

CHP office shift increases presence in El Dorado Hills

By Mike Roberts, Village Life staff writer

[01.28.09] When Eddie Murphy famously proclaimed “There's a new sheriff in town” in the buddy-cop classic “48 Hours,” he created a metaphor for change that's so versatile it can describe a new president or a new puppy.

So it's tempting to trot it out for California Highway Patrol Lieutenant Greg Ferrero, who recently assumed command of the new Rancho Cordova field office and is now responsible for traffic enforcement in El Dorado Hills.

But the “new sheriff” metaphor doesn't quite hold up. For one thing, Ferrero's not the El Dorado County sheriff - that job still belongs to Jeff Neves, whose deputies enforce penal code, not traffic enforcement.

Then there's the fact that El Dorado Hills isn't a town, and it's that fact which makes the highway patrol especially important to El Dorado Hills residents concerned about traffic safety. Traffic enforcement is the responsibility of local police. Since there are none in unincorporated El Dorado Hills, the job falls to the CHP.

Until recently, the Placerville office's coverage included El Dorado County's entire western slope. It was a lot of geography, especially in inclement weather.

“They were stretched too thin,” said CHP Valley Division Commander Stan Perez, whose responsibilities include all of northeastern California.

The new field office was created to serve Rancho Cordova, Folsom and especially El Dorado Hills. It was part of a proposal by Perez to increase traffic safety and reduce drunk driving in the region.

The plan was approved and went into effect on Jan. 5. The new office is currently housed with the Valley Division's headquarters at 11336 Trade Center Drive in Rancho Cordova. By mid-summer, the division offices will move to Sacramento, leaving Ferrero in charge of the 19th field office in the Valley Division and the 109th in the state.

Ferrero currently has 28 field officers in his command. He shares administration staff with the division office. In April he's slated to get his own public affairs officer, and the administrative support his office needs to stand alone once the Valley Division headquarters moves to Sacramento.

Placerville officers were given first crack at the new Rancho Cordova jobs, and the two motorcycle officers who most often worked El Dorado Hills signed up for the transfer, including the “POP” (Problem Oriented Policing) officer.

Ferrero and Perez are both El Dorado Hills residents, and recently sat down with Village Life to talk about the local impact of the shift in responsibility.

“Our first priority was to do something with El Dorado Hills,” said Perez. “The population, traffic, and calls for service are all on the rise.”

Ferrero pulled out statistics that showed a 43 percent increase in accidents on El Dorado Hills Boulevard and 40 percent on Silva Valley Parkway from 2004 to 2007.

Areas to the north, east and south of El Dorado Hills will remain the CHP's Placerville office's responsibility,

including the Four Seasons community, the business park, the Bass Lake community streets, the Cresleigh subdivision and Malcolm Dixon Road. The Rancho Cordova office's coverage area is outlined in the map on page 1.

Jurisdiction lines are not a factor for emergency response, Perez said. The CHP call center gets all cell phone-initiated 911 calls. "Dispatch knows where everyone is, and decides who is closest for any call," he said.

"Our goal is to have two officers in El Dorado Hills 24 hours a day," he said, barring emergency responses elsewhere in the region. He promised an increased CHP presence on El Dorado Hills Boulevard, Silva Valley Parkway, Green Valley Road and Salmon Falls Road.

During the day, the officers will be assigned separate vehicles, he said. From 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. the two officers will typically "partner up," and ride together.

The Placerville office currently has private contracts with Serrano, Waterford and Highland View homeowners associations to patrol their streets. Those agreements have automatically transferred to the Rancho Cordova field office.

Perez promised that staffing those assignments will never detract from the normal patrols. "Those are strictly voluntary, overtime assets," said Perez.

Perez has two sons who attended local schools, and has first-hand experience with the traffic congestion around them. He promised a much stronger CHP presence in and around the schools during the day, as well as a visible presence during after-hours events.

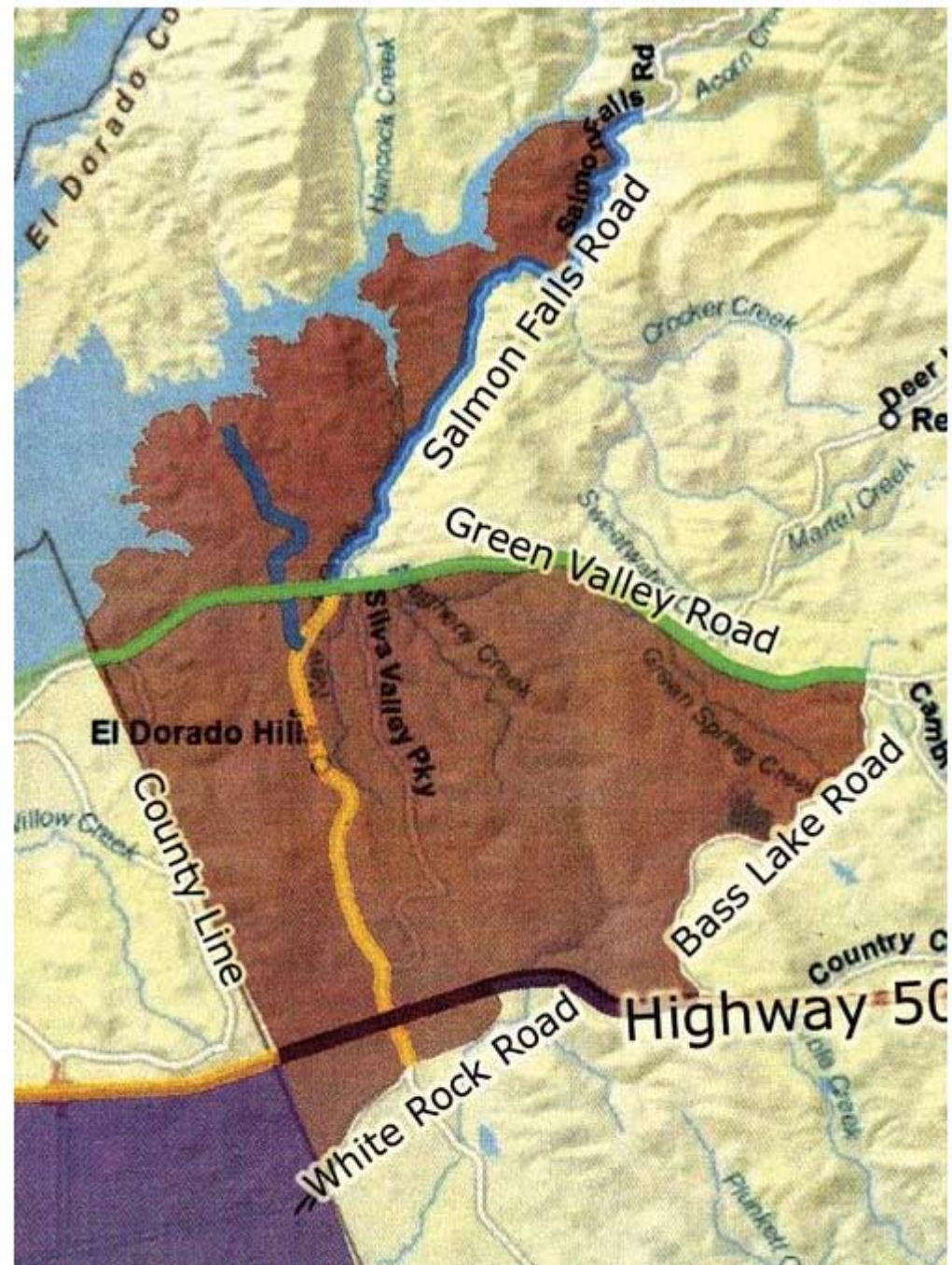
The Valley Division has also added four aircraft to its arsenal. One of them, most often the plane, will patrol the Highway 50 corridor, shared by the Placerville and Rancho Cordova offices.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2006 expansion of the CHP is the largest not linked with a specific new mission since the late 1960s. The result was 240 additional officers in 2008, and another 240 in 2009, with full replacement of retirees and transfers.

"It's a tremendous commitment to public safety," said Perez "It's also a commitment to the local economy. A stable public safety environment is essential to a community's economy."

The acting public affairs officer for the Rancho Cordova field office is Steve Merchant: (916) 622-1110.

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NEW CHP OFFICE COVERAGE BOUNDARIES — The new Rancho Cordova field office's coverage area is roughly described as west of Bass Lake Road, north of White Rock Road, east of Latrobe Road, south of Green Valley Road and west of Salmon Falls Road. Areas in the far north, east and south of El Dorado Hills will remain the Placerville office's responsibility. *Map courtesy of the California Highway Patrol*