

Retired El Dorado County sheriff's sergeant arrested

By Kathryn Reed

A retired El Dorado County sheriff's sergeant who worked in the South Lake Tahoe substation is behind bars.

Donald Philip Atkinson, 50, was arrested March 8 on 44 felony charges. He is accused of embezzling more than \$300,000 from the El Dorado County Deputy Sheriff's Association, of which he was president. Grand theft, perjury and forgery are among the other charges.

The 11-page complaint filed by the state Attorney General's Office in El Dorado County Superior Court says the crimes occurred between Jan. 1, 2005, and June 30, 2011. The alleged thefts started when he lived in the Carson Valley and continued to when he moved to El Dorado Hills, where he was most recently living.



Donald
Atkinson

Atkinson is the detective who in 2006 handled teacher Karsten Gronwald's child pornography case. In 2007, he was widely quoted admonishing then Sheriff Jeff Neves for shuffling assignments that put search and rescue responsibilities in the hands of Placerville deputies. He was vocal with the Board of Supervisors when it came to budget cuts.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Daniel B. Proud set Atkinson's bail at \$1 million.

This is the same judge who in March 2007 ruled against the deputy sheriff's association and in favor of Neves in regards to the labor suit.

When a scam in June 2007 was gaining traction soliciting money for the deputy sheriff's association it was Atkinson who warned people not to donate the money.

A joint press release from Attorney General Kamala D. Harris and El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson says, "An investigation by the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office with assistance from the Attorney General's Office showed that Atkinson falsified official documents, including Fair Political Practice Commission forms, submitted forged documents to DSA and claimed checks were written for charitable purposes but pocketed the money. The investigation was conducted after a request from the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office."

Atkinson allegedly used the money to open accounts in his name.

He is accused of taking \$100,000 from a 72-year-old woman and \$20,000 designated for the families of Sgts. Mark Dunakin, Ervin Romans, and Daniel Sakai and Officer John Hege, the four Oakland police officers killed by a parolee in March 2009.

