

A glimpse into the sheriff's department

By Ted Long

On March 19, I completed my first session of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Citizens Academy. Of the 30 participants, I was the only one from South Lake Tahoe, and like many other things I have done in Placerville, it seems that Lake Tahoe is in a different world.

And with the new lines for supervisor we will soon lose a resident supervisor.



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I am participating in the program for several reasons, one is just something to do, but more important as a former attorney who has seen his share of police abuse, former grand jury member who has investigated and reported on the sheriff's office several times and as a curious citizen. In an effort to encourage more South Lake participation in county affairs I would like to share with you my weekly adventure.

The class, 14 in all, meets every Tuesday at the government center and according to Sheriff John D'Agostini, is done as an effort to inform and educate the public on the operation of the sheriffs' office. The sessions will cover all aspects of the sheriff department from hiring to actual hands-on operations and include a ride along.

Session one was about the hiring practices and training of a new sheriff's deputy. The class was run by Bob Ashworth, a captain with 25 years of service in the department. A very likable guy who answered everyone's questions. He used his path as an example of the process, starting with his teen-age desire to be a cop, his military service while he waited to be old enough, 21, to apply for a job with a police department. After five years in Birmingham, Ala., he came to El Dorado County where he has worked his way up to captain.

While his presentation is homey and interesting, the best part for me was the questions. He explained how certain issues in your past might or would disqualify you for the job, such things as drugs, prior criminal behavior, questionable events dealing with sex and other behavior, all of which seemed to make sense, except when asked if there were any real research on the truth of these conclusions, he said no.

There is a strong military influence as you might suspect. The problem as I see it is that through years of "inbreeding" the department reflects a certain lack of diversity. A large group of similar thinking individuals, hiring others. In explaining the interview process I noted there was no citizen input. Ashworth seemed to think that it might not be useful. He did note that the use of marijuana is not as much a barrier as it use to be, especially medical use. It just seemed to me that seeing such a change might open the department to consider other issues. For example, a non-violent criminal record as a youth, might just be the lesson that would make someone a good cop? Just a thought, which a citizen participant might bring?

Next week is a tour of the communications center and the jail.

Ted Long is a resident of South Lake Tahoe, former City Council member and has been on the El Dorado County Grand Jury.

