

Editorial: Rice, Sears, Allen for LVFPD board

Publisher's note: *The following endorsement is from Lake Tahoe News after a team of seven community members gathered to discuss who should be on the Lake Valley Fire Protection District board.*

Lake Valley Fire Protection District will be 70 years old next year. One would think with that kind of history it would run like a well-oiled machine. Not so.

A five-member board oversees the operations of the 86-square-mile district that covers most of the unincorporated area of the South Shore on the California side. Therein lies the problem. Much of the board has been entrenched for years, thus creating a good ole boys' club.

Three positions are open, with four people running. The second longest serving board member – Greg Herback since 2003 – is stepping down. That leaves Dave Huber (on since 1990), Bob Bettencourt (2004), Rob Rossi (2010) and John Rice (2011). Bettencourt and Rice are running for re-election.

These five men stood by while former Fire Chief Gareth Harris had two votes of no confidence from staff. They stood by while the El Dorado County Grand Jury investigated the chief. They drew a line in the sand when it came to working with South Lake Tahoe on the ambulance joint operating agreement. The buck stops with them when it comes to having let some key staff leave, for morale to have tanked and for a once prideful department to spiral into dysfunction.

None of the four candidates – Tony Sears and Leona Allen are the challengers – chose to respond to *Lake Tahoe News'* questions. The media is a conduit to the elected body's constituents. Not wanting to answer difficult questions or be

political are pathetic excuses for not being accountable to the people they represent.

The board members need to realize they work for the people of the fire district, not for the employees of the district.

The comradery at board meetings where the electeds are eating dinner with staff before business commences shows a lack of division.

While the district appears to be on a better path with Jeff Michael temporarily being at the helm and the hiring of Tim Alameda as the next full time chief, the board clearly needs to change.

Lake Tahoe News is endorsing Rice, Sears and Allen.

Bettencourt is too much of an obstacle and old guard. The district can't afford to keep operating under his leadership, as he is the current board chair.

Rice has been in this community for quite some time, with a stellar reputation as the head honcho at Sierra-at-Tahoe ski resort. With new blood on the board, his voice should become louder and stronger. We hope he'll assert himself to be a leader on the board and restore the district to a prestigious level. That board needs a dose of the professionalism he brings to his day job.

Sears, we hope, will keep the board on the straight and narrow. The group could use an attorney among its ranks. The board functions in a loose fashion, with a lack of understanding of the Brown Act. While Sears is a deputy district attorney for El Dorado County, clearly his expertise of the law is different than what the board will need, nonetheless, he is ethical – a label that today cannot be applied to the board as a whole.

Allen might be a bit of a wildcard on the board. She has been

called the mother of the department. For several years she was the administrative secretary as well as the public information officer. She is chummy with the rank and file members. That isn't always a good thing. What is good is that she is familiar with the workings of the board, the budget and how a fire department functions. Plus, she has the experience of being the key person at the Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Academy at Lake Tahoe Community College. Hopefully, being a board member will not present a conflict of interest.

It is *Lake Tahoe News'* hope that Rice, Sears and Allen will restore Lake Valley Fire Protection District's reputation, instill a sense of professionalism and abolish the good ole boy status of the board. The community and staff equally deserve this.