

3 gang members accused of robbery

Three South Lake Tahoe gang members were arrested in connection with a home robbery, with a fourth suspect still at-large.

The victim, whose name is not being released, reported the Oct. 11 crime to police officers on Oct. 13.

“They entered the victim’s residence, assaulted him – no weapons were used – and took several items of personal property from him,” Lt. David Stevenson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The robbery occurred in the Ski Run Boulevard area, with the arrests occurring Oct. 14 on Bobby Grey Circle.

“Based on the suspects’ gang affiliations and their history, the SWAT team was used to serve the warrants,” Stevenson said.

What gang they are associated with has not been released.

Anthony Baltazar, 20, Jose Chan, 20, and Nathan Garrett, 18, were arrested on charges of robbery and burglary.

Stevenson said the victim and suspects were acquaintances of each other. It is not known what led to the altercation, nor has the extent of the victim’s injuries been released.

Identity of the fourth suspect has not been released.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

2 hurt in Kings Beach head-on crash



Drivers of these two vehicles were hurt Oct. 18.
Photo/North Tahoe Fire

Two people were hurt Saturday afternoon in a head-on collision in Kings Beach.

Alexander M. Bell, 30, of Kings Beach, crossed into oncoming traffic Oct. 18 on Highway 28, according to the California Highway Patrol. His vehicle collided with a vehicle driven by John M. McKnight, 68, of Carnelian Bay.

Both men were airlifted to Renown Medical Center in Reno with broken femurs.

Officers said they do not believe alcohol was a factor. The cause is under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Motorcyclist hurt, driver accused of DUI



A motorcyclist was hit
in Truckee on Oct. 20.
Photo/Provided

A motorcyclist was seriously injured Monday after being hit by an alleged drunken driver in Truckee.

The collision occurred Oct. 20 at 7:02pm at the intersection of Brockway and Highway 267. Highfield has one prior DUI conviction and is on court probation for DUI.

The name of the 32-year-old Truckee resident riding the motorcycle has not been released. Officers said he suffered serious injuries and was transported to Tahoe Forest Hospital. He is expected to recover from his injuries.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Union Pacific boosts

inspections on mountain passes

By Tony Bizjakt, Sacramento Bee

Faced with public concern about the risks of crude oil shipments, the Union Pacific railroad last month boosted its rail inspection program on mountain passes in California and the West, dispatching high-tech vehicles with lasers to check tracks for imperfections.

UP officials say they have leased two rail inspection vehicles, called geometry cars, doubling the number of computer-based safety cars in use on the company's tracks. The move comes amid mounting public concern about hazardous-material shipments, including a growing quantity of highly flammable crude oil from North Dakota being shipped to West Coast refineries.

The inspection cars will supplement similar geometry cars UP owns that it uses to inspect hundreds of miles of tracks daily on the company's main lines west of the Mississippi River. Running at regular train speeds, the inspection vehicles can detect tiny deviations and wear on rail lines that could cause a derailment if allowed to grow, UP officials said.

The new cars will patrol the main mountain routes into the state, UP officials said. Northern California sites will include Donner Pass, the Feather River Canyon and grades outside Dunsmuir. The state has designated all those areas high hazards for derailments.

Read the whole story

Study: Ski industry a \$564 mil. boon for Tahoe

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The ski industry generated \$564.5 million worth of economic impact on Lake Tahoe's economy last season, according to a study by San Francisco State University.

The study of the 2013-14 ski season comes as the Tahoe region struggles with a long slide in tourism, the result of the rise of Indian casinos in Northern California. Tahoe has been trying to reinvent itself as an international tourism destination, and the study notes that overseas travelers accounted for 3.4 percent of skier visits.

[Read the whole story](#)

Desalination not a cheap water solution

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

CARLSBAD — Along this patch of the Pacific Ocean, welders and pipefitters nearly outnumber the surfers and sunbathers. Within sight of the crashing waves, the laborers are assembling what some hope will make water scarcity a thing of the past.

They are building the Carlsbad Desalination Project, which will convert as much as 56 million gallons of seawater each day into drinking water for San Diego County residents. The

project, with a price tag of \$1 billion, is emerging from the sand like an industrial miracle. In California's highly regulated coastal zone, it took nearly 15 years to move from concept to construction, surviving 14 legal challenges along the way.

The desalination plant is being built by Poseidon Water, a private company, and will be paid for in large part by rate increases on San Diego County water customers. On the surface, the plant resembles any other major construction project: Construction cranes scrape the sky as concrete foundations are poured; the giant new blocky building could be any warehouse or parts factory.

Inside, the truth of the project is revealed. The building will house more than 16,000 reverse-osmosis membranes – salt filters, essentially – that will convert the Pacific Ocean into drinking water suitable for making coffee and watering lawns.

Reverse-osmosis desalination was invented in California in the 1950s. But other nations with fewer natural freshwater supplies – Israel, Australia, Saudi Arabia and others – embraced the technology first and built dozens of projects over the past few decades. When the Carlsbad plant begins operating in 2016, it will be the largest desalination project ever built in the Americas. Desalination on this scale is so new, said MacLaggan, that Carlsbad will be operated initially by an Israeli subcontractor, which will help train a staff of California workers.

The eyes of a thirsty state are trained on this project: It is a crucial test for an industry eager to expand in California, where residents are famously protective of their coastline and also accustomed to relatively cheap water. In short, the Carlsbad project is challenging California's status quo while also offering the tantalizing prospect of relief from drought.

One of the big challenges is energy demand. Desalination requires more electricity than nearly any other water source, because water must be forced through reverse-osmosis membranes by high-pressure pumps. The San Diego County Water Authority committed to the Carlsbad project partly because it anticipates imported water will become more expensive over time and eventually reach parity with desalination.

Others view that equation differently. Four years ago, the city of Long Beach abandoned its desalination plans because of the energy cost. The city of Santa Cruz, with no imported water to shore up its supplies, rejected desalination after an uproar from residents concerned about the cost and environmental risks. The Marin Municipal Water District also decided for similar reasons in 2010 not to pursue desalination, and it boosted conservation efforts instead.

About a dozen new desalination projects are in various planning stages throughout the state. Only a few are as large as Carlsbad. The nearest to construction is another Poseidon project, proposed in Huntington Beach. A final permit from the state Coastal Commission comes up for a vote late in 2015.

Anticipating more proposals, the State Water Resources Control Board is drafting new regulations to govern desalination. The rules focus primarily on two crucial operating features: seawater intakes and outfalls.

Read the whole story

As debt mounts, Caesars in talks with lenders

By Kimberly Pierceall, AP

Caesars Entertainment said Friday it is prepared to start formal discussions with some of its bank lenders as it works to reduce its debt and stave off what some see as near certain bankruptcy.

In a filing to the Securities and Exchange Commission, the casino company announced that it has reached out to some of its creditors – namely bank lenders – to find ways to ease pressure on its \$24.2 billion debt.

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline.

That came a day after the company promised its creditors who are first in line a claim on cash held by its debt-strapped subsidiary Caesars Entertainment Operating Co. in case it defaulted. It's been in formal talks with that group of creditors, too, for about a month.

In recent years the company has spun off multiple divisions in an attempt to shape up its finances, including Caesars Entertainment Resort Properties and Caesars Growth Properties, dividing its casinos, properties and businesses among the subsidiaries. The operating company has the largest debt load.

Earlier this year, the company sold the Claridge hotel tower of its Bally's Atlantic City property and sold the Atlantic City Country Club to a private buyer. It also closed the Harrah's Tunica casino in Mississippi in June and shut down the Showboat Atlantic City casino in September.

For financial analysts watching the debt-heavy operations

division that includes Caesars Palace on the Las Vegas Strip, the company's trademarks and two of its remaining Atlantic City properties as well as other regional casinos, it's not a matter of if but when the casino company will file for bankruptcy.

Caesars spokesman Gary Thompson said he couldn't comment, citing the company's SEC-mandated quiet period before its third quarter financial results are released Nov. 10. But CEO Gary Loveman has told the *Las Vegas Review Journal* before that the company has no plans for bankruptcy.

Analysts said Caesars' actions could be an attempt to reorganize its financials outside of a federal courtroom or, if that doesn't work, get priority creditors on its side before it inevitably files for bankruptcy.

Alex Bumazhny, a financial analyst with Fitch Ratings, said it's going to be difficult for the company to reorganize its finances out of court or arrange a pre-packaged bankruptcy wrapped in a bow that it can take to a judge.

The tricky part, Bumazhny said, is the creditors who are second-in-line.

He said the company owes more than the company is worth to those who are first-in-line to be paid back. That leaves little for those second in line.

Those in the latter position have declared Caesars already in default of its agreements. The company dismissed the contentions in recent securities filings.

"It's just hard to see everybody agreeing to a deal without a pretty long bankruptcy proceeding," Bumazhny said.

Chris Snow with CreditSights pointed to \$230 million in interest owed to some of the second-in-line holders of debt in December. He said if Caesars doesn't want to pay up, it likely

behooves the company to get the priority creditors on its side now rather than later while it still has attractive cash on hand.

Both analysts said it would be difficult to handicap when the company might file bankruptcy, but Bumazhny said it could be within the year. Snow said it could be imminent or into the middle of next year after the company passes the threshold of time for some transactions that the court would otherwise be able to look back on during its bankruptcy consideration.

The company has 52 casinos in the United States and abroad with most bearing the Caesars, Harrah's and Horseshoe brand. About 68,000 people worked for the company at the end of 2013.

Nev. takes steps to be prepared for Ebola

By Steve Morre, Las Vegas Review-Journal

An advisory task force to oversee Nevada's preparations for Ebola is being organized to ensure plans are in place to contain the deadly virus in the event of an exposure in the state, Nevada Chief Medical Officer Tracey Green said Friday.

An Ebola tool kit is available online with information about what steps need to be taken to reduce the risk of infection for emergency medical responders, health care workers and the public.

Gov. Brian Sandoval has called for health care experts and public health officials to enhance communication, training and responsiveness on the Ebola situation, and to provide regular

updates to his office. Green, Nevada epidemiologist Ihsan Azzam and others in the state's Public Health Preparedness and Emergency Management Services agency have followed directives and alerts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Read the whole story

Calif. to vote on lighter penalties to relieve prisons

By Michael B. Marois, Bloomberg

California voters are being asked to lighten criminal penalties for low-level drug possession and nonviolent thefts such as shoplifting, to help ease crowding in the state's prisons.

Support for the ballot initiative is uniting billionaires on opposite ends of the political spectrum, from financier George Soros and Netflix Inc. Chief Executive Officer Reed Hastings to Republican donor B. Wayne Hughes Jr., son of the founder of Public Storage, the largest self-storage business.

Proposition 47, reducing certain non-violent property and drug crimes from felonies to misdemeanors, is a turnabout for the state that enacted one of the first Three Strikes laws in 1994. It's one of six measures on the statewide ballot that also asks voters to sell bonds for water works, stash money away for a rainy day, restrict increases in health care insurance premiums, and boost malpractice civil judgments.

"This is incredibly significant," said Nichole Porter,

director of policy advocacy for the Sentencing Project in Washington. "This could set the stage for the next 20 years in terms of rethinking the nation's approach to criminal justice policy. If the voters of California authorize this ballot measure, that will really change the conversation nationally."

Simple drug possession, bad checks under \$950, shoplifting and petty theft with the same limits would be misdemeanors, generally punishable by a fine or a term in county jail, rather than a felony, requiring a prison sentence.

Read the whole story

Suspect fires at EDC deputy; no injuries

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A search is under way for a man who Friday morning shot at an El Dorado County sheriff's deputy.

At about 8am Oct. 17, the deputy contacted a man near Cable Road in Camino. A struggle began with the 6 feet 2 inch 225 pound man.

The man then retrieved a handgun and fired at the deputy, missing him, according to a sheriff's office press release.

Read the whole story