

Stateline nightclubs No. 1 problem for DCSO

By Kathryn Reed

Simple batteries and assaults at Stateline nightclubs are the No. 1 call Douglas County sheriff's deputies respond to.

"It's just a younger, more rambunctious person that tends to go to the clubs," Undersheriff Paul Howell told *Lake Tahoe News*. "When you mix alcohol and young people, you get fights. When I talk to my counterparts in Reno and Vegas, they see the same problems."

On occasion, shoplifters at the big box stores in the Carson Valley eclipse fights at the casinos. Such was the case in July. Last month deputies responded to 62 thefts in the valley and 51 assaults at the lake. Still, 95 percent of the thefts throughout the county are in the valley, while 95 percent of the fights in the county are at the clubs.



Nightclubs on the South Shore keep Douglas County sheriff's deputies busy.
Photo/LTN

Howell said the number of altercations at the Tahoe casinos has declined through the years as gaming has slid in popularity in the basin. Plus, the numbers fluctuate based on how many people are in town. And summer is always a more

violent time than winter.

A simple assault is defined as pushing, shoving, slapping and punching – “something that does not cause serious injuries.”

Not all the people deputies run into are arrested. Sometimes security at the clubs has defused the situation. Howell said his officers work hand-in-hand with casino security to quell the unrest. It is usually security that calls in DCSO for reinforcements.

Many times the situation is resolved by people willingly leaving the club. Often people don't want to press charges, so no arrests are made.

Between 95 and 98 percent of the people causing the disturbance are visitors; with most of them being from the Sacramento or Bay Area, according to Howell.

Howell doesn't blame the free alcohol at the casinos as the problem. He said the people gambling are seldom the same ones who are in the clubs. People in the clubs are paying for their booze and it's not always cheap, especially with bottle and VIP services.

But there are opportunities to drink for cheap or free. At Opal Ultra Lounge inside MontBleu drinks are a buck on Thursdays, while women drink for free on Fridays until 2am.

No one from MontBleu nor Harrah's returned phone calls. Those two casinos are home to the main nightclubs in Stateline.

XHale – Hookah Bar and Lounge, which opened in May in part of the building that used to be Bill's Casino, has seen deputies show up a few times.

“When people are intoxicated, they don't know what they are doing and they get all physical,” Sunny Patel, owner of XHale, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “My security guards try to break up the two people who are fighting. Usually it's the other person not

fighting who gets in the middle and ends up getting hurt.”

Patel said he has cameras in many locations so there is evidence to prove who did what when. He added that it hasn't always been guys at XHale who are the instigators.

But Howell said deputies mostly interact with guys in their 20s.

He doesn't anticipate the Hard Rock Hotel, when it opens in the winter, will add to his deputies' workload. Howell said a property of that caliber tends to hire the appropriate number of security officers and that they tend to be highly trained.