

# Lovell calls it quits after 30 years with sheriff's office

By Kathryn Reed

Lt. Les Lovell's last day on the job is Thursday.

After more than 30 years with the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office, he is turning in his badge – at least until the summer. Then he returns to the seasonal boat patrol with Larry Olsen, who was a detective with the agency until he retired last fall.

"Thirty-one years is a long time to give to an agency," Sheriff John D'Agostini said of Lovell. "He has done a fantastic job. I relied on him immensely for the knowledge and wisdom he has for the basin."



Lt. Les Lovell is retiring March 21. Photo/Lisa J. Tolda

Lovell, 52, started his career with the department in 1980.

"I just had such a varied career and wonderful opportunities that other law enforcement officers don't get. I did everything I could do," Lovell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He started in the jail, worked boat patrol, patrolled the streets, was a canine officer for 11 years, an undercover narcotics officer, investigated person and property crimes, graveyard watch commander, internal affairs, jail commander, and finishes as commander of the Tahoe substation after a little more than nine years.

At one time he had aspirations of moving farther up the ladder, but others thwarted those dreams.

In an unusual ploy, sheriff candidate Stan Perez essentially ran with Lovell as No. 2 even though it is an appointed position. Perez quit the race under a dark cloud in February 2010, giving Lovell an hour's notice this was about to happen.

Still, Lovell says he wouldn't change a thing about his career.

In 1989, Lovell was working undercover. He didn't look like the clean-cut officer he is today. His efforts helped bring down then Mayor Terry Trupp and 19 others in the federal investigation that was called Operation Deep Snow – so named because the drug of choice was cocaine. Lovell was an undercover cocaine buyer in the multifaceted case.

Two years later he was in the thick of the investigation of the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnapping. He had recently finished a stint with the DEA, so the leads he followed had to do with drugs.

He supported Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe when it created the Fighting Chance program after Dugard was abducted in June 1991. Lovell also brought change to his department.

Lovell was there 18 years later when the call came that she had been discovered. He was there Sept. 6, 2009, when the community came together in a parade to celebrate Dugard's escape from captivity.

He missed the brunt of the Angora Fire in June 2007 because he was in a remote area of Alaska fishing. When the operator of the outpost powered up the generator to get online he saw Tahoe was on fire and told Lovell about it. He was back in Tahoe in a few days, but not before his wife, Kathay, had to evacuate.

In fall 2005, he graduated from the FBI Academy, and in May 2010 he graduated from the state's command college.

It was in 2009 that Lovell obtained his associate's degree from Lake Tahoe Community College.

"I was on the extended plan. I literally have hundreds of units," Lovell said of the degree he started in 1979.

It's not that Lovell really wants to call it quits, but with how retirement dollars work, he has actually been losing money the last six months. Thirty years is the maximum someone can pay into CalPERS.

While he plans to spend time "vacationing" in Tahoe – something he hasn't done in the last 30 years, traveling to national parks, and fishing, he might not be done with having a title before his name.

"If it looks like there is a void in leadership for the (El Dorado County) Board of Supervisors, I might step up for that. I don't want Tahoe not to have the representation it needs," Lovell said. (Norma Santiago will be termed out when the next election comes up in November 2014.)

Besides being in law enforcement for three decades, Lovell has been on the board of the Tahoe Area Coordinating Council for the Disabled for nine years, an instructor at Lake Tahoe Community College for 12 years, and in Kiwanis for 10 years. Those endeavors he plans to continue.

Lovell's departure is not the only change.

Pete Van Arnum has been promoted from sergeant to lieutenant. Van Arnum's position will not be filled. When there is a staffing shortage in Tahoe, a sergeant from Placerville will be sent down, D'Agostini said.

Randy Peshon, who had been lieutenant in the Tahoe jail for years, has been promoted to captain for the county's two jails. He spends most of the week in Placerville.

Lt. Terri LeDoux has taken over for him in Tahoe, however she is out on leave. D'Agostini would not say why she is off work.