South Tahoe youth hockey on home ice this weekend

The Tahoe Grizzlies Squirts (ages 9-10), PeeWees (ages 11-12) and Bantams (ages 13-14) youth ice hockey teams are geared up for another season.

The two game home openers for the Squirt and Bantam teams are set for Nov. 5-6 at the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena. The Grizzlies Squirts square off against the San Jose Jr. Sharks Girls Saturday at 4pm, followed by the Grizzlies Bantams home opener against the Santa Rosa Flyers at 5:45pm.

Sunday finds the fast paced Squirt action starting the day against the Jr. Shark Girls at 8:15am, followed by the hard-hitting action of the Bantams, concluding their home series against the Santa Rosa Flyers at 10am.

Admission is free. The rink is at 1176 Rufus Allen Blvd.

The PeeWee team will take the ice the following weekend against the San Francisco Pee Wees – Nov. 12-13. The puck drops for the Saturday contest at 5:45pm and then again on Sunday morning at 10.

The combined full season schedule including all the home game weekends is available from the Northern California Youth Hockey Association website.

Royal Gorge ski area, Rainbow

Lodge for sale

By Tim Hauserman

Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Area, including more than 3,000 acres on Donner Summit and the Rainbow Lodge along the Yuba River, is being put up for sale this month by a court appointed receiver.

The receiver, Douglas Wilson, took possession of the property after the owners of Royal Gorge defaulted on a $16.7 million loan on the property. It is the end of a short, tumultuous chapter in the history of what is known as the largest cross country ski resort in North America, a centerpiece of the Donner Summit community.

How did this happen?



Royal Gorge plans to operate this winter, but it is for sale.

In 2005, developers Kirk Syme and two brothers, Mark and Todd Foster, purchased Royal Gorge from its long-time owner and original developer, John Slouber. They paid a reported $35 million and set out to get approval for a cross country ski area based development that would include 900 residential units, several small lakes, retail and restaurant establishments and several new lifts.

Things didn’t work out like they had planned. They had difficulty finding enough water and sewage capacity. Public officials said they would need to build a second access road to the development because the current two-lane road that goes over a busy railroad track would be insufficient in an emergency.

Then there were those “Save Donner Summit” bumper stickers which popped up everywhere as folks on the summit railed loudly against the development.

But the nail in the coffin was the real estate bust. With a built up inventory of luxury golf course homes in nearby Truckee it is hard to picture someone beginning a 900 unit residential and commercial development at this point in the economic cycle.

What happens to the ski area?

Douglas Wilson’s managing director for Brokerage Services, Tom Olson, says the receiver will keep Royal Gorge Cross Country operating and will maintain the level of service. Royal Gorge General Manager David Achey agrees, stating that the receiver has been supportive of the ski area.

“We got guys painting, doing maintenance, summer trail work, looking into signage, maintaining grooming fleet. We are putting out a great product,” Achey told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This year Royal Gorge will allow dogs on several trails for the first time. The Wells-Fargo and Emigrant trails will form a dog friendly loop on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Olson says the property is being put up for sale for $24 million and is being marketed extensively internationally. The receiver is contacting cross country and downhill ski resorts, as well as individuals who in the past have purchased large parcels for conservation purposes. In addition to the 3,000 acres of Royal Gorge, which includes the Summit Station

building and a number of huts along the trail, the sale also includes Rainbow Lodge with its 114 acres along the Yuba River and about 300 acres of land in Negro Canyon above Donner Lake.

One party that has already expressed interest in the property is the Truckee Donner Land Trust. Trust Executive Director Perry Norris said his group has been interested in the Royal Gorge property for more than 20 years, especially the environmentally sensitive Van Norden meadow. Norris says the trust sees the best use of the land is for conservation, not development, and to keep the cross country center operating.

He doesn't believe the value for the property is $24 million, however.

"We are banking that at the end of the day the bank that is foreclosing on the property will see us as the best and strongest buyer. They had a very competent developer who tried to develop the property for six years and he didn't move it one inch closer to the goal line," Norris said.

USFS looking for input on Incline thinning project

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is proposing to thin trees and brush on National Forest System lands near Incline Village to reduce wildfire risk and restore forest health.

The LTBMU is seeking public input on the Incline Fuels Reduction and Healthy Forest Restoration project until Nov. 28.

The project area includes 3,927 acres of National Forest System lands on the northeast shore of Lake Tahoe, from the California-Nevada state line to Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park.

The proposed work would provide defensible space for nearby communities while reducing the risk of wildfire and its impacts to commercial, private and public property. The project would also reduce tree density to improve the health of remaining trees and restore vegetation such as aspen, alder, willow and meadow grasses and shrubs by removing encroaching conifer trees.

Work would consist of hand and mechanical cutting of brush and trees, which would then be removed for biomass, chipped, masticated, or piled for prescribed burning. Piles would be burned approximately one to three years later, once the fuels are dry. Work would begin as early as fall 2012 and could take three to five years to complete.

The proposed action and a map of the project area are available at the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Supervisor’s office, 35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe, or online.

For more information, contact Duncan Leao at (530) 543.2600 or Paul Guarnaccia at (530) 543.2898 or email comments-pacificsouthwest-ltbmu@fs.fed.us using the subject: Incline Project.

Kokanee return to North Shore after 50 years

A stream restoration project on the North Shore is reaping environmental benefits as a small, fall run of kokanee salmon was spotted in the lower reaches of the creek last month.

The run has gone missing since the 1960s when Lake Forest Meadow was filled and numerous stream channels were diverted into a culvert in anticipation of a construction project that was never built.

Restoration work by the Placer County Department of Public Works Tahoe Engineering Division began in 2009. The project reconstructed the historic stream channel close to how it existed prior to modification in the 1960s. Additionally, the meadow was changed back to its historic contours. In all, 35 acres were restored, which required moving 21,000 yards of soil. To restore the natural grade of the area, 3,000 yards of that soil were actually trucked out of the Tahoe Basin.

Kokanee salmon are not a native fish species to Lake Tahoe. Their introduction likely occurred in the 1920s when an overflow of troughs in the Tahoe City fish hatchery allowed kokanee fry to escape into the lake.

The land for the Lake Forest Meadow restoration was acquired by the California Tahoe Conservancy and work began in September 2009.

In 2010, work was completed on restoration of 300 feet of channel on the north side of Highway 28, along Old Mill Road three miles east of Tahoe City. The channel runs south through the Lake Forest Meadow and ends at the outlet to Lake Tahoe in

Pomin Park.

The project was finished earlier this year.

When the meadow was filled in the 1960s, it became drier than normal and vegetation was reduced. This lack of riparian vegetation then reduced wildlife habitat, encouraged erosion, and reduced opportunities for the public to enjoy the area.

In the now finished project, water flows through the meadow and has re-established a more natural environment. The finished grade of the meadow is closer to the top of the water table, which encourages greater vitality for the plant community. The restoration has increased species richness associated with riparian, meadow, and wetland habitats.

Funding for the $2.7 million project was provided by:

* U.S. Bureau of Reclamation;

* U.S. Army Corp of Engineers;

* U.S. Forest Service;

* California Tahoe Conservancy;

* Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Northstar part of U.S. Revolution ski-snowboarding tour

By USSA

PARK CITY – Young riders and skiers eager to make an impression on the world of competitive winter action sports are gearing up for the Dec. 19 start of the U.S. Revolution Tour. The well-established series will feature snowboarding and freeskiing events at each stop.

In its eighth year, the Revolution Tour is a proving ground for up-and-coming athletes looking for a chance to compete against their peers on the national stage. The 2012 Tour will feature two new venue stops, bookended by returning resorts Copper in December and Mount Snow in March.

“With the addition of slopestyle skiing and snowboarding, and halfpipe skiing to the Olympics, it’s definitely making this coming season exciting for the Revolution Tour because the kids have an understanding that if they do well on the Tour, they have a direct path to Olympic qualification,” U.S. Snowboarding and Freeskiing Event Manager Nick Alexakos said. “Athletes competing at the Revolution Tour have a shot at qualifying for the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix series, which is an Olympic team qualifier.”

The tour kicks off Dec. 19 at Copper Mountain in Colorado’s Summit County with halfpipe skiing and snowboarding and slopestyle competitions held the week after the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix series.

“The 22-foot-pipe is a huge, early-season advantage that Copper has. Summit County is the epicenter of the snowboarding and freeskiing world early season and it’s great to have the first stop of the Tour in December when everyone is there,” Alexakos said.

Following its stop at Copper, the Revolution Tour moves farther west to Northstar on Jan. 9 where, in addition to halfpipe skiing and snowboarding and slopestyle events, the event will also feature skicross and snowboardcross.

“Northstar brings a world-class venue and it’s Shaun White’s

new home mountain reiterating the quality of that venue for Revolution Tour competitors," Alexakos said.

On Jan. 29 the Revolution Tour makes a Midwestern stop at Otsego Resort in Michigan where halfpipe, slopestyle and cross sports will all be on tap for skiers and snowboarders.

"It's an Olympic-training style venue with a 22-foot pipe and it's going to be a great place for us to be," Alexakos said.

The tour touches down for its final stop at Mount Snow in Vermont on March 13 for halfpipe skiing and snowboarding and slopestyle. Mount Snow will mark its third year as the final stop on the Revolution Tour in 2012 where the overall champions will be crowned.

The Revolution Tour's top male and female athletes have the chance to qualify for the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix, USASA Nationals spots, the US Open, the Aspen Open and Project Gold Team.

2012 U.S. Revolution Tour Schedule:

Dec. 19-22 Copper, Colo.

Halfpipe snowboarding, slopestyle snowboarding, halfpipe skiing, slopestyle skiing

Jan. 9-13 Northstar, Truckee

Halfpipe snowboarding, slopestyle snowboarding, halfpipe skiing, slopestyle skiing, skicross, snowboardcross

Jan. 30-Feb. 3 Otsego Resort, Mich.

Halfpipe snowboarding, slopestyle snowboarding, halfpipe skiing, slopestyle skiing, skicross, snowboardcross

March 13-16 Mount Snow, Vt.

Halfpipe snowboarding, slopestyle snowboarding, halfpipe

skiing, slopestyle skiing.

Nation’s lone bi-state park a success based on popularity

By Kathryn Reed

Closed, but not off limits. That’s the status of Van Sickle Bi-state Park as of sunset Monday.

Considering the traffic to the nation’s first and only bi-state park exceeded expectations, it may come as a surprise to some people the gates won’t be open again for six months.



Van Sickle Bi-state Park in its first season is popular with locals and tourists. Photo/LTN file

The park near the state line on the South Shore was always intended to be open seasonally. Although this was a short season, with the park opening July 22, the plan is for it to

be open each May through October – without snow.

People may still walk in. Driving is no longer an option. It's possible people will use the park to snowshoe and cross country ski, but no trail markers are set up.

The caretakers will continue to live on-site so someone is keeping an eye out on things.

In this inaugural season, locals and tourists have been flocking to the 725-acre park.

"It's good when locals adopt a place like that and they adopt it as part of their culture," Ray Lacey, deputy director of the California Tahoe Conservancy, said. "It's been astonishing and delightful for us how popular it has become."

When officials are out there they ask people where they are from to get a feel for who is on the trails. Local running groups are scampering up the dirt trails that lead to some magnificent views of Lake Tahoe.

Official user counts will be done next year.

Trail maps and interpretive signs are in the works, but not guaranteed for next summer.

"Explore Tahoe really has had the opportunity to be an urban trailhead now," Lisa O'Daly, program supervisor with CTC, said. "They are incredible at letting people know the adventure going on outside their door so they can walk straight to the park."

Explore Tahoe is in the Heavenly Village area, providing outdoor info to urbanites.

The Conservancy and Nevada State Parks are the owners of the bi-state park, while the Tahoe Rim Trail Association has contributed substantially to the operation and trail building.

“The connector up to the Rim Trail is not completed in the sense that it is smooth and 100 percent built to standard yet,” Mary Bennington, TRTA executive director, said. “About one mile in the middle has been roughed in. You could hike it, but that part will be harder because it is not really finished.”

The idea is from the South Shore’s main bed base people will be able to hook up with the Tahoe Rim Trail at the Daggett Summit-Kingsbury Grade area.

Bennington expects the connector be done sometime in summer 2012. With the upper section not being able to be accessed until July because of snow, it made it impossible to have enough time this season to get the work done.

Cold, snow moving into Lake Tahoe Basin

While a storm like the one that blasted the East Coast is not supposed to hit the region, fall is going away this week and in its place will be winter.

It could make for an uncomfortable night of trick-or-treating. The National Weather Service in Reno is saying the cold front will move in tonight.



October's storm covered Mount Tallac; more snow is coming. Photo/LTN

“However, fast movement of the front and limited moisture will result in minimal amounts of rain or snow accumulation,” weather folks report.

The worst day – as defined by the amount of snow and level of temperatures – will be Thursday. Six to 12 inches could fall in the Sierra, with snow in the Carson Valley, according to the National Weather Service in Reno.

That system is expected to stick around through next weekend.

“Anyone planning travel through the Eastern Sierra or over Sierra passes Thursday into Friday morning or late in the weekend should closely monitor the latest forecasts and weather statements,” the NWS says.

After today’s high being in the low 60s in the Lake Tahoe Basin, it’s expected to drop to 46 on Tuesday with that night’s low being in the teens.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Gondola to link The Ridge with Heavenly

Getting to the slopes of Heavenly Mountain Resort is about to

be much easier for guests at Ridge Resorts.

After three years without a gondola going between the lodging property at the top of Kingsbury Grade and Stagecoach chairlift, the Hilltrac Skier Express is expected to be operational Dec. 23.



The gondola between Ridge Resorts and Heavenly will open in December.

The eight-person gondola sits on a track about 10 feet off the ground and will look much like Heavenly's Gondola on the other side of the resort. This is the same type of contraption the St. Regis at Deer Valley uses to transport its guests.

"It will give the Ridge Tahoe an elevated status as far as accommodation properties in the South Shore. It is the only lodging property that sits on Heavenly ski resort that will be ski-in, ski-out," Teri Sweeney with Ridge Resorts said of the gondola.

The old chairlift between the two entities was taken out in 2008. It required guests to walk across the parking lot. The gondola will drop people off closer to the ski resort chairlift.

Ridge Tahoe guests need only carry their room key to be able to use the new gondola.

– Kathryn Reed

Wiping out hodgepodge bike trail system on North Shore

By Katherine E. Hill

TAHOE CITY – Winter is approaching as the days grow cooler, but crews are continuing to work to complete a section of the region's growing network of bike trails before weather puts a halt to their work.

Tahoe City Public Utility District's network of bike trails that extend from Tahoe City to Dollar Hill, Olympic Valley and down the West Shore have long been a patchwork of trail systems that go for miles in some areas, with only small sections completed through Tahoe City. Work on the last lakeside sections that will connect the west and east ends of Tahoe City have been under way this fall, with the section from the Tahoe City State Recreation Area extending west in front of the Lighthouse Center to be finished before snow falls.



North Shore bike trails will soon be

better
connected.
Photo/Katherin
e E. Hill

On the west end of town, the bike trail that meanders along Commons Beach ends abruptly at a pump station at the base of Grove Street, which forces pedestrians and cyclists to climb the steep hill at Grove to reconnect to a roadside path along Highway 28. The new section will extend east on the lakeside around the pump station, along the Tahoe City Marina property and the Boatworks Mall before connecting to the section at the Lighthouse Center. Work will continue on this section until winter and will continue in the spring. Work will be postponed again during the busy, summer months with the heavy use at the marina and then restart in fall 2012 when it will be completed, according to Kelli Twomey, TCPUD director of resource development and community relations.

The two sections being built now and a third recently completed section come at a cost of $3.3 million that was funded entirely by grants, Twomey said.

The missing sections will be welcomed by pedestrians and cyclists who find it dangerous to ride along Highway 28 in Tahoe City in order to connect to the bike trail system.

“Folks are anxious, especially with kids,” said Peter Underwood, owner of Olympic Bike Shop. “Riding through town has long been dangerous.”

Underwood said Tahoe City has long needed a dedicated bike trail, especially for families who often use trailers with small children. He also said that’s he lost rental customers when families discover they must ride along the busy Highway 28.

“This is a going to help our community in a lot of ways,”

Underwood said. “It’s not just going to help our business, but to help people coming through town.”

Olympic Bike Shop opened in 1973 and rents 100 to 200 bikes a day from July to early September. Underwood said that he often directs people to ride down Grove Street to pick up the bike trail along Commons Beach or to take Fairway Drive that runs behind the Tahoe City Golf Course and then cross Highway 89 to connect to the Truckee River bike trail.

Missing link in Homewood

Twomey also said that the last one-mile section to connect the bike trail through Homewood will be “shovel ready” by next spring, but that construction will likely be delayed until 2013 when Caltrans will be doing erosion control work in the same area.

Right now, the bike trail extends for 5.7 miles from Tahoe City to Cherry Street in Homewood, where pedestrians and cyclists must then continue on Highway 89, where there are no bike paths or shoulders, before picking up the paved trail again at Fawn Street. It then continues another 3.7 miles before ending in Tahoma just past Sugar Pine Point State Park.

Underwood said the missing section in Homewood was dangerous and that he often directs families not to ride down the West Shore for this reason.

The final route of the bike trail has not yet been determined, but Twomey said that the proposed route calls for continuing from Cherry Street along Highway 89 south to Trout Street. From Trout, the trail would follow Sans Souchi Terrace, connect to Silver Street and run through the interior of the parking area at Homewood Mountain Resort before connecting to the existing trail at Fawn. When completed, the TCPUD network will include 20 miles of trails.

More trails on the horizon

The TCPUD network ends near the top of Dollar Hill along Highway 28, but plans are in the works for a 2.5-mile section through California Tahoe Conservancy and North Tahoe Public Utility district lands that would extend behind the Highlands and Old County neighborhoods. The Dollar Creek section, being developed by Placer County, would pave hiking and mountain bike trails that are already being used by local residents. The proposed trail should start near Dollar Drive on Highway 28, skirt past the eastern edge of the Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area, go by Dollar Reservoir and come out at Fulton Crescent Road in Carnelian Bay.

Public comments are now being accepted through the Placer County Department of Public Works with construction eyed for 2013, contingent on available funding, according to county officials.

Public comments on the Dollar Creek trail are being accepted at pkraatz@placer.ca.gov or in writing at Placer County Department of Public Works, Attn: Peter Kraatz, P.O. Box 336, Kings Beach, CA 96143.

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Heavenly tuning up its ski school, upgrades trails

By Kathryn Reed

While it’s fall at lake level, the top of Heavenly Mountain Resort is covered with white stuff. Snowmaking usually begins Nov. 1, but with the overnight temps well below freezing last week, the guns were fired up Tuesday night.

All that snow will bode well for the anticipated opening day of Nov. 18.

Visibly, the newest addition to the mountain is the permanent ski school building that is to the right of Tamarack Lodge. Considering the general manager of the resort rose through the ranks via ski school, it seems logical Pete Sonntag would want something more than a yurt to represent his roots.

It’s a short walk (or snow skate) from the top of the gondola. It looks much like a mini version of the year-old lodge. (SMC Contracting built both structures.)

About 100 kids can have lunch at any given time. Instructors will be able to show video of their charges to assist with learning.

Food used to be brought to the two yurts from an outside vendor. Now lunch will be made by Heavenly’s staff, which allows more control – with the goal of serving something a bit more nutritious.

“We make sure there is a heavy focus on fun.” Mike Allen, director of snow

surfaces

Heavenly's ski school started with the legendary Stein Erikson. This year's crop of instructors includes three members of the Professional Ski Instructors of America's National Demonstration Team and six who belong to the Western Demonstration Team.



Mike Allen, director of skier services, has seen plenty of changes to the ski school in the 20 years he has worked for Heavenly.

"We are seeing a little trend to parents being more open to kids starting snowboarding at a younger age," Allen told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said Heavenly's instructors are trained to teach kids – not just teach a sport.

"We make sure there is a heavy focus on fun," Allen said. After all, a parent's first question is often, "Did you have fun?"

Teaching comes in many forms. When playing in the snow kids are learning why it's important to keep their gloves on – frostbite, that sort of thing.

A new learning component this season for kids' ski school is Black Bear Hollow. But it's open to everyone and might be something big kids would have fun visiting, too.

"It's a low-angle, low-risk boardercross trail for kids," explained Josh Spoelstra, who designs the ski school curriculum. "It creates a lot more adventure for kids."



Ski school isn't always just about time on the slopes, according the Heavenly's philosophy. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Groomed rollers through the trees are what this trail is all about.

Carved wooden animals dot the landscape, with information about them so kids are learning a bit about the environment. Plus, there is a play structure that can be used even with ski boots on.

Safety, fun, learning – that’s the mantra of ski school.

“If it’s safe and fun, you are probably learning,” Spoelstra said.

Other upgrades

Heavenly has made improvements for older, non-rookies, too.

While the painfully slow two-seater Galaxy lift will still be churning this season (it’s in the master plan to eventually upgrade it), there will be new trails in that area. Called the Galaxy Pod, the intermediate trails on the Nevada side add 20 acres of skiable terrain.

This will be a bonus on windy days with more access to lower elevation terrain via Stagecoach and Galaxy chairlifts.

Five trails on the California side have been widened – Ridge (at the top by the wind fence), Ellie's (making it more uniform), Liz's, High Five and High Roller Park.

The Umbrella Bar will now be found at Snow Beach.

"I think people will be psyched. It will have a beer garden atmosphere and good food," Russ Pecoraro, spokesman for Heavenly, said of the revamped Snow Beach.

Even more Adirondack chairs will be scattered about for those soaking up the rays.

Heavenly keeps upgrading its snowmaking to be more efficient, while also putting in guns to cover more of the mountain. Seventy-three percent of Heavenly's trails can be covered with the fake stuff. In an hour, 1 acre can be covered with a depth of 3½ feet.

New to Heavenly and Northstar (also owned by Vail Resorts) is Epic Photo – a component of EpicMix. Action and still shots will be available for free via a rider's EpicMix account (which is free). They can be shared immediately on Facebook or Twitter, or high-resolution shoots may be purchased for $19.99.

While individual lift ticket prices are not set until the opening, Heavenly has long been big on touting its season pass. With the change of ownerships at various Tahoe-area resorts, pass deals are abundant – but Vail Resorts says it has the best value, either through Epic or Tahoe Super passes.

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