

Sheriff Pierini calling it a career after 40+ years

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Violence on New Year's Eve at Stateline used to be the norm. People were struck by flying Champagne bottles. One year someone was shot. Disobedience ruled. At the peak about 100,000 people filled the casino corridor – many of them underage.

Closing Highway 50 at the bewitching hour and then long enough to clear the throng of revelers was Ron Pierini's idea – and that was when there were just a couple thousand revelers.

This is just one of many ideas Pierini has had through the years that has helped the men and women who work for Douglas County Sheriff's Office.

Today New Year's Eve at Stateline is nothing to write home about – which is fine for law enforcement. Still, they prepare for the worst – especially with terrorism now always being a real possibility.

"There's been many New Year's Eve nights where the sheriff and I were out of doors at observation posts watching the crowd and I'm thinking to myself, here is a dedicated elected official being out in the cold after being so many years as sheriff," South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler said of Pierini.

It's that kind of dedication to the job, really to the community, that has made him so electable by the people of Douglas County and respected by those outside the agency who work with him.

Pierini has had an incredible career, with the bulk of it

spent at DCSO.

A year from now Pierini will retire as sheriff of DCSO, a position he has had since 1997 when he was appointed to replace Sheriff Jerry Maple. He is finishing his fifth elected term.



Douglas County Sheriff Ron Pierini is retiring when his term expires in 2018. Photo/Kathryn Reed

A storied career

Pierini grew up in Northern Nevada, graduated from UNR and started his career with the Carson City Sheriff's Office. He came to Douglas in July 1976 as a deputy at the Lake Tahoe substation, which at the time was on Warrior Way. He worked there for 18 years, rising to the rank of captain. Then he went to the Carson Valley for three years where he was undersheriff for Maple.

"The community up here was very strong," Pierini said of Tahoe.

Things have changed in his 40-plus years as an officer. Back in the day, Tahoe was responsible for 80 percent of the county's crime. Now it's 20 percent.

Traffic was worse then. Before the loop road it could take two hours to get from the old substation through the casino corridor. There was more of a permanent population at the lake.

Pierini is proud to claim that Douglas has the lowest crime rate of any county in the state. Instituting programs and providing officers with the appropriate tools are how that's been achieved.

Gang activity and drugs are issues Pierini has no tolerance for. In the 1990s when he started to see some unsavory types try to stake their territory here, he set up a gang task force. It stopped the problem.

"I've lived in Nevada my whole life. I don't understand why we've legalized marijuana," Pierini told *Lake Tahoe News* during a wide-ranging conversation. He believes it will just escalate the use of harder drugs. "We say it's OK and it's not OK.

"As time goes on we will see traffic accidents and people will die."

Fatal car accidents in the county are already an issue, with eight people having lost their lives this year.

Pierini is all about early drug education. He goes to every DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) graduation. This is a program for grade school students.

"They go home and I wonder if their parents are using drugs," he said.

Pierini is known for his blunt talk, which depending on who's on the receiving end may not be welcome.

"The characteristic that I will always attribute to the sheriff is his unfailing straightforwardness. You never get a couched answer from Ron, you get the facts, whether pleasant or otherwise," Bill Chernock with the Carson Valley Chamber of Commerce told *Lake Tahoe News*. Those two have a history that goes back to when they both worked at the lake.

Memorable cases

Like most in law enforcement, Pierini finds crimes involving children to be some of the most difficult to comprehend. Krystal Steadman is one of those cases.

"It hit me so hard and all of Lake Tahoe," Pierini said of the 9-year-old who was raped and murdered in 2000 by a father and son duo. She was a fourth-grader at Meyers Elementary School when the pair abducted her. "It's one of the worst things that ever happened."

Then there was the shootout in 1982, with shots being fired as officers and the bad guys sped along Highway 50; glass was falling on Pierini.

The suspects drove into a garage in Round Hill. When they came out they continued to lead officers on a pursuit up Spooner Summit, all the while shots are being fired. The suspects drove off the side of the road and then came out with their hands up.

The woman from the house in Round Hill – an innocent victim in the melee – was in the car. Officers didn't know that until she stepped out of the vehicle. She had been on the floor during the shootings and was lucky to not have been struck.

In 1980, Pierini was the captain at the Tahoe substation when Harveys was bombed. It was the largest bomb to go off in the United States until the World Trade Center bombing in 1993.

"It was a big deal. We saved 600 people," Pierini said.

Sonny Bono's death in 1998 at Heavenly ski resort gave him a taste of mass media. As sheriff, he is who people wanted to talk to.

"Every media truck from around the world was at Heavenly," Pierini recalled. Journalists wanted to know if this was an assassination or if drugs were involved. "It was just that he hit a tree."

Bono was a congressman at the time, but was still widely known as the other half of Sonny and Cher.

Oftentimes the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District is part of the drama that is unfolding. Pierini and now retired Fire Chief Ben Sharit had very different jobs, but often were involved in the same altercation.

"I always had access to him which was amazing with how busy he was," Sharit told *LTN*. "He was apolitical in a political position. I value his commitment to public safety."

Moving on

While those are a few of the big cases Pierini has been involved with, it's more administrative work that he does today. It's dealing with the budget. It's making sure the state-mandated body camera program for officers is carried out. This means figuring out how to store all that data – and paying for the equipment, and dealing with the fact the recordings will be a public record.

At 65, Pierini looks like he could still tangle with any bad guy he encountered. And while that's not necessarily what he wants to do in his last year, he also hasn't started counting down the days to December 2018.

"I'm not looking forward to retiring," he said. Still, he knows now is the time to go. It may give others in the department a chance to do new things. Undersheriff Paul Howell will also

be retiring next year.

And it means he can spend more time traveling with his wife, seeing their kids and grandchildren. And Pierini's 91-year-old mother lives in Carson City, so now he'll have more time for her as well when he no longer has a job that is essentially 24 hours, seven days a week.

Opinion: How Congress funds firefighting needs fixing

By David Edelson and Tim Quinn, Sacramento Bee

California continues to experience the worst wildfires in its history, with tragic loss of life and devastation to communities, a disaster for our state by any definition.

Congress has an opportunity to act now to reduce the risk of future such disasters. California's representatives in Congress – especially House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi – should make sure that it does.

Congress is working on yet another bill to fund disaster recovery, as part of a larger year-end bill to keep the government operating. A fire funding fix belongs in that bill. Not all of this year's fires involved our federal forests, but the fires burning in Southern California right now do, and future fires will.

Read the whole story

Thomas Fire now the second largest in Calif. history

By Hailey Branson-Potts and Nicole Santa Cruz, Los Angeles Times

After a brief respite from the relentless gusts that have driven the deadly Thomas Fire for more than two weeks, powerful winds are expected to return, adding to the challenges facing firefighters working to contain the mammoth blaze.

The fire, which began near Santa Paula in the foothills above Thomas Aquinas College on Dec. 4, has burned through 272,000 acres as of Tuesday evening, making it the second-largest wildfire in modern California history.

On Tuesday, the Thomas Fire surpassed the lightning-sparked Rush Fire, which burned 271,911 acres in Lassen County in 2012.

[Read the whole story](#)

Airlines set to limit use of 'smart bags'

By Chris Isidore, CNN

Many smart bags could soon be banned on most U.S. flights.

“Smart bags, also known as smart luggage, have become more popular over the last few months, and they are expected to be a popular gift this holiday season,” said American Airlines. “However, smart bags contain lithium battery power banks, which pose a risk when they are placed in the cargo hold of an aircraft.”

The bags generally have USB ports where customers can recharge their phones and other devices. They might also have GPS to track the bag’s location in case it gets lost, electronic locks and a weight scale to prevent overpacking. Some even a motor to propel the bags so that they can double as a scooter or just follow their owner around the airport.

Read the whole story

Founding chapter of Disabled Sports USA celebrates 50 years



Achieve Tahoe started as a way to get

wounded veterans, mainly amputees, out on the slopes. Photo/Provided

By Ally Gravina, Moonshine Ink

Achieve Tahoe, formerly Disabled Sports USA Far West, was founded 50 years ago by the late Jim Winthers, a World War II veteran of the 10th Mountain Division and director of the Soda Springs Ski School.

To recruit participants, Winthers and other vets would walk around Letterman Army Hospital in San Francisco talking to wounded Vietnam soldiers, mainly amputees, about coming up to Tahoe to ski.

Doug Pringle, who would later become one of the founding members of the organization, was apprehensive the first time he saw the WWII guys walk through his ward at Letterman. A West Point graduate who lost a leg in Vietnam, Pringle had skied only once before his injury. He described his time skiing with two legs as falling down the entire mountain, and he thought the WWII guys were crazy to talk about skiing on only one leg.

Declining the first offer to go to Tahoe, Pringle quickly changed his mind after his fellow hospital mates returned after a weekend of skiing saying they not only made turns, but also hung out at the bar with a bunch of beautiful women.

Read the whole story

Valhalla seeking submissions for 2018 plays

Do you have a play you would like to see presented on the Boathouse Theatre stage in 2018? Now is the time to submit it for consideration.

The deadline to submit is 5pm, Jan. 19. Send all submission materials in one email to info@valhallatahoe.com with the subject line "2018 Theatre Submission" or in one envelope addressed to Valhalla Tahoe, RE: 2018 Theatre Submission, PO Box 19273, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.

Applicants will be notified in February.

For more information, go **online**.

From elite athletes to Tahoe business owners



Snowboarder Ryan Williams is the brains behind the app Stomp Sessions. Photo/Provided

By Alexandra Spychalsky, Moonshine Ink

It's no secret that Tahoe is rife with professional athletes, both current and retired, but it may surprise some to learn that a number of local businesses, from long-standing staples to new companies just taking off, have former elite athletes at the helm.

The decision to leave a professional run in a lifelong passion is not easy. Here are five athletes who all decided their successes needed to be measured in more than medals and magazine covers.

Kristin Krone stands in the construction zone that will soon be her new bakery, deep in discussion with her team. The white subway tiles gleam behind her as Krone ponders the best placement for the kitchen sink. Although she has owned Wild Cherries for 18 years, this is her first opportunity to design

a space from scratch. And she is loving the new challenge.

Before she got into the coffee shop businesses, Krone was chasing gold on the U.S. Ski Team, traveling on the World Cup circuit, and competing in the 1988 and 1992 Olympics. In her later years on the team, however, she found herself pondering different careers at every turn, which she took as a sign that she was ready for a life off the snow.

Read the whole story

Time to begin campaign process in EDC

People wanting to run for an office in El Dorado County may take out the paperwork now for the June 5 primary.

Declaration of candidacy forms and nomination papers can be filed beginning Feb. 12.

All El Dorado County elected offices are up, including supervisorial districts 4 and 5, the latter being Lake Tahoe.

The last day to file for one of these offices is March 9.

For more information, go **online**.

Appointments are recommended for pulling papers. To schedule one, contact Kim Smith at 530.621.7490 or kim.smith@edcgov.us.

LTCC receives grant for culinary apprentice programs

Lake Tahoe Community College is one of a handful of educational providers in the state to win a \$500,000 grant from the California Apprenticeship Initiative (CAI) to help build and launch culinary pre-apprenticeship programs in South Lake Tahoe.

The money will be used to help better prepare South Lake Tahoe's workforce and to improve local residents' ability to secure in-demand jobs and progress to higher-wage careers in the Tahoe basin.

LTCC will receive \$500,000 over two years to create and implement pre-apprenticeship programming, including a heavy focus on expanding the culinary and transition offerings of the ADVANCE network and career center, which is housed at the college.

The CAI grant will provide the foundation for LTCC's long-term plan to launch the Tahoe Culinary Academy, a registered apprenticeship program aligned to American Culinary Federation (ACF) standards.

A hospitality management program will be the next program developed at the college, also based upon the apprenticeship model. The proposed Hospitality Management program will be designed in alignment with the American Hotel and Lodging Association standards.

Climate change hits Winter Olympic preparation

By Associated Press

AAS-FEE, Switzerland – The athletes' half-hour commute in the Swiss Alps – up two gondolas, then through a tunnel in the world's highest underground train to a glacier at 11,000 feet – served up daily grim reminders that global warming is threatening their line of work.

After exiting the train, they squelched through a field of grayish mud to reach shrinking snowfields scarred by new crevasses. Occasionally, they heard the sharp roars of glacial ice breaking off in monster chunks, then echoing across the peaks where they trained jumps, tricks and turns for the Pyeongchang Olympics. Most days, they basked in brilliant, snow-melting sunshine that bathed the whole scene in deceptive beauty.

Another subtle but telltale indicator of climate change's disruptive impact on winter sports: Many athletes – here 5,000 miles away from the Rockies and 3,500 miles from the Green Mountains of New England – had the letters "USA" emblazoned on their jackets. Americans once had little need to swap continents to guarantee offseason access to snow. But warming is forcing athletes to hunt farther from home for wintry conditions, particularly just months away from an Olympics.

Read the whole story