

# Top 100 workers cost EDC \$20M in compensation

By Kathryn Reed

Four people on El Dorado County's payroll in 2016 made more than \$300,000 in wages and benefits. Two work for mental health and two for the sheriff's department.

Another 43 workers have packages valued at more than \$200,000. The 100 highest compensated employees in 2016 accounted for \$20,202,036 of the budget.

This is in a county that has about 183,000 residents.

Auditor-Controller Joe Harn released the figures on June 12. Information for the past two years is available **online**.

The mental health director's total compensation was \$364,850, while in 2015 it was \$412,523.

According to Harn, it is not unusual for mental health workers, psychiatrists in particular, to be the highest paid county employee. This is because throughout the United States there is a shortage of this specialty and they can command a higher wage. Doctors at county-run hospitals often have the highest salaries.

El Dorado is getting ready to adopt its next fiscal budget. The 2017-18 budget released by CAO Don Ashton is \$536 million, with the General Fund being \$284 million.

This is his first budget on his own; he came in last year having to pick up the pieces from the previous county leader.

While he boasts of eliminating 40 full-time positions, what wasn't disclosed in a press release from his office is that the bulk of those are through attrition – either no one has

been in the position for a while or those leaving are not being replaced.

The main real loss in terms of staffing in the next budget cycle is to senior legal. This disclosure came just weeks after Ashton was in South Lake Tahoe at a joint meeting with the city at the local senior center. At that time, he professed there would be no cuts affecting seniors.

Ashton in his **June 6 column on *Lake Tahoe News*** said residents – aka taxpayers – can expect services to be cut or taxes to increase: “If the residents of El Dorado County want increased discretionary services, e.g., libraries, veterans, better roads than what the state is willing to provide, and the high quality of service to our seniors, while maintaining the high quality of public safety provided in El Dorado County, we need to offer additional shopping venues – which typically requires larger populations obtained through residential development – or increase the tax rates. If we aren’t willing to do either, we must accept that the current level of services to our discretionary but essential services will be reduced.”

He has not offered to make a true reduction in county staff.

In looking at the stats Harn released, the top 100 highest paying positions in the county based on salary and benefits made at least \$142,000 in 2016. Of those, the lowest salary alone was \$108,508/year for the deputy director of information technologies.

The undersheriff’s package was \$515 more than his boss’ at \$306,542. However, in 2015 the sheriff has the No. 2 spot on the list at \$314,738 and the undersheriff was No. 3 at \$298,279.

The chief investigator for the District Attorney’s Office compensation was \$267,016, while the district attorney’s was \$256,868.

“Posting the list to the county’s website is part of the ongoing effort to increase transparency in our county government,” Harn said. “The best government transparency involves placing all financial information online in a readily understandable manner. Government transparency allows taxpayers to see how our county is spending tax money, and gives El Dorado County citizens the ability to hold us accountable. The internet is a great place to enhance transparency.”