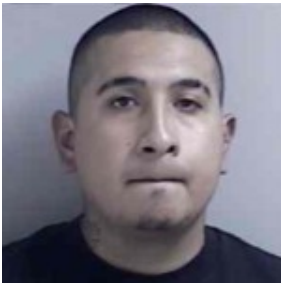


S. Tahoe gang member faces felony charges

A domestic violence call ended with a known gang member being arrested April 7 on felony battery and drug charges.

Jesus Rodriguez, 20, of South Lake Tahoe is an admitted member of the Norteno criminal street gang and has been involved with prior violent gang related encounters in South Lake Tahoe, according to officers.



Jesus
Rodriguez
faces felony
domestic
battery and
possession of
a controlled
substance for
sale charges.
Photo/Provided

Police officers were called to the residence by the 8-year-old brother of the victim.

“The victim stated she had discovered her husband ... had hidden a significant amount of cocaine inside the residence they share with their 2-year-old child,” police Lt. Brian Williams said in a press release. “The victim re-hid the drugs prior to confronting Rodriguez about her discovery. When she refused

his demand to return the cocaine to him, Rodriguez allegedly pushed the victim down on a bed and forcibly held her down with his hands around her throat.”

Rodriguez fled the house with the couple’s toddler.

Officers recovered 20.6 grams of cocaine at the house.

Rodriguez was arrested at his brother’s home.

The child was returned its mother.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

AP revises policy on use of ‘illegal’ in reference to immigrants

By U.S. News and World Report

The Associated Press decreed last week that the term “illegal immigrant” is no longer appropriate to describe people who reside in the United States without legal permission.

An update to the AP’s influential stylebook was blasted out in an email to subscribers of the guide’s online version, saying in part, “Except in direct quotes essential to the story, use illegal only to refer to an action, not a person: illegal immigration, but not illegal immigrant.”

In a blog post the AP’s senior vice president and executive editor, Kathleen Carroll, elaborated that the news organization “had in other areas been ridding the Stylebook of labels” and ultimately decided it was best to only label

specific behaviors as illegal.

Debate over the term is highly political. Opponents of illegal immigration fear softening the language is a move to subtly shift the policy debate over immigration reform away from enforcing current immigration laws.

Maricopa County, Ariz., Sheriff Joe Arpaio is one of the nation's foremost anti-illegal immigration hawks. Arpaio told *U.S. News* Wednesday, "If a person enters the United States illegally, that's how we should refer to their status and not try to soften the crime of entering illegally by calling it something else."

William Gheen, president of Americans for Legal Immigration, told the *Los Angeles Times* that the AP's "Big Brother" style update was "political correctness on steroids." Gheen told the *Times* his group will begin using the term "illegal invader." On Tuesday evening late-night TV host Jay Leno joked that he would use the term "undocumented Democrats."

The AP previously defended its use of the term "illegal immigrant."

AP Deputy Managing Editor Tom Kent wrote in an October 2012 memo excerpted by the Poynter Institute: "Terms like 'undocumented' and 'unauthorized' can make a person's illegal presence in the country appear to be a matter of minor paperwork. Many illegal immigrants aren't 'undocumented' at all; they may have a birth certificate and passport from their home country, plus a U.S. driver's license, Social Security card or school ID. What they lack is the fundamental right to be in the United States."

Following the AP's Tuesday announcement, the public editor of the *New York Times* disclosed that it too was preparing to announce a revision this week to its stylebook entry for the term "illegal immigrant." That change "will probably be more incremental" and introduce a more nuanced offering of

terminology, rather than an outright ban on the term, according to the *Times*.

Old Tahoe being turned into boutique hotel

By Kathryn Reed

From a 1-star to a 4½-star property. That is what Jim Demetriades is trying to do with a prime piece of real estate in South Lake Tahoe.

He is turning the old Royal Valhalla motel into the Landing Resort & Spa.

“What South Lake Tahoe was lacking was a 4-, 5-star establishment ... a super high-end boutique hotel,” Demetriades told *Lake Tahoe News*.



What the Landing Resort & Spa in South Lake Tahoe will look like. Rendering/Midkiff & Associates

He bought the sprawling property 1½ years ago and began

construction last fall. It is at the end of Stateline Avenue between Lakeshore Boulevard and Azure Street. Part of it is next to single-family residences along the streets of Hill Road and Sunrise Lane. Then it abuts the open space that is directly across from Lakeside Beach.

Demetriades would not disclose how much money he is putting into the renovation, but said, "It's millions and millions of dollars."

He said there is no way to build something like this from scratch because it would be cost-prohibitive and the regulatory hurdles insurmountable.

"We focus on properties in secondary markets that are reasonably priced, with a tremendous amount of charm and character," Demetriades said. "We think South Lake Tahoe is a beautiful environment. But like many secondary markets it has gone through its ups and downs. It's been in a prolonged tailspin with a lot of rundown properties. We think there is a crowd of guests who are interested in a nicer property in the area that is reasonably priced."

He says room nights will range from \$150 to \$250.



This sign will soon

disappear.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

"It will be Ritz-Carlton quality, but half the price," Demetriades said.

But at a Ritz, people are used to getting service that is off the charts. Demetriades wants to deliver that as well.

He said the general manager he expects to have on board has experience at high-end properties.

Demetriades has properties in Southern California, as well as a hotel and three restaurants in Mammoth.

Jimmy's Taverna is one of the eateries. And it's what will be cloned and opened in Tahoe. Billed as Greek seafood, it will serve three meals a day. The restaurant will be for hotel guests and anyone else. The restaurant will seat 120, while the bar will fit about 50. In the summer outdoor seating will be available.

The restaurant will be the fifth and last building to be constructed.

Of the five buildings, one is almost done, two are well under way, and No. 4 had concrete poured two weeks ago.

The sound of hammers and saws could be heard last week as workers transform the three-story property.

The Royal Valhalla had 91 rooms; the Landing Resort & Spa will have 88. Part of the hotel could open in July.

"We are not taking reservations just yet. We are working with construction teams to validate the opening date. A lot has to do with the furniture," Demetriades said.



Part of the new hotel is expected to open in July.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Each room has a balcony, some with views of Lake Tahoe. All are within earshot of the Harveys outdoor summer concerts.

The furniture is being custom made. Waterfall showers, heated floors, heated toilet seat, and heated towel racks are standard features.

A 150-seat conference facility is being built. Weddings are expected to be a large part of the revenue stream, with the facility able to be cordoned off into three rooms or one big room for 300 guests.

A spa will also be on-site.

Partnerships with nearby Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course are being worked out. Guests will have access to Lakeside Beach. Bikes and boats will be available, as will a shuttle service.

The goal is someone flies into Reno, arrives at the Landing Resort & Spa and never has to drive.

Body believed to be Nevada official found in Carson River

By Brian Nordli, Las Vegas Sun

Three suspects were arrested in Las Vegas on Saturday after a body believed to be that of Nevada's chief insurance examiner was found in a river in Carson City.

Carson City Sheriff Ken Furlong said that although a positive identification and cause of death haven't been established, investigators believe searchers found the blanket-wrapped body of William McCune in the Carson River.



William McCune

A fourth suspect was arrested in Carson City. Furlong said all four are from the Carson City area, but detectives were unsure of their relationship to the 62-year-old McCune or the motive for the slaying.

Investigators suspected foul play after finding evidence Thursday of a violent struggle in McCune's apartment in Carson City. McCune had not reported for work and missed a scheduled work flight earlier that morning.

A Carson City Special Enforcement Team worked with Metro Police to arrest the suspects, Carson City Sheriff officials said. Three suspects – Makyla Blackmore, Anthony Elliot and

Raul Garcia – were arrested near Spencer Street and East Warm Springs Road, and the fourth, Michael Evans, was arrested in Carson City.

Evans, 23, and Elliot, 20, were booked on murder charges. Blackmore, 20, and Garcia, 22, were arrested on burglary charges.

The incident remains under investigation.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Mental health care still lacking in Calif. prisons

By Norimitsu Onishi, New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO – A federal judge on Friday rejected California's motion to regain control of mental health care in its prisons, ruling that the quality of care failed to meet standards required by the Constitution. The move dealt a blow to Gov. Jerry Brown's broader efforts to bring the prisons back under the state's authority.

In a ruling handed down about 90 days after the state first argued that enough improvements had been made to mental health care after 18 years of outside control, Judge Lawrence K. Karlton of U.S. District Court in Sacramento wrote that there were "ongoing constitutional violations" and that court oversight "remains necessary to remedy those violations."

In a statement, Deborah Hoffman, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, said the judge had not given enough weight to experts and evidence

showing that mental health care in the prisons was “a model for the nation.” She said the state will appeal.

Since January, Brown has made it a priority to regain greater control of the state’s 33 adult prisons, the nation’s biggest corrections system. In addition to mental health care, he is seeking to overturn an order by the United States Supreme Court to further reduce prison overcrowding. In 2011, the Supreme Court ruled that conditions in California’s prisons were so poor that they violated the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment. In 2006, the state prisons held more than twice the population for which they had been designed.

On both issues, Brown has argued that federal oversight has led to unnecessary financial burdens on the state and that billions of dollars’ worth of improvements had been made. A hearing has yet to be held on court oversight over the prison population.

Michael Bien, a lawyer representing inmates who are against the state in the mental health case, said Friday’s ruling undermines the state’s bid to regain decision-making authority over the prison population.

“If the constitutional violations persisted in this case, there is no basis for the population reduction case,” he said. “The two motions were intricately intertwined.”

Marijuana bust on West Slope

ends with 6 arrests

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

An investigation into marijuana sales in El Dorado County has resulted in six arrests, as well as seizure of approximately 60 pounds of processed marijuana and \$80,000 in currency.

A three-month investigation by El Dorado County sheriff's detectives regarding a conspiracy to sell marijuana culminated Thursday with the service of five search warrants.

The investigation centered around the sale of marijuana through two businesses. River City Wellness, also known as Right Choice Wellness, in Cameron Park and C4C in Shingle Springs were operated by 45-year-old David Sisson of El Dorado, his wife, 44-year-old Stacy Sisson, also of El Dorado, and David Sisson's brother, 34-year-old Robert Sisson of Shingle Springs, authorities said.

David Sisson was booked into El Dorado County Jail on suspicion of conspiracy to sell marijuana, possession of marijuana for sale, and being a felon in possession of a firearm. Robert Sisson was booked on suspicion of conspiracy to sell marijuana and possession of marijuana for sale, and Stacy Sisson was booked on suspicion of conspiracy to possess marijuana for sale.

Employee Mathew Wollman, 29, of Sacramento was arrested and booked on suspicion of possessing a concealed firearm in a vehicle, and another employee, Austin Lange, 26, of Cameron Park was arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to sell marijuana.

While detectives were serving a search warrant at one of the businesses, James Dungan, 50, of Santa Cruz arrived allegedly intending to sell processed marijuana to the business. Detectives arrested him on suspicion of possessing marijuana

for sale.

Sheriff's officials said search warrants were served at each business and at the business operator's home. The other two search warrants were for bank accounts. In addition to the processed marijuana and currency, detectives seized nine firearms and authorities said more seizures are expected.

Climate change will increase extreme precipitation levels

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

Rainfall or snowfall dumped by the most intense storms could grow significantly heavier in most of the United States by the final decades of the century, according to a climate change study.

The paper, written by a research team led by scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, examines the effects of rising greenhouse gas emissions on factors that influence maximum precipitation.

The authors concluded that increasing atmospheric moisture will play the dominant role in ramping up rainfall intensity, which they projected using climate models.

As the Earth warms, sea surface temperatures rise, accelerating evaporation and increasing the amount of water vapor in the atmosphere. If greenhouse gas emissions continue at high levels, atmospheric water vapor levels will jump 20 to 30 percent in the final decades of the century, the researchers found.

That will push up maximum precipitation by a corresponding amount, with increases in the Western U.S. falling in the high end of that range, according to the paper, which has been accepted for publication in the journal Geophysical Research Letters.

“We have high confidence that the most extreme rainfalls will become even more intense, as it is virtually certain that the atmosphere will provide more water to fuel these events,” said lead author Kenneth Kunkel of the National Climatic Data Center.

Although the study focused on the U.S., the researchers said their conclusions applied to most areas of the globe.

They warned that the projected increases would raise the risk of damaging floods. “The long lifetimes of dams and similar structures ensures that they will experience the impacts of future climate change,” the authors wrote.

Ignoring the expected effects of climate change, they added, “is likely to lead to a false sense of security.”

NV Energy moving from coal to renewables

By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – NV Energy rolled out a major policy initiative Wednesday, announcing that it will shutter its coal-fired plants, increase investment in renewable energy and create thousands of construction jobs over the next 12 years.

Under the plan, Nevada’s coal plants would begin closing by

the end of next year, and the company would accelerate investment in wind, solar, geothermal and natural gas to replace the coal energy going offline. The company estimates the plan could result in a nearly 4 percent increase in rates over the next 20 years, and the proposed legislation would limit the Public Utilities Commission's ability to approve the increases.

The utility unveiled the proposal it's calling "NVision" on Wednesday at the Legislature as an amendment to Senate Bill 123.



The coal-fired Reid Gardner Generating Station near Moapa. Photo/Sam Morris/Las Vegas Sun

"This does three things: it retires coal from Nevada, builds renewables, and it creates jobs," said Tony Sanchez, NV Energy senior vice president.

The amendment calls for the accelerated closing of three of the four units at Reid Gardner, the controversial 553 megawatt coal plant in Moapa, by 2014. It leaves the fourth unit operating until 2017, after which the utility would have no coal plants operating in Southern Nevada.

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., has relentlessly called for the closing of the plant, most recently during an address to the Nevada Legislature last month.

(Under the plan, the utility would not divest from its share of ownership in the Navajo and Valmy coal plants until 2017 and 2025, respectively.)

A state legislator familiar with the proposed amendment said NV Energy's plan could position Nevada as a leader in renewable energy development in the wake of its divestment from coal.

"I applaud the utility in having the foresight and the courage to try to answer the questions about the future of coal in Nevada and their willingness to recognize that coal needs to be exiting stage left," said Assemblyman David Bobzien, D-Reno, who chairs the Assembly Commerce and Labor Committee that could hear the bill if it passes the Senate.

Bobzien tempered his praise of the proposal with a cautionary note that legislators still need time to investigate the plan to see how the Legislature can achieve the goals of getting Nevada out of the coal business and firmly into the renewable energy business without adversely affecting industry and consumer interests.

"In the coming weeks the Legislature is going to have some questions about how we get there so that it's done in a way that's going to be predictable and stable for ratepayers," he said.

In place of coal, NV Energy wants to invest in a 60-40 split of natural gas and renewables.

NV Energy would construct, acquire or contract for 600 megawatts of renewable energy in Nevada during the next five years.

The bill mandates that the utility own or operate 25 percent of that renewable energy.

This would be the first time the utility would own and operate

renewable energy power plants, Sanchez said.

The company would also construct or acquire and own 1,000 megawatts of natural gas during the next five years and 1,000 more megawatts in the next 10 years with construction or acquisition intended to be in-state.

The amendment also calls for the construction of natural gas pipelines and transmission lines to hook the new power plants into the grid.

The construction projects would bring about 4,700 construction jobs to Nevada and would result in about 200 permanent operations and maintenance jobs at the facilities.

NV Energy said it does not anticipate any layoffs from Reid Gardner because employees will be involved in ramping down the plant and could transition to new jobs at new facilities, said Rob Stillwell, spokesman for NV Energy.

All this comes at a cost to the ratepayer.

"NVision has an estimated compound annual growth rate in electricity prices of 1.65 percent, which includes the effects of inflation," according to an NV Energy statement released to the *Las Vegas Sun* on Tuesday.

The utility's amendment would call for the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada to review the plan upon legislative approval. The commission would have 210 days to review the plan, considering among other things that the cost is "just and reasonable in light of the elements of the plan," according to a copy of the amendment obtained by the *Las Vegas Sun*.

The commission does not appear to have the ability to reject the plan; the amendment instructs the commission to "approve or modify" the utility's proposal.

The utility would also charge ratepayers to recover all "just

and reasonable” costs of renewable energy construction, maintenance, and operation.

NV Energy would also be able to recover costs for closing coal plants, including charging for unused coal inventory, contract termination, and decommissioning and remediation costs.

Such rate hikes would automatically begin on the first day of the next financial quarter after they were enacted.

The Public Utilities Commission could retroactively review rate hikes permissible under the plan during the next general rate case, a reversal of the current practice in which it reviews such rate increases before they take effect.

The wide-ranging amendment also covers several significant changes to the state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard, its renewable demonstrations programs and its net metering program.

The bill also mandates that the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection oversee the closure and remediation of its coal plants, a job that would have gone to the Southern Nevada Health District under current law.

Chateau project team being reassembled

By Kathryn Reed

Joe Stewart with SMC Contracting put in the concrete and rebar at the convention center project in South Lake Tahoe. His crew is ready to resume work.

Pete Joseph was ready six years ago to move his McP's Pub into a much larger building that would sit near the corner of Highway 50 and Stateline Avenue. He's still ready to move.

MBA Architecture and Design in Reno came up with the original plans for what is still being called the Chateau project and they are back in the game today figuring out what the next phase will look like.

Randy Lane with the now bankrupt Lake Tahoe Development Company was to develop the \$400 million project. Today he is offering advice to Bill Owens, who now owns the majority of the 29 parcels that make up the nearly 11-acre site.



The original rendering of the Chateau project by MBA Architecture and Design.

Lew Feldman, the attorney who represented Lane, is now advising Owens.

It was the South Lake Tahoe City Council of Hal Cole (he was mayor), John Upton, Mike Weber, Ted Long and Kathay Lovell who on July 11, 2006, approved the owner participation agreement. This was the contract for what was to be the largest development in the city limits. It included two condo-hotels, a 93,000-square-foot convention center and about 57,000-square-feet of retail space.

Next week city officials and the latest project proponents are

going to have a sit-down about the next steps. The Owens group has submitted plans the city keeps calling incomplete.

While council members would not normally have to sign off on modifying the number of phases when a permit has already been issued for a project, they have requested to do so after the planning commission takes action. Cole will get to vote again. Joining him are electeds Tom Davis and Brooke Laine, who with their pasts, are well versed on projects in that area. New to voting on items in this location are Councilwomen Angela Swanson and JoAnn Conner.

The plan is to develop about 20,000-square-feet of retail and 9,000-square-feet of food and beverage that will mostly span Highway 50, but will go down Stateline Avenue a bit, too. The section is a bit triangular, with the point being at the west side before McP's Pub. It will be divided on the highway by a driveway that will access the underground parking.

The concrete that is there is the floor of the garage. While the original plan never had enough parking spaces for the entire project, a bit of irony is that this phase being proposed would have more parking than should ever be needed.

Back in the day, Jim Marino who is now capital improvements project manager for the city, and Hilary Roverud, who now runs the planning department, told the council it should not approve the project because the parking plan was inadequate. The electeds ignored the professional advice.

On the day the OPA was signed then Redevelopment Agency Manager Gene Palazzo said a performance bond was still needed.

The official city minutes from that meeting say, "Palazzo explained that in the event the developer were unable to finish the project, the performance, labor and materials bond provide the ability for the city to step in and get the project completed. Palazzo noted that this item was not included in the agreement and required resolution."

Someone dropped that ball and was never held accountable for never securing that performance bond.

Also in the minutes from that meeting is talk about the Highway 50 tunnel.

The minutes say, "Palazzo remarked that per the OPA, the developer was required to construct the underpass tunnel connecting Project 3 to the Park Avenue Project; however the OPA only required that the developer maintain onsite improvements, of which the tunnel was not a part. Palazzo noted that this item was not included in the agreement and required resolution."

Promises evaporate with redevelopment agency

While the OPA is a rather thick document, it is now useless. City Manager Nancy Kerry explained because it was an agreement between the developer and the city's Redevelopment Agency it ceased to exist as a legally binding document when the state dissolved the Redevelopment Agency.

So, while the permits from the city and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency are in effect, there is no contract. This means inadequate parking will be an issue at full build-out and that there is no way other than crosswalks at Stateline and Friday avenues to get from the Chateau site to Heavenly Village. This means crossing a five-lane state highway.



Work on the hole could begin

in three months. Photo/LTN

It also means what was supposed to become a city-owned convention center is now likely to be a privately operated conference center. Through the Redevelopment Agency and tax increment the city was going to have money invested in the original Chateau project. It was guaranteed to have access to the convention center for a predetermined number of days. That is out the window even though Kerry would like it to be a negotiating point when appropriate.

She doesn't understand "how any city manager could allow this to get to the condition it is because a consolidated parcel map would have been standard." (Dave Jinkens was city manager when the OPA was signed, when construction began, when work ceased and when LTDC filed bankruptcy.)

Going forward

Construction is expected to begin in July, sources told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Before any of that happens, though, the city needs to receive a plan from the developer that is complete.

Kerry said she isn't going to cut corners. She isn't going to let work resume without these seven affected parcels being consolidated into one map. She is going to insist on a performance bond.

"Nothing occurs until we see documents of ownership," Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Stewart, the contractor, has been talking with Owens, but as of today a contract has not been signed. That would be a bit premature without having received the city's OK to start again.

"Rumors have been going on since the day they shut that down.

I've never felt very confident anything would happen on that job until now," Stewart told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In addition to putting in the foundation for the Chateau project, SMC built most of the retail at Heavenly Village as well as the transit center next door. SMC also built the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly, Zephyr Lodge at Northstar and all of the new buildings at South Tahoe High School.

Stewart said it wouldn't be weird to work on a small portion of what will be a larger project. He likes the idea of having a large area for staging.

"The hardest will be along Highway 50 that we would be doing this year. Being able to focus just on that is nice from a contractor's standpoint," Stewart said.

McP's also doesn't have a signed contract in place. But Joseph said he's been in touch with Feldman about his continued desire to occupy a much larger plot of real estate.

The two-story building that is proposed would be on the street level and below ground.

Joseph is familiar with change. Eminent domain forced him out of his spot across the street to make way for Heavenly Village. He was ready to move into the same spot that could be under construction this summer, but instead has been operating on an island of sorts for six years. McP's is at the west end of the fence that surrounds the concrete and rebar.

He's been in business for 10 years and wants to stay in Tahoe. If he isn't part of the Chateau project as originally planned, he told *Lake Tahoe News* he doesn't know what the future holds for him.

Joseph is banking on another move – just down the street.

"The building would have a lot more character and that would be helpful. There would be outdoor dining, fire pits, sliding

windows from indoors to out,” Joseph said.

The roof design makes it look like a freestanding building.

In addition to the city, the developer needs to work out issues with Caltrans still.

Sidewalks and a streetscape that match what is at Heavenly Village are planned.

The city is going to insist the entrance from Cedar Avenue be more than driving through a construction site. It must be a safe, finished driveway.

“As you pull in off Cedar there will be some sort of wall treatment. You won’t have the sense you’ve been turned loose in an underground construction site,” Feldman said. Improvements to Cedar Avenue will also be made.

Feldman would not disclose the amount of investment Owens plans to make in this initial restart phase, but said it would be eight figures.

The theory is having something usable in the ground will spur someone to come in to develop the rest of the project.

The original project was supposed to be a hotel-condo project, but condos are not a sellable product today. But what the market may bear when someone comes in to build future phases remains to be seen; as well as what that person would want to do.

“There may be plan revisions. That’s not uncommon for a larger scale project to amend the permit to reflect changes in the marketplace,” Feldman said.

While there are ideas about the types of businesses that might occupy the retail, negotiations will not begin until the green light for construction is given. Nor is it being disclosed how many storefronts there might be.

Family survives plunge into American River

By Richard Sharp, KCRA-TV

A Livermore family traveling through the Sierra on Friday is lucky to be alive after their SUV veered off the road, hit a concrete mile marker, a large tree, a boulder and landed in the middle of the South Fork of the American River.

"It was fortuitous that they didn't actually land on me," said Mark Devittorio, a kayaker who was in the river when the crash happened. "I was kayaking right there moments before they plunged off the cliff."

Devittorio rushed to help.



Mark Devittorio was kayaking in the American River when an SUV went off a cliff and landed near him in the river.

Photo/Mark Divittorio via KCRA

He found three children standing on the vehicle. They had

managed to unbuckle their seat belts.

He helped the children to the side of the river and went back to help the driver and his wife.

Devittorio found the driver pinned upside down with his head partly underwater. His wife was helping hold his head up.

"I was afraid that if I would have cut the seat belt, he would have died in front of me and his wife and his three kids," Devittorio said.

By chance, a fire engine with swift-water trained firemen was nearby after returning from another call.

What would have been a 15-minute response was reduced to 3 minutes. They were able to stabilize the driver while they worked to free him.

"We actually used a life jacket to put under the driver's head and shoulders to hold his head up out of the water, while we were cutting the roof off the vehicle," said Mike Pott, the fire marshal of the El Dorado County Fire Protection District.

All five family members were taken to area hospitals, Pott said.

Only the driver had major injuries, the rest of the family only had bumps and bruises, Pott added.

Another factor that worked in the families favor was the river level.

"The lack of rainfall this year actually worked in favor of this family. The water wasn't as high as it normal is and it wasn't as swift as it normally is," Pott said.