Editorial: Is Internet poker good for California?

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 27, 2014, Sacramento Bee.***

California's multibillion-dollar gambling industry could grow significantly if bills introduced last month to legalize Internet poker become law.

Neither would be an advance.

Indian tribes that own casinos and are major forces in the Capitol are seeking to form consensus among themselves on legislation to legalize Internet poker. Some lawmakers seem willing to serve as their vessels.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Standing up for equal rights

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 26, 2014, Miami Herald.***

The rights of same-sex couples got another boost last week when U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. offered a carefully worded piece of advice to his state counterparts on when they can choose not to defend gay-marriage bans. Holder didn't suggest that state attorneys general can just disavow these laws based on politics or personal objections, but rather that, when these state laws relate to basic Constitutional

issues such as the equal-protection clause, attorneys general should apply the highest level of scrutiny before deciding not to defend them on the grounds that they are discriminatory.

A finely calibrated distinction, to be sure. As an example of what he meant, Holder cited Brown v. Board of Education, which ordered public schools to integrate. “If I were attorney general in Kansas in 1953, I would not have defended a Kansas statute that put in place separate-but-equal facilities,” Holder said. The U.S. attorney general has quite rightly likened the quest for gay rights today as an extension of the era of the civil-rights movement. And there are plenty of people today who back him up.

Wednesday, a federal judge in Texas – Texas, y’all! – struck down that state’s gay-marriage ban, though it will not go into effect pending Attorney General Greg Abbott’s intent to appeal. Also last week, Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed joined others in opening the Southerners for the Freedom to Marry campaign, a $1 million effort to overturn bans in 14 Southern states that have statutory or constitutional laws defining a legal marriage as between a man and a woman, period. This includes Florida, of course, where voters in 2008 approved a state constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.

Read the whole story

Letter: Bijou thanks LTCC science club

To the community,

Big thanks to the Science Club of our own Lake Tahoe Community

College for sending three of its young, energetic members to my kindergarten classroom. Mike Mancillas, William Chen and John Serenio taught a science lesson on the water cycle and states of matter to my kindergarten class at Bijou Community School on Thursday.

Not only did they impart their science knowledge to my students well, they did it using very age-appropriate methods. All three young men were wonderful role models for my students by generating excitement about science while setting high academic and behavioral expectations.

They are looking forward to presenting in any other classroom in this school district, and if you are a teacher I would highly recommend this experience for your own classroom.

Laura Chappel, kindergarten teacher Bijou Community School

Letter: Kiwanis serve food to less fortunate

To the community,

It’s always rewarding to see the smiling and grateful faces of Bread & Broth dinner guests and how helping the less fortune of our community has become such a high priority for many members of the Lake Tahoe South Shore community. Bread & Broth is very fortunate to have the weekly support for our “Adopt A Day of Nourishment” program and the hot, nutritious meals our sponsorships provide.

On Feb. 24, the Kiwanis Lake Tahoe Sunrisers generously

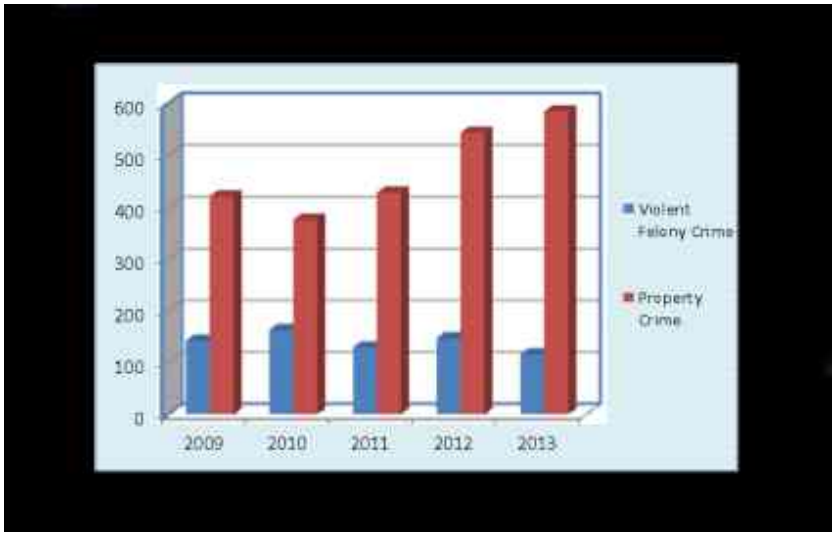
donated $250 to provide the evening’s meal as B&B’s Adopt A Day sponsor. Kiwanis Sunrisers’ member Charles Nelson manned the serving line helping to dish out Dijon honey ham, scalloped potatoes, baked beans and an assortment of green and fruit salads.

“It’s rewarding to help the community,” said Nelson as he assisted the B&B volunteers with serving and cleanup.

The role of the Kiwanis Lake Tahoe Sunrisers is to conduct service projects to respond to community needs. There are many members of the south shore community that are in need and in selecting Bread & Broth’s AAD program, the Kiwanis Sunrisers helped to feed a much needed hot meal to our community’s members. Thank you Kiwanis Lake Tahoe Sunrisers.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Property crime rising in S. Lake Tahoe



Source: SLTPD

By Brian Uhler

In order to keep you informed, the South Lake Tahoe Police Department will be compiling a monthly report to the community. This report will provide the latest information about crimes and give some crime prevention tips that might help us be a safer and more secure community.

In January, we completed our annual Uniform Crime Report. Details about the Uniform Crime Reporting system along with searchable databases about crime nationally, in California, other cities, and South Lake Tahoe may be found online.

The five-year trend for South Lake Tahoe is very clear. Property crime is up and violent crime appears to be fairly flat. Last summer we interrupted a ring of burglars through a surveillance effort that led to their arrest in Nevada. Recovery of a large amount of property came about through these arrests.



Brian Uhler

Many of the aggravated assaults were related to gang and drug activities in our community. Domestic violence is also disproportionately high.

In 2013, there were 131 burglaries, 89 aggravated assaults and 16 robberies.

On the positive side, SLEDNET [South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team], which combats drug related crime, is being supported in our region even though the state has withdrawn funding. Further, the SLTPD partners with Live Violence Free to help curb domestic violence.

So, what can we do about crime? Some simple crime prevention efforts enacted by our entire community can help. For a crime to occur, there are: (1) a target or victim, (2) a criminal, and (3) opportunity. When opportunity is eliminated, crimes do not occur. The thing you control is opportunity so here are three things you can do to take away or minimize a criminal's opportunity:

• Keep your property secure.

• Stay aware of your surroundings and people who may pose a threat.

• Alert the police quickly to suspicious circumstances

Brian Uhler is the police chief in South Lake Tahoe.

Editorial: Time to act like there is a water crisis

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 19, 2014, Fresno Bee.***

The California drought has finally gotten the attention of state and federal officials, and they are even taking actions that could be helpful in the short term. Earlier this month, President Obama announced drought relief assistance for California and then Gov. Jerry Brown and legislative Democrats offered their drought legislation.

The prolonged drought has serious implications for the state's economy. In addition to threatening the state's agricultural industry and driving up food prices, a lack of water could reduce availability of water for urban uses across California.

While agriculture has been feeling the impact of the drought for several months, mayors and city council members of California's cities have been conducting business as usual when it comes to limiting urban water use.

This head-in-the-sand approach shows a remarkable lack of understanding of the crucial need for all of us – farmer or city dweller – to save water.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Gun control about to get harder

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 18., 2014, Los Angeles Times.***

Even if you accept the notion that the Second Amendment confers an individual right to bear arms – a proposition we wish the Supreme Court had rejected – states should be able to place reasonable restrictions on that right in the interests of public safety. One such restriction is California's requirement that permits to carry a concealed weapon be issued only for "good cause." Last week, a federal appeals court needlessly weakened that provision.

By a 2-1 vote, a panel of judges of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of five residents of San Diego County who had challenged the county's interpretation of the good cause requirement, which denies permits to applicants who can't cite some specific threat to their safety.

In his dissent last week, 9th Circuit Judge Sidney Thomas rightly argued that his colleagues should have confined their inquiry to the questions of whether the Second Amendment protected the concealed carrying of handguns in public and whether San Diego's rules infringed on that right. That approach would have yielded a different result.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Barton meeting community's health needs

By John Williams

It takes collaboration and action to meet a community's health needs. In March 2012, Barton Health engaged with the community to complete a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) of South Lake Tahoe's health needs.

Part of the Affordable Care Act, all nonprofit hospitals must identify health needs for vulnerable, often under-served, populations within their community and create an action plan to address these needs. Using community input, local data, and a team of dedicated community stakeholders, three top health gaps specific to our area were identified: substance abuse, access to healthcare, and mental health. In two years, since the initial CHNA took place, Barton has taken action to address pressing health issues and better serve our local residents.



John Williams

Substance abuse is prevalent in South Lake Tahoe; the area has four times the national average of illicit drug use, a high percentage of chronic drinkers, and a higher rate of drug-induced deaths. By 11th grade, 74 percent of South Tahoe High School students admitted using alcohol and 56 percent had tried marijuana.

To help reduce substance abuse, some of Barton's efforts include: Participating in and financially sponsoring Every 15 Minutes and the Drug Store Project – discouraging alcohol and drug use by local youth. Joining and now chairing monthly South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition meetings. Donating $7,500 toward local nonprofits with the goal of reducing substance abuse. Hosting a physician seminar to discuss drug addiction and pain management. Facilitating a six-session training on best pain management practices for healthcare providers in the county.

There are many barriers that cause a lack of access to healthcare, including lack of insurance coverage and financial barriers. To improve access, Barton has: Expanded the Community Health Center by 3,000 feet and added seven exam rooms to help under and uninsured. Services expanded to include Saturdays and same-day appointments. Increased our Telehealth services to include eight different specialties, allowing patients to speak to specialists locally, saving time and travel. Launched BWell, with discounted cash pay CT, EKG, and lab services and free wellness lectures. Donated over 700 hours of staff time to help over 125 uninsured families navigate CoveredCA.com and enroll in a healthcare plan. Implemented "Transitions in Care" that provides free at-home visits for patients with certain chronic medical conditions after being released from the hospital.

The third issue prioritized was mental health. Barton has: Hired a full-time child psychiatrist who provides services at Barton Psychiatry and Barton Community Health Center, and expanded tele-psychiatry services with four contracted psychiatrists. Provided $28,000 in grants for local nonprofits that service people with mental health needs. Hosted a community health forum on mental health needs. Published five mental health articles and conducted two community lectures on mental health needs. Ongoing grief support for the community and an annual children's bereavement camp.

In an on-going effort to serve our community, Barton Health will be collecting input from residents for the next assessment in 2015. The public will participate in phone surveys, public health data will be gathered, and focus groups will provide a clinical and social service perspective.

To view a complete report of Barton's results to address the CHNA, go online.

John Williams is CEO of Barton Health.

Letter: Meyers Area Plan is a worthy document

To the community,

It's been sad for me to see all of the misinformation and confusion about the Meyers Area Plan lately. As someone who is a from a third generation small mountain community family (my kids being the fourth) and someone who has lived in Meyers since 2001 and raised my kids here, I want to see some improvements in our town like I have seen in many other progressive, environmentally responsible small mountain communities in this country. That is why I volunteered to be on the Meyers Community Advisory Council to help update out 20-year-old community plan.

What stood out to me since the beginning of the process two years ago is that it is all about the community. A lot of times we see a county write a plan and just go through the motions with whatever public input is required. But that's not

what happened in Meyers. It was Meyers residents who started this process, and it has been Meyers residents who have led this community plan update and will see it through to approval.



Rene Brejc

It is my perception that council members wanted to focus on the implementation part of the plan with the goal of positioning ourselves on getting things done by adding an implementation strategy section to the plan. The advisory council has been meeting ongoing with public workshops and community meetings along the way at key points in the process. In fact, the League to Save Lake Tahoe, which works with communities around the lake, complimented the team on the Meyers Community Plan process compared to others around the lake. Perhaps other council members see things differently, but this is how I saw things work.

There will always be a handful of people that want nothing to ever change and there will always be a few people with over the top ideas about changing our town. But this plan is for the majority of us that are somewhere in the middle. It’s for people who want to see some improvements in our town like getting some crosswalks, a stoplight at Apache Avenue, a welcome to Meyers sign, upgraded streetscape for our main street, making it easier for property owners to do basic improvements, and doing something with the eyesore properties such as the old gas station.

Recreation ands sports are on the minds of many community

members now with three Olympians from Meyers; two of who won gold medals in Sochi. Three Olympians for 3,060 in population makes us perhaps one of the highest per capita of Olympians in the entire country and perhaps the world.

We also have many other high profile athletes and recreations athletes that live, work and play here whether they be primary residents, second homeowners or tourists. We have new companies incubating in town including ski and snowboard manufacturers, video-related manufacturers, book publishing companies and many other creative brain-based companies here. We all love Meyers for what it is and want to be here – to live, work and play. This growth and progress is happening organically – here and now. The vision is thriving local-based economy.

I've heard a lot about how this area plan calls for big parking garages and skyscrapers, but that's just not true. Yes, a company did come up with some proposals about an Olympic-high altitude training center and transit center. The size and scale of what they proposed were too big for Meyers and just about everyone agrees with that. The Meyers Community Advisory Council didn't endorse this concept, it couldn't be approved under the draft area plan, and it's not in the area plan. Also, as one Meyers business and landowner mentioned to me, if a big developer was coming to Meyers, it would have been between 2000 and 2006 when money was cheap.

But, the reality is that some things will change in Meyers over the long term, whether we like it or not. So the question is, do we want to just sit back, do nothing, and have a bunch of fast food places and dollar stores built in Meyers; or do we want to look at the possibilities and try to promote something like a recreation-sports center, place for people to catch ski shuttles, a community gathering spot – in a nut shell – an amazing place to live, work and play?

The updated Meyers Area Plan keeps the maximum height and

density pretty close to where they've been for years. But now instead of about 25 pages of TRPA regulations to tell us how high a building can be, we can just have a number. It helps small local businesses by getting rid of overlapping TRPA and county rules to just have one set of rules about what can be done in Meyers. This isn't something for big developers; they can pay a consultant to navigate the different regulations. But small local businesses in Meyers need this if we don't want to go broke trying to remodel or build something. Most important, this draft area plan makes sure that Meyers residents have a say in what gets built in the future. Right now projects can get approved in Placerville without anyone in Meyers even realizing. The area plan would require that each project be reviewed by a council of Meyers residents at a public meeting in Meyers.

I know most people don't have the time to sift through documents and separate fact from fiction. But this plan is for Meyers residents, so please do what you can to read the plan, get the facts, make your own decision, and get involved. The draft Meyers Area Plan is available online. www.edcgov.us/Meyers/. You can also submit comments, questions, and suggested revisions to the draft to MeyersAreaPlan@edcgov.us. Lastly, if you can, please attend the meeting on Feb. 26 from 6-8pm at the CCC building in Meyers at 1949 Apache Avenue.

I love Meyers,

Rene Brejc, Meyers Community Advisory Council member

Letter: Tahoe airport needs to be accountable to all

To the community,

I was pleasantly surprised at the turnout for the city's first workshop on updating the airport master plan last week on Feb. 13 at City Hall. I want to thank city officials for holding it. There was a large crowd present who came to the meeting with different views and perspectives about the airport. Several people voiced support for it, while others want it to be closed. Some people were there just to listen and find out more.

We were told that the city's existing airport master plan expired in 2012 so the Federal Aviation Administration gave the city a 90 percent grant to pay for the $350,000 consultant study that is expected to take one year to complete. More public meetings will be held during the study period.

The South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors supports a viable airport and the board asked me to participate in the update process and keep them advised. I am also one who supports having a viable airport in town because I believe that it can be an alternative travel option for visitors to using their auto. I support commercial service as long as the planes are state-of-the-art technologies, noise standards are enforced, and the people of South Lake Tahoe do not have to subsidize commercial flights as they did in the past. The airport is a public safety resource in times of emergency as was demonstrated during the Angora Fire. The airport is one of a few locations in town where non-aviation lands can be used to grow environmentally friendly businesses and grow and diversify the local economy, something we desperately need if we are going to have more than minimum wage jobs. Finally, a viable airport may attract ecologically

minded business men and women to live and work in South Tahoe who want easy access to other regions to do offsite work and can conduct business here via the Internet.

However, I recognize that a few community members want the airport closed down and the land restored to a natural condition, and they want to know the cost to close the airport. They point out that the airport built in 1959 took away valuable environmental lands. Some people want to know the specific benefit the airport provides to residents and businesses in South Lake Tahoe? To these requests, the consultant doing the study stated that master planning process did not cover the cost to answer these questions.

Although I am an airport supporter, a way must be found to answer the questions about the cost of airport closure, the impact of airport closure (good and bad), and the specific benefits South Lake Tahoe residents derive or can derive from it. In addition, I think the study needs to be examining how the airport master plan implementation can be coupled with needed environmental improvements in the community just as city government officials did a few years ago when the airport runways were rebuilt but narrowed and improvements were made to the Upper Truckee River adjacent to the runways to reduce sedimentation discharge into the Lake.

We need continued civic engagement on the airport master plan, involvement by supporters and critics, and answers to questions being posed by the public. I believe that we can find common ground between supporters and critics by the participation of all concerned parties and clear and concise answers to questions posed by the public.

Thank you for your assistance in regard to this matter.

David Jinkens, South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs liaison volunteer