

# Sheriff's volunteers add manpower to streets of El Dorado County

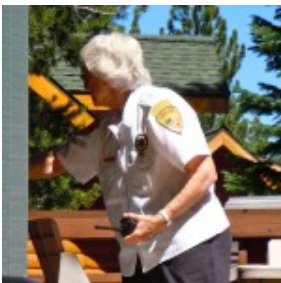
By Kathryn Reed

Walking around the house they look to see if the doors and windows are secure – that no one, not even a bear – has broken in.

It's all part of the job – these checks on homes where people are on vacation or the house is for sale. (It's free for the homeowner.)

Dick and Joan Young are two of the 20-member Sheriff's Team of Active Retirees. They don't carry guns. A radio is their biggest weapon, so to speak. Had there been something amiss at this house off North Upper Truckee they would have radioed it into dispatch so a deputy could take over.

"STARs are our eyes and ears. They are not our hands and feet," is how El Dorado County sheriff's Lt. Les Lovell puts it. "It's a volunteer program to assist the sheriff's office with providing services to the community."



Joan Young checks on a house to make sure it is

secure.

Photos/Kathryn

Reed

Although the program started in 1994, the Youngs have been doing it for a handful of years, with Dick starting first.

Two people always are in the vehicle at the same time – acting as partners for each other like sworn officers do.

They put in about 16 hours a month. This particular Thursday the South Lake Tahoe couple is on a four-hour patrol shift. Another team had taken a morning shift.

No two days are alike – just like with sworn personnel. They might be asked to take a vehicle to Placerville or a local shop for repairs. Perhaps it's another sort of delivery between the offices.

Lovell says the STAR volunteers allow deputies to be patrolling the streets – doing more critical law enforcement work.

While some might say STAR volunteers do the more mundane things in terms of all the duties involved in operating a sheriff's department, there is excitement.

A few years ago when a man put a gun to his head in the middle of Riverside Avenue it was STAR volunteers who put their vehicle in the middle of traffic to stop people from getting closer.

Traffic patrol is a big thing for these volunteers. They helped out during the Angora Fire of 2007, too.

No one tells them where they have to go unless there is an emergency. The Youngs have been called up to the parking lot at Vikingsholm to clear the lot so a helicopter on a search and rescue mission could land there.

Most people, though, have probably seen these men and women at special events. They had a booth at the air show Aug. 27 at Lake Tahoe Airport in addition to being responsible for parking cars.



Dick Young drives through El Dorado County looking for possible trouble.

Before the air show this year the hours STAR volunteers in the basin have put in are:

- Administration-reception – 135
- Patrolling – 1,060.5
- Station meetings – 294.5
- Cape Program – 56
- Special Events – 254

Total hours – 1,800.

Special events they help with run the gamut from providing overnight security for the Fine Arts Festival to working on the Drug Store Project to being at veterans events to providing security on Election Day.

Dick Young said it's never boring; just some days are slower

than others.

His wife likes being able to drive around to parts of the county she wouldn't otherwise see.

On this day they drive through the North Upper Truckee area to Tahoe Mountain Road, around Angora Highlands, down to Fallen Leaf Road and into two U.S. Forest Service operated beaches.

They notice traffic has slowed and the beaches are less crowded. So many schools are back in session.

But with Lake Tahoe Unified students returning to school this week it will mean being visible around bus routes. STAR volunteers take down the license plate numbers of drivers not obeying the flashing red lights or speed limits in school zones.

While no law enforcement background is needed to be a STAR, they take on the traits of seasoned officers.

"The one thing I've learned is you do a lot of looking," Dick Young said. "You pick up on things that are not in order, like a window that is broken out."

To be a STAR volunteer you must be at least 50 years old and not be a felon. Then you must go to a two-week STAR academy that is about four hours a day, five days week. For more information, call Sgt. Pete Van Arnum at (530) 573.3002.