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2004 Madera County Grand Jury
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**The 2004 Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report on The
Eastern Madera County Sheriff's Facility**

INTRODUCTION

The Madera County Grand Jury toured the Eastern Madera County Sheriff's Facility on July 15, 2004, pursuant to Penal Code 925, charging the Grand Jury with investigation of, "County officers, departments or functions; operations, accounts and records; investigations and reports".

FINDINGS

The Madera County Sheriff met and welcomed the Public Safety Committee of the Grand Jury. He introduced the Sergeant who is in charge of the Bass Lake Division. He explained the patrol operations on Bass Lake. During the summer season, May through September, they have four sworn and four non-sworn personnel assigned. Non-sworn (volunteer) officers perform oversight and control issues on Bass Lake, and report incidents to the sworn officers. Sworn officers have peace-officer powers, including the enforcement of California Law. They enforce boat speed limits, operating under the influence, etc. Jet ski operators cause the most problems and accidents, according to information provided by the Sergeant. They have specific areas of use on Bass Lake for jet skis.

The Sergeant is also in charge of the other volunteer operations such as 'Search and Rescue'. This unit is well trained and primarily used in the mountain and remote areas. They continuously train in order to be prepared when an emergency occurs.

The Sergeant is also in charge of the Dive Team. They must be trained to dive in murky water with only a few feet of visibility, swift-water rescue and recovery, and water containing hazardous debris. They must be exceptionally well trained for their own survival. The Sergeant is also the coordinator for the SWAT Team, which is a multi-agency operational task force. All members of SWAT Team are sworn personnel.

The Sergeant then introduced the Grand Jury members to the Lieutenant who is in charge of the Eastern Madera Sheriff's Operations. He escorted us into the Government Center where we observed the Dispatch and Clerical Operations. From there the Grand Jury tour continued to the two holding cells. The cells are strictly temporary holding units, which appeared to be well maintained. One detriment of the facility is a nearby sewage-processing system, which is very evident. The Lieutenant then took us through the rest of the center and showed us the courtroom. The Grand Jury's tour then proceeded up a long driveway, around the rear of the Government Center to a small house that had been converted to the needs of the Detective Division. The Detective Division has offices and a "Briefing/Report Writing Area". The space appeared to be quite adequate. There is a shortage of detectives. At the time we were there, the Detective Division had one Sergeant and two Detectives, but both of the detectives were leaving shortly thereafter - one on a medical leave and the other for emergency leave.

The Grand Jury then went to the Sheriff's Mountain Area Headquarters in Oakhurst. It is a converted doctor's office. It had one large room, where meetings or briefings can be held, a break room with a refrigerator where the

deputies can relax and eat their lunches, etc. The remaining areas consist of offices. They have both phone service and radio contact from this location. This enables the officers to be available to handle calls when needed.

The Grand Jury then requested that the Sheriff provide a personnel roster covering the Mountain Division. This roster uncovered and revealed that the Board of Supervisors had supplied the five deputies from the existing Sheriff's staffing, rather than providing for five additional deputies as required by the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU is the Agreement between the Chukchansi Tribe and The Madera County Government regarding Casino Operations. When the Chukchansi Gold Casino opened and agreed to pay for five deputy positions, it sounded like a good boost to security in the Mountain community. However, this is not the case.

The County accepted the money, from the Chukchansi Tribe and Casino, but instead of adding the five additional deputies that Chukchansi paid for, they transferred the five deputies from the existing Patrol Deputy allotment. This means that the five deputies are assigned to the Coarsegold area around the Casino. This leaves nine deputies assigned to patrol to handle enforcement in the remainder of Eastern Madera County. One of these deputies is assigned to Yosemite High School, leaving eight deputies to protect the rest of Eastern Madera County. It requires five deputy positions to provide one deputy around the clock. This means that there are less than two deputies per shift to cover the area from the San Joaquin River to North Fork up to the Mariposa County line and across to the Valley Division Line. An article in the Sierra Star newspaper, September 17, 2004, had headlines that state, "Sheriff won't lose deputies with budget." This is misleading because there is a hiring freeze that does not allow vacancies to be filled. The Madera County Board of Supervisors transferred Sheriff's personnel to meet the requirements of the Chukchansi Tribe & Casino, to fund the police security at the Casino and within the Coarsegold area as mandated in the agreement.

CONCLUSION

The antiquated space at the Government Center for the Sheriff's Station is used efficiently. The Sheriff and his staff should be commended for the job they do with the limited number of personnel. Currently, the staffing requirements at the Bass Lake Station is under-staffed by three positions. The budget of the Sheriff's Department appears in need of additional funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Board of Supervisors review the level of protection they provide to the residents of the Mountain Area.
2. The two frozen positions in Patrol are filled.
3. The money received for the five additional deputies that Chukchansi paid for should be used only for those five additional deputy positions and not taken out of the Sheriff's Budget.
4. The Board of Supervisors fund the Sheriff's Department Budget adequately to hire the additional detectives necessary to maintain the Detectives Division at the Bass Lake Government Center.
5. The Board of Supervisors provides funding for the deputies to staff the main force of the Sheriff's Department at pre-Chukchansi Casino levels.

RESPONSES

1. Board of Supervisors
2. Madera County Sheriff's Department