

Marriott's quarterly net income up 26%

By AP

A recovering economy and demand for hotel rooms helped lift Marriott International Inc.'s first-quarter net income 26 percent.

More people stayed in the company's hotels and paid 3.2 percent more per night.

The Bethesda, Md.-based company earned \$172 million, or 57 cents per share, beating the 51 cents expected by Wall Street analysts surveyed by FactSet. That's up from \$136 million, or 43 cents per share, in the same period last year.

Revenue rose 5 percent to \$3.3 billion, in line with Wall Street's expectations.

Those increases come even after Marriott adjusted its reporting period to have three fewer days in the quarter this year.

The company's revenue per available room – a key industry metric known as RevPAR – rose 6.2 percent in the first quarter, showing both an increase in occupancy rates and how much the hotels can charge for those rooms.

And nearly 6,000 rooms were added during the first quarter, including 3,300 rooms in international markets.

"While hotel industry supply in North America is growing only modestly, particularly in the full-service segment, we are taking a greater share of new hotels being developed around the world, reflecting owners' and franchisees' confidence in our brands and operational strength," CEO Arne M. Sorenson said in a statement.

Marriott doesn't own most of the hotels in its system but makes money off either managing or franchising its 18 brands, which include Ritz-Carlton, Fairfield Inn & Suites, Courtyard, SpringHill Suites and Renaissance.

Time for Calif. to pay down unfunded liabilities

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

Any struggling family knows that first you put food on the table, make sure there's a roof overhead and lay in some daily essentials. Only then can you realistically think about paying down the credit card.

True, you shouldn't have run wild with the card in the first place. But that's past. Now, you create a repayment plan and muster some discipline.

That's where Sacramento sits currently with its daunting credit card debt.

The state's annual budget that covers daily expenses is finally balanced after years of recession-plagued deficits. Yes, previous politicians deserve criticism for bad planning. They gave away unaffordable tax cuts and spent lavishly, especially for generous public employee pension upgrades.

But the treasury has been replenished because of the Legislature's program cutting, Gov. Jerry Brown's soak-the-rich tax increase and a recovering economy. Moreover, two years ago, there were some modest pension rollbacks for future state employees and teachers.

Now it's time to tackle those potentially crippling credit cards – especially the unfunded liabilities for retiree pensions and benefits.

Brown listed them in January while unveiling his budget proposal. The unfunded liabilities totaled \$218 billion – including \$80 billion for teachers' pensions, \$64 billion for state retiree healthcare, \$46 billion for state employee pensions, \$25 billion for University of California pensions and retiree healthcare and \$3 billion for judges' pensions.

The most troubling, by far, is the big hole in the California State Teachers' Retirement System, called CalSTRS.

Read the whole story

Early morning heist at Simpson's Jewelers

Four masked men stole thousands of dollars worth of merchandise from Simpson's Jewelers in South Lake Tahoe.

They used a sledgehammer to gain access to the South Lake Tahoe store in the Raley's center near Stateline.

"We believe the truck was stolen from another location and used to commit the smash and grab," Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It suggests a higher level of sophistication with the planning."

The truck is believed to be a Ford F250.

The burglary occurred in the early morning of April 29. The incident was caught on videotape. The suspects were in the

store for less than five minutes.

“We are trying to clean it up here and get the inventory done,” a store employee told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The exact value of the goods taken has not been determined. However, the more expensive product is stored in safes.

Detectives will look to see if there is a link between the Tahoe heist and the March burglary at Devon’s Jewelers in the Meadowood Mall in Reno.

Anyone with information is asked to call the police department at 530.542.6100.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

All of Calif. in at least a moderate drought

By Olivia Allen-Price, KQED-TV

For the first time in the 15-year history of the National Weather Service Drought Monitor, 100 percent of California is judged to be in moderate to exceptional drought.

It’s a dramatic-sounding milestone, although the state has been lingering at the 99.8 percent mark since March 18.

Though it’s a first for California to be completely in drought, other states have been there before, including New Mexico in June 2013, and Texas from September through November 2011.

You’d need to return to a time before the Drought Monitor

existed to see California in such a dire situation.

Read the whole story

Professional skier from Squaw dies skydiving

By Rina Nakano, Fox-40

ACAMPO — A 27 year-old professional skier died in a skydiving accident at the Parachute Center on Tuesday afternoon.

Timy Dutton was a sponsored free skier from Squaw Valley, who also engaged in many types of sky diving activities for the last few years.

According to the owner of Parachute Center, Bill Dause, he and a friend jumped off a plane wearing wing suits. This is an advanced sky dive, where jumpers wear a high performance body suit and fall at speeds faster than 100 miles per hour.

Read the whole story

Dispatch center a constant hum of activity



Sue Keast keeps an eye on three monitors in the South Lake Tahoe dispatch center. Photo/Lesia Witkowsky

By Kathryn Reed

"When you pick up the phone and hear screaming, you know it's not going to be a good call."

Those are the words of a South Lake Tahoe dispatcher. It's something they deal with around the clock, seven days a week.

But then there are the calls from people wanting to know what the weather is like or asking when power will be restored. They end up tying up one of the five dedicated 911 lines. Those questions are not why the emergency system was installed nor are they questions dispatchers should have to deal with.

Sometimes people are surprised to get a busy signal when they call 911. But if everyone calls when they see a wreck, those five lines will get tied up pretty fast.

Besides phones going off, the dispatchers are monitoring three

screens. Soon there will be a fourth that will have mapping software.

A new phone system is coming, too.

They are dispatching for city police officers, and fire calls for the city, Lake Valley and Fallen Leaf Lake, and all ambulances on the South Shore.

Stressful work

One ear is paying attention to the person on the phone, the other to the officers, firefighters or paramedics. Sometimes they are helping direct CalStar to a scene.

All the while they are typing what's going on.

And multiple calls at a time are the norm.

They work in a relatively small room that only has artificial light. The one window is covered because it looks out to the front waiting area. This is where they take breaks. A trip to the bathroom better be fast.

They work as a team and consider the other person their partner.

While there are four desks, no one can remember when four dispatchers actually worked at the same time. The dispatch center is so understaffed that often only one person is working. Otherwise it's two people. And it's always two people on Friday and Saturday nights. Fourth of July and New Year's Eve often warrant three dispatchers.

"We try not to work more than 14 hours except in cases like New Year's Eve. Sometimes you might have to work longer, or if there is a fire or some sort of incident where you can't leave," Sue Keast, who supervises the dispatchers, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Checking probation status, driver's license, warrants – it's all part of the job. They are the records department after normal business hours. Dispatchers enter citations and warrants.

Not that long ago they didn't provide a caller with much medical help. Today there are a slew of issues they can help with. A computer program prompts them to ask questions based on the answer given.

Linda, a dispatcher who doesn't want her last name used, says the goal is to calm people down, to try to provide whatever assistance they can before paramedics arrive. It could be a life and death situation if a person can start CPR before the ambulance arrives.

Personal involvement

Being such a small area it's not unusual for the dispatchers to know the caller or victim.

"I was on the fire radio and my mom called 911. My partner took the call. She recognized the address and tried to get my attention. When I saw the address you could hear my voice shaking as I dispatched an ambulance out to my parents' house," Keast said. "Everyone's fear is they are going to dispatch to a family member."

Coming this year people will be able text 911. It's a federal mandate. While this is seen as a good thing for when there is a prowler or another circumstance where it's best if the intended victim doesn't say something, the use of pictures is what worries dispatchers.

It's bad enough hearing everything that is going on. They don't need pictures.

For Joe, who also just wanted to use his first name, someone died every day the first two weeks he trained.

Everyone has stories to tell – like the lady on the phone whose husband was face down in the bathtub. She was too frail to turn him over and could only watch him drown. The dispatcher could only listen to her tears.

Debriefing for dispatchers is only now becoming part of the norm. They were not included in the debriefing after the Angora Fire – yet they all knew people who lost their homes – including one of the dispatchers.

It's not always a single event that lingers, but the accumulation of calls. Last summer, the dispatchers say, was one of the worst. There were two murders, several deaths, the child at Camp Sacramento who went into anaphylactic shock and died, the swimmer who drowned at Emerald Bay.

"It was pretty devastating to our staff," Keast said of all the tragedies. She said the department is getting better at addressing the stress involved with being a dispatcher.

Ambulance issues

South Lake Tahoe believes it is subsidizing the CalTahoe JPA by \$60,000 a year in dispatch services. The JPA contract pays \$90,000, but the city says the cost is more like \$150,000.

Funding for ambulance JPAs in the county differ.

"The West slope JPA was started before the passage of Prop. 13. Accordingly, the West Slope ambulance JPA gets a portion of the base 1 percent of each tax bill on the West Slope. That is what state law requires," Joe Harn, El Dorado County auditor-controller, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The CalTahoe Ambulance JPA was after the passage of Prop. 13. Accordingly, the CalTahoe Ambulance JPA does not get a portion of the base 1 percent of each tax bill in Tahoe. That is what state law requires."

Counties can decide how ambulance service is provided. Mike

Applegarth who works in the chief administrative office chose not to answer the following basic questions:

- Why is the county in the ambulance business?
- Why not let the fire departments run it themselves?

“As part of the JPA contract we have to provide dispatch, ambulances have to meet certain criteria. It’s a comprehensive package,” Jeff Meston, South Lake Tahoe fire chief, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It favors the county.”

Meston said the county is getting money via taxpayers and by billing for ambulance service, but all of it is not returned to the CalTahoe JPA.

“The money exists in accounts we cannot get our hands on,” Meston said.

Last year the JPA board sent out a request for proposal for dispatch service, but it wasn’t done properly so it never went anywhere. The board is made up of two Lake Valley Fire Protection District board members and two South Lake Tahoe City Council members. North Tahoe Fire used to be part of the JPA, so then there was a fifth vote.

CalTahoe Ambulance JPA has been without an executive director until Monday when Ryan Wagoner was hired. He recently took a medical retirement from the city police department. He has also been on Lake Valley’s board. He is also an emergency medical technician.

Other than being dispatched to calls, Wagoner said he is not yet privy to the intricacies of issues surrounding dispatch.

“I heard it will be one of the first things the chiefs want to talk about,” Wagoner told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Survey: SLT voters warm to upping some taxes

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe voters are open to spending money on infrastructure, but they don't want to foot the entire bill.

The city submitted a few questions for a recent survey that Lake Tahoe Community College contracted for in regards to its proposed general obligation bond. The city paid for 25 percent of the survey at a cost of less than \$5,000.

"Since the college was conducting a survey, which is typically expensive, it was a good opportunity to see if for very little cost the city could tag onto the college's survey," City Manager Nancy Kerry explained.



Harrison Avenue upgrades are being funded by a variety of sources. Photo/LTN file

The results show that 65 percent of voters would support increasing the hotel tax. On previous city surveys the voters have said the same thing – it would be fine to up the transient occupancy tax.

When it came to be willing to support a sales tax for infrastructure, slightly more than half the voters, or 54 percent, said do it.

“The City Council does not have on its work plan to go to the voters anytime soon on a tax increase,” Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Still, money is needed if the city is going to make any kind of dent in upgrading, maintaining and bringing some of its infrastructure to code.

“We also need money for recreation upgrades and facilities and services. The question is whether there is an appetite of the community to invest in these key strategies – infrastructure and recreation – or if funding will need to come from another source,” Kerry said.

The massive Harrison Avenue project, which has started, in part is being funded by the city taking out a loan.

Here are the actual survey results.

Stateline casino profits surge in March

Credit Stateline’s casinos for pushing Nevada’s gaming revenues into the win column for March.

The South Shore casino take was up nearly 32 percent in March compared to 2013, with profits of \$14.93 million.

Statewide gaming revenues were up 7.6 percent compared to the prior year at \$982 million. A lot of this had to do with a

surge in baccarat.

Reno casinos didn't fare as well, with a decline of 10.6 percent.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Online poker becomes tourism draw

By John Brennan, New Jersey Record

On any given Sunday, Mike Azzaro – or mikeycasino, as he's known online – will travel from his home in Yonkers, N.Y., to a Ramsey hotel room for the night.

The reason is not glamorous, but it is profitable: Azzaro, 27, is a professional poker player.

Of the online players who have signed up to play in New Jersey at PartyPoker.com, 15 percent don't live in the state. You must be within New Jersey's borders to play, but residency isn't required. That so many out-of-state players are traveling to New Jersey – call it “poker tourism” – is an encouraging sign for the fledgling industry, which so far has been generating less than \$2 million per month in tax revenue for the state budget.

Mike Azzaro, sitting by the window, and other out-of-towners playing online at the Borgata in Atlantic City on Friday.

That figure is less than a tenth of the projections made last year by the Christie administration, but it is far closer to the amount anticipated by most industry analysts in the first

year of play.

By crossing into New Jersey, Azzaro can engage in unlimited hours of legal online poker. New Jersey is one of three states that permit such play. The state's rollout of a variety of online games in November followed a similar move by Delaware a month earlier. Last spring Nevada – the state best known for gambling – became the first to offer online poker.

New Jersey benefits when Azzaro and friends cross the Hudson and pay for hotel rooms and room service. And Azzaro admits he has “splurged” on purchases in the state to celebrate wins, such as after he won more than \$15,000 in PartyPoker's first two tournaments in December.

Read the whole story

Truckee teens arrested in BB gun incident

Two Truckee teenagers have been arrested in connection with firing a BB gun at a man who had to be hospitalized for his injuries.

The incident occurred April 24 in downtown Truckee. The victim transported himself to Tahoe Forest Hospital and was later transferred to Renown Medical Center in Reno because a pellet that entered his chest had lodged near his heart.

A day later officer arrested Kyle Mello, 18, and a 17-year-old male on charges of assault causing great bodily injury, burglary and possession of stolen property.

Officers said during the investigation they discovered Mello

and the juvenile allegedly broke into three houses in Tahoe Donner prior to the pellet incident. They stole alcohol and the pellet gun used in the assault from these houses, officers said.

Anyone with further information is asked to call 530.550.2335 or 530.550.2336.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*