

Two EDSO deputies still owe pay awarded for bogus degrees

By Anne Knowles

Two El Dorado Sheriff's Department officers who were ordered to return pay increases they received based on diplomas from unaccredited colleges still owe the county more than \$23,000, according to the county's recently released grand jury report.

Last year, the grand jury found that five of the department's officers had received Educational Incentive Pay (EIP) based on bogus college degrees acquired from so-called diploma mills. The officers were not criminally charged because it couldn't be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that they were aware the diplomas were worthless, but the officers were required to return the pay increases. The report never named them, but none worked in the Lake Tahoe substation.

In the 2011-2012 report released June 29, the grand jury said it found that one of the sheriff's officers had paid back 59 percent of the incentive pay while another had returned 67 percent, together owing the county \$23,353.11.

The report said three of the officers had repaid the county in full.

The five officers initially owed a total of \$166,459.72, according to the grand jury report released last year.

El Dorado County Sheriff John D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News* that the five employees and El Dorado County had entered into a civil agreement under which the county is recouping the pay, but that it was a personnel matter and he could not comment any further.

The grand jury has directed the El Dorado County District

Attorney's Office to sue to recover the money. It also told the county's human resources department to adjust the officers' CalPERS accounts and recommended that the sheriff's department "conduct regular reviews of their Code of Ethics and employ methods to constantly remind the staff of this required higher standard of ethics."

Last year's report found that former Sheriff Jeff Neves had been negligent in checking on officers EIP qualifications before awarding pay increases.

"The former Sheriff suggested that he and his administration were too busy to fulfill their oversight obligation to the county in so much as PPF forms were concerned. Retired Sheriff Neves testified that because they received so many PPF forms for review and signature, they adopted an unwritten policy of simply signing the forms and submitting them to county payroll without even attempting the most cursory or surface review of the forms and their content," the 2010-2011 report read.