

Work on Kingsbury Grade begins

Initial construction work has begun on Kingsbury Grade.

Preliminary construction work will take place on the road shoulders, with flagger controls, through April 30 during the evening from approximately 8pm-6am.

Beginning May 1 through Memorial Day weekend, Kingsbury Grade will be closed near Daggett Summit as full construction begins. During the nearly monthlong period directly prior to Memorial Day, and another monthlong period after Labor Day, Kingsbury Grade will be closed to through traffic near the summit, just east of Tramway Drive. During those times, non-residential traffic will be detoured to Highway 50 to get to Lake Tahoe.

Construction will also continue during the summer months between Memorial Day and Labor Day, with Kingsbury Grade open to through traffic, but nighttime construction-related lane closures and delays to be expected. The road will be open with one lane in each direction during daytime hours, weekends and holidays through these summer months.

The approximately \$15 million project will reconstruct pavement and make drainage, safety, curb and gutter, sidewalk, lighting and other improvements on areas of Kingsbury Grade from just east of Daggett Summit (Tramway Drive) to the intersection of Highway 50 at Stateline.

California tax collections increase

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

California's tax revenues jumped by \$18.2 billion in 2013, thanks to an improving economy and the impact of a temporary sales and income tax increase approved by voters, a new Census Bureau report shows.

All tax collections, including those for special purposes as well as the state general fund, increased from \$115 billion in 2012 to \$133.2 billion last year, with virtually of the increase generated by sales and income taxes. The general fund received about 75 percent of the taxes.

California's 15.6 percent increase was more than twice the 6.1 percent increase recorded by all states, the Census Bureau reported, Total state collections were \$846.2 billion last year, with California's \$133.2 billion being 15.7 percent of all state taxes, even though the state has just 12.2 percent of the nation's population.

Read the whole story

Heroin spreads misery throughout U.S.

By Amy Forliti, Dan Sewelll and Nigel Duara, AP

On a beautiful Sunday last October, Detective Dan Douglas stood in a suburban Minnesota home and looked down at a lifeless 20-year-old – a needle mark in his arm, a syringe in his pocket. It didn't take long for Douglas to realize that the man, fresh out of treatment, was his second heroin overdose that day.

"You just drive away and go, 'Well, here we go again,'" says the veteran cop.

In Butler County, Ohio, heroin overdose calls are so common that the longtime EMS coordinator likens the situation to "coming in and eating breakfast – you just kind of expect it to occur." A local rehab facility has a six-month wait. One school recently referred an 11-year-old boy who was shooting up intravenously.

Sheriff Richard Jones has seen crack, methamphetamine and pills plague his southwestern Ohio community but says heroin is a bigger scourge. Children have been forced into foster care because of addicted parents; shoplifting rings have formed to raise money to buy fixes.

"There are so many residual effects," he says. "And we're all paying for it."

Heroin is spreading its misery across America. And communities everywhere are indeed paying.

The death of actor Philip Seymour Hoffman spotlighted the reality that heroin is no longer limited to the back alleys of American life. Once mainly a city phenomenon, the drug has spread – gripping postcard villages in Vermont, middle-class enclaves outside Chicago, the sleek urban core of Portland, Ore., and places in between and beyond.

It remains a small part of America's drug problem; cocaine, Ecstasy, painkillers and tranquilizers are all used more, and the latest federal overdose statistics show that in 2010 the

vast majority of drug overdose deaths involved pharmaceuticals, with heroin accounting for less than 10 percent.

But heroin's escalation is troubling. Last month, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder called the 45 percent increase in heroin overdose deaths between 2006 and 2010 an "urgent and growing public health crisis."

In 2007, there were an estimated 373,000 heroin users in the U.S. By 2012, the number was 669,000, with the greatest increases among those 18 to 25. First-time users nearly doubled in a six-year period ending in 2012, from 90,000 to 156,000.

The surge is easily explained. Experts note that many users turned to heroin after a crackdown on prescription drug "pill mills" made painkillers such as OxyContin harder to find and more costly. Whereas a gram of prescription opiates may go for \$1,000 on the street, that same gram of heroin will sell for \$100, authorities say.

It's killing because it can be extremely pure or laced with other powerful narcotics. That, coupled with a low tolerance once people start using again after treatment, is catching addicts off guard.

In hard-hit places, police, doctors, parents and former users are struggling to find solutions and save lives.

"I thought my suburban, middle-class family was immune to drugs such as this," says Valerie Pap, who lost her son, Tanner, to heroin in 2012 in Anoka County, Minn., and speaks out to try and help others. "I've come to realize that we are not immune. ... Heroin will welcome anyone into its grasp."

Minnesota: Message for the masses

The night before Valentine's Day, about 250 people filed into

a Baptist church in Spring Lake Park, Minn., a bedroom community north of Minneapolis that brags of its “small-town charm and friendly folks.” There were moms and dads of addicts, as well as children whose parents brought them in hopes of scaring them away from smack.

From the stage, Dan Douglas gripped a microphone as a photograph appeared overhead on a screen: A woman in the fetal position on a bathroom floor. Then another: A woman “on the nod” – passed out with drug paraphernalia and a shoe near her face.

Douglas didn’t mince words. “You just don’t win with heroin,” he declared. “You die or you go to jail.”

It was the third such forum held over two weeks in Anoka County, which encompasses 440 square miles of urban neighborhoods, rural homesteads and suburban centers that are home to nearly 340,000 souls. Since 1999, 55 Anoka County residents have died from heroin-related causes. Only one other Minnesota county reported more heroin-related deaths – 58 – and it has a population three-and-a-half times greater than Anoka’s.

In 2009, when Douglas began supervising a drug task force, authorities were focused on stamping out meth labs. Heroin, with its dark and dirty image, just wasn’t a concern. Then investigators noticed a climb in pharmacy robberies and started finding Percocet and OxyContin during routine marijuana busts.

As prescription drug abuse rose, so, too, did federal and state crackdowns aimed at shutting down pill mills and increasing tracking of prescriptions and pharmacy-hopping pill seekers. Users turned to heroin.

“It hit us in the face in the form of dead bodies,” says Douglas. “We didn’t know how bad it was until it was too late here in our community.”

Douglas says authorities are doing what they can: educating doctors about the dangers of overprescribing painkillers, holding events where residents can dispose of prescription opiates, and aggressively trying to get drugs off the street. But, he says, "law enforcement cannot do this alone."

The idea for the forums came not from police but rather from Pap, a third-grade teacher whose youngest son died of a heroin overdose.

Tanner was an athlete who graduated from high school with honors. In fall 2012, he was pursuing a psychology degree at the University of Minnesota, and dreamed of becoming a drug counselor. He had not, to his mother's knowledge, ever used drugs, and certainly not heroin.

Then one day Tanner's roommates found the 21-year-old unconscious in his bedroom.

Amid her grief, Pap realized something needed to be done to educate others. She met with county officials, and the community forums began soon after. At each, Pap shared her family's story.

"Our lives have been forever changed. Heroin took it all away," she told the crowd in Spring Lake Park.

Douglas says most heroin-related deaths he has seen involve victims who struggled with the drug for years. The detective usually tries to shield his own boys, ages 7 and 11, from what he sees on the job. But after meeting parents like Pap, Douglas shared his heroin presentation with his oldest son, complete with the sobering pictures.

"Could I still be blindsided? Absolutely," he says. "But it's not going to be for lack of information on my part. ... I don't want to scare my kid. I don't want to scar my kid. But I sure as hell don't want to bury him."

Ohio: OD antidote helps save lives

Brakes screech. The hospital door flies open. A panicked voice shouts: "Help my friend!" Medical technicians race outside with a gurney. An unconscious young man is lifted aboard, and the race is on to stop another heroin user from dying.

It's known as a "drive-up, drop-off," and it's happened repeatedly at Ohio's Fort Hamilton Hospital. The staff's quick response and a dose of naloxone, an opiate-reversing drug, bring most patients back. But not all. Some are put on ventilators. A few never revive.

"We've certainly had our share of deaths," says Dr. Marcus Romanello, head of the ER. "At least five died that I am acutely aware of ... because I personally cared for them."

Romanello joined the hospital about two years ago, just as the rise of heroin was becoming noticeable in Hamilton, a blue-collar city of 60,000 people. Now it seems to be reaching into nearly every part of daily life.

"If you stood next to somebody and just started a conversation about heroin, you'd hear: 'Oh yeah, my nephew's on heroin. My next-door neighbor's on heroin. My daughter's on heroin,'" says Candy Murray Abbott, who helped her own 27-year-old son through withdrawal.

Abbott and childhood friend Tammie Norris, whose daughter was also a heroin user, decided last year to bring attention to the problem in their hometown, using Facebook to organize poster-waving demonstrations by everyone from recovering addicts to parents and grandparents of children who died of overdoses.

Norris could only shake her head at the surge in attention to heroin after Hoffman's death. "Well, duh," she says, "it's been happening to our kids every day – and nobody sees it."

A couple decades ago, the big problem in Hamilton was cocaine. That shifted to prescription drug abuse, which morphed into heroin as pharmaceuticals grew harder to come by. Now heroin-related deaths have more than tripled in Butler County, where Hamilton is the county seat. There were 55 deaths last year, and within one two-week period, the city's emergency paramedic units responded to 18 heroin overdoses. Once, they had five overdose runs in a single day.

Users run the gamut, says EMS veteran Jennifer Mason – from streetwalkers to business executives. They die in cars, public parks, restaurant bathrooms, a university building. Mason has found people turning blue with needles still in their arms.

Sojourner Recovery Services, an addiction treatment organization in Hamilton, has a six-month waiting list for beds for male addicts.

Romanello's hospital saw 200 heroin overdose cases last year, and countless related problems: abscesses from using unsterile needles, heart-damaging endocarditis and potentially fatal sepsis infections.

Overdose patients usually bounce back quickly after given naloxone, known by the brand name Narcan. It works by blocking the brain receptors that opiates latch onto and helping the body "remember" to take in air.

At least 17 states and the District of Columbia allow Narcan to be distributed to the public, and bills are pending in some states to increase access to it. Attorney General Holder has called for more first responders to carry it. Last month, Ohio's Republican governor signed into law a measure allowing a user's friends or relatives to administer Narcan, on condition that they call 911.

Romanello says his patients are usually relieved and grateful by the time they leave his hospital. "They say, 'Thank you for saving my life,' and walk out the door. But then, the

withdrawal symptoms start to kick in.”

“You would think that stopping breathing is hitting rock bottom,” adds Mason. “They don’t have that fear of dying. You’ve blocked the heroin, and they have to have it. They go back out to get more. You haven’t fixed their addiction.”

Oregon: Former addict fights back

Before 9 o’clock every weekday morning, the secret to one of the most successful drug rehabilitation clinics in Portland waits behind a locked door. Meet David Fitzgerald, leader of the mentor program at Central City Concern, which claims a 60 percent success rate for treating heroin addiction.

The lock, Fitzgerald says, is a necessity because his addicts will take every opportunity offered, including early access to the “mentor room.”

Inside, the walls are covered in photos, including a collage from last year’s group picnic. Recovering addicts smile and hold plates of food. Seven months later, Fitzgerald looks over the faces. Are they all still sober? Are they all still alive?

“Most of them,” he says. “Not all.”

Heroin cut a gash through the Pacific Northwest in the 1990s. Then prescription pills took over until prices rose. Now the percentage of those in treatment for heroin in Oregon is back up to levels not seen since the ’90s – nearly 8,000 people last year – and the addicts are getting younger.

Central City’s clients reflect that. In 2008, 25 percent of them were younger than 35. Last year that went to 40 percent.

“A lot of them aren’t ready at a younger age,” Fitzgerald says. “The drug scene, it’s fast ... it’s different. It’s harder than it was.”

Fitzgerald, 63, speaks with a laconic prison patois, a

reflection of 20-plus years incarcerated, all the while addicted to various drugs. The worst was heroin. In 1997 he got sober, and in 1999 he joined Central City Concern, then a burgeoning outfit.

Fitzgerald saw that the usual path for treating addiction wasn't working. Addicts were processed through detox for seven or eight days, then handed a list of tasks that included finding work, meeting with a probation officer, and locating the drop site for their daily food box.

"Like they're going to do any of that," Fitzgerald scoffs. "First thing they do is see somebody they know, get that fix."

Central City Concern instead accompanies clients to housing appointments, keeps their daylight hours filled with to-dos and requires they spend idle hours at the facility, where they also sleep.

It's a bare-bones staff operating on a razor-thin budget, and the crop of younger addicts presents a new problem: finding appropriately aged mentors to match them with. But Fitzgerald has hope in 26-year-old Felecia Padgett, who remembers clearly the first time she fired heroin into her veins.

"I heard one time somebody say it's like kissing God," says Padgett. "It is. It's like getting to touch heaven."

Padgett's six-year tumble involved, in order: heroin smoked, heroin shot intravenously, homelessness, one overdose, two close calls, a suicide attempt, arrest, jail, arrest, jail, arrest, jail and, finally, a one-shot, last-chance stop at Central City.

Before sobriety, she found herself selling to people younger than herself, suburban kids rolling up in their parents' cars.

Fitzgerald doesn't yet have money to pay her, and Padgett herself is still in recovery. But she, and others like her,

may play a crucial role in confronting the problem as the face of Portland's heroin addiction gets younger.

Fitzgerald knows that many of the clients he sees at 25 may be back in rehab at 35, but he tries to remain optimistic that some of what they learn at Central City will, ultimately, make a difference.

"That's about all you can do," he says, "hope some of it sticks."

LTCC decision on SnowGlobe expected in May

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry made a case Tuesday for why Lake Tahoe Community College should allow SnowGlobe to continue on the school's adjacent ball field.

The two public agencies own the field, with the city responsible for maintaining it.

The college board of trustees at its first May meeting is expected to vote on whether the three-day year-end music festival should return for years four, five and six.

The city last month agreed to a three-year contract with the promoter. But the event won't happen without the college's OK.

"As soon as the field is replaced, it won't come back," Kerry said of the festival. The field could be replaced at a potential cost of \$750,000 in the next 30 to 36 months.

The goal is to find a turf company that has been in existence for a while. The firm the city used for the existing field went out of business before the warranty expired.

“The sample that was shown is not what was installed,” according to Roberta Mason, LTCC board president.

When Measure S was approved the voters thought they would be getting multiple fields. They got one multi-use field instead.

Kerry told the board it’s not the festival that is the field’s major deterioration, but instead it’s snow.

“Snow itself and how it melts creates a wobbly field,” Kerry said.

While the city wants to keep SnowGlobe on the South Shore, a suitable replacement venue has yet to be secured. It is estimated the event brings in \$6 million to the region.

Study: Calif. women make 84 cents for every \$1 men do

By Shan Li, Los Angeles Times

Despite all the recent focus on female empowerment and “leaning in” at work, California women are still paid just 84 cents for every \$1 paid to men in the state.

In the Golden State, a woman who works a full-time job earns, on average, \$41,956 a year, compared with \$50,139 for a man who works full time, according to an analysis from the nonprofit advocacy group the National Partnership for Women & Families. That’s a wage gap of \$8,183 per year between the

genders.

Collectively, California women lose out on a total of nearly \$37.7 billion annually, the report said.

Read the whole story

Caltrans plans detours in Placerville

Smith Flat Road in Placerville will be closed to through traffic at the Highway 50 overcrossing for approximately three months.

Motorists will be detoured to continue east on Broadway Street, turn north on Jaquier Road and then west back onto Smith Flat Road. Marked detour signs will be used to direct motorists.

Bridges at the Smith Flat Road undercrossing and Coloma Street Pedestrian overcrossing are being worked on as part of a \$3.2 million seismic retrofit project. Columns will be retrofitted and bracing will be added to the structures.

Future hardships for Calif.

as drought persists

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

As California's drought stretches toward the hot summer months, state and federal officials are planning extraordinary measures to protect drinking water supplies and endangered Sacramento River salmon, according to a plan unveiled Wednesday.

The "Drought Operations Plan" was released by the state Department of Water Resources and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operate the primary systems of water reservoirs and canals in California.

Among other things, the plan calls for further loosening of water quality rules in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, allowing the agencies to keep river flows low to preserve as much water as possible in upstream reservoirs, especially Shasta Reservoir. Temporary dams are proposed on three Delta channels to allow the remaining freshwater runoff to more effectively push back saltwater intrusion from San Francisco Bay.

Read the whole story

Hiker reports seeing body in Cascade Lake

An El Dorado County search and rescue crew is at Cascade Lake this morning searching for a possible body.

A woman hiking on April 9 to Cascade Falls reported to

deputies that afternoon that she thought she saw a body floating in the lake.

Nothing was found on Wednesday. A dive team was searching the South Shore lake off Highway 89 on Thursday morning. CalStar is also assisting with the search.

El Dorado County sheriff's Lt. Pete Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News* there has been no report of a missing hiker.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Judge candidates square off in court



Dylan Sullivan

Joe Hoffman

What does “judge pro tem” mean?

That question was at the center of a legal challenge between two candidates for El Dorado County Superior Court judge. Dylan Sullivan took Joe Hoffman to court over his use of the phrase on his ballot statement. The two are running for the same seat in the June 3 election.

Placer County Superior Court Judge Charles Wachob heard the case because El Dorado County judges had recused themselves.

Ultimately Hoffman agreed to remove “judge pro tem” as one of

his professions.

He told *Lake Tahoe News* he did so because of the hour that the case was being heard. If the proceedings continued beyond that afternoon, the county may not have been able to get ballots off in time for military personnel overseas to vote. Hoffman said that is why he didn't fight the matter further.

Hoffman says the judicial handbook of a judges' association allows him to call himself a judge pro tem.

Dylan and her attorney disagree.

"Nobody defines judge pro tem. He has been a settlement law attorney in family law cases. That is not a judge. What he has done is all volunteer," Jacqueline Mittlestadt, Sullivan's attorney, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "But the law is clear. If you are not a judge, you can't say you are a judge. You can be subject to fines and criminal penalties."

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Drill keeps first responders' skills sharp



Emery Mulligan and Jack Suglian comfort each other after being “shot” April 7 at Tahoe Valley. Photos/Lesia Witkowsky

By Kathryn Reed

Shots have been fired at Tahoe Valley Elementary School. A guy has been seen with a gun. Sirens wail in the distance. Officers in helmets, some carrying AR-15 semi-automatic rifles make their way to the front of the building before entering. A shot goes off as they enter, but they proceed.

This was all a drill on Monday as members of the South Lake Tahoe fire and police departments practiced what they would do if there had been a shooting. They played out the same scenario a week ago at Lake Tahoe Community College, using the two facilities during their respective spring breaks. Lake Valley firefighters participated in last week’s training.

All the first responders knew is that the drill involved an active shooter. They didn’t know where he was, how many were wounded or the extent of their injuries.

Two members of Barton Health's staff are there, too. Cate Neal is a trauma nurse coordinator and Tina Bruess is the grief counselor. They would be doing the same thing if this were real.

Ultimately it's up to Barton to decide which patients go to what hospital.

Paramedics have the wounded – who are high school drama students – stretched out on green, yellow and red tarmacs. Red is for people with the severest wounds. The deceased are off to the side. The shooter, once apprehended, it kept far from his victims.

Some of the wounded have walked out on their own; rescue personnel assisted others. The paramedics assess their condition, putting a triage tag around their neck so once they get to the hospital the medical personnel will have some idea of what they are dealing with.

Gone are the days when the wounded are tended to after the shooter is in custody or killed. The old policy had victims waiting hours to receive medical care.

"We make it as safe as we can and then get people inside help," police Lt. David Stevenson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While the scenario had nowhere near the intensity of a real tragedy, it still provides those involved with an opportunity to get a feel for what it would be like.

"Our mass casualty incident training days provided us excellent training opportunities to work on our skills in responding to an incident with multiple victims. These events can be very challenging for responders due to the complexity of the required steps to triage, treat and transport multiple patients," Kim George, SLTFD engineer, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She coordinated the event. "This live drill training provides us all with a memory to call upon if we encounter a true

incident that is similar in nature and that gives us an advantage.”

Douglas County loaned the city its camera that was posted high in the air to capture what was going on. This was being relayed back to Lake Tahoe Airport, which doubles as the command post for the Office of Emergency Services, where Fire Chief Jeff Meston was watching his charges.

With mass shootings happening throughout the country, and close by – Carson City iHop in 2011 – this type of scenario could be a reality in South Lake Tahoe. The closest school shooting was last year at Sparks Middle School where a student killed a teacher before shooting himself.

Mother Jones has been tracking mass shootings. There have been 67 mass shootings in the last three decades. Most shooters got their weapons legally.

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