

Pensions prove it pays to be a retired government employee

By Kathryn Reed

There comes a time when it doesn't pay to work. That time is when government workers are tapped out in the Public Employment Retirement System and it makes more sense to start withdrawing from that account.



Former El Dorado County Sheriff Jeff Neves a year ago said he was leaving office a year early to spend time with his family. He might be. He certainly has the cash to do so.

Neves, 56, is collecting \$15,202 a month. He is not the only person in the county making more than \$100,000 year off the taxpayer funded retirement system. Though he is the highest "paid" ex-county employee at \$182,424.84 a year.

Here is what other former El Dorado County employees are collecting annually in retirement:

- Robert Altmeyer, \$139,006.20
- Robert Brown, \$118,633.68
- Steven Davis, \$132,624.12
- Marty Hackett, \$117,003.48
- Michael Hanford, \$120,500.76
- Keith Harvey, \$106,491.36
- David Koupal, \$101,294.52

- John Litwinovich, \$134,142.72
- Doug Nowka, \$102,240.72
- William Whealton, \$134,209.56.

Gayle Erbe-Hamlin, who retired earlier this month as the county's chief administrative officer, doesn't register on the list – but she will.

CalPERS recipients receive 60 percent of their highest annual salary.

Even though Erbe-Hamlin's base pay was \$185,661 per year, she actually got paid \$307,141.23 in 2010, according to county Auditor-Controller Joe Harn. The larger dollar amount includes longevity pay, management or administrative leave pay, buyout of sick pay and vacation time.

A letter from Harn this month to the Board of Supervisors warns the county's unfunded pension liability is \$264 million and growing. It doubled from June 2008 to June 2009.

That figure is part of the estimated \$1 trillion in unfunded retirement and health care packages nationwide. It's one of the reasons state, county and city budgets keep running a deficit.

South Lake Tahoe has initiated a two-tier pension system so new hires will get less when they retire. The county has not enacted such a policy.

But the city also has former employees who are collecting more than \$100,000 a year through their pensions.

Former South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Terry Daniels, 52, is the top money collector at \$123,630.84 a year, or \$10,302.57 a month. He retired a year ago.

Current Police Chief Brian Uhler makes \$145,000 a year – to

work.

Two former South Lake Tahoe fire chiefs are also in the \$100,000 club:

- Mike Chandler, \$101,670.48
- Jim Plake, \$101,145.24.

Placer County has 21 ex-employees with pensions of more than \$100,000 a year. Truckee has three people in that category.

All of this data is accessible to the public via this website.

Statewide, there are 9,111 retired government workers with pensions of more than \$100,000 a year.

California has 59 city or county public employee retirement systems. Collectively there are 2,330,929 members – of that figure, 1,779,811 are active. There are 1,032,360 people receiving periodic payments.

Nevada has two PERS accounts with 117,794 members. Of those, 106,168 are active and 38,197 receive payments.

Below are two charts from the U.S. Census Bureau regarding PERS.

The 2008 survey covered fiscal years that ended between July 1, 2007, and June 30, 2008, and does not reflect revenue data for the entire calendar year of 2008.

State and level of government	Total receipts	Government contributions				Earnings on investments
		Employee contributions	Total	From state government	From local government	
United States	79,649,581	36,929,944	81,996,539	36,261,593	45,734,946	(39,276,902)
State	56,419,735	31,639,290	63,869,874	35,755,522	28,114,352	(39,089,429)
Local	23,229,846	5,290,654	18,126,665	506,071	17,620,594	(187,473)
California	(3,740,451)	7,784,280	15,767,098	4,705,733	11,061,365	(27,291,829)
State	(6,204,256)	6,039,098	11,371,374	4,691,795	6,679,579	(23,614,728)

Local	2,463,805	1,745,182	4,395,724	13,938	4,381,786	(3,677,101)
Nevada	739,892	131,333	1,167,578	174,655	992,923	(559,019)
State	739,892	131,333	1,167,578	174,655	992,923	(559,019)

Expenditures of state and local public employee retirement systems for fiscal year 2008 in thousands of dollars.

State and level of government	Total payments	Benefits	Withdrawals	Other payments
United States	193,808,914	175,423,416	4,634,335	13,751,163
State	157,410,232	143,453,487	3,211,317	10,745,428
Local	36,398,682	31,969,929	1,423,018	3,005,735
California	30,195,419	28,019,958	606,055	1,569,406
State	21,397,173	20,194,042	482,035	721,096
Local	8,798,246	7,825,916	124,020	848,310
Nevada	1,243,467	1,033,622	16,830	193,015
State	1,243,467	1,033,622	16,830	193,015
Local	—	—	—	—