

FOCUS ON PUBLIC SAFETY

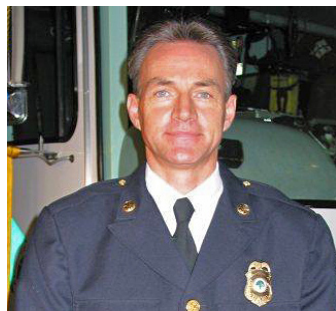
Presentations to the Bass Lake Action Committee by Two Principal Public Safety Officers of El Dorado County

EL DORADO HILLS FIRE CHIEF VEERKAMP SPEAKS ON FIRE PROTECTION

The September meeting of the Bass Lake Action Committee saw a visit by El Dorado Hills Fire Chief Brian Veerkamp, along with EDH Fire Board Chairman John Hidahl.

Hidahl briefly outlined the services provided by the Fire department, which are fire protection, paramedic services, rattlesnake eradication, lockouts in cars, gate access, and home access. He then turned the meeting over to Chief Veerkamp. Following is a summary of Chief Veerkamp's remarks to the BLAC Board and the BLAC members and guests in attendance.

The El Dorado Hills Fire Department was formed in 1963 to protect approximately 10,500 acres and about 90 homes. Today, the fire district for which the El Dorado Hills Fire Department is responsible covers over 30,000 acres with 12,450 homes, giving El Dorado Hills an estimated population of 37,350 people. The fire department protects five elementary schools, three junior high schools, and one high school. Commercial develop-



ment has grown extensively in recent years, and the fire district now includes a 900-acre business park with 146 buildings, totaling approximately 3,700,000 square feet. Total commercial space within the fire district is approximately 3,800,000 square feet. Strangely enough, a portion of Folsom Lake and Brown's Ravine Marina lies within the boundaries of the fire district.

The Department is staffed by seven chief officers, fifty-six career personnel, four administrative support personnel, and over thirty volunteers. The Department has three fire stations, plus one which is under construction. Station 84 is located at 2180 Francisco Drive; Station 85, which includes the Administration Office, is located at 1050 Wilson Boulevard; and Station 86 is located at 3670 Bass Lake Road. Under construction is Station 87, located on Cypress Point Court in the business park. Currently all three fire stations are staffed with Advanced Life Support personnel (paramedics). Besides having staffed fire apparatus at each station, the department also has a Paramedic Ambulance ready to go twenty-four hours a day at Station 85.

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LAW AND ORDER PRESENTATION BY EL DORADO COUNTY SHERIFF JEFF NEVES

El Dorado is one of the original counties formed under the old 1849 California Constitution on February 18, 1850. The El Dorado County Sheriff's Department is considered the oldest chartered Sheriff's Office in California because the citizens of what became El Dorado County elected the first Sheriff in California. This all occurred prior to California's admission to the United States on September 9, 1850.

Bass Lake Action Committee hosted El Dorado County Sheriff Jeff Neves at their October monthly meeting. Asked to speak about the role of the Sheriff and the challenges facing the county, Sheriff Neves spoke at length. Following are his remarks.



Sheriff Neves elicited a big laugh from his opening remark: "The Sheriff's Department has a public relations problem. The people we meet are usually having a problem and are unhappy to see us."

Neves said that he has a growing staff that are dedicated and passionate about their work. Currently he has 410 employees, which will grow to 450 over the next couple of years. Fifty percent have five or more years of experience and fifty percent have less than five years' experience. Neves considers anyone with less than five years' experience as a rookie.

There are four divisions in the Sheriff's Department: Patrol Services, which is the face of the Sheriff's office to the public, and half of what the department does; the Jail Division, which has responsibility for a 400-person facility in Placerville and a 200-person facility in South Lake Tahoe; the Investigative Division, which oversees crimes involving property, persons, narcotics, etc.; and the Administrative Division, which includes hiring, recruiting, internal affairs, and contract administration.

As Sheriff, Jeff is primarily responsible for law and order. He also holds the positions of County Coroner (inquests) and Public Administrator (when people die intestate). Neves also manages the Office of Emergency Services (wild land fires, floods, and other

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BRIAN VEERKAMP *(continued)*

The annual budget of the Department is about \$18 million a year, and the Department has regularly run a surplus over the last few years. A substantial portion of the Department's funding comes from property taxes, with a lesser amount coming from development fees.

In the recent Angora Fire, which fire agencies from both California and Nevada shared responsibility in fighting, several fire safety lessons were learned or reinforced, according to Veerkamp. First, every neighborhood needs a second exit. Second, large conflagrations like Angora need a central command center. Third, homes in woodland areas need 100 feet of defensible space around them, and there need to be open space buffers to act as fire breaks. The obvious problem with the 100 feet of defensible space rule is that a person only controls the area from his house to his property line, which is usually less than 100 feet, he said.

Veerkamp also said that the fire-fighting response to the Angora fire was slowed due to interagency cost reimbursement issues, as fire agencies worried about who was to pay for their firefighters before committing their resources. Veerkamp said that, to the contrary, all fire chiefs in this area of the county respond immediately, and get their people out to fight the fires, and reimbursement issues are always secondary.

The areas in El Dorado Hills that have high fire risk are Lake Hills, Ridgeview, and Salmon Falls. The Bass Lake area is in pretty good shape because it is less heavily wooded. Veerkamp said that if a fire occurs

around Bass Lake, the EDH Fire Department can hit the fire with up to 15 fire trucks in a very short time.

The new Oak Woodland Ordinance contemplated by the county could create a problem from the standpoint of fighting wild land fires, according to Veerkamp. His position is that we have to protect people first, then the trees. Fire Board member John Knight is on the Planning Commission to represent the Fire Board's view regarding the proposed Oak Woodland Ordinance.

With regards to response time for fire trucks and ambulances, Veerkamp said that a "land-line" 911 phone call from your home telephone goes directly to the El Dorado County Dispatch Center in Placerville, which can send help quickly.

On the other hand, a 911 call on a cell phone is automatically routed to CHP Dispatch in Sacramento, which will usually cause a delay in how soon emergency crews can be sent to the scene. Veerkamp recommended that cell phone owners who wish to report a fire or a medical emergency in the county should use the 530-626-4911 number that goes directly to the El Dorado County Dispatch Center, just like a 911 call.

Veerkamp said that the ambulance services in the county are run by a joint powers authority. The El Dorado County Regional Pre-hospital Emergency Services Authority (or "West Slope JPA") furnishes paramedic ambulance service to the Western Slope service area of El Dorado County. The West Slope JPA operates seven full-time ambulances and one part-time ambulance from locations in El Dorado Hills, Cameron Park, Georgetown, Diamond Springs, Placerville, Pollock Pines, South Lake Tahoe, and Homewood. There is only one ambulance for the over 40,000 residents of El Dorado Hills, which is an issue. Other less-populated areas of the county are understandably unwilling to shift resources to more-populated parts of the county like El Dorado Hills. The communities of Diamond Springs and El Dorado are both talking about separating from the JPA and establishing their own ambulance services locally. Veerkamp is planning a review of services and hopes to get El Dorado Hills the equivalent of one and a half ambulances. Fortunately, the city of Folsom, with a population of 50,000, has four ambulances, and backs up the El Dorado Hills ambulance if needed.

In the future, Veerkamp said that the EDH Fire Department is contemplating a new fire fighting training center that would be built adjacent to Fire station #87 in the Business Park. Funding for the center would come out

of the general fund and new development fees, and rental fees from other fire agencies to use the facility, with no new taxes or assessments.

In the Bass Lake area, Veerkamp said that the land in front of Fire Station 86 on Bass Lake Road has proved to be too small for the new Sheriff's station the Sheriff is looking to build in El Dorado Hills.

A spirited question and answer period followed the presentation, and Chief Veerkamp was given a long round of applause for coming and talking to the group. ~



JEFF NEVES *(continued)*

natural disasters), and is responsible for the county Search and Rescue team, which may be called out up to 75 times per year. Neves noted in passing that technically a county can charge another county for having to rescue one of its residents. For example, if someone from El Dorado County is rescued by Sacramento County, El Dorado County could be billed for the cost of the search and rescue services incurred; however, it is rarely done in practice.

Sheriff Neves believes his department is getting better because complaints about service and courtesy from his officers have gone down, and the department often gets compliments from the public about the quality of their work.

Sheriff Neves said that both El Dorado County jails are full. The South Lake Tahoe jail has been expanded three times in the past, and he doesn't think it can be expanded outward any further. To be enlarged, it will have to be torn down and rebuilt with multiple levels on the same footprint. The Grand Jury and others who inspect the two jails continue to give the department good

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THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Hello Everyone,

As you can see, this month's Bulletin is primarily devoted to public safety issues in and around Bass Lake, though the issues extend to the greater El Dorado Hills area.

I came away from the meetings with Chief Veerkamp and Sheriff Neves feeling that we have two very dedicated and talented public service officers working for us. They are just what we need to cope with the growing pains that we will no doubt experience over the coming years, as more and more people come to live in our lovely county.

On the same theme of public safety, the board of supervisors in their wisdom recently raised the speed limit on the southern portion of Bass Lake Road to 50 MPH. While relying on the California Department of Transportation formula that the speed limit should be in the 85th percentile of the speeds actually driven, I don't think that local conditions were adequately considered. The California Department of Transportation Manual also provides that "When roadside development results in traffic conflicts and unusual conditions which are not readily apparent to drivers, as indicated in the collision records, speed limits somewhat below the 85 percentile may be justified."

In other words, a record of accidents and injuries can justify lowering the speed limit after the fact. On the other hand, a lower speed limit does not necessarily guarantee a safe roadway. The concurrence and support of traffic enforcement officials are necessary for the successful operation of a restricted speed zone. As long as Bass Lake Road is not patrolled, folks will drive as fast as they can on it. Please be careful when driving on Bass Lake Road from now on.

On a happier note, a new traffic signal will be required for the new shopping center at Bass Lake Road and Serrano Parkway, and I understand that the process of approving a new traffic signal at Hollow Oak Drive is moving forward. We have asked that a stop sign be erected at

Hollow Oak in the meantime, and we hope that public officials will be responsive to our request. Feel free to call Supervisor Dupray at (530) 621-5650, or email Rusty at bosone@co.el-dorado.ca.us, to express your support for a signal and an interim stop sign at Hollow Oak Drive.

Have a Happy Halloween.

John E. Thomson

President

JEFF NEVES *(continued)*

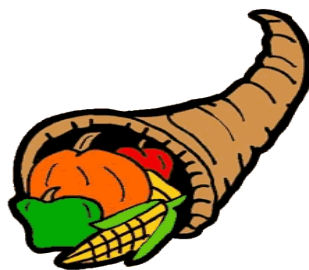
marks. Neves said that housing 450 inmates carries a huge liability, since the County is responsible for the inmates' health and safety. Despite this, the department has experienced almost no lawsuits from jailed inmates.

Looking into the future, the Sheriff explained that he has three priorities for the County:

First, he wants to expand the Placerville jail from its present 400-person capacity to an 800-person capacity as soon as possible. To accomplish that, the county has already hired an architectural firm to design a new \$30 million jail addition that will double the jail's capacity. Besides adding new cells, the design also must include expanding the jail's infrastructure, which includes medical, visitation, and kitchen facilities.

Second, he wants a new Sheriff's Office. The department has outgrown the Sheriff's current administration building in Placerville. Neves' staff is currently working out of ten different buildings, which are up to five miles apart. This does not make for efficient operation.

Third, a Sheriff's substation in El Dorado Hills. His goal is to have administrative facilities, supervisors, and deputies all based in El Dorado Hills. There is currently a satellite Sheriff's office, but as it is not more than an administrative post, not much can be done



there, so a full substation is needed.

Because there isn't land available in Placerville large enough to house a new Sheriff's administration building, Neves has submitted a proposal to the county supervisors to move the entire Sheriff's Office from Placerville down to the west end of the county and combine it with a new El Dorado Hills substation. The combined administrative and substation facility would require an 80,000 square foot building, and cost around \$60 million.

Neves is asking local land developers for a proposal to furnish a parcel of land somewhere in the area from the Sacramento county line to Cameron Park, and fairly close to Highway 50, that would be suitable for the combined facility. The developer would provide the land, financing, architectural design, and construction and lease the building to the County over a twenty- to thirty-year term. Developers who he expects to submit proposals are Parker Development, El Dorado Town Center, and other property owners who have land on Bass Lake Road near the present Fire Station 86. Jeff hopes to make a decision by June of 2008 and be in a position to sign a contract with the developer soon thereafter.

Neves referred the group to the Sheriff's website for information. There, one can sign up to get notices of events in the county, press releases, and public alerts or bulletins. There is a Crime Alert site where one can type in a street name (e.g., Summer Drive) and get information relating to crimes that have occurred on that street. Information regarding a specific address on a specific street is not available due to privacy requirements, he said. There is also an "Ask the Sheriff" button, and one can file crime reports on line.

In the Sheriff's opinion, El Dorado County is an incredibly safe place from the standpoint of personal safety. Citizens in El Dorado County are most likely to be the victims of property crimes rather than other types of crimes. He said that there are a lot of vehicle burglaries where valuables are left in plain sight, which invite theft. Noise disturbance calls are also high, and the Sheriff's office receives about 700 false alarms calls per month from security systems in homes and businesses.

The Sheriff recommended that BLAC organize a National Night Out, a community event where neighbors get together at a barbecue, and law enforcement officers come out to these meetings with their SWAT teams, canine teams, etc., and do talks and

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JEFF NEVES *(continued)*

demonstrations. He said that law enforcement is most effective when it is partnering with the community members.

Asked about making emergency calls on a cell phone, the Sheriff gave the group the telephone number 530-626-4911 to program into their cell phones to contact the Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center directly in the case of an emergency.

The Sheriff said that his department has had a tough summer, with three officers shot in Shingle Springs, an assault on two of his officers by an enraged man, and the death of the CHP officer who was deliberately run down on Highway 50.

According to Neves, it takes 5.3 officers to cover one patrol beat twenty-four hours a day. An officer with pay, overtime, and benefits costs about \$130,000 per year.

When there are people out on disability leave and when officers retire, he can't hire a replacement as long as those people are still in the job. When an deputy position is filled, it takes a year of training to bring the officer up to speed, and another five years or so to become a fully experienced officer. He has ten additional officers in his budget, but he may need twelve or fifteen additional deputies to handle the impact of the new Foothill Oaks Casino. Neves will hire eight officers to start; however, he is currently down 16 positions because of retirements, new officers still in training academy, or injuries.

Asked about traffic enforcement, Neves said that the Sheriff's Office responsibility is to safeguard lives and property, and the California Highway Patrol's responsibility is for road and driving violations on public highways, which includes any road maintained by taxpayer dollars.

There is an ordinance in the Vehicle Code that has been interpreted to say that the Highway Patrol has the sole responsibility for traffic violations. A Sheriff's Deputy can issue tickets for traffic violations but cannot be a traffic control unit and monitor traffic to watch for violations. Jeff encourages his officers to issue tickets when they see people speeding, running red lights, or going through stop signs.

When asked if the law were changed to give the Sheriff's Office in El Dorado County responsibility for driving violations, Sheriff Neves said that not much would change unless the Board of Supervisors added more officers. However, he said that at his request the CHP has approved additional

overtime for patrols on non-freeway roads in El Dorado Hills, and is trying to do more radar monitoring and ticketing.

Neves estimates that it costs \$5.5 million more each year for the Sheriff's Department to provide the same services.

The Sheriff recommended that all residents take advantage of the Sheriff's Team of Active Retirees (STAR) program when on vacation. The STAR program is composed of volunteer senior citizens who are familiar with El Dorado County and who have been trained in law enforcement, communications, first aid, drugs, gangs, and traffic control. The STAR patrol cars will come out to your house several times per day to check on your house while you are away. STAR also provides a service for people who live alone to check on them and ensure they are all right.

Prolonged applause marked the end of Sheriff Neves' presentation. ~



**HAPPY
HALLOWEEN**

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BLAC ELECTIONS, ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY SLATED

The Bass Lake Action Committee will nominate officers for 2008 (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and director-at-large) at the November monthly meeting, which will be held on November 5, 2007, at the home of Tasha Boutselis.

The election of officers will be held in conjunction with the annual Christmas Party on December 1, 2007, at the home of Tom and Andy Stuchell. More details about the December event will appear in the November Bulletin.

The present office holders have indicated a willingness to serve another term, but all have said that they would welcome anyone else that may wish to fill any of the offices for 2008. Any member in good standing may be elected to office, and anyone interested in serving in 2008 should call Kathy Prevost for information. ~

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