Driver in fatal Cave Rock crash faces 4 felonies

A Carson City woman has been charged with four felonies related to the accident last summer near Cave Rock that killed a woman from Thailand.

The preliminary hearing for Kimberly Ann Davis, 40, is scheduled for Feb. 15 in Douglas County. Charges include driving a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol causing death and three counts of driving under the influence and causing substantial bodily harm.

According to the Nevada Highway Patrol, Davis was going east on Highway 50 when her vehicle crossed a double yellow line and struck the westbound vehicle head-on. Killed was 52-year-old Sranthon Bunnag, a passenger in the oncoming vehicle.

The NHP report showed Davis with a blood alcohol level of 0.22 90 minutes after the June 26 crash.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Fast, cold storm to strike Lake Tahoe area

A quick moving storm is set to blow through the region today into Monday. Expect temperatures to drop and snow to fall.

Snow levels are likely to reach the Carson and Reno areas as well. The wind is expected to pick up before the moisture arrives in Tahoe. A lake wind advisory is in effect Sunday from 10am-10pm.

“A quick burst of snow is possible along the cold front, making for a potentially slick and icy commute Monday morning,” according to the National Weather Service in Reno. “Inside slider storms like this typically have limited moisture and sporadic areas of accumulating snow.”

The sun is expected to return Tuesday. Temps will be in the teens overnight, with highs in the 30s through Tuesday. By Thursday the basin could see 50s again.

The hazy air on Saturday was mostly dust being kicked up. With it being a dry winter, winds are picking up dirt and carrying it for miles.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

CalPERS facing hit as charter schools consider leaving

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

One of the state’s largest charter school organizations is exploring whether it wants to withdraw from CalPERS, raising alarms among unions and public pension officials who fear a gradual weakening of the fund.

Aspire Public Schools, which operates 36 schools in California, opened talks with the California Public Employees' Retirement System after the charter school organization's board of directors unanimously voted in November to consider leaving the $345 billion pension fund.

Wayne Davis, a CalPERS spokesman, confirmed that Aspire had contacted the agency to request information about how it can terminate its participation in the fund. Organizations that leave CalPERS pay hefty termination fees that are invested into low-risk pools to support pensions owed to their retirees and workers.

Read the whole story

Guilty verdict in killing of Placer County deputy

By Don Thompson, AP

A man in the United States illegally was convicted Friday of killing two Northern California deputies in a case that helped fuel the national immigration debate.

Luis Bracamontes was found guilty of murder in the shootings of Sacramento County sheriff's Deputy Danny Oliver and Placer County sheriff's Detective Michael Davis Jr. in 2014. He also was convicted of attempted murder, carjacking, weapons violations and other crimes.

"Yay," he said softly after first verdict read, looking around at the victims' families and jurors with a slight smile.

Read the whole story

Private company brings affordable houses to Indian Country

By Mark Fogarty, High Country News

Last year, in Yreka, a town of 8,000 in Northern California's Shasta Valley, Sarah Abono, a member of the Karuk Tribe, moved into a four-bedroom house in a new development on tribal land. She, her husband and three children, who had been living in a modest unit nearby, are enthusiastic about their new dwelling. "This house was a blessing, really," she said.

"Everybody gets their own room. … We have a beautiful view," she said. "It's nice that there's a lot of young families moving in. Everybody seems to be happy." Abono's husband had been laid off, so the new house is especially welcome now.

In recent years, affordable housing creation in Indian Country has been languishing due to the decreased buying power of tribes' federal housing assistance. But one company is helping alleviate some of those woes for people like Abono and her family. One for-profit consultant – Travois, based in Kansas City, Mo. – has helped build more than 5,000 homes on tribal homelands, most of them in 17 states in the West, including the one Abono moved into. Over the past two decades, the company has raised $650 million for affordable Indian housing by leveraging the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit, created in 1986 during the Reagan administration. (That credit remains unchanged in the new tax legislation signed into law this January by President Trump.)

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe City Council schedules meeting to fire city manager for undisclosed reasons

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe city officials appear to be operating in a vacuum of lawlessness and deceit, and with no transparency.

A special City Council meeting has been scheduled for Feb. 12 at 9am. The only item on the agenda is in closed session: Public employee discipline/dismissal/release.

The council is only in charge of two employees – the city manager and the city attorney.

Until Nira Doherty started sitting in the city attorney chair on a full time basis the council as a whole had not had a problem with City Manager Nancy Kerry. For nearly six years she received glowing reviews, including as recently as June 2017. At that time she was also given a 5 percent raise.

The City Council on Sept. 19 in closed session agreed to hire Burke, Williams & Sorensen out of Oakland to replace City Attorney Tom Watson, who left at the end of September. Doherty, who had been a deputy city attorney for South Lake Tahoe before going to work for that law firm, had been doing work for the city as special counsel.

She is the interim city attorney who keeps spending taxpayer money beyond what is contractually allowed. (The questions in this **Feb. 3 story** still have not been answered.)

Kerry was placed on indefinite paid leave after the Feb. 6 council meeting. There still has been no reason given.

The following day the city sent out a press release stating Fire Chief Jeff Meston would be interim city manager. *Lake Tahoe News* sent an email to Tracy Sheldon, who handles PR for the city, asking what the difference between interim and acting is because Mayor Wendy David had told *LTN* that Meston was the acting city manager.

Within 10 minutes Sheldon sent a correction to the press release stating acting was the correct word.

Doherty had signed off on the original press release.

In the legal/government world there is a huge difference between acting and interim. And had anyone been made interim city manager, it would have to be announced in open session. Plus, there are protocols to removing a sitting city manager.

There was no item on any council agenda in open or closed session about Kerry between the June review and the Jan. 23 review. That June review was done by consultant Ted Gaebler pro bono, after saying it would cost $1,500.

An agreement from Mary Egan of Municipal Resource Group is dated Oct. 9. That public document was sent by Egan to Doherty and provided to *LTN* by the city.

Austin Sass was mayor at the time. It is well known Sass and Kerry had their differences; he was also having issues with his council colleagues. Sass, who sits on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board, is not well regarded by his colleagues there or among that agency’s staff.

Sass has made it known he would prefer a strong mayor form of government instead of what the city has had for 52 years, which is a city manager led government. It was a contentious year with him in the mayor’s seat.

If Egan’s company sounds familiar it’s because she has done work for El Dorado County.

El Dorado County entered a contract with Municipal Resources Group in 2014 to eliminate the “climate of fear” and create a Climate Action Plan. As was noted in **Larry Weitzman’s column on Nov. 3, 2014**, “The purpose of the contract was to address the alleged problems supposedly enumerated in the ‘Climate of Fear’ study created by the law firm of Van Dermyden Maddux, a study which cost $140,000.” It was then CEO Terri Daly who kept wanting these studies.

While the City Council agreed to have Egan come do the assessment, no one will say whose idea it was.

For legal/Government Code reasons it could not be called an investigation. The word evaluation isn’t even in the agreement. Still, what it amounted to was a witch hunt to find dirt on Kerry. And this came just months after that stellar review done by an outside firm.

The agreement letter with MRG describes the scope of work as “assessment of the city leadership effectiveness, the culture of the senior management team, succession planning status and related issues.” It further states the plan was to interview department heads, Kerry, Doherty and the five council members. That happened later in October.

Egan refused to respond to *Lake Tahoe News’* inquiries about who first contacted her from South Lake Tahoe and why there was no written report.

One has to wonder how this council and future electeds are supposed to know what the succession plan is or anything else. And succession plans are usually handled in-house.

Egan told Doherty her report would be available in early November. The contract was for $10,000, with another $1,500 in expenses.

“There are no invoices/payment records that exist,” City Clerk Suzie Alessi told *Lake Tahoe News.*

This is because Egan’s bill went to Doherty’s law firm, who then billed the city via her monthly agreement. That in part accounts for the higher monthly legal bills she submitted in October and November. The city has refused to release itemized invoices from Doherty’s firm.

Paying the consulting firm via the law firm was also a way to hide from the public where taxpayer money is being spent and that Egan was even hired.

There was never any reportable action out of closed session about the firm being hired, which is where it had to be talked about because it was never discussed in open session. A Brown Act violation.

The Brown Act is California’s public meeting law that ensures the public’s business is conducted in public and not behind closed doors. The only items allowed in closed session are personnel and litigation. And when action is taken in closed session, it has to be reported out in open session.

So the public is left wondering when Egan’s services were discussed or if a rogue councilmember or city attorney went on his or her own to hire the firm.

Because the agreement was sent to Doherty and lists her law firm it appears she is the one who at taxpayer expense launched a covert probe of the city manager.

Doherty, David and Meston were asked: How is this contract legal? How is this not a violation of the Brown Act?

The response – silence.

Egan was at the Jan. 23 meeting to talk in closed session about her findings. The department heads reached by *LTN* on Feb. 9 did not want to talk about their sessions with Egan.

One would hope if Egan had found anything egregious about Kerry – which is what the inquiry was focused on – that it would have been brought to council's attention immediately, not three months later.

It's normal in any work environment for co-workers to not all get along, even for people to not like their boss. People switch jobs all the time for a variety of reasons. Just as there is no perfect employee, there is not a perfect boss.

"In my department we are sad. We are saddened about the anonymous comments by past and current employees (as reported in other media)," Lauren Thomaselli, recreation superintendent, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She was not interviewed by Egan and didn't know about her until this week.

"(Kerry) never intended to hurt or put off anyone. The person I know would never intend to have that impact on somebody, especially a coworker or colleague. She is known to really stick her neck out for employees and support us any way she can," Thomaselli said.

The latest edict from the city as of Feb. 9 is that the public is supposed to go through City Clerk Alessi if they want to contact a member of the council. This has never been the policy in all the years this reporter has covered city government.

Alessi, as an elected official, really has no boss other than the public – just like the council. That is why it might be difficult to reach her since she has been known to not work regular hours, has missed multiple council meetings, and takes off as much time as she wants without being held accountable to anyone. All of that is legal as an elected official.

Per Kerry's contract she is owed nine month's severance unless she is fired for cause. A settlement of some sort could be possible. Kerry could also sue for what appears to be multiple reasons. With the council being her boss, she has rights as an employee that are likely to be proved to have been violated.

David was asked what the process is after next Monday’s meeting. No reply.

David as mayor appears to have adopted Sass’s way of doing business with transparency and lawfulness not mattering. After the council meeting earlier this week she said there was no reportable action, but went on to tell ***LTN*** about Kerry being placed on leave and Meston stepping in. So, she either lied about there being no reportable action or she violated the Brown Act by talking about what went on in that meeting on Feb. 6, or maybe both.

And David, who is mayor and therefore the de facto leader of the council, will not say why she is behind firing the city manager.

Sierra snowpack on pace to shatter record low of 2015

Street sweepers have been more prevalent this winter than snowplows in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

As relentless sunshine continued to pound California on Thursday, the Sierra Nevada hit a reckoning point: There's less snowpack now than on the same date three years ago, when the winter went down as the driest in recorded history and sent shudders through cities, farmlands and the state Capitol.

The troubling lack of snow during the winter of 2014-15 not only shortchanged the state's drinking-water reservoirs but left the Sierra nearly unrecognizable. Normally white-blanketed forests and meadows remained a springtime green, and mountain roads were free of ice.

The picture has become increasingly similar this year. Tahoe's ski resorts have been forced to close many low-elevation runs while working their snow-making machines overtime, and rangers at Yosemite National Park have had to apologize to guests for the lack of snow powering famed waterfalls.

Read the whole story

Agreement could bring hotel to Kings Beach

The Placer County Board of Supervisors this week approved an agreement that could result in the development of the first new hotel in Kings Beach in decades.

In a 4-0 vote, the board approved a $3 million purchase and sale agreement with developer Kings Beach Center LLC, represented by Craig Clark, to redevelop Placer County's Kings

Beach Center property in the Kings Beach town center. Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery was absent from the meeting due to illness.

The 3.5-acre parcel on North Lake Boulevard and Salmon Avenue includes vacant land, residential and commercial buildings.

The development concept negotiated in the purchase agreement includes a hotel with 80 to 150 rooms, 10 to 40 condominiums, 15,000 square feet of retail and 2,000 square feet of space for public use, with a library among the options being considered for that space.

The Feb. 6 decision does not complete the sale of the property or approve the project, but sets the conditions for its eventual sale if and when a project is formally approved.

Calif.'s chief marijuana regulator predicts more issues with supply

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

California's top cannabis regulator said the state deserves credit for a successful rollout of retail marijuana sales, but acknowledged that significant issues loom in the near future.

One month after the start of recreational marijuana sales, Lori Ajax, chief of the state Bureau of Cannabis Control, gave an assessment of the state's performance for a few hundred people at the International Cannabis Business Conference.

She praised her employees, who worked through the weekend before the Jan. 1 beginning of legal sales, granting licenses to dispensaries eager to start. Employees continued to work on Jan. 1, expecting to receive complaints from license applicants and holders, but they never came, Ajax said.

Read the whole story

Calif. wildfire risk is rising; Congress not helping

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

Washington Forestry experts have a dire warning for California: the conditions are ripe for more catastrophic fire seasons like the one last fall. And an arcane federal funding arrangement is making it a lot harder for forestry officials to do something about it.

Instead of fixing the problem, however, Congress just punted — again.

Senate leaders announced a two-year budget deal Wednesday afternoon that would lift the federal spending caps instituted under the 2011 Budget Control Act, aka "sequestration." It is expected to pass in the Senate this week, but could face a fight in the House. Still, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called it a "breakthrough" after months of brinkmanship. It "doesn't have everything Democrats want, it doesn't have everything the Republicans want, but it has a great deal of what the American people want," Schumer said.

Read the whole story