

Uthe turning in his assistant DA badge

By Kathryn Reed

Hans Uthe is good about talking on just about any subject except if the topic is himself.

It took his wife, Beth, to convince him to speak to the media about his retirement. And then in an interview with *Lake Tahoe News* he spent more time talking about his colleagues, his dad and crime in general than he did his career, the cases he's tried or his future.

"Humble and unassuming" is how El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury describes Uthe.

The two worked together in the DA's office when Jerry Lasarow had the position Uthe now has.



Hans Uthe is closing the door on his tenure as lead prosecutor in the South Lake Tahoe office of the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office. Photo/LTN

"I remember a time when we were in the Justice Court, presided over by now retired Judge [Gene] Rasmussen, when a fellow came

in for arraignment who was charged with a Fish & Game violation for illegal possession of a kestrel, a small hawk-type bird. Gene looked a little puzzled because the code section wasn't readily familiar, when Hans launches into a lengthy and detailed explanation about what a kestrel was, its habitat, diet, etc. The judge was getting frustrated because he wanted to move his calendar along, but Hans was so caught up in his story that he didn't even pause for a breath," Kingsbury told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Uthe is known for having a breadth of knowledge about an array of topics. One of those is substance abuse.

He estimates at least 80 percent of the crimes in South Lake Tahoe have a substance abuse component – outright drug use or sales, burglaries to pay for drugs or an argument that escalated into battery because of being under the influence. Most of the DUIs also involve locals.

"The percentage of crimes by locals is higher than you'd think," Uthe said.

He points to the casinos, the 24-hour community being a huge factor. When talking to his counterparts on the North Shore they don't experience the crime rate South Lake Tahoe does.

"I've always thought we generate more crime than a community this size should," Uthe said. "This community was leading the state last year in heroin seizures."

South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team leader Jeff Catchings said he regularly works with Uthe to make sure the prosecution team has what it needs to obtain a conviction.

"He was very, very easy to work with," Catchings said. "He's a very smart attorney."

That respect also comes from those on the other side of the aisle.

"Hans and I have worked together for several years, always on opposing sides of criminal cases. While I congratulate him on his retirement, he will be sorely missed in the criminal courtrooms of South Lake Tahoe. Hans brings decades of experience into the courtroom and always acts in a dignified and respectful manner," attorney Rob Woelfel said. "Hans has dedicated himself to public service and to protecting the citizens of El Dorado County. He is also very generous with his time, volunteering for activities such as mentoring teens through the teen court program and helping those struggling with drug addiction through the court."

It's the Roberson case that Uthe says he is most proud of, even though as he describes it, he played a minor role. He credits colleague Trish Kelliher, now retired South Tahoe police Capt. Martin Hewlett and FBI Agent Chris Campion for putting Ulysses Roberson behind bars.

"Roberson is pure evil. I don't think he has a single redeeming quality," Uthe said.

Roberson in December 2009 was convicted of second-degree murder in the death of his son.

"Our job is to exonerate those who are falsely accused and convict those who are guilty of crimes," Uthe said.

Uthe's boss, Vern Pierson, said, "Because of Hans's hard work, dedication and compassion, many victims and citizens of El Dorado County have seen justice served. Hans will be greatly missed by the office and the law enforcement community. We wish him all the best in his retirement."

With only one week left in the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, the top prosecutor in the South Lake Tahoe office will be leaving a huge void. He's been the assistant district attorney since July 4, 1998. April 5 is his last day.

"He has been a supportive boss for his troops, not only

backing them up, but providing assistance anywhere it was needed. If one of his support staff was out, leaving the others short handed, he would sit down and churn out clerical work. He never hesitated to pick up a case or a calendar for the attorneys in the office," Kingsbury said.

There are no plans to replace him. It means an office that is already lacking personnel will be even more comprised.

"I'm concerned," Uthe said of his position not being filled. "You always have to have leadership in an office."

The 58-year-old plans to spend more time with his wife – who he says has supportively understood his job has been his priority. While he hasn't gotten on the slopes this year, he intends to. If he doesn't, it will be the first year he hasn't skied. After all, he spent 10 years on the Bear Valley ski patrol.

Mountain biking, hiking and fly fishing are the other outdoor endeavors he enjoys.

The Uthes moved out of Tahoe several years ago after people with access to a police scanner heard he had been called out to a crime scene. They took the opportunity to throw rocks through windows at his home. That was enough of being so close to the bad guys.

And while he can see doing some pro bono legal work, Uthe said he has no intention of being in the private sector for compensation.

"I gave everything I had," Uthe said of his time in El Dorado County. Now he wants a little time for himself.