

S. Tahoe among few communities without water meters

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Despite urgent calls for water conservation amid one of California's worst droughts, more than 255,000 homeowners and businesses across the state can still use all the water they want without paying higher bills.

And nobody even knows how much water they are using.

From Bakersfield to Sacramento to Shasta County to Lake Tahoe, 42 communities in California have not installed the most basic tool of water management – water meters – for all of their connections.

People without meters are charged a flat monthly rate in those areas for water, usually between \$20 and \$35 a month. And those communities use 39 percent more water per capita than the state average, according to an analysis of state Department of Water Resources records by the San Jose Mercury News.

Most California residents have had water meters for generations.

Communities have different explanations for why they've been slow to install meters. In South Lake Tahoe, officials had to upgrade sewer systems that were in danger of polluting the lake, and they still need to modernize water systems for fire protection, said Richard Solbrig, general manager of the South Tahoe Public Utility District.

"Basically our community had other priorities that were a lot more important," he said. "A lot of people get upset when we

say Lake Tahoe is different than other places. But the reality is that it is.”

Read the whole story

3 Tahoe residents hurt in Hwy. 28 car accident

Three Tahoe City residents were injured Tuesday in a single-vehicle accident on Highway 28.

Morgan Russell, a passenger in the Nissan Murano, was taken to Renown Medical Center in Reno with life-threatening injuries. Wesley Waterman, the driver, and Karly Findorff sustained minor injuries.

Nevada Highway Patrol troopers said Waterman might have fallen asleep, causing the vehicle to drift to the right.

“The front of the vehicle struck a roadway sign, continued in a southerly direction then struck a tree. The vehicle came to rest on the right shoulder, facing south,” troopers said in a press release.

The accident occurred March 11 at 6:27am on Highway 28 south of mile marker 10, not far from the intersection of Highway 50.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Heroin use up because of crackdown on prescription drugs

By Jerry Markon and Alice Crites, Washington Post

From the beginning, the U.S. government's decade-long crackdown on prescription drug abuse has run an unsettling risk: that arresting doctors and shuttering "pill mills" would inadvertently fuel a new epidemic of heroin use.

State and federal officials have pressed their campaign against prescription drug abuse with urgency, trying to contain a scourge that kills more than 16,000 people each year. The crackdown has helped reduce the illegal use of some medications and raised awareness of their dangers.

But at the same time that some pain medications have become less available on the street and pricier, many users have switched to cheaper heroin, since prescription pills and heroin are in the same class of drugs and provide a comparable, euphoric high.

Read the whole story

20-year sentence in vehicle manslaughter case

A chronic DUI offender was sentenced March 10 to 20 years to life in prison for gross negligence vehicle manslaughter while intoxicated, an enhancement of fleeing the scene, and felony

hit and run.

Larry L. Halverson, 61, had been found guilty on those charges on Oct. 1.

Patrick Purnell, 51, was killed Sept. 4, 2011, when he was crossing Ski Run Boulevard near Forest Avenue in South Lake Tahoe. A vehicle driven by Halverson struck him. He was driving despite having his license revoked for prior DUIs.

Halverson had nine prior driving under the influence convictions, of which eight were talked about before the El Dorado County Superior Court jury last year.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placerville house fire victims died from gunshots

The two women who died last week in a Placerville house fire had been shot to death.

“The cause of the two victims deaths has been determined as gunshot wounds, however the manner in which they received those gunshot wounds is still under investigation,” El Doardo County sheriff’s deputies said in a press release.

The victims are Carol Hague, 62, who lived at the residence and Crystal Ann Ward, 58.

The cause of the March 7 fire is still under investigation, but arson investigators are involved.

The fire was reported at 5:48am Friday in the 1600 Block of

Rose Lane. The residence was mostly destroyed by the fire.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Substantive changes approved for SAT test

By Tamar Lewinmarch, New York Times

Saying its college admission exams do not focus enough on the important academic skills, the College Board announced on Wednesday a fundamental rethinking of the SAT, ending the longstanding penalty for guessing wrong, cutting obscure vocabulary words and making the essay optional.

The president of the College Board, David Coleman, criticized his own test, the SAT, and its main rival, the ACT, saying that both had “become disconnected from the work of our high schools.”

In addition, Coleman announced programs to help low-income students, who will now be given fee waivers allowing them to apply to four colleges at no charge. And even before the new exam is introduced, in spring 2016, the College Board, in partnership with Khan Academy, will offer free online practice problems and instructional videos showing how to solve them.

The changes are extensive.

Read the whole story

Calif. middle class feels health insurance squeeze

By Christopher Cadelago and Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

Dawn and Nick LaPolla of Fair Oaks are solidly middle class, and they aren't uninsured.

Yet their required switch to a new health insurance plan under federal changes puts them at a financial crossroads.

If they earn less than \$94,200 a year, the family of four's preferred plan through the California health exchange would cost about \$750 a month. But if they make even slightly more, they'll pay about \$1,040. That's because they would exceed the threshold to qualify for federal subsidies. Their current high-deductible plan, which expires in two months, costs \$573 a month.

Unlike wealthier state residents who more easily can afford the new, often more comprehensive plans, or lower-income people aided by government subsidies, the LaPollas are part of a sizable segment of Californians slowly coming to grips with dedicating a greater percentage of their income to new policies.

For the vast majority of residents, the Covered California subsidy isn't an issue. Low-income residents receive health insurance through Medi-Cal. Millions of others have insurance subsidized by their employer.

Read the whole story

TTD outlines transportation goals for basin

Lake Tahoe News staff report

One of the obstacles with securing funding for transportation projects in the Lake Tahoe Basin is that the area is considered rural.

But congestion defies that rural status when there are more than 5 million visitors vying for a spot on the road.

"On an average busy day there are more than 200,000 residents and visitors in the basin," Carl Hasty, executive director of the Tahoe Transportation District, said in his presentation last week to the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

His agency's goals include getting the rural designation changed, creating a regional transportation system, installing bike trails, all while keeping an eye on environmental concerns.

Hasty said there will be workshops this summer on the loop road project. This project would change the alignment of Highway 50 on the South Shore so it goes behind Harrah's and MontBleu and then turns the current highway into a city street. The draft environmental documents should be released this fall.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner reiterated her concerns about displacing local businesses and residents, saying she believes the millions of dollars this project would cost could be better spent.

The ferry project that would service Ski Run Marina and one in Tahoe City is moving forward. TTD sees this as a commuter vessel and one for tourists.

Mayor Hal Cole said he could envision this as a recreation item, not something people would use daily.

Planning is progressing on the north end of the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail. It will eventually hook up with the route already completed on the South Shore that goes from Kahle Drive to Round Hill Pines Beach.

This summer 0.6 miles of bike trail will go in from the southern boundary of Sugar Pine Point State Park to Meeks Bay Resort.

Construction of the Highway 89 bypass around Tahoe City will start in 2015. This is so highway traffic avoids the seismically challenged Fanny Bridge. It will turn the bridge and approach to it into a city street.

Thirteen agencies are collaborating to create a scenic byway on Highway 28 near Incline Village.

Calif. beats U.S. in millionaires, food stamp users

By James Nash, Bloomberg

Gov. Jerry Brown, who decries a widening gulf between rich and poor, is campaigning for a fourth and final term presiding over a state that's outpacing the U.S. in producing millionaires and food-stamp recipients.

The number of households with more than \$1 million in assets gained 3.6 percent since the Democrat took office in 2011,

compared with 3.5 percent nationally, according to Phoenix Marketing International's Global Wealth Monitor. Food-stamp use rose 18.2 percent in the period, almost twice the nation's 9.4 percent, U.S. Agriculture Department data show.

Brown, 75, who signed a bill to raise California's minimum wage to \$10 an hour by 2016, goes before the state Democratic convention tomorrow unopposed after turning budget deficits into the largest surplus in more than a decade. California's economic health improved more than 44 other states between the first quarter of 2011 and the second quarter of 2013, according to the Bloomberg Economic Evaluation of States.

Read the whole story

Online poker growing in Northern Nevada

By Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Ultimate Gaming was already attracting poker players from Northern Nevada to play the company's Internet wagering platform.

An agreement announced Thursday with Reno's Peppermill Casino and four Northern Nevada casinos operated by the same company could grow that customer base.

Under the deal, UltimatePoker.com, the online poker room operated by Station Casinos-owned Ultimate Gaming, will become the Internet poker destination for the five casinos in Reno, Sparks and Wendover.

Read the whole story