

Court commissioner seeks El Dorado judgeship

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County's lone court commissioner is running for Superior Court judge.

Dylan Sullivan, 47, started with the El Dorado County court system in September 2011 after having spent a number of years with the state Parole Board.

Judge Daniel Proud is retiring, thus creating the vacancy. The primary will be in June 2014, with a runoff in November if necessary.



Dylan Sullivan is running for El Dorado County Superior Court judge.
Photo/Provided

"I encourage voters to spend some time looking at who has the capacity to make difficult decisions for the community because the decisions that come through the judicial branch go to the heart of what happens in everyday life," Sullivan told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It's important to have somebody in the judicial role who can look at facts, be unbiased and understand the dispute and give a fair proceeding."

As a court commissioner Sullivan does the work of a judge, but is officially a rung below that level. Plus, it is not an elected position.

Sullivan works in the South Lake Tahoe courthouse where she hears family law, Child Protective Services, unlawful detainers, traffic, and restraining order cases.

“It’s basically the tough cases – CPS, people getting kicked out of their homes, some domestic violence and some drug addiction,” Sullivan said.

She said her experience with the Parole Board has helped her with her current position, adding that this is a different side of what is often the same problem.

“Nothing in the courtroom is shocking,” Sullivan said. “It makes me want to work with community service providers to see how we can better deliver services. If we do a better job collectively upfront to work with families to get through a crisis better, we are better off as a community because less people will be depending on government and more will be able to contribute and be able to live without abuses and dysfunctions.”

Outside of work Sullivan also gives back. She is a member of the El Dorado County Child Abuse Prevention Council, an advisory member to the board of the El Dorado County Big Brothers Big Sisters, on the committee for the Department of Justice’s local Safe Haven grant, a Kiwanis member, and volunteers as the Teen Court judge in South Lake Tahoe.

She also teaches judges in the state for the Committee on Judicial Education and Research.

It was that sense of wanting to give back that led Sullivan to go to law school.

Before getting into law Sullivan was in the medical field. She

earned a bachelor's in physiology from UC Davis in 1988. She worked in a trauma center and then in medical sales when she was in her 20s. Corporate America is not where she wanted to be.

In 1997, she graduated from McGeorge School of Law with honors. She started in private practice doing civil litigation and criminal defense. From there she went to the Parole Board where she was a deputy commissioner.

Half the time at the parole board she conducted hearings to decide if someone should be granted parole. Mostly it was murderers she was dealing with. Sullivan also managed people who did the hearings, and worked at headquarters on policy and litigation.

When the commissioner position opened in El Dorado County she knew it would be the logical next step in her career – and a way to give back. Plus, she liked the idea of “the everyday give and take in the courtroom.”

Of the eight Superior Court judges in El Dorado County there is one woman. If Sullivan were elected, she would bring the percentage to 25, still below the state average where 33 percent of the bench is female.

She's worked in a male dominated field her whole career. Plus, she's already an integral part of the court dynamics. She doesn't see how things like gender have any bearing on one's ability to do a job.

“As judges we are people and we bring who we are,” Sullivan said. “We learn how to put our personal ideas about life at the door so we can objectively evaluate the facts and apply it to the law.”

The only downside Sullivan sees in being elected is the position is on the West Slope, so it would make sense to move from Tahoe to the other side of the county. She enjoys calling

Tahoe home – taking advantage of the hiking and playing in the snow. But she knows she can always make the short drive to Tahoe to play on her day off.