

Animals in Tahoe trash a continual problem

By Kathryn Reed

Mattresses continue to be the No. 1 large bulk item that Clean Tahoe picks up. Televisions are a close second.

Catherine Cecchi, executive director of the nonprofit, updated the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday about what her organization has been up to.

"We have a number of problem properties where a bear or other animals are in Dumpsters every night," Cecchi said. "We've posted signs on Dumpsters. Some don't have lock bars or a clip."

Eventually, repeat offenders get referred to the city's code enforcement officers. Cecchi said improvement comes when code enforcement gets involved.

In the past year, the two Clean Tahoe crewmembers have gone to 1,657 illegal dumpsites in the city. Between the city and in the basin portion of El Dorado County 583 cubic yards of trash have been picked up.

Earlier in the Dec. 10 meeting, South Tahoe Refuse President Jeff Tillman said that starting March 3 trash pick up will start at 7am.

"We hope residents will no longer put garbage out the night before," Tillman said.

This is designed to cut down on the number of animals getting into garbage and creating a mess.

Clean Tahoe is looking at getting a grant for bear resistant containers to help with the chronic garbage problems.

Trails dominate South Shore rec discussion

By Kathryn Reed

Build the bike path that would link Meyers to Stateline.

That was the idea that received the largest number of votes from the more than 50 people who attended a recreation meeting Dec. 11 at South Tahoe High School.

Consultants putting together the South Lake Tahoe-El Dorado County Recreation Master Plan wanted to hear from the public what they would like the South Shore to look like five and 10 years from now.



Peter Fink talks Dec. 11 about ideas his table has for recreation on the South Shore. Photo/Kathryn Reed

There will be another meeting tonight from 6:30-8:30 at Kahle Community Center in Stateline. Douglas County has hired the

same firm to work on a recreation plan at the lake. The goal is to have a seamless sense of recreation that eliminates jurisdictional boundaries, at least on the South Shore.

Other areas of interest are building an amphitheater, creating a centralized multi-use facility, expanding the city's recreation center, eliminating Campground by the Lake and using it for recreation, and providing better information to locals and tourists about what the area has to offer.

Improving what is in the ground, signs pointing to where things are, being known for something other than skiing, homegrown festivals and events, promoting what's here – those were some the things people envision.

In the end, the summary of the night was, "We envision an accessible interconnected and sustainable system of diverse year-round recreation opportunities. Our parks, facilities, trails, events and programs reflect our character, heritage, environment and shared future for recreation in the South Shore."

While months ago the powers that be spoke of how this plan would get into the need for ball fields so large tournaments could come to town, that was not broached Wednesday night. Nor did it rise to the top of the list during surveys.

A cohesive, well thought out trail system is what people want. They are tired of bike trails that abruptly end as well as sidewalks. And they want trails that would drop them off at areas of interest, including recreation destinations.

A draft of the master recreation plan is expected to be released in the spring.

More information about the plan is online. From that website it's possible to signup for email updates from El Dorado County.

Live at Lakeview concerts coming back in 2014

By Kathryn Reed

With Lakeview Commons still in its infancy, South Lake Tahoe officials are struggling to figure just what it should be.

While the agenda topic Tuesday at the council meeting was to recap the summer concert series run by Rob and CarolAnne Giustina of OnCourse Events, much of the talk was about what else the area at El Dorado Beach could offer.

Family nights, movies, alcohol-free events, different musical acts – all of these were suggestions. Instead of expanding what OnCourse does the council instead directed city staff to come up with events, perhaps with partners, that the city can call its own.



Live at Lakeview will be returning for a third summer in 2014. Photo/LTN file

One of the issues brought up by Lauren Thomaselli, city recreation manager, during her Dec. 10 presentation is that even though the city is a major sponsor of Live at Lakeview,

it was not featured prominently in advertising and promotional material. Besides providing \$2,500 in cash, the city waived \$5,000 worth of staff hours and \$3,250 in rental fees.

Top billing went to Coors and Heavenly Mountain Resort. To eliminate the beer sponsor it would cost the city an additional \$12,000 per summer. To get rid of alcohol completely would require a \$35,000 contribution, according to the staff report.

CarolAnne Giustina told the council the demographics of the audience changes throughout the course of the Thursday night Live at Lakeview concerts. It starts out with many who are older than 50, then families come and the later crowd is younger and tends to drink more.

People smoking pot was another issue that was raised. It was agreed police officers will make a stronger presence early on and that perhaps fewer warnings and more citations will be issued.

It's against the law in California to smoke marijuana in public even with a medical card. But one thing officers consider is whether the DA's office will prosecute what amounts to a minor crime.

Next year parking will likely be problematic because the Harrison Avenue project will be under way. Everyone agreed better promotion of the free lot at the rec center is needed. Using a shuttle between the lot and Lakeview was also broached.

More than 1,000 people attended each of the 10 concerts. More than 300 came via bicycle, while a couple dozen were in some type of watercraft.

Despite some of the second-year hiccups, the council had high praise for the event and Giustina said she is willing to make necessary improvements.

OnCourse Events' two-year contract runs through summer 2014. While the South Lake Tahoe company would like the first rights of refusal for 2015, that can't happen because it was not in the original request for proposal.

S. Tahoe delays plastic bag fine; Cole now mayor

By Kathryn Reed

On a 4-1 vote the South Lake Tahoe City Council decided to waive all fines associated with the plastic bag ban for the first 90 days.

The ban for grocery stores takes effect Jan. 15. Other retail outlets will be banned from using the single-use bags starting Oct. 15.

Councilman Tom Davis was the lone dissenter. He has been against this ordinance since the get-go.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner pushed hard for the delay in implementing a fine so businesses can adapt to the change. She also initiated the reduction in the fine structure to have it start at \$50 instead of \$100 as City Attorney Tom Watson had proposed.

Warnings will be given to businesses until mid-April, after which financial penalties kick in. Those fines are per day that the retailer hands out plastic when they aren't supposed to.

Mayor Hal Cole said he would like the money collected to be used for the program either in terms of education or being

able to provide bags to nonprofits that use them. However, this was not incorporated into the resolution that was adopted Dec. 10.

The plan is for city staff to assess in the spring how the program is going and then convene a meeting with the rest of the businesses that must adhere to the plastic bag ban. It's possible the grocery stores could offer advice. The council will then revisit the ban in the summer.

In other action:

- Cole was elected mayor for the next year by his peers on a 4-0 vote. He chose not to vote. Brooke Laine was elected mayor pro tem on a 4-1 vote. Conner's issue with Laine is that she had not been elected to the council, but was appointed.
 - The 911 fee on phones is going up from \$1.55 to \$2.25 on Jan.1 and then to \$2.65 on Jan. 1, 2015, on the 26,463 phones in the city. The city wants to have the system pay for itself and no longer subsidize it at \$300,000 a year. Police Chief Brian Uhler said the gap is because of salary and benefit increases since 2009.
 - The council, with a good portion of the fire department staff in attendance, approved the purchase of a new engine. The city does not have a backup engine, so it uses a brush truck, a state vehicle or borrows one from another agency when an engine is sidelined. The engines are 11-, 14-, and 22-years-old. To date combined they have been out of service for 107 days this year. The cost of the new engine is \$529,746.60. It will be financed and paid back via Proposition 172 funds.
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Tech giants want government to back off

By Edward Wyatt and Claire Cain Miller, New York Times

Eight prominent technology companies, bruised by revelations of government spying on their customers' data and scrambling to repair the damage to their reputations, are mounting a public campaign to urge President Obama and Congress to set new limits on government surveillance.

On Monday the companies, led by Google and Microsoft, presented a plan to regulate online spying and urged the United States to lead a worldwide effort to restrict it. They accompanied it with an open letter, in the form of full-page ads in national newspapers and a website detailing their concerns.

It is the broadest and strongest effort by the companies, often archrivals, to speak with one voice to pressure the government. The tech industry, whose billionaire founders and executives are highly sought as political donors, forms a powerful interest group that is increasingly flexing its muscle in Washington.

Read the whole story

2 men to serve time, pay fine for bear poaching

Two Northern California men will spend time in jail and pay fines for poaching bears in El Dorado County.

Peter George Vitali, 56, of Pioneer and Arthur Martin Blake, 59, of River Pines, pleaded no contest to misdemeanor charges of illegally taking wildlife for profit. Vitali was fined \$12,500 and Blake \$5,000. Both must serve 30 days in jail, followed by 36 months on probation.

Vitali and Blake were arrested by California Department of Fish and Wildlife officers in April 2013 after they were found to be in possession of 20 large bear claws and three bear gall bladders in the Eldorado National Forest.

“This case is an example of the challenges our officers face,” CDFW Lt. Stacey LaFave said in a statement. “Heavy fines and jail time send a strong message to poachers who unlawfully take and profit from California’s natural resources.”

Officials said the two men killed three bears, likely a sow and two cubs. The claws, liver and gall bladder had been removed from the sow and only the liver and gall bladder were removed from the younger two bears. The bile contained inside bear gall bladders is believed by some to have medicinal properties and is sold on the black market.

California laws forbid the sale, purchase or possession for sale of any bear part.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nissensohn sentenced to death for 3 killings

By Kathryn Reed

Joseph Michael Nissensohn will never have the opportunity to

hurt another woman. On Tuesday, a jury of 12 in South Lake Tahoe said he should die for his crimes.

In October, the 62-year-old was found guilty of three counts of first-degree murder.

The remains of Kathy Graves, 15, of South Lake were found near the Mount Tallac trailhead in 1990, about one year after she was last seen alive. Nissensohn also killed Monterey County teenagers Tanya Jones and Tammy Lynn Jarschke in 1981.



Joseph Michael Nissensohn

He has already been in prison 15 years for the second-degree murder of a woman in Tillicum, Wash. When he was supposed to get out in 2008 El Dorado and Monterey county prosecutors agreed to wrap their cases into one and filed charges before Nissensohn was freed.

It took jurors only 90 minutes to complete this phase of the more than six-month trial.

As soon as the clerk in the El Dorado County Superior Court read the verdict Nissensohn was handcuffed. The entire time he sat staring straight ahead in the direction of Judge Suzanne Kingsbury.

"I wouldn't say it was disturbing, but you definitely feel a lot of responsibility is on your shoulders," Bob Grant, one of the jurors, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the Dec. 10 sentencing verdict. "You are very careful to pay attention in court to

make sure you get the right verdict.”

El Dorado County sheriff's Lt. Pete Van Arnum was in the courtroom. Afterward he called Nissensohn a dangerous man. Van Arnum was with a different department when Grave's skull was found near Fallen Leaf Lake.

He said it's good Nissensohn was sentenced to death; pausing to wonder if these are the only crimes the criminal committed.

Nissensohn is scheduled to be formally sentenced March 18.

Since El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson was elected in 2007 his office has pursued the death penalty three times and has won them each time. Prior to today, David Zanon was the last person sent to Death Row from El Dorado County. This was three years ago for the murder of California Highway Patrol Officer Scott Russell.

California has more than 700 inmates on Death Row. Clarence Ray Allen on Jan. 17, 2007, was the last person executed. The controversy of using lethal injection is creating the logjam.

Nevadans may be asked to vote on 2% business tax

By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

Here's one for the holiday shoppers in Nevada whisking in and out of retail stores.

No state business tax means you should be getting better

prices here than in other states, right?

After all, if businesses pay fewer taxes in Nevada than in other states, the savings ought to trickle down to Nevada consumers. It's simple logic: Hey, the state's giving you a break, so how about cutting us a break?

But just the opposite is happening, says Guy Hobbs, founder of Hobbs, Ong & Associates, Inc., a Las Vegas-based financial advisory firm. Nevadans are effectively subsidizing other states' consumers because people living in high-tax states are paying about the same price as people do in Nevada when they shop at national retailers, Hobbs said.

And the complaint doesn't stop there. Nevadans also are paying with a diminished quality of life that is rubbed in our noses with every new ranking that compares Nevada dismally with the other states.

Some political activists say it's time for large companies to pay more to do business in Nevada and are advocating a tax measure to wring money out of companies for Nevada's education system.

That effort comes in the form of a proposed 2 percent business margins tax, which teachers and others want voters to approve in the Nov. 4 election.

Read the whole story

In-house suspensions at STHS

a possibility

By Kathryn Reed

Students at South Tahoe High School who are caught with or under the influence of drugs, including alcohol, get what amounts to a three-day vacation from school. That could change.

In the past the school had a diversion program where students would get counseling as part of the process. With cutbacks in recent years, the school has lost two counselors, a community outreach person who was bilingual, a clerk who made calls to see why kids weren't at school and a full-time person for the high school who handled the School Attendance Review Board.

To date for this school year, there have been 27 alcohol or drug offenses at the school. Nine of those were committed by the same three people. Five were alcohol related and committed at the same time.



South Tahoe police Officer Aaron Crawford, left, and South Tahoe High Vice Principal Dennis Sarosik talk Dec. 9 about student drug use. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Freshmen or sophomores usually commit the infractions. After a

while the kids figure out it's not a good idea to be bringing drugs to school.

"Alcohol is not the drug of choice, it's marijuana," Dennis Sarosik, STHS vice principal, said.

South Tahoe police Officer Aaron Crawford is the school resource officer. He patrols the grounds along with a probation officer.

"It's easy access here at the lake. It's easier to get than alcohol," Crawford said of marijuana.

It's so pervasive that South Lake Tahoe is known as a "green community" and that has nothing to do with the environment.

Sarosik and Crawford were at the Dec. 9 South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition meeting to talk about what happens to students who are caught with drugs and listen to ideas from coalition members.

The first infraction a student is suspended for three days; the second comes with a five-day suspension. Alternative education is the next course of action. Referrals to Tahoe Youth & Family Services are also given, but are not mandatory.

Athletes face other consequences per NIAA regulations.

The coalition is working on devising a program where students will serve suspensions at the school.

STHS used to have a diversion program. It is part counseling – which could be individual, group and/or family; criminal justice (this piece is all that exists today); and school support.

The latter is important because so many of the multiple offenders are also failing more than one subject.

"There is a need for academic support. We need someone there

to manage it," Sarosik said.

Sarosik said the school would be open to resurrecting the diversion program, but it does not have the manpower to make it happen.

Hector Reyes, supervising health education coordinator with El Dorado County, said his department and others in the community could provide the counseling piece. Tahoe Turning Point and TY&FS also have drug and alcohol counselors on staff.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District does not have a drug-testing program, unlike its neighbor Douglas County School District. DCSD started the program in 2009-10 for students who participate in athletics and other extra curricular activities.

Sarosik said cost is a prohibiting factor to drug testing, as well as that it is hard to test for synthetics. However, it was pointed out that Tahoe Turning Point tests for drugs onsite at a cost of \$15.

STHS does use a breathalyzer at dances on everyone coming and going.

"It's changed the character of dances. There's no more projectile vomit or people passing out," Sarosik said.

But it's not just high school students using. Crawford said the number of marijuana infractions this year is increasing at South Tahoe Middle School. Every year there are a couple elementary students who are high or are possessing drugs.

Here are some stats from 2011-12 regarding drug use at STMS, STHS and Mt. Tallac high.

The goal is for coalition members to research other diversion programs, for drug counselors to devise a way to provide STHS help, and for the school to figure out what it would need to make it all work.

Vail reports \$73.4 mil. quarterly loss

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

Vail Resorts lost \$73.4 million in the first quarter of fiscal 2014, compared to \$60.6 million for the same period last year.

The resort company typically loses big in the August-through-October first quarter, when it ramps up for the ski season without actually hosting skiers.

Vail Resort chief Rob Katz said in a statement that the net loss was expected and was higher than last year due to expenses from its acquisition of Utah's Canyons ski area and two urban ski areas outside Minneapolis and Detroit. Those acquisitions in the last year generated \$7.6 million in net losses, including \$2.7 million for "integration and litigation related costs," according to the company's earnings statement.

Sales of the Epic Pass through Dec. 7 were up 13 percent, with dollar volume up 16 percent over the same early season last year.

Read the whole story