awarding certain grants.

Prior to the law, if students had severe allergies, they had to carry their own EpiPen, or the devices were kept in stock at the school in their name. But EpiPens could not be administered if the devices were in another child's name – all that could be done was to call 911.

Read the whole story

Missing Citrus Heights man found in Truckee

By Charles Piller, Sacramento Bee

The search for a 77-year-old Citrus Heights man ended Thursday night when he was located in Truckee, according to Citrus Heights police officers.

A family member had reported James Mengel was missing as of 11:30pm Wednesday. Citrus Heights police Sgt. Nicole Garing said his family believed Mengel was driving alone. He had been seen at Holy Family Catholic Church in Citrus Heights on Old Auburn Rd. near Sunrise Boulevard, but then never returned home.

[Read the whole story](#)

Placer County issues listeriosis warning

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacramento Bee

Placer County health officials on Wednesday warned that a nationwide outbreak of listeriosis associated with commercially produced caramel apples may have extended locally.

Initial reports indicate that an El Dorado County resident recovering from listeriosis probably acquired the illness from a caramel apple purchased at a retail store in Placer County, said Robert Miller, the county's public information officer,

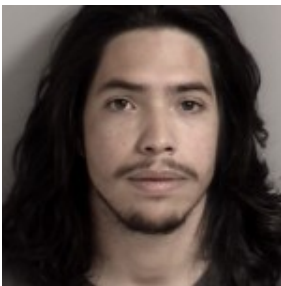
in a news release.

Read the whole story

SLT man accused of Christmas Day burglary

A South Lake Tahoe man was arrested Dec. 25 in conjunction with a burglary in the Al Tahoe area of South Lake Tahoe.

People renting a vacation house on Fresno Avenue were awakened about 6:30am to a man rummaging through their belongings. He allegedly entered through a second story sliding glass door.



Daniel Vega

He ran out the front door with their property, according to officers.

“The burglar fell in the snow just outside the entrance and dropped a folding knife with a blade of about 4 inches,” according to a police press release. “The suspect had not brandished the knife at any of the victims during the crime.”

South Tahoe officers with the assistance of El Dorado County sheriff’s deputies found Daniel Vega, 24, in the neighborhood. He was reportedly stealing things from vehicles after he left

the residence.

Vega was booked into the El Dorado County Jail on a felony charge of first-degree residential burglary.

Police believe other people are involved. They also are trying to locate stolen goods. Missing are an Apple laptop computer with several stickers displayed on it, and a woman's brown purse with gray strap and its contents.

Anyone with information is asked to call the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at 530.542.6100 or Lake Tahoe Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Comments sought on Hwy. 89-Fanny Bridge project

Three meetings are scheduled for January to discuss the Highway 89/Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project in Tahoe City.

Comments will be accepted through Feb. 17.

The proposed project aims to improve traffic congestion at the intersection of highways 28 and 89 in Tahoe City and address the long-term structural integrity of Fanny Bridge over the Truckee River. Improvements are designed to reduce traffic congestion, accommodate future traffic increases, enhance motorized and non-motorized mobility, increase access across the Truckee River, address pedestrian and traffic safety

concerns, and encourage revitalization of the Tahoe City community.

Tahoe Transportation District is lead agency for the environmental impact report prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act. TRPA is lead agency for the environmental impact statement. Federal Highway Lands Administration Central Federal Lands Highway Division is lead agency for the environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The environmental documents are available online.

The environmental documents examine seven project alternatives.

Public hearings are scheduled for:

- Jan. 14, 9:30am, TRPA Advisory Planning Commission, 128 Market St., Stateline.
- Jan. 23 9:30am, Tahoe Transportation District board of directors, Granlibakken Resort, Tahoe City.
- Jan. 28, 9:30am, TRPA Governing Board, the Chateau, Incline Village.

More than 13,000 expected at Colossus poker event

By Associated Press

The prizes will no doubt be plenty but so will the competition

when the 46th annual World Series of Poker returns for 49 days next year.

The premier poker tournament with more than 60 separate events produced by Caesars Entertainment is returning May 27 to July 14 to the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas.

Organizers announced a new event will join the lineup in 2015. Dubbed "the Colossus," the no-limit Texas Hold 'Em event will have a \$565 buy-in – the lowest, organizers said, for an open event in the tournament in 35 years – with a guaranteed total prize pool of at least \$5 million. Organizers expect more than 13,000 entries.

The closely-watched Main Event that attracts several thousand players battling for a one in nine chance to win \$10 million is scheduled for July 5 to July 14. The buy-in is \$10,000 and the final nine players return in November to vie for the top prize.

This year's winner, 27-year-old Sweden's Martin Jacobsen, was one of three Europeans at the final table who spent hours of intense head-to-head gameplay over two days to eventually take home \$10 million.

More than 82,000 people entered the 2014 World Series of Poker's 65 events in 2014. The event got its start as a small single table in 1970 at Benny Binion's Horseshoe Casino, where the players ultimately voted on the winner in the end.

This year, the tournament handed out more than \$227 million in prizes, in addition to coveted gold bracelets awarded to the top winner in the tournament's individual events.

Buy-ins at the 2015 event range from \$75 to \$111,111 and feature niche events for seniors, women and one that promises at least \$1 million to the winner. The full schedule of events is expected to be released in January.

Fire damages Kings Beach condos

Updated 9:30am:

Five condominium units in Kings Beach were damaged Dec. 24 by fire, smoke or water.

"The fire went through the attic. We're not sure how it started," Dave Zaski with North Tahoe Fire Protection District told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It took us a while to chase the fire around."

The blaze at 9200 Brockway Springs Drive was reported at 8pm.

Also helping put out the structure fire were crews from Northstar, Truckee and Meeks Bay fire departments.

Zaski said two of the damaged units were occupied. Four people, two from each unit, who lived there will need to find other living quarters.

The fire started in one unit and then spread to the others. Investigators are on the scene to assess the damage and determine the cause.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*