

Peshon embraces duties of EDSO undersheriff

By Kathryn Reed

Randy Peshon is a man who understands every facet of law enforcement.

And that's a good thing because for nearly a year he has been undersheriff of El Dorado County.

"He's a star. He's excelled at everything," El Dorado County Sheriff John D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News*.

D'Agostini tapped Peshon for the job when Rich Williams retired.

"His knowledge and leadership are the two main reasons I selected him for undersheriff," D'Agostini said. "I looked at where we have been and where we are going. Randy was the best choice for the next phase of this administration."

Peshon started with El Dorado County Sheriff's Department in February 1997 after having spent time as a ranger with the National Park Service and East Bay Regional Parks.

After the initial training he became the resident deputy in Tahoma, a job he had for eight years.

"It was great. At that time you not only did patrol, search and rescue, coroner, I was the dive team – you did everything the sheriff's office did," Peshon told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I was never bored."

When he made sergeant he was transferred to the South Lake Tahoe office where he worked in patrol and the courts. For a time he supervised the bailiffs. Then he spent three years in detectives before going back to patrol. As a lieutenant he

oversaw the jail in Tahoe.

Undersheriff was never on his radar. Neither is being sheriff. Peshon is happy to serve as No. 2; especially knowing D'Agostini intends to run for a third term in 2018.

"I'm expected to handle everything for the sheriff. It's a very delicate, very political job," Peshon said. "There are competing priorities. Nothing is easy. Every challenge lands on your desk."

The 60-year-old admits things are much different now compared to when he started.

"Technology is a big change. When I started we did reports in pencil. There were no computers in the cars," Peshon said.

He said the public scrutiny, especially lately, is another thing to contend with. Cameras are everywhere now – on officers, suspects and bystanders.

"It's the Ferguson effect. It's the accountability piece," Peshon said in reference Michael Brown, an unarmed black man, who was killed in 2014 by a white police officer in Ferguson, Mo. An officer's word is no longer golden.

Then there is the Hollywood effect, where TV shows and movies paint an unrealistic picture of what officers are able to do – like having DNA tests back in five minutes, when the reality is some tests take weeks or months.

"Social media drives a lot of perceptions a lot faster. We still have to manage perception even if it is wrong," Peshon said.

And, still, at the end of the day many aspects of law enforcement are the same. It's all about dealing with people and their problems.

"How you do it has changed. It's more procedure driven,"

Peshon said.



Randy Peshon has been undersheriff of El Dorado County for nearly one year. Photo/Provided

It was while Peshon was lieutenant of the Tahoe jail that D'Agostini got to know him.

Peshon was the force behind creating the **culinary program** at the Tahoe jail. This allows inmates who qualify to learn a skill that can translate into a job once they are released. And every year at the El Dorado County fair the inmates bring home multiple ribbons for their baking prowess.

"I've known Randy since his days as the Tahoma resident deputy. Randy has been instrumental in bringing a much needed focus on providing appropriate treatment to the mentally ill offenders who are incarcerated in our local jail. His hard work and tenacity resulted in the county receiving a MIOCR grant, which supported transitional housing for those leaving the jail and reentering society," El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He worked with other county agencies, NAMI and the court to develop our Behavioral Health Court. The primary goal was to reduce the number and length of incarcerations of mentally ill offenders who could be safely treated in the community. It was extraordinarily successful, but when the funding ran out, the county was not able to sustain the housing component of the program, which was a huge blow. Just recently, Capt. Jackie Noren worked with criminal justice partners to obtain another MIOCR grant, which enabled the county to secure a new transitional house."

After Peshon made captain he was transferred to Placerville, oversaw both county jails and then was tapped as undersheriff. Not all of California's 58 counties have an undersheriff, so he doesn't have many peers.

"It's a very unique job. It's really an honor that someone selects you to run the agency for them. It's also a huge opportunity to leave a legacy. The decisions I make now will affect the agency for 10 to 20 years. It tends to keep you awake at night at times," Peshon said.

The main job D'Agostini has thrust upon Peshon is to get the new headquarters in Placerville built.

"He has been my No. 1 advisor through the whole process," D'Agostini said.

Peshon was instrumental in finding the \$2.6 million for the property in Placerville, which will be paid for in February.

Construction will be another \$45 million.

The sheriff said his No. 1 goal is public safety, No. 2 is to get the headquarters built. He said the current facility is so bad it “needs to be bulldozed.”

While the fact that Peshon hails from Tahoe was not a deciding factor to promote him to undersheriff, D’Agostini admits it’s a bonus. The sheriff has made a concerted effort to eliminate the us vs. them mentality of the divide between Placerville and Lake Tahoe. Peshon is that human bridge.

For Peshon, though, the job has him spending the bulk of this time – even the nights – on the West Slope. He returns on the weekends to his home and wife.

“I’m having the time of my life. I have a really good boss,” Peshon said. “He has extremely clear values, a vision for where the agency needs to go. It’s an honor to do that for him.”