

SHERIFF SLAMS LODE LEADERS OVER BUDGET

By **Dana M. Nichols**
June 14, 2012
Record Staff Writer

SAN ANDREAS - Calaveras County Sheriff Gary Kuntz on Wednesday accused the county's elected Board of Supervisors of failing to fund enough deputies to protect county residents and suggested they were foolish to spend money on revising the county's land use General Plan at a time when the burglary rate is skyrocketing.

"Am I a little upset? Yes I am," Kuntz said near the close of a six-hour Sheriff's Department presentation before the board.

That presentation was just one of 10 departmental presentations scheduled in what could end up being more than three days of public hearings this week on the county's recommended budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

The proposed \$139 million budget for fiscal 2012-13 is about 10 percent smaller than this year's \$155 million budget.

In addition to the Sheriff's Department, representatives of the Probation Department and the county's Health Service Agency also made presentations Wednesday.

After four years of cuts, staff in almost all county departments report being cut to the bone. Facing flat revenues from local taxes and declines in state and federal grants, virtually all departments are facing further cuts. They reported a variety of problems that are no longer being addressed, ranging from roadside weeds that will no longer be sprayed, to the possibility there will be no staffing available to capture and test rabid animals for part of the summer, to an upsurge in sexually transmitted disease among the county's teenage girls.

But it was rising crime that was the major focus Wednesday. Although he did not mention it during his presentation, Kuntz, too, has been a victim. Intruders reportedly took about \$10,000 in items from his home in the Burson area on June 5, while he was at work.

Kuntz is asking the Board of Supervisors to come up with almost \$900,000 in extra funding to allow him to hire five additional deputies, purchase fuel-efficient vehicles, and bring jail staffing up to a level that would at least allow employees to take vacations and have adequate backup in emergencies.

Like Kuntz, Capt. Jim Macedo at times during the hearings accused the Board of Supervisors of bad faith. "What you are doing is asking us to cannibalize ourselves," Macedo said to the board. "It feels as though we are being worked against instead of working with us. Be honest with us. Don't just say 'no' all the time."

That raised the hackles of board President Gary Tofanelli.

"We have not always said 'no,' " Tofanelli said, then noted several board votes in recent years to dip into contingency funds to preserve staff in the Sheriff's Department.

Supervisor Darren Spellman, who has emerged as the most outspoken advocate for giving Kuntz the money he seeks, said the rising crime in Calaveras is a threat to the county's tourism industry.

Spellman said violent crime in Stockton has tarnished that city's image despite the professional sports teams and renovated waterfront that make for an otherwise attractive destination downtown.

"Neither myself or anyone I know personally would step foot within miles of that place," he said of Stockton's downtown entertainment district.

Supervisors said they sympathized with Kuntz but simply might not have the money. Supervisor Merita Callaway noted the proposed budget has a contingency fund of \$264,861, or less than a third of what Kuntz said he needs, before any other department requests are considered.

"You are insulting us," Callaway said.

Contact reporter Dana M. Nichols at (209) 607-1361 or dnichols@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/calaverasblog.

If you go

Calaveras County budget hearings will continue at 9 a.m. today and, if needed, at 9 a.m. Friday in the CalWorks Sequoia Room, 509 E. St. Charles St. The Public Works Department is scheduled to present first this morning.

http://www.recordnet.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20120614/A_NEWS/206140316/-1/A_COMM02