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LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES COLLABORATE IN RESPONSE TO RECENT CRISES

Lieutenant Christy Wurster unfolded the picture given to her by a little girl just two days prior while Wurster and her canine partner, Wrigley, were present at the El Dorado County Fairgrounds helping with the evacuation of students from Schnell School. The child had written, "Thank you for saving us." Wurster scanned the picture and sent it to the Placerville Police Department and the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, saying, "You guys are the heroes here". Wurster is a Lieutenant with the Fish and Game Department, assigned to the El Dorado County area. She is currently the acting Captain for the Department. On February 2, 2011, Wurster heard over her radio that there had been a possible shooting at Louisiana Schnell Elementary School. She responded and offered her assistance to the Placerville Police Department and was directed to the fairgrounds where she assisted with security inside.

Captain Scott of the Placerville Police Department explained that jurisdiction for command of an incident is determined by the location of the event; as the Schnell shooting occurred within city limits, it was under the jurisdiction of the Police Department. Placerville Police Department, then, as first responders, arrived within three minutes of the call. Critical incidents that occur outside of the city limits fall under the jurisdiction of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, as in the recent bomb threat at Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. The first responders to the Folsom Lake College bomb threat were Los Rios Community College officers. El Dorado County Sheriff's Department arrived within minutes of that call and took over command of the incident. Placerville Police Department sent a unit to assist. Diamond Springs-El Dorado Fire Department responded as well. Chief Cunningham of the Diamond Springs-El Dorado Fire Department said the combination of the threat at the college and the inclement weather the same day resulted in an additional 250

calls for service for their department. The Fire Department called in additional staff, including volunteers, amounting to four times the usual staffing for an eight-hour period.

In the event of a serious crisis, any law enforcement agency will respond and cooperates with the jurisdictional agency who established incident command. California Highway Patrol Public Information Officer Dan Stark explained that the Highway Patrol acted in a supporting role to Placerville Police Department the day of the Schnell shooting. CHP responded to the incident and provided air surveillance (searching for the suspect), assisted with securing the perimeter of the school, and the closing of the school. The Diamond Springs-El Dorado Fire Department responded to the Schnell incident by providing off-site support with the S.W.A.T. team and staff in the command center. Fire Chief Cunningham explained that in a large incident, the command center can become overwhelmed; the Fire Department will overlap immediately with other agencies to assist. In the case of the Schnell shooting, Chief Cunningham took phone calls in the command center.

The tragic incident at Schnell School and the bomb threat at Folsom Lake College required a great deal of communication and collaboration between local law enforcement agencies themselves as well as with education agencies. Captain Scott explained that El Dorado County agencies have always had great collaboration. This collaboration is now extremely well organized, a result of the learning that has evolved out of major crises such as Columbine and the Oakland Hills fire. He credited the Office of Emergency Services for providing the training necessary to respond to serious events. Smaller incidents have provided the opportunity to exercise or practice the work to be done in a larger scale crisis. Sheriff John D'Agostini said that collaboration is possible because the agencies "check their egos at the door, there is a job to be done. It's part of the times we live in; everyone needs everyone's help". Sheriff D'Agostini felt this type of cooperative relationship between agencies does not exist to the same extent in all communities. Fire Chief Cunningham said that perhaps part of the reason for the high level of cooperation in El Dorado County is that we are still small enough to know each other. CHP Officer Dan Stark added that our community has always had a good history of law enforcement agencies working together.

Dr. Nancy Lynch, Superintendent of the Placerville School District expressed her appreciation to all of the agencies involved in the Schnell School tragedy. She noted, "We are tremendously grateful for the work

done by our law enforcement agencies. All agencies who responded to Schnell School as well as to the fairgrounds for the student evacuation were wonderful; their focus was the safety of students and staff.”

Communication between and cooperation among agencies resulted in immediate responses. Sheriff D’Agostini watched the operation at Schnell School unfold as he arrived on scene. He reported that he felt proud of all law enforcement personnel for the work they were doing. Dr. Vicki Barber, County Superintendent of Schools, who was also on the scene, commended all of the agencies and stated that she is totally confident in the ability of our law enforcement agencies to respond to critical incidents and in the safety of our public schools. Captain Scott said the Placerville Police Department is truly grateful for the efforts of all agencies involved in the recent crises. On behalf of all of the public schools throughout El Dorado County, our sincere appreciation goes out to each and every law enforcement agency in El Dorado County; you are to be commended for what you do to serve and protect our community, especially our most precious resource – our children.