

Tourists returning to Tahoe reviving economy

By Kathryn Reed

“No vacancy” signs, traffic on the roads midweek, parking lots full. All of these are indicators of an economy that is on the rebound.

There are days, construction aside, when one cannot drive as fast they would like. Even the increase in bikes and pedestrians is slowing down the normal pace.



Beaches like the one at Lake Shore Lodge are always full for the July 4 fireworks.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

It hasn't been this way in Tahoe since before the recession.

According to the Bureau of Economic analysis, spending on travel and tourism in the United States is up 6.8 percent in the first three months of this year compared to a year ago.

A report by Dean Runyan Associates said more than 200 million people came to California in 2012 as tourists. Collectively, they spent about \$106.4 billion. This is an increase of 3 percent from the \$101.8 billion that was spent in 2011.

Pat Ronan, who owns Lake Shore Lodge and Spa in South Lake Tahoe, said everyone he's talked to – from casinos to vacation rentals – is doing better than years past.

"We sell out every year, but this year it was a month in advance," Ronan, who is also chairman of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News* of this weekend.

The three- and four-night minimums that many hotels have for this weekend were not a deterrent.

"There is a huge amount of family business because now the whole family can afford to do it," Ronan said.

Sandy Evans Hall, North Lake Tahoe Resort Association executive director, said 2012 was a great summer for her area and this summer is tracking to be on par or better.

"Probably our biggest increase now is showing up in September because of Iron Man, Tough Mudder and the food and wine festival," Hall told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The first two are new events to the North Shore.

Events continue to be an economic boon no matter where they are.

Carol Chaplin, LTVA's executive director, said events do two things. One, they draw people to that specific event, and the other is the event creates a sense of energy, that Tahoe is a happening place even if that particular event is not of interest or the person can't make it that day.

Fourth of July is traditionally the busiest time of the year throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin. This year is no different. Beaches were full of fireworks enthusiasts last night. The beach at Lake Shore Lodge and Spa was a mass of people with their eyes focused intently on the 25-minute fireworks display that featured 3,500 shells being shot off from three barges.

Tourist officials on the South Shore had predicted upward of 100,000 people could be in town this weekend.

The big difference this year compared to previous years is the advance bookings. The past few years people were all about last-minute travel, now they are planning. This is a sign of confidence in the economy.

Lodging is the first segment of a tourism destination to come back. Then people start eating out more and graduate to more expensive eateries. Then it's a special event they can afford. Finally, it will be the truly optional items people will open their wallets for – like spa treatments, helicopter rides and shopping.

“For the boats, they are pacing well above where they were last year,” Teri Sweeney with Aramark said of the two paddle-wheelers and 50-passenger Paradise her company operates.

On the Fourth, a third cruise was added for the Paradise. It sold out in 1½ weeks. All of the cruises were sold out yesterday.

Sweeney added that the boat rental business is doing well, too.

People are eating out as well.

“Last year was a record year for Riva, Gar Wood and Bar of America. This year is proving to be as good or better, even in Kings Beach (at Caliente),” Tom Turner told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Turner owns the four restaurants scattered about the greater Lake Tahoe area.

July 3 is traditionally the busiest day for Gar Wood because people are stopping there on their way to the fireworks in Kings Beach. Riva Grill in South Lake and Caliente in Kings Beach are popular viewing platforms on fireworks night.

“People are definitely loosening up, but it is much more calculated these days,” Chaplin said. She doubts the visitor who has money to throw will be returning any time soon, but is confident the tide has turned.

Crews making progress on Douglas County fire

Update 11:30pm:

The Bison Fire has grown to 1,400 acres, with approximately 15 percent containment.

No structures have been damaged and no injuries reported.

The fire has moved from the previously threatened structures.

Approximately 220 firefighters are working this blaze. Air support has been suspended for the night.

Hand crews will monitor the fire through the night.

The fire is headed toward the old Ray May and Preacher fires. The direction of the fire has been in a south to southeast direction.

The plan is to fight the fire heavy in the morning with air support, hand crews and engines, before the afternoon weather moves in.

Update 6:30pm:

The Douglas County fire has been named the Bison Fire. It is 300 acres in size and growing.

Current resources committed to this fire:

22 engines

2 air tankers

3 helicopters

3 dozers

3 water tenders

120 firefighters.

Twenty residents have been either evacuated or have been asked to evacuate. Additional crews have been ordered.

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A wildland fire is burning out of control in the Pine Nut Mountains east of Gardnerville.

This fire is growing rapidly and its size has not been determined at this time, Douglas County sheriff's deputies report.

The fire was spotted July 4 at 3:30pm.

Homes are threatened by this fire and have been evacuated. This area is closed to non-residents.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

K-9 unit takes down suspect at South Shore beach

At least one person was taken to Barton Memorial Hospital on Thursday afternoon after a fight broke out at ski beach on the South Shore.

A U.S. Forest Service K-9 unit took a suspect down. That is the person who was taken to the hospital. The extent of the injuries is unknown.

This is the same beach where authorities had problems last Fourth of July.

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies and South Lake Tahoe police officers assisted with fight that involved several intoxicated people.

Ski beach is to the left of Baldwin Beach where boats are allowed to dock.

The USFS and sheriff's departments have called in extra officers to Tahoe.

Law enforcement is reporting that for most part things have been relatively calm this holiday outside of the Ski Beach incident.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County deputy

shoots man in hand

An El Dorado County sheriff's deputy shot a gun out of a man's hand just before midnight Wednesday.

Deputies were called out July 3 to investigate a report of a man brandishing a small handgun and threatening people who had refused to give him a ride to the Raley's Market in El Dorado Hills. Deputies located the man walking on Silva Valley Road near the El Dorado Hills Town Center. As the deputy attempted to contact the man he allegedly brandished a handgun.

The deputy, whose name has not been released, fired one round, striking the man in his hand. The deputy was not injured.

Joshua Whitecotton, 21, was taken to the hospital. He has since been booked into jail on assault with a deadly weapon charges.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

3 people airlifted to hospital after head-on crash

Three people were flown to a Reno hospital Thursday morning after two vehicles collided head-on in Carson City.

The accident occurred on Highway 50 near Flint Street about about 11:43am July 4.

Nevada Highway Patrol officers have not released the names of the victims.



Three people were seriously hurt July 4 in Carson City.
Photo/Provided

The two occupants of the Kia received serious injuries, while the driver of the Mitsubishi sustained critical injuries. Three helicopters were dispatched to the crash scene and transported the victims to Renown Medical Center in Reno. The driver of the Mitsubishi and the female were flown by CareFlight while the driver of the Kia was airlifted by Calstar.

The preliminary investigation has the silver 1999 Mitsubishi Mirage four-door sedan driven by an adult male traveling west on the four-lane highway when his his vehicle traveled across the center turn lane and into oncoming traffic.

The front of his vehicle struck a white 2010 Kia Soul four-door head-on that was driven by an adult male who had an adult female passenger.

The accident caused the temporary closure of all four lanes of the highway to be blocked for about 90 minutes.

Witnesses to the crash and anyone with additional information are encouraged to contact Trooper Kris Satterwhite at (775) 689.4682.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

STD rates increase in El Dorado, Placer counties

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

The number of cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea, the two most common sexually-transmitted diseases, rose in Placer, El Dorado and Yolo counties from 2011 to 2012, part of a steady, statewide jump, state figures show.

For Chlamydia, El Dorado County saw a 20 percent increase in cases from 2011 to 2012; Placer saw an 8 percent increase and Yolo experienced a 15 percent increase.

For Gonorrhea, El Dorado County saw a 50 percent increase in cases; Placer saw a 55 percent increase and Yolo experienced a 90 percent increase.

Read the whole story

DCSD implementing all-day kindergarten

Douglas County School District will provide full-day kindergarten at all seven of its elementary schools for the 2013-14 school year.

Full-day kindergarten was implemented last year for students in the Carson Valley attending Jacks Valley, Scarselli and CC

Meneley.

Additional funds have been identified to now include students at the district's remaining four sites: Zephyr Cove, Pinon Hills, Gardnerville and Minden elementary schools. Parents at these four schools will be receiving letters from their principals.

The partial implementation began last year for Douglas County when a competitive federal grant was awarded to DCSD to assist elementary schools with the most at-risk populations.

The state's additional funding was not sufficient to make full-day kindergarten a reality for every elementary school in Nevada but it is a significant step forward in the overall goal. The district hopes that by the end of the 2015 legislative session, the FDK funding will be secure for Douglas County so that the patch-working of grants will no longer be needed.

Families who are new to the area or who have not yet completed their registration for kindergarten may contact their neighborhood school when offices reopen on or about Aug. 5th to do their paperwork at that time. The first day of school is Aug. 19.

Congressional bill all about Douglas County

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

Douglas County's public lands issues now have a proposed federal solution, after Nevada Sens. Harry Reid and Dean

Heller introduced a bill Tuesday to address everything from economic development to wilderness and sage grouse protection.

The bill, titled “The Douglas County Conservation Bill,” would give the necessary permission for municipal and other entities to obtain or purchase federal public lands and transfer “important cultural sites” to the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.

Read the rest of the story

S. Tahoe moves forward with tourist core plan

By Kathryn Reed

What was designated a workshop on South Lake Tahoe’s Tourist Core Area Plan turned out to be little more than a normal presentation by staff.

At the July 2 special City Council meeting the electeds were briefed by planner John Hitchcock about the process. The CEQA document and TRPA environmental checklist were supposed to be released today, but instead will be delayed until later this month.



Ski Run Marina is part of the new area plan in South Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

This in turn has pushed back the time line to get the document approved. It is slated to go before the Planning Commission July 11 and possibly again at a special meeting Aug. 22, to council Sept. 3, the TRPA planning board on Oct. 10 and then to the TRPA Governing Board Oct. 23.

Area plans are something that have evolved out of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's latest Regional Plan.

This particular one has the same boundaries as the current Stateline-Ski Run Community Plan. It goes from the Stateline area, but does not include Lakeside, along Highway 50 and from both ends of Ski Run Boulevard.

It is designed to complement the city's General Plan and TRPA's Regional Plan.

The document says what can be done, but not will be done. Specific projects will go through scrutiny as they come forward.

City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting that with more local control it should spur revitalization in areas that need it.

There is now wiggle room with tourist accommodation units and commercial floor area – two items the TRPA has turned into

commodities to regulate growth, but really stifle the free market.

“The Regional Plan update allows for conversion of equal TAUs to CFA,” Kerry explained.

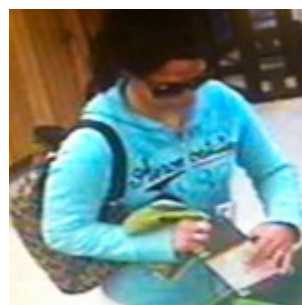
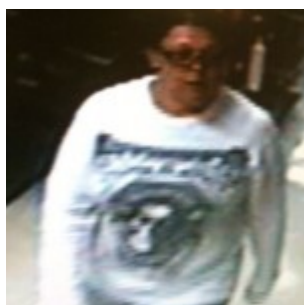
The abundance of hotel rooms in South Lake Tahoe was brought up by more than one of the five public speakers. The idea is owners of rundown motels could retire those TAUs and have them become commercial square footage to be used elsewhere. Then blight gets torn down and redevelopment begins.

Council members JoAnn Conner and Tom Davis have concerns about the height of buildings being allowed to be taller under the Regional Plan. While it is permitted, it does not mean the council or staff would have to approve it.

Laurel Ames, who has lived in town since 1947 and was on of the players involved with getting the city incorporated, is worried views will be blocked if buildings go up.

Conner also said she would like to see more than one tourist area, and not have everything concentrated in one spot.

Stolen credit cards being used on North Shore



Placer County

sheriff's deputies are trying to find three women who are accused of using stolen credit cards in Tahoe City and Truckee.

Deputies say the three were caught on video using the cards. The vehicle they were in was also photographed.

The cards were taken from a vehicle and then immediately were used, authorities say.



Anyone with information is asked to call Detective John Riella at (530) 581.6325.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report