

Opinion: EDC trying to curb DUI problem

By Vern Pierson

Although El Dorado County is relatively small, at 181,737 people according to the latest census number, we have a very large number of people that come to our county as visitors and tourists. During summer, and quite drastically in the winter, we have an influx of tourists to South Lake Tahoe for the ski resorts, New Year's Eve events, and multiple casinos just over the state line.



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Our county also has seasonal visitors to the El Dorado County wine country, gold country historic sites, and to the Apple Hill region. And, daily, we have many out of county residents who come from out of the area to work, play, and to go to the popular Red Hawk Casino.

Sadly, El Dorado County ranks fifth worst in the state for lethal drunken driving incidents involving drivers between the ages of 21 and 34. Even more shocking, El Dorado County ranks third worst in the state for drunken driving incidents involving drivers under the age of 21.

In 2012, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office applied for and received funding from the Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) to help pay for a vertically assigned deputy

district attorney and district attorney investigator. This OTS grant allows these two positions to be involved in a more integrated way with the street level enforcement and investigation side of DUI investigations. This ensures more efficient investigations and stronger cases for prosecution.

The goal of this unit, and of the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, is to hold DUI violators responsible for their actions with aggressive investigations and prosecutions, while also protecting victims' rights and keeping our community a safe place to live, work and visit. This specialized unit is dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of felony DUI cases, including cases involving vehicular manslaughter and DUI homicides.

Having the same prosecutors and investigators working on these cases from the investigative stages through the court process to jury trial is the best way to ensure the swift and thorough pursuit of justice.

Prevention of drunken driving requires a two pronged call to action – effective law enforcement investigation and prosecution and public involvement and awareness of the problem. Remember, if you see something, say something.

Vern Pierson is district attorney in El Dorado County.