

Poland to be reinstated as South Tahoe police officer

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe Police Officer Johnny Poland is returning to the streets.

The judge issued his ruling late Wednesday afternoon in Poland's favor.

After Poland was fired in June 2007, the 10-year veteran fought the dismissal. A three-person arbitration panel ruled in his favor in January 2009. The city fought that ruling. Both sides went before El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey this fall.



Johnny Poland

The nine-page document agrees with what Poland and his attorney presented in court.

When reached about 3:30pm Wednesday, Poland told *Lake Tahoe News* he feels vindicated and is ready to go back to work. He expects he'll have to go to some classes to get ready for being on the streets because it has been nearly 2.5 years since he has been a sworn officer.

Poland, who was trying to hold back tears, said the last couple weeks have been the hardest of the whole ordeal. The waiting, the not knowing what the future would hold.

Police Chief Terry Daniels could not be reached for comment.

City Manager Dave Jinkens learned of the decision from *Lake Tahoe News*.

"The matter was decided in a place where it should be. We will make everything for the transition back be successful," Jinkens said.

The city has 60 days to accept the decision or appeal it to the state Supreme Court.

The trouble began in November 2006 when Poland was accused of mishandling a lockdown situation at South Tahoe High School.

Poland will remain on paid leave until the city makes its decision. It's unknown if the council will take this matter up at its next meeting on Nov. 3.

Councilman Bill Crawford said the decision is something to celebrate. He and Mayor Jerry Birdwell wanted to accept the arbitration panel's 3-0 vote to put Poland back to work.

"Based on everything in front of us it felt like it would be right for a judge to decide. It boiled down to whether a judge should decide," Mayor Pro Tem Kathay Lovell said of that vote. "We didn't decide his guilt or innocence. It was a decision if a judge should decide to uphold the arbitration."

Councilmembers Lovell, Hal Cole and Bruce Grego voted to discard the arbitrators' decision and take it to court.

Lovell is ready to move on.

"We follow the judge's decision – that's an easy call. That's how it works, how the system is supposed to work," Lovell said Wednesday. "He comes back to work and that's how it is. He has to be accepted back and go to work."