

S. Tahoe man going to prison in DUI fatal

By Kathryn Reed

A South Lake Tahoe man was convicted this week on several charges involving the death of another resident.

An El Dorado County Superior Court jury on Oct. 1 found Larry L. Halverson, 61, guilty of gross negligence vehicle manslaughter while intoxicated, an enhancement of fleeing the scene, and felony hit and run. The jury was hung on the murder charge.

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

Sentencing is set for Nov. 1. The sentence for the vehicle manslaughter charge could be 15 years to life.

Deputy District Attorney Bill Clark told *Lake Tahoe News* the case went to trial because "I wouldn't offer anything that didn't have double-digit prison time." And Halverson, who was represented by a public defender, wanted less than 10 years.

Halverson has nine prior driving under the influence convictions, of which eight were talked about before the jury in Judge Steve Bailey's court.

"He had four priors in South Lake Tahoe before the one in Nevada and never once did anyone see he that he did not sign up for the treatment programs he was supposed to," Clark said. "Would it have changed his mind? Maybe, maybe not. We have to do a better job of monitoring high-risk DUIs."

Photo potentially altered to hurt STHS teacher

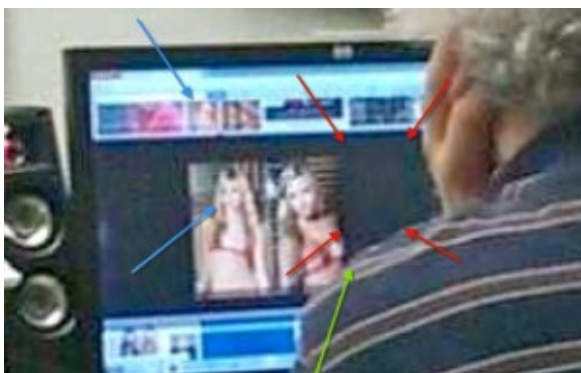
By Kathryn Reed

A photo showing a South Tahoe High School teacher looking at half naked women on a computer in his classroom has been circulating around the district and beyond.

"The teacher is on administrative leave pending an investigation. Since this is a personnel matter, we have no further comment," Lake Tahoe Unified School District Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It is easy to look at the history of websites that have been viewed on a computer. It is not known if the district has done so and what was found.

Lake Tahoe News had an independent photo attorney analyze the picture to help determine if it is real.



According to attorney Carolyn Wright, "The square indicated by the red arrows indicates someone blocked out what was there. The

green shows the shoulder is not a clean line, indicating poor cloning. The blue arrows show the women's faces are clearer but the photos on the top and bottom of the screen are extremely blurry."



This is the original photograph sent to Lake Tahoe News.

"There are several indications that this photo has been altered," attorney and professional photographer Carolyn Wright told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The photo shows teacher Paul Kushner looking at a questionable website. It's a picture of the back of his head with him focused on a computer that has images of women in bras.

But the pixilation is not the same throughout the photo.

Plus, the whiteboard in the background and his clothing are in

focus, while images on the computer are blurry. Cameras can't make the middle part of photo blurry. They can make the foreground or background sharp or fuzzy – not the middle, as is the case with the photo in question. And cell phone cameras don't have the capability to do anything but keep everything in focus.

Kushner has been teaching in Lake Tahoe Unified School District for decades and is the founder of the district's choral program. He has a master's degree in computer education.

He was not available for comment. Jodi Dayberry, head of the local teacher's union, did not respond to an inquiry.

However, this is not the district's first foray down this path. In 2006, Meyers Elementary School teacher Karsten Gronwald was arrested on child pornography charges. In 2008, he was sentenced to eight years in prison.

If it turns out someone was out to slander Kushner, they could face criminal charges.

Gaines to run for state insurance commissioner

Ted Gaines, who represents most of the Lake Tahoe Basin in the California Senate, is running for state insurance commissioner in 2014.

Gaines believes under the current leadership, the California Department of Insurance has become a hostile bureaucracy that is driving companies out of the state.



Ted Gaines

"The insurance commissioner should work to protect consumers, keep rates low, and make it easier for companies to hire and retain workers," Gaines, R-Rocklin, said in a press release. "When the insurance commissioner pushes insurers out of California just to score political points, the result is less competition and ultimately fewer choices and higher rates for all our citizens. More competition means more choices and better rates for consumers."

For nearly 30 years, Gaines has run a family insurance business, representing individuals and small business clients as an independent insurance agent.

Gaines represented Tahoe in the Assembly from 2006 until he had to resign to take the state Senate job.

The 1st Senate District encompasses parts of Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento and Sierra counties. Gaines was elected in January 2011 in a special election to fill the seat of Dave Cox who died the previous July.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Teachers learn what to do if shooter is on campus

By Kim Segal, CNN

The sound of metal hitting the floor echoed through the hallways of the childless elementary school. It was an empty clip from a gun, fallen to the ground.

“That sound should be imprinted in your brain,” Zach Hudson, co-founder of Defensive Tactics Solutions, told the educators in the audience. “That is the sound of survival. That is the sound of opportunity.”

That, Hudson said, is the best time to attack a shooter if one enters the school or classroom.

On a recent Saturday in Lake Mary, Fla., Hudson and his partner, Mike Friedman, conducted a free active shooter self-defense workshop for teachers and school staff members.

Since the deadly school shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, last year, school security plans have included arming teachers, adding police officers and armed security guards, changing how schools are designed and adding bulletproof backpacks and whiteboards to schools.

In the new school year, some educators are taking it upon themselves to be prepared for the unthinkable.

Read the whole story

Tahoe trying to find sustainable workforce

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – Employers, educators and workforce providers spent nearly three hours Wednesday trying to figure out how the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee can have a sustainable, year-round pool of workers that people want to hire.

Two of the main objectives of the meeting were to find out what the people in the room have to offer and what they need to better perform their jobs. Their needs, along with challenges they have and what they have to offer were recorded on large sheets of paper.



Kim Bateman, dean of Sierra College in Truckee, talks Oct. 2 about course offerings. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The diverse group gathered at the Parasol Foundation in Incline Village on Oct. 2. Representatives were from the four colleges in the region – Lake Tahoe Community College, Sierra Nevada College, Western Nevada College and Sierra College in Truckee, along with Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe, California Conservation Corps, Harrah's Lake Tahoe, Sierra-at-Tahoe, El

Dorado County, real estate, artists and others.

For more than a year the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative has been meeting to deal with a variety of issues. The workforce issue is the focus of the Economy-Education-Culture working group.

Inadequate public transportation, housing that isn't affordable and lack of communication between the sectors were major issues that were unearthed.

But as the human resources rep from the Ritz said, nothing he heard on Wednesday was new. And that concerned him – that nothing innovative came out of the meeting.

College personnel said they could do a better job of getting the word out on what they offer.

Those helping workers find jobs said rules about crossing county and state lines make it difficult at times to place people.

Simple things that could come out of the session include developing a more robust internship program at the colleges with area businesses; and having businesses communicate with colleges what they would like from a graduate so perhaps courses could be developed to meet those needs.

The soft skills are what employers said they need more than workers with technical skills. They are able to train the person to do the job. What they can't do is teach them how to set an alarm, not call in sick on a powder day and the importance of proper hygiene.

The group not at the table was the actual workers. So it's not known if they are having a hard time figuring out the higher education opportunities in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee area, or if they know about job placement services, or if they know what employers want. And without workers it is not known why people

are looking to leave, why they never accepted the job here, or even why they stay to find out what might be working.

One placement person said she has been told people leave the area because of lack of leadership within organizations in the area.

A man who has a small engineering firm said even a six-figure salaried position is hard to fill because people want more than the area can offer. They want better schools, more opportunities for their children and more personal professional development.

But expecting to find what a metropolitan area has to offer in a rural location is not realistic. Any professional in Tahoe looking for training beyond the work site has to travel to find it. There are tradeoffs to living and working anywhere.

On the other end of the spectrum was the desire to work with seasonal businesses to find year-round work for their employees so they aren't continually training new people.

And while the arts received substantive discussion time as a potential economic savior in the way of providing a destination for visitors, tapping colleges that already have recognized programs, and embracing the renowned artists who live in the basin, their numbers skewed the discussion so it was hard to know if that is truly a viable and desired direction for the basin to go in.

The attendees said they want to meet again to possibly drill deeper into some of the issues that were broached.

Swiss bank buys 10.3 mil. shares of Caesars stock

By Ed Komenda, Las Vegas Sun

Caesars Entertainment Corp. has sold 10.3 million shares of its common stock to a Swiss banking firm for \$200 million, according to a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Credit Suisse Securities purchased the stock for \$19.40 per share.

Tuesday's sale follows the heels of the gaming giant's Sept. 25 move to offer common stock to generate cash to pay down a mortgage loan.

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline.

Read the whole story

Calif. won't pay to keep national parks open

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Thousand of visitors were turned away Tuesday from national parks across California as the federal government shutdown took effect.

But for parks lovers and tourist businesses hoping for a bailout from Sacramento to keep iconic sites open, the answer

was no. California Gov. Jerry Brown, whose state is home to 26 national park units, from Yosemite to Death Valley to Point Reyes National Seashore, said no state money will be offered to keep the gates open.

Not only are there a lot of parks, said H.D. Palmer, a spokesman for the state Department of Finance, but California's budget is finally balanced after years of multi-billion-dollar deficits, and can't afford the expense.

"Also, if the state were to take that action, there is no guarantee that it would be reimbursed," Palmer said.

On Monday, the governor of South Dakota, Republican Dennis Daugaard, sent a letter to the director of the National Park Service offering state funding and employees to help keep open Mount Rushmore, the state's top tourist attraction. Arizona's governor used state money in 1995 in an arrangement with national parks leaders to keep Grand Canyon National Park open during the last federal shutdown. Arizona's current Gov. Jan Brewer said Monday her cabinet considered the idea but the state won't bail out the Grand Canyon this time.

Read the whole story

Placerville man dies in accident near Soda Springs

Jose Natividad Baron Vazquez, 24, of Placerville died Monday when his pickup careened down a steep embankment on Interstate 80, overturning as it hit boulders.

Passenger Joel Pelayo Rios, 22, of Placerville was able to

crawl to the highway where motorists saw him and then called for help. Rios sustained major injuries.

The accident was near Soda Springs on Sept. 30.

The California Highway Patrol says alcohol and drugs do not appear to be a factor.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

El Dorado County workers set to receive raises

Members of El Dorado County's largest union are expected to vote on a contract proposal on Oct. 3 and Oct. 7.

The deal Local 1 reached with county officials calls for a 5 percent raise effective the first full pay period after the Board of Supervisors ratifies the agreement. This would occur sometime in October assuming the union votes for the contract.

The agreement also calls for 5 percent pay increases on July 1, 2014, and another 5 percent on July 1, 2015.

The county will conduct a study to see how employee salaries compare to their peers.

The county had wanted employees to pay 4 percent more to fund their retirement, but that has been taken off the negotiation table.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

South Lake Tahoe says no to plastic bags

By Kathryn Reed

If you like plastic bags, then load up on them now because on Jan. 15 retailers will no longer be allowed to use them in South Lake Tahoe.

On a 3-2 vote Oct. 1, the City Council agreed to ban single-use plastic bags that are given out at the cash register. Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner cast the dissenting votes.

With the passage on Tuesday, this brings the number of municipalities in California with such a ban to 89. (Santa Barbara passed a ban on Oct. 1, too.)

It was in October 2009 that the city's Sustainability Commission first started talking about the plastic bag ban. Several meetings focused on that topic, with tons of community input.

Since the council disbanded the commission a group of concerned citizens has continued the quest to have the city ban the bags. Part of the reason is to eliminate an item that most people only use once, to keep the product out of landfills, to stop the production of a product that uses tons of petroleum, and to make the city an environmental leader.

Davis, in all seriousness, said the city is already an environmental leader because of its bike paths and public transportation.

Davis, as he has said at multiple meetings, also said plastic

bags are not a problem.

"You've gotta show me it's a local problem," Davis said. "If there are 8 million bags (in South Lake Tahoe used each year) and you only picked up 275 (on Coastal Cleanup Day), I would say that is not a problem."

To this Councilman Hal Cole said, "Even if all the bags are off the street, they are in a landfill and that's a problem." A stat from the meeting is that 5 percent of what is in landfills is plastic. "They measure by weight. That's a lot of plastic," Cole added.

It's not like plastic bags have always been a part of daily life. They arrived at grocery stores as an alternative to paper in 1977. From there department stores started using them.

Assuming the council on Oct. 15 at the second reading of the ordinance approves the ban, the first stores that must get rid of their plastic bags are grocery stores. That happens Jan. 15. Then on Oct. 15, 2014, all other retail entities must eliminate their plastic.

Produce bags and bags from the meat department will be allowed. Nonprofits will be able to use plastic bags. For example, each Monday at Bread & Broth people are given a plastic bag full of food to take with them. Pharmacies are also exempt from the regulation.

Retailers, if they want, will be able to charge whatever they want for paper bags. Many cities have imposed a mandatory fee for paper as a way to incentivize people to bring reusable bags with them.

Cole was adamant this was a fee or another tax. Such an imposition here was going to be a deal breaker for him.

When the 5-cent fee that had been recommended was stricken

from the ordinance, Cole was able to vote for it.

Other towns, like Aspen, have used the bag fee to fund outreach – including buying reusable bags for people; while giving a percentage of the funds to the retailer. Aspen has a 20-cent fee that has raised \$44,826 since May 2012, according to the *Aspen Times*.

Five of the eight people who spoke at the Oct. 1 South Tahoe meeting were in favor of the ban, including Jim Warlow who owns Cork & More. The nine emails the council received regarding the bag ban were all in favor of the ordinance.