

Stateline casinos do worse than rest of state

While the state gaming numbers were good in August, the same cannot be said for Stateline.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board on Monday said statewide winnings were up 11.2 percent in August compared to the prior year. On the South Shore they were down 2.7 percent. The state win was \$955 million; Stateline was \$21 million.

There was a time when August was the busiest month in the Lake Tahoe Basin. With schools starting before Labor Day, that has changed.

But that didn't hurt Reno casinos this year where the win was 9.7 percent higher than a year ago for a total of \$54 million.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Early winter bookings follow strong summer tourist season

Lodging properties in 17 Western mountain resort destinations, including Lake Tahoe-Truckee, wrapped up the summer through August with a 5.5 percent increase in actual occupancy and a 6 percent increase for the past six months compared to 2012, according to the most recent data released by Denver-based DestiMetrics.

The results are through Aug. 31. The robust number of overnight visitors led to the record-breaking summer occupancy

that surpassed prerecession figures.

As mountain destinations shift their focus to winter reservations and the ski season, bookings for the upcoming six months are continuing the summer's strength.

"At this early stage, winter bookings are pacing well ahead of last year and signs are pointing toward continued momentum, but we will be keeping an eye on economic and political news that can shift travel dynamics quickly," Ralf Garrison, director of DestiMetrics, said in a statement.

September is continuing the upward trend with on-the-books occupancy up 6.6 percent compared to last September and revenues up 13 percent for the month.

The economic indicators that may influence consumer travel behavior are the stock market, consumer confidence, unemployment, room rates and the price of airline tickets.

Court commissioner seeks El Dorado judgeship

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County's lone court commissioner is running for Superior Court judge.

Dylan Sullivan, 47, started with the El Dorado County court system in September 2011 after having spent a number of years with the state Parole Board.

Judge Daniel Proud is retiring, thus creating the vacancy. The primary will be in June 2014, with a runoff in November if

necessary.



Dylan Sullivan is running for El Dorado County Superior Court judge. Photo/Provided

“I encourage voters to spend some time looking at who has the capacity to make difficult decisions for the community because the decisions that come through the judicial branch go to the heart of what happens in everyday life,” Sullivan told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s important to have somebody in the judicial role who can look at facts, be unbiased and understand the dispute and give a fair proceeding.”

As a court commissioner Sullivan does the work of a judge, but is officially a rung below that level. Plus, it is not an elected position.

Sullivan works in the South Lake Tahoe courthouse where she hears family law, Child Protective Services, unlawful detainers, traffic, and restraining order cases.

“It’s basically the tough cases – CPS, people getting kicked out of their homes, some domestic violence and some drug addiction,” Sullivan said.

She said her experience with the Parole Board has helped her with her current position, adding that this is a different side of what is often the same problem.

“Nothing in the courtroom is shocking,” Sullivan said. “It makes me want to work with community service providers to see how we can better deliver services. If we do a better job collectively upfront to work with families to get through a crisis better, we are better off as a community because less people will be depending on government and more will be able to contribute and be able to live without abuses and dysfunctions.”

Outside of work Sullivan also gives back. She is a member of the El Dorado County Child Abuse Prevention Council, an advisory member to the board of the El Dorado County Big Brothers Big Sisters, on the committee for the Department of Justice’s local Safe Haven grant, a Kiwanis member, and volunteers as the Teen Court judge in South Lake Tahoe.

She also teaches judges in the state for the Committee on Judicial Education and Research.

It was that sense of wanting to give back that led Sullivan to go to law school.

Before getting into law Sullivan was in the medical field. She earned a bachelor’s in physiology from UC Davis in 1988. She worked in a trauma center and then in medical sales when she was in her 20s. Corporate America is not where she wanted to be.

In 1997, she graduated from McGeorge School of Law with honors. She started in private practice doing civil litigation and criminal defense. From there she went to the Parole Board where she was a deputy commissioner.

Half the time at the parole board she conducted hearings to decide if someone should be granted parole. Mostly it was murderers she was dealing with. Sullivan also managed people who did the hearings, and worked at headquarters on policy and litigation.

When the commissioner position opened in El Dorado County she knew it would be the logical next step in her career – and a way to give back. Plus, she liked the idea of “the everyday give and take in the courtroom.”

Of the eight Superior Court judges in El Dorado County there is one woman. If Sullivan were elected, she would bring the percentage to 25, still below the state average where 33 percent of the bench is female.

She’s worked in a male dominated field her whole career. Plus, she’s already an integral part of the court dynamics. She doesn’t see how things like gender have any bearing on one’s ability to do a job.

“As judges we are people and we bring who we are,” Sullivan said. “We learn how to put our personal ideas about life at the door so we can objectively evaluate the facts and apply it to the law.”

The only downside Sullivan sees in being elected is the position is on the West Slope, so it would make sense to move from Tahoe to the other side of the county. She enjoys calling Tahoe home – taking advantage of the hiking and playing in the snow. But she knows she can always make the short drive to Tahoe to play on her day off.

Murder trial involving N. Tahoe man to begin

By Charlie Brennan, BoulderCamera

On the last full day of his life, Todd Klarkowski stood in his

house on Gilbert Street in Boulder and asked his common-law wife whether he should wear his prized and well-worn boots or his sneakers for an overnight business trip to California.

“He was set in his ways. He’d ask what I thought about something, 10 times, but still end up doing whatever it was he originally thought,” MacKensey Klarkowski said.

The two went back and forth, until she thought it had been hashed over enough.

“I finally said, ‘You better just wear those tennis shoes, because you’re going to have to run to catch that plane; you’re going to be late,’” she said.

And so the morning of Feb. 4, Klarkowski laced on his athletic shoes. He took his son to school, and headed for Denver International Airport to board a flight to San Francisco. MacKensey Klarkowski claimed she rarely talked to him about his business affairs, and knew only that he planned to be back the next evening.

Klarkowski, 43, would be dead little more than 24 hours later.

On Feb. 5, three men – including one from Boulder – were killed in Sonoma County in what investigators have alleged was a botched marijuana deal. Three other men are facing murder charges in connection with the killings.

The victims:

Todd Klarkowski, 43, of Boulder, allegedly plotted with two others the purchase and transfer of 70 to 80 pounds marijuana from Sonoma County to Colorado.

Richard Lewin, 46, of Huntington, N.Y., is alleged to have introduced Klarkowski to the alleged California pot seller, Raleigh Butler.

Raleigh Butler, 24, of North Lake Tahoe was shot and killed

along with Klarkowski and Lewin in his mother's rented home in Forestville.

The same day that Klarkowski flew west, Butler, 24, a passionate snowboarder and heavy metal devotee from Sebastopol – who of late had been living in North Lake Tahoe – called his grandmother to wish her happy birthday, just as his mother, Leslie King, had reminded him to do.

“And he did leave a really nice, cheerful loving message for her,” King said. She described the younger of her two sons as “charismatic, magnanimous, kind and generous with everything he did and felt. A real leader in the way of the heart.”

The day after calling his grandmother, Butler would die alongside Klarkowski and another man, 46-year-old Lewin, of Huntington, N.Y. All were shot in the head at close range in a bedroom at the home of Butler's mother – she was away at the time – in Forestville, a small community in Sonoma County.

The three men were killed execution-style in what investigators believe was an alleged plot to move 70 to 80 pounds of pot from California to Colorado.

The crime shocked those who know both the victims and the suspected triggerman, and served as a reminder that even as states such as Colorado and California take steps to legalize marijuana, the illegal drug trade remains robust – and deadly.

Read the whole story

Indian casinos expanding

beyond reservations

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

With a referendum looming over the California Legislature's approval of a controversial Indian casino in Madera County, Gov. Jerry Brown said Friday that casino opponents are setting a bad precedent in what is likely to be a multimillion-dollar fight between casino interests.

"I think this is a dispute about money, mostly, money and competition," Brown told reporters after addressing tribal leaders at the Capitol.

At issue is the Legislature's approval this year of a casino for the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians along Highway 99, more than 35 miles from the village where tribal members live. Opponents of the casino, including New York-based financial interests and Table Mountain Rancheria, which operates a casino near the North Fork site, have raised nearly \$1.7 million to support a referendum.

Andrew Acosta, a political consultant working on the campaign, said the group will submit signatures Tuesday to qualify the measure for the November 2014 ballot.

Read the whole story

Mixed emotions as insurance exchanges set to open

By Eric Whitney, NPR

Tuesday is a big day for the White House. That's when new open in every state, where people can buy the insurance the Affordable Care Act requires next year. They will also see if they qualify for new subsidies to help them afford it.

The day will be met by both intense scrutiny and complete cluelessness. Policy wonks will be watching like scientists running lab rats through a maze.

Camped on the virtual sidewalk outside the new exchanges, just waiting for the online doors to open, are people like Caroline Pearson, a vice president at Avalere Health, a Washington, D.C., consulting firm. She says she knows a lot of people who are just dying to take the federal government's new health insurance shopping system for a spin when it opens Tuesday morning.

"I think that every health care researcher in the country is going to immediately log in to the website – and hopefully not overwhelm the system and crash the website," she laughs.

Researchers like Pearson want to see if the technology really works. They want to compare prices across the country, know who's buying and how much people are willing to spend. They want demographics, consumer behavior, prices – data, data, data.

At the other end of the spectrum are the estimated 80 million Americans who say they don't know anything about the law and may not notice at all.

Read the whole story

Gaming execs: Market is oversaturated

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Saturation has arrived in the gaming industry and except for a few outposts – namely the state of Texas – there aren't many places in the United States where a player can't drive three hours or less to get to a casino, a panel of gaming industry executives concluded in a wide-ranging panel on industry issues.

"New England is saturated," said Penn National Gaming President Tim Wilmott. "The market is crowded in Ohio. It's a little underserved in Florida."

So what does that mean for companies in the business? Panelists said it means growth will occur by acquisition and mergers and possibly diversification into the online world.

Even international markets are getting crowded, with Southeast Asia still the best option for new venues. Wilmott said Japan and South Korea have casinos in their future.

Read the whole story

Rim Fire salvage plan ignites debate

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON – The devastating Rim Fire around Yosemite National

Park has now rekindled a fierce fight over salvage logging.

Some want to speed commercial removal of the wrecked timber left behind by the fire that has burned over 257,000 Sierra Nevada acres since mid-August. Others caution about the consequences of eliminating the standard regulatory and judicial reviews. The politically savvy agree that a far-reaching timber salvage bill newly introduced by Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, is only the start of serious debate.

“If this effort is anything more than just a press release, he’s going to have to be able to sit down and negotiate with the Senate,” Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, said Friday.

The bill introduced late Thursday is a more aggressive version of a salvage logging amendment added, on a largely party line vote, a week ago to a separate piece of House legislation about public lands. Like McClintock’s House amendment, his bill effectively blocks lawsuits to challenge salvage logging plans.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe, TTD settle MV dispute

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Transportation District expect to have their legal matters with MV Transportation resolved next week.

The City Council on Oct. 1 is expected to ratify the

settlement agreement that calls for the city to pay MV and South Tahoe Area Transit Authority \$115,000. The money will come from the general fund's unassigned excess reserves. The money is to be split equally among the entities.

Fairfield-based MV had signed a three-year contract in summer 2009 to run the daily operation of the bus service on the South Shore that included BlueGo, Heavenly ski shuttles, Nifty 50 Trolley, routes to Carson City, and service into Carson Valley.

MV filed a lawsuit against South Tahoe Area Transit Authority – which was the overseer of the bus operations – after the agency severed the contract within a year. STATA filed for bankruptcy on Sept. 13, 2010. MV that year filed a complaint saying it was owed \$2 million for services rendered and another \$1 million in lost revenue.

The staff report for Tuesday's council meeting says, "The city has vigorously defended its position that it has no liability in this situation. However, the costs in time and attorney's fees have resulted in a determination that the certainty received in settlement is better for the city than the risk and ongoing expenses to proceed further with litigation."

The agreement is expected to be filed with the Bankruptcy Court in Reno on Oct. 23.

The TTD board earlier this month voted to settle as well. The court is expected to approve that agreement on Oct. 3.

"TTD has agreed to assist the parties in recovering potential reimbursable expenses from outstanding operating grants, and TTD will be able to keep 50 percent of whatever funds are recovered," TTD Executive Director Carl Hasty told *Lake Tahoe News*. "TTD will also pay the parties \$150,000 in total with the potential to offset some or all of that through the 50 percent of recovered funds from eligible operating expense reimbursement, which minimizes or negates any potential impact

to existing south shore transit service.”

Other entities involved in the case have settled, but not everyone is talking about it.

S. Tahoe coalition receives multi-year drug grant

By Kathryn Reed

Drug use and abuse is nothing new in South Lake Tahoe. But there is a group in town that believes the status quo must go.

The South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition secured a \$150,000 federal grant for each of the next five years. The money will primarily go toward education and prevention. The funding starts Oct. 1.

South Lake Tahoe was one of nine communities in California and one of 147 nationwide to receive the Drug Free Communities grant.

“Look around, there is probably not one of us who doesn’t have a family member, an associate or someone in our different circles that has not been affected by substance abuse,” Erica Eng told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The grant is about prevention and prevention at a young age so kids don’t go down that route to begin with, so they don’t become addicted to alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs.”

Eng works for Tahoe Youth & Family Services, the lead agency for the Drug Free Coalition. While she led the charge during

the grant seeking process, Leanne Wagoner with Barton Health is now chair of the coalition. (This reporter is a member of the coalition.)

“Working toward reducing substance abuse in our community will benefit everyone. Substance abuse can be correlated with many other social health factors such as domestic violence or mental health, known as co-occurring disorders, which can negatively affect the quality of life for many living in our area,” Wagoner told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Additionally, from Barton’s perspective, reducing substance abuse may ultimately reduce healthcare costs. You see, when a patient is admitted to the hospital for a medical issue and it is combined with substance abuse, their stay tends to be longer. Many of these patients do not have the ability to pay for these services, which results in Barton donating this care, which affects the cost of healthcare for everyone.”

The coalition also wants to work with Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Students from South Tahoe Middle School are part of the coalition. Going forward South Tahoe High students are expected to be part of the mix.

Here are some local stats from the California Healthy Kids Survey, which is conducted every two years in middle and high school:

- In LTUSD during the 2011-12 school year, 27 percent of freshmen and 46 percent for juniors said they had at least one alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days.
- The number of juniors in the district using alcohol in the past month was nearly 10 percent higher than the state average from 2004-10.

Barton Health’s 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment showed that 29 percent of people living on the South Shore consider themselves binge drinkers. This is 12 percent higher than the national rate. The survey found local illegal drug use nearly

four times the national rate.

“Barton has been working this past year on initiatives targeting substance abuse in our community by creating an awareness poster campaign in primary care offices encouraging patients to ask their doctor about available resources, supporting initiatives like the Drug Store Project and Every 15 Minutes through the volunteerism of many nurses and physicians, looking at pain management protocols and how Barton can be more proactive about looking into non-medication solutions to address patients’ pain, integrating an electronic medical record system which allows physicians to better manage a patient’s care holistically and helps practitioners identify conflicts in care or overuse of medication, sponsoring local events and nonprofit organizations such as Tahoe Youth and Family Services, Live Violence Free, the Drug Store Project, and sober grad nights at both local high schools,” Wagoner said.

Binge drinking was the subject of a study at the University of Michigan from 2005-11 where more than 16,000 high school students across the U.S. were surveyed. The results were released this month. The research revealed in the last two weeks 20.2 percent of high school seniors reported drinking more than five drinks or more at a time, 10.5 percent reported having 10 or more drinks, and 5.6 percent reported 15 or more drinks.

Other stats from the study: Rates of 5+ binge drinking and 10+ extreme binge drinking have declined since 2005, but rates of 15+ extreme binge drinking have not significantly declined. Students from more rural areas were more likely than students from metropolitan areas to consume 15 or more drinks.

Lake Tahoe is considered rural.

Some of the grant money will help keep current prevention programs intact. This includes Drug Store Project. In April,

350 sixth-graders went through the program that shows them the consequences of taking prescription drugs. (The 2014 event will be April 1 at Lake Tahoe Community College.)

Illegal drug use is not just a local issue. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., head of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, on Sept. 25 chaired a hearing on dangerous synthetic drugs such as Molly, K2, Spice and bath salts.

She cited statistics, saying poison centers nationwide responded to approximately 3,200 calls related to synthetic marijuana and bath salts in 2010 and that by 2011 that figure jumped to 12,834. Sixty percent of those calls were from people 25 and younger.

"In my view, synthetic drugs are diabolical. Synthetic drugs are often unregulated substances designed by scientists to mimic the effects of controlled substances. They are similar in chemical structure to Schedule 1 controlled substances. They are sold at gas stations, convenience stores, head shops and over the Internet," Feinstein said during the hearing. "When Congress outlawed several of these synthetic drugs last year, traffickers did not stop producing them. Instead, they slightly altered the chemical structure of illegal drugs to skirt the law. By making these alterations, the drug traffickers produced what we call 'controlled substance analogues' which mimic the effects of drugs like ecstasy, cocaine, PCP and LSD."

In July, Feinstein introduced the Protecting Our Youth from Dangerous Synthetic Drugs Act to give law enforcement the tools they need to prosecute individuals who produce and distribute controlled substance analogues. The bill would establish an inter-agency committee of scientists to be responsible for establishing and maintaining an administrative list of controlled substance analogues.

The local drug coalition will hire a coordinator to implement the goals of the group, oversee future programs, and manage the grant funds.

For more information about the South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition, including becoming a member or volunteering time, contact Erica Eng at Erica@tahoeyouth.org.