

Skyland fire contained to chimney

Tahoe Douglas firefighters were able to keep a chimney fire from spreading to the rest of the house Monday night.

The call came in about 6pm Jan. 14 that a house in the Skyland area was on fire.

“This was extinguished without damage to the structure,” Fire Marshal Eric Guevin told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said green, uncured wood is the worst because it excretes the most amount of creosote. It’s creosote build up that leads to chimney fires. He added that burning paper is frowned upon because it burns fast and can ignite the creosote.

Guevin recommends people sweep their chimneys annually to help prevent chimney fires.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Frozen pipes cause damage at 4 Stateline casinos

By Kathryn Reed

After three days of record-breaking low temperatures, many pipes in the Lake Tahoe Basin had enough and started doing some breaking of their own.

The four major casinos in the Stateline casino corridor have all had burst pipes. The damage started Jan. 13 at Horizon

when a pipe near the loading dock froze and broke.

Harrah's, Harveys and MontBleu each had frozen pipe issues Monday. This has kept maintenance departments as well as Tahoe Douglas firefighters busy.

At Harrah's Lake Tahoe at about 8am Jan. 14 a stand pipe that is a fire department connection broke on the 18th floor and flooded the tower with several thousands of gallons of water.

"It incapacitated the elevators for some time," Tahoe Douglas Fire Marshal Eric Guevin told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Stateline casinos are mopping up after pipes burst from extreme cold. Photo/LTN file

Water went into the restaurants on the upper floors and down the elevator shafts. Most people chose to stay in their rooms.

Three hours later a sprinkler head froze and discharged in the high limit gaming area. Some of the high rollers had to be evacuated.

"The engineering department was quick to respond in all the issues and make it safe for everyone and minimize the water damage and get the fire system back online for the safety of patrons," Guevin said.

The role of the fire department is to make sure the fire lines are working as soon as possible, help maintain the safety of everyone during the crisis, assist with evacuations and set up contingency plans in case there is a fire when the sprinkler

system is inoperable.

The next pipe to go was at 11:30am at Harveys. A fire head discharged over an employee at a jewelry store. The gaming floor then began to flood.

At 3pm another head froze at Harveys; this time near the elevator lobby of the casino floor.

Harrah's-Harveys spokesman John Packer was unavailable for comment.

"The cold definitely got inside the building and affected those pipes. Those systems have held up well over years, but this definitely challenged them," Guevin said.

The record cold in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 14 was minus 11 degrees. The previous record of minus 7 was set in 1997. (The National Weather Service in Reno predicts a warming trend – with the low on Jan. 15 forecast to be 5 degrees above zero, which would be 12 degrees off the record.)

At MontBleu on Monday afternoon a zone near the casino area by the front doors had frozen pipes.

"They were designed not to freeze," Guevin said.

He expects crews will be working into Tuesday morning to get those systems working. In the meantime, a "fire watch is in place," Guevin said.

Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course had issues on Monday, too. At 8am a frozen sprinkler head broke in the maintenance shop.

"The main significance of all of this is that it's very cold and it affects the fire lines that are designed to save lives and property. This time they did discharge, but they are still important systems to have to save lives. That is undisputed," Guevin said.

Truckee man arrested on domestic violence charge

A 52-year-old Truckee man was arrested Saturday on domestic violence charges.

Truckee officers responded to a 911 call for assistance from a female on Beacon Way on Jan. 11. She had been involved in a physical struggle with the suspect.

Police were called back to the residence the next day.

Officers contacted the original victim who reported she had been locked in a room all night by the suspect and was denied access to a phone to call for assistance.

Officers located the suspect, Douglas Fleming, hiding with their 3-year-old child in a closet. Fleming was arrested. The child was unharmed.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Praise for TRPA plan rolls in as others contemplate lawsuit

By Malia Wollan, New York Times

Deep in the Sierra Nevada, 39 trillion gallons of crystalline water straddles the border between California and Nevada.

That water, Lake Tahoe, can be as smooth as glass, but the politics of land-use planning along the lake's 72-mile shoreline are some of the most contentious and muddled in the country.

Lawmakers from the two states tend to have very different ideas about how to manage development around the lake, to say nothing of the more than 50 federal, state and local agencies with jurisdiction in the basin.

But last month, after nearly a decade of wrangling, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the bistate agency that regulates development, approved a new plan that will guide building there.

"The infrastructure around the lake was built in the 1950s and '60s, and it's failing the communities and it's failing the lake," said Todd Ferrara, deputy secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency. "California and Nevada have this shared treasure, and the stakes are too high not to work together to protect it."

The new regional plan encourages ripping down and rebuilding the area's aging infrastructure, removing buildings from environmentally delicate areas near marshes, streams and rivers, and constructing denser urban centers. It also streamlines the permit process for construction projects in the basin, which gets three million visitors a year.

For many of basin's 55,000 full-time residents, the fact that the agency's governing board – made up of seven Nevadans and seven Californians – reached consensus came as a great relief.

"We're very happy that a plan has finally been passed, because without concrete regulations, nobody wins and the lake suffers," said Darcie Goodman Collins, executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe, an environmental advocacy group.

While the plan has broad support on both sides of the state line, some environmental groups say it will result in taller buildings and denser development, which could ultimately harm the ecosystem of the lake.

"This new plan is a plan for improving the tourist economy, not a plan for improving the environment," said Laurel Ames, conservation co-chairwoman for the Tahoe Area Sierra Club, which is considering a lawsuit to halt it before it is carried out on Feb. 11.

But policymakers counter that replacing aging infrastructure would be a major step toward restoring the lake's ecosystem and quintessential clarity.

"The idea is to get rid of this strip development that causes sediment to run off into the lake and rebuild," said Lew Feldman, a lawyer who represents developers in the area.

Beginning in the 1950s, developers hurriedly built in preparation for the 1960 Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley and to support the burgeoning gambling industry on the Nevada

side.

In just a few decades, whole sections of shoreline were rapidly transformed from stands of Ponderosa pine trees and willow-filled marshes into a kind of continuous strip of low-slung motels, casinos and budget restaurants.

By the late 1960s, sewage was leaking into the lake, resulting in the growth of microscopic algae that clouded the lucent waters.

“Every little pebble was distinct, every speckled trout, every hand’s-breadth of sand,” Mark Twain wrote of his unimpeded glimpse into Lake Tahoe’s depths in “*Roughing It*.”

When scientists first began testing the lake’s clarity, in 1968, they could see down more than 102 feet into the water. By 2011, the most recent year with complete data, visibility was 69 feet and the summer clarity was the second worst on record.

To control the runaway development in the Lake Tahoe basin, Congress approved a bistate compact between Nevada and California in 1969, creating the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

“The focus is on water quality restoration,” said Joanne Marchetta, the agency’s executive director. “The lake is the canary in the coal mine: if the lake is healthy, the surrounding environment and economies can be healthy.”

The agency’s last regional plan, carried out in 1987, capped development and established standards for environmental quality in the basin.

“The bistate compact was created in an effort to strangle the uncontrolled growth that was undeniably polluting the lake, and it succeeded,” said Ross Miller, Nevada’s secretary of state.

In fact, the compact restricted growth so rapidly it had the effect of freezing the lakeside communities in time. Much of the infrastructure still looks like it did when Elvis Presley spent summers there playing at the Nevada casinos in the early 1970s.

Other economic forces also hampered development. Beginning in the 1990s, the growth of Native American gambling in California sent Nevada's casinos into a tailspin of lost revenue and empty hotel rooms.

By 2011, Nevada lawmakers became so frustrated with the agency's strict development regulations that they passed legislation to withdraw from the compact in 2015 if a new regional plan was not approved.

"It is time for Nevada to stand alone in serving Nevadans and the valuable natural resource Lake Tahoe," state Sen. John Jay Lee, who sponsored the bill, said at the time.

Since the agency approved the new plan on Dec. 12, some Nevada lawmakers, including Miller, say that as long as the plan does not stall in the courts, they will rescind the bill and recommit to bistate management.

"The different states and stakeholders all come with different perspectives," Marchetta said. "But they share a passion for the lake and a desire to preserve it."

1987 parking deal between South Lake Tahoe, Heavenly

Mountain Resort surfaces

By Kathryn Reed

While the South Lake Tahoe City Council keeps making decisions about paid parking, the issue won't go away. And it's not going away because of a 1987 agreement with Heavenly Mountain Resort that has come to light.

The staff report dated Nov. 18, 1987, says, "Any costs related to the use of these streets for parking by Heavenly Valley will be reimbursed to the city by Heavenly Valley. This will result in no direct cost to the city's general fund."

The agreement approved by the City Council at the Dec. 1, 1987, meeting called for the ski resort to implement and enforce a parking permit system on some of the streets leading to the California Lodge, as well as provide snow removal in the permitted parking area.

While Mayor Tom Davis indicated a partial recollection of the agreement, the details of it have not been enforced in the last quarter century.



Paid parking on Ski Run Boulevard is in a state of flux. Photo/LTN file

Police Chief Brian Uhler, whose department is responsible for parking, has been talking to Heavenly officials about the 25-year-old deal.

"I'm optimistic we can reach an agreement," Andrew Strain, head of government affairs for Heavenly, told the council last week.

He told the council the resort has plowed and sanded the streets when the city crews could not do so, that the resort has paid for one-third of the cost of the message board signs on Ski Run Boulevard, \$240,000 was spent on a repaving project, and that overflow parking is needed no more than 20 days a season.

All four councilmembers agreed they want the 1987 agreement to be analyzed, revised and an update on what aspects of it will be enforced this winter.

When it came to voting on the parking meter-permit plan it was a 3-1 vote with Davis voting no. He didn't give a reason for doing so.

Paradise Avenue from Ski Run Boulevard to Wildwood Avenue has been designated a parking meter zone. Free permits will be issued to residents impacted by paid parking areas.

Fees associated with paid parking will come back to the council. It's possible Paradise Avenue will allow overnight parking – at a cost – because this is currently where some guests of Embassy Vacation Resort park instead of paying the hotel.

In other action:

- The council collectively voiced its frustration with the Tahoe Transportation District in light of a letter received by Executive Director Carl Hasty. The council expected the loop road discussion to be more in depth and for one meeting to be

in council chambers for city residents, which in turn would be televised for more people to see. "I thought it was a dog and pony show," Councilman Hal Cole said of the presentations he went to. "That is not how you select a \$60 million project." A stern letter will be sent to Hasty saying just how the council feels.

- The council agreed to use a recruiter to find a city attorney. Patrick Enright will be leaving when his contract expires at the end of May.
- A workshop will be scheduled to prioritize capital improvement projects.
- The city will be taking employee and community surveys in the coming weeks, with results available in March.
- A request for proposals to be the concessionaire at Bijou Park, Lakeview Commons and Regan Beach has been released. A business or person may apply for one or all three. The City Council is expected to make a decision in late February or early March.

Pipe bursts in LTCC's PE building

A broken pipe in the fitness education center at Lake Tahoe Community College means no classes in that building through at least Jan. 16.

LTCC officials discovered the burst pipe Jan. 13. They are still assessing the situation and as of Sunday night did not

have an estimated value of the damage.

All other classes scheduled for the Physical Education Building will continue as scheduled.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Nevada in a slow climb out of recession

By David McGrath Schwartz, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Nevada's hard fall from its peak seems to be over. The ugly years of shuttered businesses, massive layoffs and relentless cuts in education and government services are, for the most part, past.

But if this is the tenor of the state's recovery, it will be a long and slow slog toward economic health, an improved education system and a government that doesn't struggle to take care of the state's neediest.

Gov. Brian Sandoval is set to deliver his State of the State address on Wednesday, the chief executive's assessment and vision for the state delivered every two years, before the Legislature meets.

If Sandoval's history holds, the address will be optimistic, emphasizing the progress Nevada has made since he was inaugurated in January 2011.

But in reality, job creation rates are sluggish. The state still leads the nation in unemployment. More Nevadans than ever are seeking food stamps from a strained government. More

than a thousand people – children with autism or Down syndrome, adults with brain injuries, single mothers looking for child care – are on waiting lists for state services. And the state's education system, marred by contentious labor disputes in Clark and Washoe county, is not performing.

Sandoval is confronted with a raft of challenges.

How does the job market recover, when one of the pillars of Nevada's economy was based on construction workers building houses for other construction workers?

How can the education system, which struggled even when the state was flush with cash, be improved?

How does the state raise more money when it would mean going to businesses that continue to struggle to keep their doors open or Nevadans whose homes are severely underwater?

Sandoval has said he will support extending most of the \$620 million in taxes passed in 2011 that would otherwise expire this year, in order to prevent cuts to education. But he will also seek to reduce some business taxes while finding more money for education.

Meanwhile, state employees have had to endure pay cuts for four years and the Clark County School District said it has cut \$600 million over the past four years.

Sandoval will answer pressing question on how he will keep those promises – raising education funding while cutting taxes and keeping government spending cuts to a minimum – when he releases his budget the morning of the State of the State address.

As Sandoval enters his third year in office, here is a sobering reminder of where Nevada stands on the economy, education and it's overall government.

The economy

The Great Recession, according to state economists, started in December 2007 and ended in June 2009. That was the burst of Nevada's economic heyday. And don't expect to get back there anytime soon.

"We're in recovery, but we're not out of the hospital," said Stephen P.A. Brown, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at UNLV.

Brown said that the recovery is slow, and it will be long, hampered by a construction sector that is still 50,000 jobs below its peak and a fragile housing market, where many properties are owned by banks or homeowners who aren't making payments.

"We're essentially overbuilt," Brown said. And it's not only in the residential market.

The Strip casinos and commercial development were overbuilt too, in part fueled by easy lending that allowed homeowners to take out second mortgages on their homes to finance vacations to Las Vegas.

Jeremy Aguero, principal of financial firm Applied Analysis, said that we need to stop comparing the state today to the peak years in 2006 and 2007,

"Employment is growing, the economy is showing some signs of economic diversification. Incomes are rising," Aguero said. "I don't think you could ask for a whole lot more. Are we good? no. Are we better? Yes."

Sandoval has made economic development a priority for Nevada. But so far tax incentives have been granted for 2,900 jobs, according to records provided to the *Las Vegas Sun*.

In a state where 147,000 jobless Nevadans are still claiming unemployment insurance, and thousands more are underemployed or have given up looking for work, that's just a drop in the

bucket.

Since the number of Nevada jobs bottomed out at 1,109,300 in September 2010, the state has gained just 38,900 jobs, according to employer surveys.

Brown said Sandoval faces difficult decisions about raising taxes, which could hurt consumer spending and businesses, or cutting government services and education.

He noted that states with a more educated workforce have recovered more quickly from the recession. Nevada is not one of those states.

Education

If there was one vivid news fact last year on education, it was this: Nevada had the lowest graduation rate of any state in the U.S.

It was a reminder of what many education experts on both ends of the political spectrum say – that our state's education system is not performing well.

The poor rankings come amid contentious labor negotiations in both Southern and Northern Nevada school districts. Clark and Washoe school districts lost their bids to prevent teachers from receiving pay increases. The Clark County School District had to eliminate 1,000 teaching positions as a result.

Nevada Department of Education Superintendent James Guthrie, appointed by Sandoval, said the governor will propose a funding increase of about 2 percent.

"Is that enough? I don't know," he said. "But it's in the right direction, that's for sure."

Sandoval will propose new resources and programs, committing new revenue generated in the economic recovery to education.

“He’s really dug deep into the state treasury,” Guthrie said.

Sandoval also has a new board of education, which is more accountable to him. And a new council of business leaders, from a variety of sectors, will be formed to advise the state. That makes Guthrie hopeful about the future of education in Nevada.

Clark County Superintendent Dwight Jones said “progress is being made.”

He pointed to turnaround schools, where principals are given more control over personnel along with additional accountability measures, and improvements in the state’s graduation rate from the previous year.

“But the conversation both internally, as well as externally, is, is it enough?” Jones said.

Part of the reason some schools are struggling is because of money, he added.

Class sizes in Clark County, for example, went up roughly two to three students per class on average.

When he became the Clark County superintendent two years ago, Jones made a point not to “just ask for more money,” he said. He wanted to evaluate how money was being spent. Now he’s ready to start asking for additional funding.

“The system is making some progress doing more with less,” he said. “But we’re getting to that pivotal place where it’s difficult to sustain that. Less is almost becoming less.”

He said increased prices of gas and electricity add between \$30 million and \$40 million in costs each year. Additionally, the district faces another round of negotiations with its labor unions.

More students in poverty are entering the school system, and

more are coming in speaking English as a second language.

Asked how much additional money the district would need, Jones said, "I don't know for sure what would be adequate."

General government

In the summer 2011, after the last Legislature adjourned and lawmakers went home, the state sent out chilling notices to parents of children with disabilities receiving services through the state. Their children would get fewer services or not be able to get them at all, because of a lack of money.

Cutting services for children with autism and Down syndrome would, it seems, be a last resort for the state. But often times, cuts to programs used by the poor, disabled and mentally ill are unnoticed or ignored by the media and public at large. And it also demonstrates just how fragile Nevada's social safety net is.

Sandoval's budget puts more money into some programs, including the state's Early Intervention Program, which serves newborns to three-year-old.

And part of his commitment to extend taxes was to preserve the "essential services" in state government.

But in health and human services, more than a thousand of people are on wait lists for things like child care, mental health services and help to be able to stay in their homes.

More broadly, other areas of state government are also looking for more money. Agencies asked for \$419 million over the cap Sandoval put on spending requests. Some of those "items for special consideration" are for items that agencies would like to have, such as more money to spend on economic development, to incubate businesses. Another request was for a new, more reliable computer system for law enforcement to run background checks during police stops.

But other spending requests that came in over the cap are for what department heads termed “essential.”

In a speech billed as the “progressive State of the State,” former Sen. Sheila Leslie called them “items Nevada really needs but can’t afford.”

Douglas County first in state to win broadband certification

By Anne Knowles, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

Douglas County has added another feather to its economic development cap.

It is the first county in the state to be certified as a Connected Community from Connect Nevada, the state affiliate of Connected Nation, a nonprofit advocating for widespread broadband access.

To receive certification, the county conducted a detailed analysis of its broadband capabilities. A committee of 15 assessed broadband access, use and adoption, according to Tammy James, communications manager in the county’s technology services department.

Based on the committee’s findings, the county scored 109 points out of a possible 120, exceeding the required 100 points for Connect Nevada certification.

The certification provides county planners with a tool to reassure businesses looking to locate or launch there that the

community can meet most of their technology needs.

More important, the snapshot of its broadband capabilities gives the county a roadmap for improvements.

“It doesn’t mean we’ve got services everywhere,” says James. “This is a platform for us to build on and to look at how do we improve if we want to be a community that entices businesses into the area.”

For example, James says the evaluation highlighted a need to upgrade broadband access at the county’s business parks. “Higher bandwidth is critical for businesses that might have a need to back up data to an East Coast location,” says James.

Based on its assessment, the county has 16 broadband providers offering 3 megabits per second service to 96.16 percent of Douglas County households. More than 75 percent of homes have access to 10Mbps service while 92.5 percent have the option of more than one provider. Almost 100 percent have access to mobile broadband.

In the area of adoption, the county has eight digital literacy programs that have trained more than 700 people in the last year and 36 computers available to the public in four public computing centers, including the library.

And in terms of county use, the study identified 10 broadband uses, including education, government and healthcare.

The report also recommends 17 action items, including further analysis of underserved areas, reassessment of telecom contracts, more public computers and development of a broadband training program for small- and medium-sized businesses. The study was presented to the Douglas County commissioners this week.

Connect Nevada is working with other counties to map the state’s broadband landscape. Lyon County is expected to submit

its report this month and Humboldt, Esmeralda and Storey counties are preparing drafts, according to Lindsey Niedzielski, program manager with Connect Nevada in Carson City. Other counties are in various stages of evaluation.

Niedzielski says some of the counties face various obstacles, especially the high cost of broadband access in some rural areas.

“Some counties are struggling with this and we’re helping them figure out what they need to do to move into the 21st century,” she says. “It’s an economic development tool and that’s the primary reason most counties are interested in it.” Connect Nevada is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

Discarded hot ashes catch S. Tahoe house on fire

Placing hot ashes on a combustible wood deck caused a South Lake Tahoe house to catch fire Jan. 12.

The fire at 1394 Matheson Drive started at 12:30pm on the deck, moved up the exterior wall and started to move into the residence as firefighters arrived on scene.

“It was in between the wall and sheet rock, trying to make its way into the attic,” Karl Koeppen, shift commander with the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A resident was home at the time and was temporarily evacuated. The house is habitable.

Koeppen warns people that ashes should be placed in a metal container with a lid and then stored on a non-combustible surface and not near anything that could catch fire.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

El Dorado County woman accused of murder – again

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

On July 27, 1985, a local land surveyor facing divorce called the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office from one of two family homes near Wilderness Way, south of Placerville.

"I think I just shot my husband," Colleen Ann Batten told a dispatcher.

Last Sunday, sheriff's officers arrested the same woman – now Colleen Ann Harris – on suspicion of shooting and killing another husband at a neighboring property.

The arrest of Harris, 70, a rural resident who asked neighbors to pony up money for road-paving and orderly mailboxes, stirred memories of her acquittal 27 years ago in a sensational Placerville murder trial.

Up a meandering mountain road from the wooded house on Wilderness Court, where authorities say she shot and killed Robert Edward Harris, 72, a week ago, longtime neighbor Dan McKelvie is puzzled over the tales of one woman, two husbands and two deaths in the same rustic community.

"She was acquitted last time. So I can't say there were two

murders,” said McKelvie, who merely knew Colleen Harris as a “very nice person” who had a court case long ago involving a husband who died.

“But I would like to go to the courthouse to see what this is all about. I’m just blown away by the coincidence.”

The last time authorities responded, they had gotten a call about the shotgun killing of Harris’ then-husband, James Batten, 46. In an emergency call, she told authorities she was “scared” and that her husband was “lying on the floor” and “won’t get up.”

She also told the dispatcher, “He said he was going to kill me. Oh God!”

A trial that followed pitted the prosecutor’s contention that she had gunned down her husband after a dispute over dividing up property in a divorce case against defense arguments that she acted in self-defense in response to ongoing abuse.

As the trial unfolded in January and February 1986 at the historic courthouse in downtown Placerville, the local *Mountain Democrat* newspaper chronicled the proceedings with screaming headlines: “Colleen Batten – murderess or martyr?” and “Batten killing – justifiable homicide or murder?”

In court, defense attorney David Weiner called a psychiatrist to testify that Colleen Batten – despite her 911 call – suffered from traumatic amnesia and had no recollection of the killing.

On the witness stand, Batten testified to remembering that, before the shooting, her then-husband held a gun to her head, threatened to kill her and forced her to commit a sex act after boasting of having sexually abused a daughter for more than a decade.

Weiner told jury members, “It would be a horrible mistake to

find her guilty of murder," urging the panel: "Acquit her. Let her go home to her family. Hopefully, in time, the scars will heal."

But the prosecutor, then-chief assistant district attorney Walt Miller, argued that Colleen Batten had waited an hour before calling police after shooting James Batten with a .410-bore shotgun as he was apparently reading a newspaper in bed. Miller alleged that she moved in to finish her husband off with a second round at close range and later planted a pistol on the bed to make it appear as a self-defense killing.

The jury acquitted Colleen Batten of murder after a judge declined to allow a lesser charge of manslaughter.

Jury foreman Paul Laufman told the *Mountain Democrat*, "We were aware that a man's life had been taken ... but the net result was, we felt there was insufficient proof of intent to commit murder."

Miller, who went on to serve as El Dorado County district attorney from 1989 to 1995, said in an interview last week that he believed Colleen Batten deliberately killed her husband in the earlier case.

"I thought she had committed a homicide. I argued sincerely for a conviction for murder," Miller said. After hearing of the new fatal shooting from the DA's office, he reflected, "I can't say I expected her to do it again."

This time around, authorities found the body of Robert Harris after an emergency call from an attorney for Colleen Harris directed them to her home in the 3200 block of Wilderness Court in the Hanks Exchange area near Placerville.

Authorities said Robert Harris was Colleen Harris' husband and a volunteer since 2007 for the El Dorado County Sheriff's Team of Active Retirees program, in which seniors help out with record-keeping and community watch programs. Court records say

the couple, married in 1990, divorced in 2004.

Last week, Harris, wearing an orange jail smock, appeared in an El Dorado County courtroom on a charge of homicide with use of a firearm as the judge set arraignment for Jan. 16. A criminal complaint said Colleen Harris fatally shot Robert with a 12-gauge shotgun.

Authorities provided few other details. Defense lawyers haven't offered a theory on what occurred.

"She definitely wants to present a defense at the proper time and in the proper manner," said attorney Dain Weiner, whose father, David, represented Harris in the last shooting trial and will lead her defense again.

As she faces a murder trial that could put her in prison for 25 years to life, her neighbors are being careful about drawing conclusions.

McKelvie said Colleen and James Batten were land surveyors who had mapped out the neighborhood of about a dozen homes off Pleasant Valley Road near Diamond Springs. McKelvie, who didn't know Robert Harris, said Colleen "is just a very nice person.

"It just amazes me what's going on," he said of another shooting death in the neighborhood, years after the first. "I feel terrible for her. I don't know what the facts are. I don't want to rush to judgment."