

Personnel issues plague S. Tahoe's juvenile hall

By Kathryn Reed

The \$6.3 million Juvenile Treatment Center in South Lake Tahoe has been rife with problems since it opened in 2004.

Since September girls aren't taken there. They must go to the facility in Placerville because there aren't enough female employees to care for them. This isn't the first time the girls have had to be transported to the West Slope.

And when they go, it means pulling a South Lake Tahoe police officer or El Dorado County sheriff's deputy off the streets in the basin. That in turn means fewer cops on the street, and more expenses in terms of mileage and potential overtime.



The Juvenile Treatment Center in South Lake Tahoe opened in 2004.
Photo/LRS Architects

While the 26,500-square-foot facility has room to house 40 kids, it never has. Thirty-four is the most it has housed, according to Greg Sly, chief probation officer. (The El Dorado County Probation Department runs the JTC.)

According to Don Ashton, principal analyst with the Chief Administrative Office, this month the high mark was 17 juveniles, and 15 in both November and October.

Because the number of delinquents has never hit the maximum capacity, the probation department currently has a budget as though 30 would be the maximum number of kids housed at the center.

"A lot of times we've reduced the number to 20 beds and no one knows about it," Sly said. "Occasionally it's a problem for a parent of a minor if they've been moved to Placerville."

The reduction in available beds has to do with staffing. With the 30-bed scenario, the Tahoe juvenile hall should have 20 line staff members, plus supervisors. Right now there are five vacancies at the line level – or 25 percent fewer workers than there should be.

Sly told *Lake Tahoe News* this is not a new problem, but one that has been going on since the center opened eight years ago. He attributes it to wages, people not wanting to live in the snow and/or not wanting to make the commute.

In a letter dated Sept. 27 Sly outlines his concerns to the Board of Supervisors in 36 pages. Much of what was included were historical issues with the facility, but he still presented a case for the need to hire more people to make the Tahoe JTC function at the level it was designed for.

That letter was part of the Oct. 16 Board of Supervisors packet. However, Sly was not able to present his findings and beliefs to the elected officials in person because one day after the letter was dated – Sept. 28 – he was placed on administrative leave.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury signed an order putting Sly on indefinite leave. That order was rescinded Dec. 12.

He was paid while he was on leave, but how much has not been released to *Lake Tahoe News*.

And why he is back on the job or was ever forced out on leave has not been made public. Kingsbury oversees the probation department. However, it is not possible to leave a message at the courthouse until Jan. 7 when employees return to work.

In September, Kingsbury deferred comment to Chief Administrative Officer Terri Daly. She is the top person in El Dorado County. Daly has yet to return any call or email of *Lake Tahoe News*'.

But Sly got what he wanted. Supervisors agreed to hire more personnel. It's possible they could be hired by the end of January. Even so, they still must undergo several weeks of training.

Daly-Sly issues

Daly has been on the job since December 2010. She had worked as the county's assistant chief administrative officer for five months before the promotion. She was the CAO in Amador County before working for El Dorado County.

Sly has been with the county since 1990, having been head of the department since July 2005. He was instrumental in getting the JTC funded and built.

Sly won't talk to *Lake Tahoe News* about why he was put on leave or why he was allowed back. Nor would he say anything about the investigation that is going on regarding whether Daly acted in retaliation against him. He did say he has retained an attorney.

Bobbi Bennett, the county's Human Resources manager, on Dec. 28 told *Lake Tahoe News* she would respond to a Public Records Request Act within the statutory 10 days.

Lake Tahoe News wants to know what the county paid Sly to not work for more 2½ months, why an outside law firm is handling the alleged retaliation investigation, and how much that firm

has been paid. Answers to those questions are public information.

However, with the leave issue falling under "personnel", it may never be known why the CAO asked the judge to remove Sly from his job in the form of an administrative leave.

Karl Knobelauch, the acting Human Resources director, is supervising the retaliation investigation. He did not respond to emails about the subject.

Knobelauch and Daly are friends and know each other from when they worked for Amador County. Knobelauch was the undersheriff until retiring in 2006.