

Cops disband South Shore drug task force

By Kathryn Reed

A South Shore drug task force has disbanded, but it's not because crime has gone away.

Five years ago California said it was shutting down South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team. While the state didn't actually pull its funding until 2014, the remaining two partners – South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County – finally did the same.

“With the significant reduction in assigned personnel, the operational effectiveness of SLEDNET was diminished as major drug investigations require large numbers of law enforcement officers for things like surveillance, drug raids, etc. Last month, the El Dorado County sheriff made the difficult decision to no longer support SLEDNET with assigned personnel, leaving only the SLTPD as a participating agency,” Police Chief Brian Uhler said in a statement. “With only one agency, a task force by definition cannot continue.”

SLEDNET was formed in 1988, the year before Operation Deep Snow filled headlines. That was the investigation that led to the arrest of South Lake Tahoe Mayor Terry Trupp and 19 others on federal charges that were mostly drug related.

At its peak the narcotics task force included officers from SLTPD, El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, California Department of Justice, California Highway Patrol, El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, El Dorado County Probation Department, Alpine County Sheriff's Department, Douglas County Sheriff's Department, and Nevada Division of Investigation.

El Dorado will continue to have a drug task force based out of

the West Slope. South Lake Tahoe PD's two officers who were in SLEDNET will join the detectives' division. Their focus will still be on drugs.

"Unfortunately, there is a serious problem with drugs in South Lake Tahoe. We see direct connections with drug abuse and crime. Just a few months ago, a marijuana transaction-related homicide occurred in our city," Uhler said. "Social scientists and law enforcement professionals agree that myriad other crimes also have their roots in the drug trade and drug usage. Crimes related to drug use, such as theft, auto theft, and other property crimes, seriously erode the quality of life in our community."