

South Tahoe hitting non-tax paying rentals

South Lake Tahoe has collected nearly \$40,000 this year in two cases of people who were not paying transient occupancy tax money for their vacation rentals.

South Lake Tahoe Police Department, which runs the vacation home rental department for the city, conducts routine audits to ensure TOT is being collected.

A recent audit of a vacation home rental yielded just more than \$14,800 in TOT and penalties. The owner denied renting out the vacation home despite evidence to the contrary, according to city officials. When the owner refused to voluntarily comply, a criminal investigation was conducted which showed the owner had been renting out the vacation home since at least 2008.

The owner eventually opted to comply by becoming permitted. Had he not, felony embezzlement of public fund charges could have been pressed.

Earlier this year, another routine audit totaled more than \$24,000 in past TOT fees. That owner arranged a payment plan.

Owners who fail to pay TOT as required are stealing from the city, according to Police Chief Brian Uhler. TOT is one of the city's three main revenue sources.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Humans endangering themselves, bears

U.S. Forest Service officials are threatening to shut off access to Taylor Creek on the South Shore if people don't start behaving better.

“We have had mobs of people rushing the bears trying to get a selfie. People are going off the trails to look for bears,” Lisa Herron, spokeswoman for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Our visitor center staff had a report of a bear charging someone. We have had people running across the highway because they heard there is a bear.”

Bears like to frequent the South Shore creek this time of year because the salmon are spawning – so it's a great feeding place for them.

What people are forgetting is that these animals are wild – and that this is not some sort of controlled Disneyland spectacle.

Forest Service officials said human interaction with bears at the Taylor Creek Visitor Center during the Kokanee salmon spawn has reached an unsafe level. Visitors are getting too close to bears to take photos and videos. Not only can someone be hurt, but then the bear would likely have to be put down.

For more information on visiting bear country, go online.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Climate change scaring insurance companies

By Tim McDonnell, Mother Jones

In the months after Hurricane Sandy, insurance companies spooked by rising seas dropped coastal policies in droves.

That could become an increasingly common story, according to the largest-ever survey of how insurance companies are dealing with climate change, released Wednesday. Global warming is increasing the risk of damage to lives and property from natural disasters beyond what many insurers are willing to shoulder. And most insurance companies aren't taking adequate steps to change that trend, the survey found. That's a problem even if you don't live by the coast: When private insurers back out, the government is left to pick up much of the damage costs; already, the federal flood insurance program is one of the nation's largest fiscal liabilities.

Ceres, an environmental nonprofit, evaluated the climate risk management policies of 330 large insurance companies operating in the United States. The results are worrying. Only nine companies, 3 percent of the total, earned the highest ranking.

The insurers that scored highly on the survey (including several of the world's biggest, such as Munich Re, Swiss Re, and Prudential) were those that have adopted a broad range of climate-conscious products and services, such as rate pricing plans that account for potential climate impacts like storms and fires. Some insurers are also investing in high-end climate modeling software to better understand where their risks really are. Others offer environmentally friendly plans like mileage-based car insurance and encourage their customers to rebuild damaged homes using green technologies. And some insurance companies are making significant efforts to monitor

and reduce their own carbon footprint.

However, the report finds that one major way insurance companies are adjusting to climate change is by not insuring properties that are threatened by it, said Washington State Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler, a lead author of the report.

Read the whole story

Lights shine on Harrison Ave. improvements



Harrison Avenue looking
north from Modesto Avenue.
Photo/Jonathan Moore

Thursday was the first night all the lights were turned on from Tallac Avenue to Los Angeles Avenue in South Lake Tahoe.

The road and landscaping improvements are part of the multi-million dollar Harrison Avenue project. It is jointly funded by the city and property owners in the area. Work is still being done in the area.

Select properties are improving buildings at their expense.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

5 S. Lake Tahoe businesses burglarized

Several South Lake Tahoe businesses were burglarized this week. Police believe the same suspects – who remain at-large – committed the five break-ins.

On Oct. 22 at approximately 11:15pm officers responded to the Kmart Garden Center. Two suspects smashed the front door glass and attempted to steal the cash registers. They took an unknown amount of cash and fled on foot.

Witnesses described the suspects as males wearing grey hooded sweat shirts.

While officers were investigating that burglary, an alarm at nearby Ponderosa Glass on Emerald Bay Road went off at 11:45pm. The suspects smashed the glass in the front door. Two hundred dollars was stolen.

Officers then discovered a business next door owned by Barton Health had its front door kicked in. At this time it is unknown if anything was stolen from that location.

The following morning Enchanted Florists on Emerald Bay Road and Auto Bazaar on Lake Tahoe Boulevard reported their doors had been smashed. An iPhone was stole from Auto Bazaar and a laptop taken from the florist. Both are in the general area of the other burglaries.

Officers suggest businesses get better surveillance systems or turn on the ones in place.

Sgt. Josh Adler told *Lake Tahoe News* these incidents are not likely related to the smash and grab at Simpson's Jewelers earlier this year. It is believed the suspects in that case may be the same ones who were apprehended in a Tahoe City crime.

Anyone with information about these cases should call the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at 530.542.6100 or Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

EDC wants vacation rentals to be good neighbors



C.L. Raffety, El Dorado County tax collector, leads a meeting Oct. 23 about vacation rentals.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Vacation rentals aren't going anywhere, so El Dorado County officials want to find a way for neighbors to get along with these temporary guests.

C.L. Raffety, the county treasurer-tax collector, hosted a meeting in South Lake Tahoe on Oct. 23 for people who manage vacation rentals or own them. Her department oversees vacation rentals throughout the county.

"We want to work to prevent violations," Raffety told the group. "They have a right to rent their home, but neighbors also have rights. Everyone has rights that need to be respected."

The county has devised the Good Neighbor Program. A trifold brochure has been created with the intent that it be handed out to all renters. It touts how to be a good neighbor by following noise, parking, garbage, pet, and occupancy regulations.

It says, "Renters please keep in mind that you may be cited or fined or evicted for creating a noise disturbance or violating any of the provision of the county vacation home rental ordinance chapter 5.56. Neighbors are provided contact numbers and should an occasion arise they are encouraged to report disturbances. Your permanent neighbors have a right to peace and repose and this must be respected at all times of the day but especially into the evening hours."

The goal of the whole program is to reduce the number of complaints.

"It starts with VHR (vacation home rental) owners taking the responsibility to communicate with their VHR neighbors in a diplomatic outreach effort to prevent incidents that lead to complaints," reads a letter the county sent to owners. "The outreach includes distributing to the permanent residents in

the vacation home rental neighborhood, a brochure with your local contact person's phone number."

Every vacation rental has to have a person who can be at the property within an hour – no matter the time of day or weather conditions. That person, the owner or property managers are being encouraged by county reps to walk the neighborhoods to get to know the permanent residents before there is an issue.

There are about 700 permitted vacation rentals in the unincorporated area of the Lake Tahoe Basin of El Dorado County. All are supposed to be permitted. County officials at the meeting said they regularly peruse vacation rental websites to check addresses to see if they have a permit.

Those without permits are also not paying transient occupancy tax – which is another issue.

People have 10 days to get into compliance before a fine would be levied. County officials said only once has someone not complied. The county does not mandate owners put their permit number on any website advertising the property.

South Lake Tahoe, however, does have that rule in its ordinance.

Several representatives from property management firms urged Raffety to get the Board of Supervisors to make that change to the county ordinance. She said she would see what she could do.

Enforcement of rules in the ordinance is an ongoing battle.

"They hired two code enforcement officers for the community development agency. They are so busy with health and welfare issues," Raffety said. "They don't do vacation rentals."

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies can enforce some aspects of the ordinance, but for a citation to be issued the reporting party needs to sign a complaint. That has been a

sticking point with some people because they don't want their name to be known. Property managers asked Raffety to coordinate a meeting with the higher ups in the sheriff's department to discuss how things might be able to work better in the field.

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Notes:

- Complaints about vacation rentals may be made to the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office at 530.573.3000 or to Raffety's office at 530.621.5800.
- South Lake Tahoe will be revisiting its vacation rental ordinance early next year.

Plastics industry spends big to reverse Calif. bag ban

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

The clash over California's newly passed ban on single-use plastic bags has moved from the Legislature to the streets as the national plastics industry has donated more than \$1 million for a campaign to undo or delay the law.

Moments after Gov. Jerry Brown announced signing Senate Bill 270 in September, a plastic industry group that vociferously fought the legislation declared its intention to launch a referendum campaign. If proponents secure enough signatures by the end of December, the measure would be placed on the 2016 ballot, suspending the law's implementation until then.

Money has begun pouring in. A new filing shows plastics companies contributing \$1.2 million toward the referendum campaign. All but \$50,000 came from companies based outside of California, illustrating the fight's national dimensions.

Even if the referendum ultimately fails, bag manufacturers would buy themselves a significant reprieve if the signature-gathering campaign succeeds. Large stores are poised to cease offering plastic bags by this summer, with smaller stores to follow by July 2016. Qualifying a referendum that pushes those dates back until after the November 2016 election could be worth a multimillion-dollar price tag of collecting signatures.

Read the whole story

Stumbles on campaign trail nothing new in Nev.

By Kyle Roerink, Las Vegas Sun

Gaffes, follies and slips are as much a part of politics as campaign buttons.

In Nevada this year, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, attorney general candidate Adam Laxalt and congressional candidate Crescent Hardy all made headlines for gaffes.

But none of those ranks among the biggest goofs in recent Nevada political history.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe hotel fined for pool water discharge

Lake Tahoe Vacation Resort in South Lake Tahoe has been fined \$10,000 by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency for illegally discharging pool water earlier this year.

The Governing Board on Oct. 22 approved the agreement.

The staff report says, "... Diamond Resorts staff emptied a portion of the pool water by draining it onto an area of the Diamond Resorts property, instead of the preferred method for pools on commercial properties of draining into the sanitary sewer. The pool water overflowed the area of the Diamond Resorts property and flowed into the neighboring stream environment zone property, causing a slight sediment discharge as well as the possibility of polluting the ground water with treated pool water. In addition to the unauthorized discharge, the pool draining was done without the installation of any temporary BMPs."

The Ski Run Boulevard hotel has since revised its policy regarding draining the pool.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Poverty, hunger near epidemic

in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – People in South Lake Tahoe are not only hungry, but they don't know where their next meal is going to come from. That is called food insecurity. And it's a growing problem here.

Poverty, of which hunger and food insecurity are byproducts, is such a concern that a survey was recently conducted by the El Dorado County Food Bank (which receives zero funding from the county) to gauge the needs of South Lake Tahoe.

One of the big things to be revealed is that what was once considered emergency supplemental food is now something people are relying on to sustain themselves on a regular basis. Twenty-two percent of the people surveyed require emergency food assistance at least once a month – so, 12 times a year.

Ninety-two percent of respondents said food distribution needs to be more often, 89 percent want more fresh food, and 70 percent need the distribution to be closer to where they live. Twenty-three percent have no transportation.

Most who are receiving aid are older and/or disabled, with 41 percent being at least 65 years old. Seventy-five percent are unemployed. Eighty-five percent of those working make less than \$25,000 a year.

Twenty-eight percent of the households have children. And 99 percent of those have incomes of \$25,000 or less a year.

Those statistics are all for South Lake Tahoe.

Respondents were people receiving aid and agencies. They were asked 30 questions.

South Lake Tahoe is following the state's trend. For the

second year in a row, the Census this month reported that California has the highest poverty rate in the country – 23.4 percent. That is 8.9 million people. Nevada came in second at 20 percent.

Carey Fong with the Food Bank spoke Oct. 21 to Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe at Harrah's Lake Tahoe about the growing issue of hunger and poverty in the city. Diane Weidinger, who runs the 25-year-old weekly hot meal program Bread & Broth, talked about that program.



Bread & Broth volunteers serve a hot meal to anyone who wants it every Monday at Grace Hall in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

“It’s almost an epidemic,” Weidinger said of the hunger in this community. “It’s a cycle. Once you are born into poverty, it’s almost impossible to get out without some assistance.”

Every Monday about 100 people are served a hot meal at Grace Hall at St. Theresa Catholic Church. It’s families, singles, older people – a mix of those in need. Another 40 receive a meal on Fridays at the Presbyterian Church. Other churches and organizations also give out food.

Bread & Broth is a benefactor of the El Dorado County Food Bank, while Christmas Cheer buys food from the Northern Nevada Food Bank. Fong said they’ve tried to get Christmas Cheer to switch agencies.

The El Dorado County Food Bank brings 360,000 pounds of food to South Lake Tahoe a year, with a value of \$600,000.

The local need is growing and that is not expected to change. Nationwide there will be 79.7 million older adults in 2040. This is twice as many as there were in 2000. They are the ones on fixed incomes with transportation issues, who are in need of food.

The Food Bank is looking at how it can better cater to the needs of those in the basin today and going forward.

Ideas include having a distribution center here to help with storage issues, increasing the number of days and hours when food is handed out, nutrition education, creating community gardens, and advocating for higher paying jobs. A task force has been formed with the goal being to form an action plan.