

# Opinion: EDC needs to fund ambulance service

By Gareth Harris

The Lake Valley Fire Protection District is one of two members of the California Tahoe Emergency Services Operations Authority (JPA). The JPA has a contract with the county of El Dorado to provide advanced life support ambulance services to the California side of the South Shore of Lake Tahoe as well as a portion of Alpine County. The JPA has been providing advanced life support services under two different contracts with the county since 2001.



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The JPA operates three staffed and two reserve ambulances out of fire stations strategically located throughout the South Shore. The city of South Lake Tahoe staffs two ambulances and Lake Valley Fire District staffs one ambulance 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In addition, Lake Valley also cross-staffs a reserve ambulance with engine company personnel that is available whenever the three-staffed ambulances are committed to calls for service. Both fire departments have the depth and ability to recall off duty personnel to staff additional reserve ambulances as needed or for planned high call volume events such as New Year's Eve or July 4 celebrations.

Since the inception of fire department-based delivery of emergency medical services in 2001, the county of El Dorado

has compensated the JPA for providing these services to the citizens and visitors of the South Shore. The level of compensation is the key issue at hand since the JPA has always exceeded all of the performance criteria required by the county. Since implementation of the first contract, the level of compensation by the county has only been enough to provide for half of the staffing required of the three ambulances. The city of South Lake Tahoe and the Lake Valley Fire Protection District have both paid for the other half of the required ambulance staffing and continue to do so daily.

The other significant issue with the insufficient level of compensation by the county to the JPA is the requirement for the JPA to continuously upgrade and replace its capital assets, including four-wheel drive ambulances and medical equipment such as cardiac monitors. The level of compensation is simply not enough to sustain the JPA's capital replacement needs over the long term. Over the course of the last four years, the JPA has reduced its reserves by purchasing required capital equipment to the point that the reserves are becoming dangerously low.

Both the city of South Lake Tahoe and the Lake Valley Fire Protection District take a significant amount of pride in the exceptional level of care provided to our constituents and visitors. Our fire department-based EMS delivery system has many advantages over other options. These advantages include advanced life support paramedic certified personnel on engine companies, depth and ability to staff up reserve ambulances, and a proven history of 14 years of excellence in the delivery of advanced life support services to the communities we proudly serve.

The JPA is currently governed by a Board of Directors made up of two City Council and two fire district board members. The JPA board of directors has already formally requested that the county of El Dorado increase the compensation to a level that would fully fund the staffing and capital replacement needs of

the JPA. What we are asking for is both reasonable and consistent with what the county of El Dorado is currently compensating the JPA that provides EMS services to the West Slope of the county.

The Lake Valley Fire Protection District wants passionately to continue to provide the highest level of emergency medical services to the community we proudly serve. We believe that the current fire service-based partnership is working very well and has done so for the past 14 years. The fire district urges the county of El Dorado to recognize the excellent level of care the JPA provides, and increase the level of compensation to the appropriate level to ensure sustainability for the future of EMS delivery services in the South Shore.

*Gareth Harris is fire chief for Lake Valley Fire Protection District.*