

T.J. Maxx building changing water purveyors

By Kathryn Reed

Sometime in October the T.J. Maxx building in South Lake Tahoe will be a water customer of South Tahoe Public Utility District's instead of Lukins Brothers Water Company.

The STPUD board will get an update this afternoon at 2 about the property owner's application for water service and the main line extension.

The Garfinkles own the building at the Y.

The water supply became an issue last fall just before the department store was about to open. It was discovered there was not adequate water pressure for the sprinkler system that had been installed. An emergency agreement was drawn up between the two water companies that would provide fire suppression by South Tahoe PUD if needed.



The T.J. Maxx building will switch this fall from Lukins to STPUD water. Photo/LTN

Original sprinkler plans had been signed off by the South Lake Tahoe fire marshal. But when it came time for inspection it was discovered that the system was of a higher grade that is

more than the building needs and would require more pressure than Lukins could supply.

(The Garfinkles and the contractor are in a lawsuit regarding that issue.)

For months a resolution has been sought for a permanent supply of water in the event of a fire. The Garfinkles, who live off the hill, triggered a clause in their agreement that allows them to switch from Lukins to STPUD.

"I never thought it would come to that. It's such an unfortunate situation," Jennifer Lukins told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Switching water companies requires special circumstances like this. It's not just something any customer may ask for and receive.

The Garfinkles have told STPUD they will have the necessary work done by Oct. 1.

Part of the reason for the switch is the money involved. STPUD was going to charge Lukins \$147,500 for the fire only connection fee. This represents 36 percent of a full domestic 8-inch connection. Lukins in turn was going to pass the cost onto Garfinkles and not spread the expense to all of its customers.

South Tahoe PUD offered Garfinkles domestic and fire water for \$97,469.

Richard Solbrig, STPUD general manager, said the total comes in part from the connection fee and then the following:

- The estimated 1-inch diameter domestic line for \$11,389;
- Six-inch diameter for the sprinklers in T.J. Maxx for \$953;
- A 4-inch diameter for the sprinklers in the other half of the building currently unoccupied for \$477;

- A \$2,500 water main extension agreement charge;
- A \$2,000 time and materials deposit;
- A \$150 administration fee.

“Note that both options provide the capability of extending the main further along James Avenue to accommodate redevelopment of the old AAA building on the adjacent parcel. This is currently being studied by the property owner,” Solbrig told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lukins, though, said the neighboring building would remain one of her company’s customers.

Caesars officials downplay bankruptcy rumors

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The publisher of a newsletter about Las Vegas is encouraging readers not to put money down on hotel reservations or make deposits in casinos operated by Caesars Entertainment, citing the prospect of a bankruptcy filing.

Caesars owns Harrah’s and Harveys at Stateline.

“In an abundance of caution, this newsletter advises you not to deposit any funds (deposits for hotel reservations, deposits in the cashier’s cage or not redeeming casino chips, etc.), in ... Caesars hotels, until the situation at Caesars becomes clearer,” Publisher Bill Mandel said in his Openings

and Closings in Las Vegas newsletter distributed Monday.

While analysts have speculated on a Caesars bankruptcy filing, company insiders said executives aren't considering it.

A UNLV gaming expert said that even if Caesars were to file for bankruptcy protection, it's highly unlikely that it would affect hotel reservations and casino deposits.

Read the whole story

Wildfires and climate change go together

By Kate Galbraith, New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO – The huge wildfire scorching one of America's most beloved national parks, Yosemite, has rained ash on San Francisco's water supply and jolted the nation.

Experts say this is just a foretaste of major fires to come, in the United States and much of the world.

Increasing incursions by humans into forests, coupled with altered forest ecology and climate change, will make fires bigger and more destructive, with implications for air quality as well as homes and infrastructure.

"We face the increased risk of fires almost everywhere," said Chris Field, director of the department of global ecology at the Carnegie Institution for Science, who is co-chairman of a working group for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

There have always been forest fires, of course. But their patterns are changing because of people.

Read the whole story

U.S. university enrollment on the decline

By Janet Lorin, Bloomberg

The number of U.S. university students declined by almost half a million last year, following years of growth, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The decrease was driven by students 25 and older, with 419,000 fewer enrolled in the fall of 2012 from a year earlier, according to data the Census Bureau released today. The number of college students younger than 25 also declined.

The cost of college continues to rise as the population of college-age students drops. After two decades of growth, the number of high-school graduates probably peaked at 3.4 million in the 2010-2011 school year, the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education said in January. College enrollment at the undergraduate and graduate levels had grown to 3.2 million between 2006 and 2011 before the decline.

One group that didn't follow the trend was Hispanics, whose numbers grew by about 447,000 between 2011 and 2012.

Read the whole story

Precautionary lockdown over at STHS

South Tahoe High School was on a temporary lockdown this morning.

South Lake Tahoe police officers were in the area on a case involving a high-risk warrant. It was at their request the school go on lockdown. This was done as a precautionary measure.

The lockdown was over at 9:31am Wednesday.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

California spends \$428 mil. to combat plastic

By KTVU-TV

California communities are spending \$428 million dollars a year to keep plastic and other trash off the streets and keep it from polluting waterways and beaches, an environmental group said in a new report.

For many, “soda bottles, food wrappers, and cigarette butts are just forgotten bits of muck that hit the street and wash away, forgotten. That waste doesn’t just disappear though, and it is very expensive to clean up,” the Natural Resources

Defense Council said in an “issue brief” about the litter problem.

The study, released on Aug. 28, was based on information supplied by 95 communities around the state on how much they spent on street sweeping; litter pickup; waterway and beach cleanup; storm drain cleaning and maintenance; installation of devices to trap trash that flows down storm drains with runoff, and public education programs about litter’s impact on waterways.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe cracking down on arts-crafts festivals, outdoor displays by businesses

By Kathryn Reed

Who gets to sell what and where dominated Tuesday’s South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting. At the root of the discussion is what the five electeds want the city to look like.

Less junky was the overwhelming, though not unanimous, decision.

No longer will arts and crafts festivals be allowed in South Lake Tahoe every weekend during the summer. Starting in 2014 four will be allowed instead of the current 12.



Anderson's has a special use permit that allows it to display its bikes in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

This topic is usually a heated discussion and Sept. 3 did not disappoint. Voting against the change in numbers were councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner.

"They add to the ambiance of the community," Davis said of the fairs. "They are selling what the customer wants."

Conner said she sees locals as vendors and customers at the fairs.

The topic was brought forward because in the past the promoter had to give \$5,000 from each event to a local nonprofit. A recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling has made this mandate by governments illegal.

"I have consistently felt that arts and crafts shows have been detrimental to the city," Councilman Hal Cole said. He has voted for them in the past because of the nonprofit component.

He believes tourists have a limited amount of discretionary income and that offering these fairs takes away from established businesses.

Loretta Bookhammer with the Tahoe Art League told the council that promoter Bob Williams, who secures all 12 festivals, allows their members free booth space. Artists then give a

percentage of their proceeds to TAL. She lobbied for as many fairs as possible.

The council was open to a larger juried art festival that might fall under a special event and not a crafts fair that would allow TAL to make money.

On a related matter the council was in unanimous agreement to actually enforce the ordinance on the books that deals with outdoor displays.

"I think the policy helps improve our built environment," Councilmember Brooke Laine said. "You can't just put all of your goods on the sidewalk."

But Davis cited specific businesses that rent bikes, standup paddleboards and sell wood carved bears that ought to be allowed to display their wares. He worries businesses will go out of business if the ordinance is enforced.

City Attorney Tom Watson admonished him by saying that would be favoritism and the council can't do that. The policy must apply to everyone and be enforced equitably.

"By enforcing (the ordinance) we are going to say take down the display by Oct. 15," City Manager Nancy Kerry said. The plan is to send a letter to the offenders explaining the rules and telling them they don't get to break them again in the spring when the weather is nice.

A business like Anderson's Bike Rentals has a special use permit so it can display its bikes.

The goal of the ordinance is to not allow businesses to take things out of their store and clutter the entrance and walkway with goods.

The ordinance allows businesses to seek a special permit to have outdoor sales or the like four times a year.

Councilwoman Angela Swanson said the predominant complaint she hears from constituents is how “crummy” the town looks. And the outdoor displays are one example of that crumminess.

The amended ordinance, which had a 5-0 vote, calls for no longer allowing food trucks or any mobile vending business to receive a temporary use permit that would allow it to be parked at a business for up to six months.

The amendment now allows temporary activities for four days with four days between the activities. Security deposits for these activities will be required to discourage violations of the ordinance.

This was the first reading of the ordinance, with the second expected at the Sept. 17 council meeting.

The council agreed at a future meeting to come up with a policy regarding mobile vendors, whether certain businesses may have outdoor displays on a more permanent basis, and whether there is flexibility with the four special events a year at any one location. The latter is a Tahoe Regional Planning Agency mandate.

Donner museum opening delayed one year

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacramento Bee

TRUCKEE — Mired in the bureaucracy of a contract dispute and lacking the funds to hire a coordinator, California state parks officials have delayed the opening of a new museum at Donner Memorial State Park.

Instead of opening this fall, the High Sierra Crossing Museum – a 9,400-square-foot structure that's nearly complete – will sit empty until fall 2014.

When it finally does open, the museum will feature exhibits on the Donner Party, regional American Indian history, the history of railroad development through Donner Pass and early highway construction.

Donner Memorial State Park is probably best known as the site where most members of the Donner Party, an 81-member wagon train from the Midwest, camped in 1846 and became trapped by heavy snows.

Read the whole story

North Tahoe firefighters return from Rim Fire



The Rim Fire on Aug. 21.
Photos/ Greg Smith

The five North Tahoe Fire Department firefighters who were sent to the Rim Fire are expected back in Tahoe Tuesday tonight.



Several Tahoe firefighters have been working the Rim Fire.

They have been helping fight the Yosemite area inferno for nearly two weeks.

Firefighter Greg Smith shot the photos from the camp burn over when he and his trainee were caught in a safety zone.

"It was a big safety zone and we were fine," Smith wrote to his colleagues in Lake Tahoe.

The fire has burned 235,841 acres and is 80 percent contained.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Court sides with DCSD in expulsion

By AP

A federal appeals court has upheld Douglas County High School's decision to expel a former student who referenced the Virginia Tech massacre and threatened violence against

classmates through social media five years ago.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last week that Landon Wynar's threat to massacre classmates at the Minden school were not a form of speech protected by the First Amendment.

Wynar was a 16-year-old sophomore when he was arrested in 2008 after students reported his comments in messages on MySpace. He filed a lawsuit in 2009 saying the school board had no authority to suspend him for things done off school property.

The San Francisco-based appellate court upheld the suspension partly because his comments evoking images of the slayings at Virginia Tech presented a clear danger to others.

Wynar was jailed for 31 days and suspended for 10 days until an expulsion hearing before the Douglas County school board led to him being removed from school.

The 9th Circuit Court concluded Wynar "engaged in a string of increasingly violent and threatening instant messages sent from his home to his friends, bragging about his weapons, threatening to shoot specific classmates, intimidating that he would 'take out' other people at a school shooting on a specific date and invoking the image of the Virginia Tech massacre," Judge Margaret McKeown wrote in the opinion on Thursday.

The Virginia Tech campus was the scene of the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history when a student-gunman killed 32 students and faculty before killing himself on April 16, 2007.

Wynar said in interviews with two sheriff's deputies that he sent the messages but also said they were a joke, prosecutors said.

The MySpace messages included threats against two or three

specific students and disturbed friends who reported them to school officials. They included references to “that stupid kid from vtech” and said, “I bet I could get 50+ people and not one bullet would be wasted.”

“The nature of the threats here was alarming and explosive,” the court ruled. “The messages presented a real risk of significant disruption to school activities and interfered with the rights of other students. Under the circumstances, the school district did not violate Landon’s rights to freedom of expression or due process.”

The court said that in such a circumstance, the district could take disciplinary action against off-campus speech and was responsible to do so.

“Landon specified a date for the attack and described how he would kill two specific named classmates,” the justices wrote, adding, “Douglas County did not need to wait for an actual disruption to materialize before taking action.”