

S. Tahoe city attorney receives positive review

South Lake Tahoe City Attorney Tom Watson was given a glowing review by the City Council in closed session on Tuesday.



Tom Watson

However, there are no changes to his three-year \$154,000 contract that was entered into in May 2013.

“He battles for the city just like he were battling for his own family,” Mayor Hal Cole told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Cole said his way to determine how a city attorney is doing is based on the outcome of cases.

“Some cases like STATA are huge. Before he came along we were looking at a six-figure number and we got it down to a manageable figure,” Cole said of the transportation case.

Watson’s next task now that litigation has settled down is to have his office go through the city ordinances to clean them up in terms bringing consistency and to eliminate “patch work” as Cole described them.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Affordable Care Act enrollees have new challenges

By Robert Pear and Abby Goodnough, New York Times

FORT WORTH — Paul D. Donahue and his wife, Angela, are among more than a million Americans who have signed up for health coverage through the federal insurance exchange. Donahue has a card in his wallet from his insurer to prove it. But when he tried to use it to get a flu shot and fill prescriptions this week, local pharmacies could not confirm his coverage, so he left without his medications.

Similar problems are occurring daily in doctors' offices and drugstores around the country as consumers try to use insurance coverage that took effect on Jan. 1 under the Affordable Care Act.

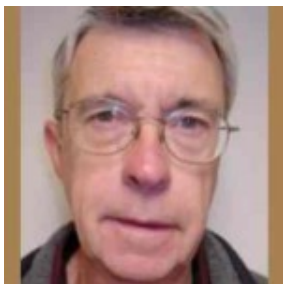
In addition to the difficulties many face in proving they have coverage, patients are also having a hard time figuring out whether particular doctors are affiliated with their health insurance plan. Doctors themselves often do not know if they are in the network of providers for plans sold on the exchange. Many are also having trouble reaching exchanges and insurance companies to confirm their enrollment or pay their first month's premium. Doctors' offices and pharmacies, too, are spending hours on the phone trying to verify patients' coverage, sometimes to no avail.

Read the whole story

Truckee sex offender loses Supreme Court case

By David Kravets, Wired

A convicted sex offender's loss at the Supreme Court on Monday was indirectly a boost to the privacy rights of travelers crossing the border to the United States.



Howard
Cotterman
Photo/Californ
ia Sex
Offender
Archive

Without issuing a ruling, the justices let stand an appeals court's decision that U.S. border agents may indeed undertake a search of a traveler's gadgets content on a whim, just like they could with a suitcase or a vehicle. That is known as the "border search exception" of United States law, where travelers can be searched without a warrant as they enter the country. The Obama administration has aggressively used this power to search travelers' laptops, sometimes copying the hard drive before returning the computer.

However, in a rare win for digital privacy, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling last year concluded that a deeper forensic analysis by border officials using software to decrypt password-protected files or to locate deleted files

now requires “reasonable suspicion” of criminal activity – an outcome the justices refused to tinker with today.

It’s a victory of sorts for the public at large. But for convicted sex offender Howard Cotterman of Truckee, the decision upholds a forensic search on his gear that, authorities said, led to the discovery of hundreds of child porn images that can now be admitted in court as evidence.

Read the whole story

Drought could be a political test for Brown

By David Siders and Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

As California withered through a drought in 1977, Gov. Jerry Brown called for a 25 percent reduction in personal water use statewide and flew to Washington to press the Carter administration for federal aid. He reduced the spray of his shower head and, in a characteristic moment of stagecraft, replaced a pitcher of water at a news conference with a single cup.

Today Brown is governor again, and California is entering one of the driest winters on record. Two dry years already have depleted many reservoirs. The snowpack is meager, and streams and rivers are running low. Although California has experienced many droughts, historically there have never been clear rules about when to formally declare one. Scientists use the term to refer to abnormally dry conditions, which California is clearly experiencing. But for governors, formally declaring a drought has been largely a political

decision based on mounting anecdotal reports of weather-related hardship and evidence that relief is not in the forecast.

If it remains dry – as long-term forecasts suggest – the drought will test the management abilities of a governor who, with the exception of the Rim Fire last year, has largely avoided widespread natural disasters since returning to the Capitol in 2011.

Read the whole story

No snow: People spending money at Heavenly Village

Publisher's note: *This is one of a series of blurbs about how the lack of winter is impacting businesses in the Lake Tahoe Basin. If you have an idea, please email it to info@LakeTahoeNews.net.*

The lack of snow had people spending a significant amount of time in the Heavenly Village during December. And it's still common to see people milling about.

"I don't know if it was more people coming up because they didn't have to deal some of the snow issues we usually have to deal with. People didn't have to think about getting stuck," Jana Harrah, owner of Heavenly Village Cinema, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I saw people in sports cars. We had a really good holiday, but then we had good movies."

Gary Casteel, who runs the village, told South Lake Tahoe

officials that sales were extremely high in December for the multitude of stores and restaurants.

The city's parking garage had its highest revenue-generating month ever – \$150,000.

Sales tax numbers are not out yet.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Colo., Utah snow balance Vail Resorts finances

By Ed Sealoover, Denver Business Journal

Increased skier visits to Vail Resorts' Colorado and Utah resorts is lifting the company enough to overcome terrible snow conditions at its Lake Tahoe-area locations, CEO Rob Katz said Monday.

Broomfield-based Vail Resorts Inc. reported that the number of people visiting its Canyons Resort ski area in Park City and its four Colorado resorts – Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone – increased 7.4 percent through Jan. 6 as compared to the same time frame in the 2012-13 season.

Snowfall in Lake Tahoe is down 85 percent compared to last season, and skier visits Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood declined by 23.4 percent, Katz said.

[Read the whole story](#)

Study: Non-drinking teens on the rise

By Herb Scribner, Deseret News

It looks like teenagers aren't hitting the bottle as often as before. On Jan. 10, BBC News Magazine published an article that looked at the teenage non-drinkers, who are finding other ways to celebrate and have fun without sipping the sauce.

"UK teenagers might have a reputation for binge drinking, but in reality the number of young people consuming alcohol has declined sharply," wrote Catrin Nye and Hermeet Chadha for BBC.

Teenagers are stepping away from alcoholic drinks and finding other ways to spend their time, BBC reported. The article highlighted Liam Brooks, an 18-year-old from east London, who had to put drinkers to bed and said "there is no pretty drunk," BBC reported.

BBC's findings are based on a 2012 report by the National Health Service statistics that found 12 percent of those age 11 to 15 said in 2011 they have sipped alcohol within the last week. This number is down from the 26 percent found in the previous decade, BBC reported.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe woman arrested after high-speed chase

A South Lake Tahoe woman was arrested Sunday night after she led multiple law enforcement agencies on a high-speed chase.

Carson City sheriff's deputies first tried to pull over Samantha Rose Randazzo. The 32-year-old kept going over Spooner Summit, into Douglas County, crossed the state line and was finally stopped near Highway 50 and Tallac Avenue in South Lake Tahoe at 6:15pm Jan. 12.

"The female driver was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon – that being her car – against law enforcement officials," South Lake Tahoe police Lt. Brian Williams told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Randazzo reportedly rammed her vehicle into a Carson City sheriff's vehicle which had successfully positioned itself in a manner to stop the suspect. Capt. Clay Wall with the Carson City department was not available for comment.

Randazzo also faces charges of driving under the influence, driving on a suspended license and felony evading with disregard for public safety.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Supreme Court to hear broadcast copyright case

By Andrea Peterson, Washington Post

Aereo is a company that sells access to live television programming over the Internet – without paying broadcasters for the privilege. Unsurprisingly, broadcasters don't like that. In fact, they dislike it so much that they've engaged in a lengthy legal battle to shut Aereo down. And Friday, the Supreme Court agreed to hear their case.

Aereo uses small HDTV antennas to receive over the air broadcasts – just the television any normal consumer with a digital antenna could receive over the air for free, not cable channels – and mirrors their content on their own servers. Users pay a small monthly fee for control of one of those antennas, as well as features including a cloud hosted DVR service. Broadcasters have alleged this counts as “retransmission” – which would require Aereo to pay fees for privilege – or else a public performance that infringes copyright.

But Aereo argues that since each subscriber is assigned their own antenna to control, it doesn't violate the federal copyright laws. And a majority opinion from New York's Second Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with the streaming service.

Read the whole story

Brakes put on special S. Tahoe parking meeting

By Kathryn Reed

Parking will not be on the Jan. 14 South Lake Tahoe City Council agenda.

The special 7:30am Monday meeting to consider creating another special meeting just for parking was not without drama, though.

Mayor Hal Cole requested the Jan. 13 meeting. Per state Government Code it would take a two-thirds majority to have had the parking issue heard Jan. 14 because the agenda for that meeting had already been posted. In other words, four of the five had to vote for the measure. Cole had the power to call for the item to be put on the agenda without his colleagues' support, but he said he would defer to the council's wishes.

Councilwoman Angela Swanson left at 8:15am before the vote because she had another city-related meeting to attend in Meyers. Swanson had previously been non-committal how she would vote – saying, “I feel like we are catering to one portion of the electorate in addressing the issue. I don't like the precedent it is setting. This is a knee-jerk reaction.” Then she added that she wanted to support the mayor.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner, as the other city rep on the ambulance JPA, stayed at the council meeting until it was over at 8:22am.

Conner believed it was too important of a topic to push through without careful analysis. Neither the council nor the public would have had even 24 hours to read the staff report

had parking been added to Tuesday's discussion.

Had Conner left early only two of the three remaining members would have needed to support getting parking on the Jan. 14 agenda. And based on the 2-2 vote, Conner made the difference.

She along with Councilwoman Brooke Laine voted no to hearing parking on Tuesday.

Fourteen members of the public were at the meeting. Most are advocates of revoking the entire paid parking program in the city as well as getting a measure on the ballot to do just that. The group says it has the signatures to get it on the ballot, but officials with the El Dorado County Elections Department must still verify them. And there also remains doubt whether there is time for the question to be before voters in June. If not, there will also be an election in November.

The council as of today is slated to discuss the paid parking program at its Feb. 18 meeting. But what won't be part of the council discussion is the proposed ballot measure.