

Gyll: 'The department is in a tailspin'



Michael T. Gyll

Publisher's note: *Lake Tahoe News asked the three Douglas County sheriff's candidates a series of questions. The responses are running in the order they were received. All but one question is the same.*

Name: Michael T. Gyll

Age: 44

Occupation: Retired Nevada state police officer, Nevada Department of Public Safety, investigation division, headquarters commander.

What groups, nonprofits, other civic involvement are you part of outside of work?: Douglas County Parks and Recreation coach, Carson Valley Little League, National Rifle Association, Veterans Administration.

In Tahoe during the morning commute there are often multiple deputies out on Highway 50. How is enforcing speed the best use of limited resources?: Having patrols on the streets during commute hours is not just about enforcing speed limits. Officer presence is a deterrent. Those citizens who would not normally drive erratically, or push their driving abilities

and their vehicle's abilities are much more likely to do so during commute hours due to being late for work or that always important meeting. When citizens drive beyond their ability they become a serious hazard to those who have planned their day accordingly. During commute hours vehicle crimes are not the only crimes that occur. Having deputies patrolling the highways also puts them in areas which would reduce response time to calls for service because they are already mobile and in the area.

When the South Shore is busy rental units often have so many vehicles they spillover onto the streets to create a problem for locals and pose a safety issue. Currently, nothing is being done about this issue. What do you think should be done to address this ongoing issue?: Discussion/awareness town hall meeting with property managers and/or owners about the issue. Having grown up in South Lake Tahoe I understand the need for tourism and the effects it has on "locals" daily routines and lifestyles. The challenge is this; how do we create an environment that is safe and effective for visitors and locals while continuing to thrive as a tourist destination. When emergency response is hampered because of this issue, immediate and swift response should occur. If it is a nuisance issue, then discussion, time and understanding will have to be sought by all parties involved. If a solution or compromise is not realized then enforcement should take place. But all attempts to remedy the situation should be attempted prior to contacting law enforcement. To have law enforcement respond to non-emergency issues pertaining to parking would not be the "best use of limited resources."

Do you believe it's better for the head of a law enforcement agency to come from inside or outside the department? Why?: There are pros and cons to both. Pros could be the fact that the person has intimate knowledge of the department's capabilities, personnel issues, department resources, etc. The cons are a high potential for "good ol boy" or nepotism

scenarios. This is always an issue with smaller departments. There is also the issue of "If it's not broke, don't fix it" attitude. This attitude comes from individuals who have no vision for the department or community. Just because something works, does that mean it's the right or only way of conducting business? No. Just because it has been working for the last 16 years does that mean it works for law enforcement in the 21st century? No. Lack of vision and a status quo attitude will not survive in the arena that current issues have with law enforcement. An insider that lacks vision will cause a department to fall further and further behind. An outsider will bring new perspective, a fresh set of eyes and enhance the department's capabilities. You have a lot of qualified personnel within these types of departments that find it hard to advance because of the negative issues described. An outsider will eliminate roadblocks to a qualified person's advancement by having that fresh perspective.

Why do you want to be sheriff?: I believe in this community and love the county I reside in. I have a lot of friends and acquaintances that call Douglas County home and have their business here as well. So when I retired from the state of Nevada, I became more active with those acquaintances and was overwhelmed with the lack of trust they had in their sheriff's department. Most cited bad experiences with the administration. As time went on, discussions were had about what can be done, then it happened, they started asking me about the possibility of running for sheriff. I continually dismissed their advances until one night at the father-daughter dance I found myself surrounded. I wasn't able to dance a single dance with my daughter. That night I thought about what had happened and wondered if there was any thing I could really do. I discussed it with my family, weighing the pros and cons and we decided that since we had so many friends at the sheriff's department and in the communities that my running for sheriff might be the right thing to. It's our community, our friends, our children's future, why not be the

loyal resident and invest in our community? That's when I knew it was right and just and that this is what is needed for all.

Why should someone vote for you over someone else?: I have the training, experience and knowledge to move the Douglas County Sheriff's Department forward in a new direction. With a fresh set of eyes and a new perspective, the sheriff's department will find harmony with the changing demographics Douglas County is experiencing. For far too long the sheriff's department has been steered into the 21st century with 20th century administrative views. With my experience, I can offer the deputies an opportunity to enhance their skills and abilities far beyond their current allowable limits. As for the citizens and communities that make up Douglas County and are served by the sheriff's department, I offer strength and vision as an administrator that has not been realized by an administrator for the sheriff's department in at least 16 years. I started my career as a state trooper, through training, hard work and determination, I was promoted and transferred to the investigation division. I have conducted and/ or supervised many investigations which involve, but are not limited to: illegal/ illicit dangerous drug crimes, officer involved shootings, murder/ homicide, suicide, crimes against children and the elderly, and crimes against public trust. I have supervised sworn police officers and civilian employees, I have had the privilege of hiring well-qualified personnel, and relieving personnel of their duties using progressive steps in discipline which had included termination of service. I have the experience, knowledge and loyalty that the citizens of Douglas County deserve.

What is your stand on medical marijuana?: I believe that the path has been paved for the formal acknowledgment that medical/medicinal marijuana is here to stay. I believe the actual use of marijuana for the treatment of aches and pains is not justified. But I do believe the use of marijuana to enhance appetite and healing for cancer patients is warranted.

If it is proven to help with treatment and it was my loved one, I would condone its use.

What kind of enforcement issue would that present for the department?: Medical marijuana is currently lawful in the state of Nevada. Enforcement is already being addressed and implemented for some time.

What do you believe is needed for a good relationship between the sheriff's department and county commissioners?: Open door access and complete transparency. There should not be administrative secrets between the sheriff and county commissioners. We should all be working to the same common goal, safety for our citizens and visitors to Douglas County. This can be achieved by open and frank communication. Barriers such as egos and personal agendas have no place in the Sheriffs administration.

If the commissioners cut your budget by 10 percent, what program or people would you cut? Please be specific.: None. First of all a 10 percent budget cut is unrealistic. If any cuts to the budget are made, I would reallocate resources, seek additional funding through OCJA and ensure that prevention, enforcement and presence in not diminished.

What is your relationship with businesses at Lake Tahoe that work with the sheriff's department on various events? If anything, what would you consider changing?: I would have to decline this answer due to the fact venues are always changing and effecting Lake Tahoe differently each and every time. I must take a fluid stance and let it be known that every venue in Douglas County will be carefully scrutinized to ensure the safety of all who attend and/ or participate.

The sheriff's department has always refused to make the New Year's Eve celebration at Stateline a sanctioned or permitted event. The casinos have asked for this and have wanted to expand the festivities, but DCSO says no. Do you believe this

is a good policy? Why or why not? And how would you address it?: For those of us who remember the '80s and '90s celebrations, I believe New Year's should have been a sanctioned or permitted event. But today's attendance numbers and the economy the way it is, it would be difficult to justify the additional expenses and personnel costs. If the casinos wanted to expand, where would they expand to? I think the enhanced outdoor venues during spring, summer and fall should give county commissioners an excellent perspective as to what would one additional venue really matter. If the county commissioners and the residents want to move forward and look at sanctioning or permitting the event, then I would be willing to readdress the issue. If you stand back and watch, a lot of what happens at Lake Tahoe should be addressed during the 4th of July arguments that are up coming.

The sheriff is a political position, something you don't have experience with as a trooper with the NHP. What do you see as your biggest challenge and how will you overcome it?: First of all, I started my law enforcement career as a state trooper employed by the Nevada Department of Public Safety, Highway Patrol Division. After working hard to attain all that I could as a state trooper, I promoted to the rank of detective and was transferred to the investigation division which is still under the Nevada Department of Public Safety. After a time of working undercover as a narcotics detective, I was promoted to sergeant and was the administrative and operational supervisor. I was charged with the coordination of a local task force which consisted of state detectives, detectives from three counties, agents from DEA, and agents from the Office of the Military and a traveling narcotic task force which was staffed with state detectives and assisted any of the 17 counties in the state of Nevada with trouble areas that a local detective or team would be unable to accomplish enforcement activities. I was responsible for the budgets, grants, training, equipping and evaluation of all personnel and responsible for all operational issues. I was then

promoted to lieutenant and headquarters commander for the investigation division. I directly supervised two multi-agency task forces, the major crimes unit, the polygraph examiners unit, the Nevada Threat Analysis Center, administrative personnel assigned to headquarters, NTAC and Fallon. I was responsible for statewide budget as it pertained to training, travel, vehicle procurement, supply procurement, uniforms, salaries, fringe benefits and emergency deployments and/ or events such as air race crashes, floods, fires, active shooter incidents or any requests from other federal, state, local or municipal law enforcement agencies. So I know I have the experience, training, knowledge, demeanor and loyalty it takes to be the sheriff of Douglas County. I know I have the skills and abilities to perform those duties of the Douglas County sheriff. I have the political experience and more to be a very effective Douglas County sheriff. Task forces and threat analysis centers are very political and are watched closely from the executive branch of Nevada government.

Douglas County sheriff's deputies make less than South Lake Tahoe police officers and El Dorado County sheriff's deputies. Does this hamper efforts to recruit employees? Do you believe deputies should be paid more? Why or why not? If yes, how would you go about getting them more money?: Of course I believe deputies should be paid more. When you are looking for a professional position as a deputy pay is only one part of the deciding factor to work or don't work for a specific agency. If all you wanted was higher wages, you would move to Las Vegas and work for Metro or Henderson. But if you want quality of life for you and your family and know that you are being paid well for the work you are doing and can wake every morning, look out your windows and see the majesty in front you being the Sierra Nevada, Carson Valley and Lake Tahoe, then the reduced pay is worth it. When elected sheriff I will of course lobby the county commissioners for better pay and work with the association to ensure my employees don't fall further behind in regards to pay and benefits. As for your

comparisons, SLTPD and EDSO, it's apples and oranges, California and Nevada, but when you compare salaries to other Northern Nevada counties, Douglas County deputy wages are comparable.

What is lacking in the department right now in terms of personnel or equipment or other resources? How would you address those needs?: Douglas County Sheriff's Department with regards to personnel and equipment is as always lacking personnel. Equipment is always attainable, but qualified applicants are not. The department could stand to increase its number of sworn personnel, but that all hinges on the economy and county commissioners. As for other resources, well, we are professional law enforcement officers, we always want the newest and greatest tools to perform our duties, and wish we had resources available to us like major metropolitan police departments.

What do you think is the biggest issue facing Douglas County Sheriff's Office and how do you plan to resolve it?: Morale. The department is in a tailspin and the administration thinks it is fine so long as the administration can keep quiet the masses. The first issue I will broach is the morale issue and I will do this using peer and supervisor evaluation and review methods. If I was to start at the top, all I might get is smoke and mirrors and never get the core of the problem. I have found through my years of supervisory experience that most often the view of a suspected problem is less hazy and very real if you look at it from the line level personnel perspective. This goes along with my "new perspective, fresh set of eyes" platform. It's time that deputies are again proud of not only the profession they have chosen, but the department they have chosen to work for.

What is one do-over you would like to have in terms of a professional decision you have made?: I would have become a fireman.

Tell us something about yourself that people might not already know?: I was raised between Lake Tahoe and Placerville. My father was an El Dorado County deputy sheriff and my mother worked for the casinos. I went to Meyers Elementary, Sierra House Elementary, Pinewood Elementary, and graduated from South Tahoe High School.