

Opinion: Accomplishments and challenges of sheriff's department

To the citizens of El Dorado County,

The year 2011 is wrapped up, and so is my first year as your sheriff. This year end report is to provide you, the community we serve, with information outlining some of the achievements by the men and women who make up your sheriff's office. I believe it is my obligation to keep you, as the taxpayers of El Dorado County, informed as to the direction and accomplishments of this office.

To recap all the achievements of the last year would take up more space than I have, so I will simply highlight some of the more significant successes. Please know that the accomplishments were a result of teamwork, leadership, and action taken by all levels and divisions of the sheriff's office.

Employees and statistics



John
D'Agostini

Your sheriff's office is budgeted for 357.5 staff members, of which 159.5 are peace officers, 88 correctional staff, and 110 professional staff. Our current approved budget is \$54

million. Your tax dollars support many programs, including the operation of two correctional facilities, patrol of over 1,700 square miles, the Office of Emergency Services, coroner services, civil services, court, bailiff, and transportation services, dispatch and radio communications, criminal records, boat patrol, public administration, investigations, and property and evidence.

We are very proud of the many volunteers that donate their time to make our county a better place. Our volunteer programs consist of over 600 citizens who support programs including search and rescue, S.T.A.R.S., C.E.R.T., Explorers, the air squadron, and our reserve deputies.

Concealed weapons

One of the first policies I directed be modified was the concealed weapon policy. I am a strong believer in the Constitution and the Second Amendment guaranteeing our right to keep and bear arms. The primary changes were removing the requirement for reference letters and accepting personal protection as justification of good cause for the permit. Our staff has been working hard to keep up with the applications, as we issued 844 concealed weapon permits in 2011, a 275 percent increase over the prior year.

Community outreach

In order to be better informed on the issues facing our county, as well as keep our citizens informed of the hard work accomplished by our staff, I attended and/or took part in over 600 individual meetings with citizens, service clubs, schools, and other community events in 2011.

The welfare of our children is a top priority for the sheriff's office, and in addition to our on-going school resource officer program, our staff reinstated the Safety Pup program. The program includes presentations at local elementary schools which reinforce safety awareness for our

children.

In 2011 we published the first Sheriff's Annual Report, which includes statistics and information concerning operations, services, and accomplishments. The statistics are eye-opening, but they also display the hard work being done every day by sheriff's office employees, and frankly, it highlights the services you—the taxpayers—are receiving for your tax dollars. The annual report can be viewed online.

In order to improve our interaction and transparency with the public, we also have revamped the patrol Citizen Ride-Along Program. In the past, the program was restrictive as to who was allowed to ride. We made changes specifically to increase the number of citizens allowed to take part in the program. The result has been a significant increase in participation.

This last year we had 106 citizens ride-along, a 54 percent increase over the prior year.

We have also continued the Citizen's Academy, which is a 10-week program, designed to educate the public on the functions and responsibilities of the sheriff's office. In order to improve access and accessibility in the El Dorado Hills area, we began staffing the El Dorado Hills Substation with our S.T.A.R.S. volunteers during normal business hours.

Crime

I strongly believe that we have a moral responsibility to provide high quality patrol and investigative services to all of our communities. Last year, at the request of our patrol staff, we changed patrol shifts to a 12-hour schedule. This schedule has reduced overtime and increased the number of deputies on patrol in your neighborhood. In order to quickly address specific crime issues we more than doubled the size of the Special Enforcement Detail, which is a team of deputies and one supervisor who address specific neighborhood, community, and county-wide crime problems.

Early last year we experienced a surge in residential burglaries in the west end of the county. Our investigators proposed an action plan that included extra patrol, increased surveillance, and concentrated investigation and patrol resources. This successful process resulted in numerous suspects arrested and thousands of dollars in stolen property recovered and returned to the victims.

We have reinstated the long dormant volunteer reserve deputy program. At this time we are in the process of hiring unpaid reserve deputies which will increase our patrol staffing as well as our presence at community events, at minimal cost to taxpayers.

It is my belief that if a citizen calls for service, they should have a deputy sheriff respond to address their problem. In the past, many citizens were referred to an online computer system to file a report. We have changed our policy so that if you want a deputy you get a deputy. The computer system is still available but only as an alternative option, as decided by the victim. It is my hope that this change will improve our knowledge of neighborhood issues and increase the number of contacts between patrol deputies and those we serve.

Internal processes

As with most organizations, I strongly believe we should listen to those who do the work by asking for their input on improving efficiency and effectiveness. Last year we conducted a confidential employee survey asking for input regarding job satisfaction, employee relations and work environment, management and supervision, ethics, fairness, standards and training and equipment. Through this survey we were able to determine things the Office does well and areas where we can improve. The response was excellent and we have made many internal policy changes based on employee recommendations. I can assure you that your sheriff's office employees strive to provide high quality services to our communities.

Last year we implemented officewide performance expectations for every employee in the organization. The performance expectations include professional ethics, human relations, and management and supervision expectations.

Public access

We have modified office hours at our lobby reception, records, and civil sections to improve public access. In the past those services were not open during lunch or until 5pm when most business is handled.

Budget

Regarding the budget, my goals from day one have been to avoid employee layoffs and avoid any reduction in public safety services in El Dorado County. We made many changes in order to reduce costs and I am happy to report that we continue to operate within the budget established by the county. At this time we are operating at lower staff levels than we had in 2001, and continuously review each and every function we provide and prioritize it as something vital, important, or just nice to have. We are focusing on our core functions and services.

We have been able to make significant reductions in overtime organization-wide by changing schedules in our Custody and Patrol Divisions, weekly overtime reporting and justification, and reducing non-mandated training.

During the past year we reduced our overtime budget by approximately \$900,000. In addition, we recently conducted an audit of cellular telephones, desk telephone lines and pagers. We identified and disconnected 96 unused cellular telephones, 70 unused pagers, 43 unused desk telephone lines, and 28 unused data lines. This will save approximately \$60,000/year.

You should be aware that sheriff office employees made personal sacrifices by voluntarily reducing their benefits and

increasing their county retirement costs, resulting in an approximate \$1 million reduction in county costs.

We also made changes in our contract with the Superior Court, eliminating peace officers at security screening locations. We will provide highly trained "sheriff's security officers" to do the same job at reduced costs. As a result, the sheriff's office is able to increase the number of staff and services provided to the Superior Court without increasing costs.

Future challenges

As you may be aware the state passed AB109, which will forever change the criminal justice system in this state. The state has passed their responsibility for housing certain inmates and supervising those released from custody to the county. This is not a good thing for El Dorado County.

Of most concern is that the state is not covering the actual costs of housing and supervising the inmates, resulting in an unfunded or under-funded state mandate. It is very possible that at some point in the near future we will reach capacity at both of our custody facilities and be forced to release inmates before their sentences are completed, impacting public safety in our county.

The sheriff's office needs a new home. We are currently spread out in six locations and spend over \$330,000 a year on leased space for our staff. We are in the process of evaluating space needs with the goals of reducing or discontinuing the use of leased space, and housing most or all sheriff's office employees within a new facility in the future.

The sheriff's office has outgrown the current facility, which was built over forty years ago. This situation not only increases costs for leased property, but it reduces our span of control, fragments our operation, has a negative impact on morale, reduces crime solving communication between divisions, and requires that our staff work in less than ideal

conditions. A new facility will reduce county costs, increase our level of customer service, and create one location where all public services will be available to our citizens.

As we move into a new year, your sheriff's office is committed to providing you with high quality public safety service and will be responsive to your concerns and safety needs.

As sheriff I pledge to work with you and faithfully honor the oath of office I took on Jan. 3, 2011. We must continue to work together to make El Dorado County a better and safer place to live. If you have community or public safety issues, or suggestions on how we can improve service please do not hesitate to schedule a meeting or call me at (530) 621.6566.

In closing, I want you to know that I am privileged to serve as your sheriff and would like to thank you for your continued support of our sheriff's office.

John D'Agostini, sheriff-coroner of El Dorado County