



Mike Fisher

Sheriff-Coroner
County of Sierra
State of California

100 Courthouse Square/PO Box 66
Downieville CA 95936
(530)289-3700 Fax (530) 289-3318

PRESS RELEASE

Multi-Agency Response Ends Active Shooter Threat in Sierra County

On July 3, 2020, at about 1600 hours, the Sierra County Sheriff's Office received information that two persons sustained gunshot wounds by an assailant in the Poker Flat area of northwestern Sierra County. The assailant was driving a utility terrain vehicle (UTV). Neither victim knew the shooter, and the act appeared to be a random act of violence.

After the two victims were transported out of the area, a 911 call came in from a 15-year-old caller in the same general area. The 15-year-old told the 911 dispatcher that he and his father, who was later identified as Dr. Ari Gershman, a physician from Danville, encountered the suspect while driving down a dirt road. The suspect opened fire on Dr. Gershman and his son, killing Dr. Gershman. The juvenile son fled into the forest to escape the shooter and find an area where he could call for help.

Throughout the night of July 3, and into the following day, the Sierra County Sheriff's Office coordinated a massive law enforcement response to the area. Responding agencies included: U.S. Forest Service, California Highway Patrol, California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Grass Valley Police Department, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, and Yuba counties. Additionally, helicopters from the California Highway Patrol, Washoe County (Nevada), and Placer County Sheriff's Office assisted throughout the incident.

Initial responding officers were able to locate Dr. Gershman and his vehicle. Officers searched the surrounding area for the suspect and missing juvenile. Officers remained in the area searching throughout the night. As day broke the following morning, tactical teams were assembled and continued searching the area.

In the afternoon of July 4, CDFW wildlife officers and a K-9, using human tracking skills, hiked through the forest with a Sierra County Deputy tracking the missing juvenile. Although the juvenile had fled a considerable distance, the officers were able to track and locate him. Even though the juvenile had fled the shooting and spent the night alone in the forest, he was in good physical condition and did not require medical attention. After giving him some food and water, officers transported him to the Sheriff's Office, where he was reunited with his mother.

Shortly after locating the juvenile, the suspect approached two CDFW wildlife officers and a USFS officer at high speed in the UTV. The officers were maintaining a checkpoint on Saddleback Road and attempted to stop the vehicle. The suspect failed to stop and tried to run over the two wildlife officers and then fled south on Saddleback Road towards Downieville. A third wildlife officer was positioned down the road in Downieville and started driving up the hill to block the suspects' vehicle. A vehicle collision ultimately occurred as officers were attempting to take the suspect into custody. The suspect immediately represented a threat to the officers, leading to an officer-involved shooting and deployment of a K-9. The suspect was taken into custody, and after receiving medical treatment at the scene, he was transported to the hospital. The suspect has been identified as John Thomas Conway, age 40, Oroville.

In addition to the above law enforcement agencies who assisted in this incident, I would like to thank the Downieville and Sierra City Fire Departments for their quick response and medical treatment of the shooting victims. I would also like to thank the Sierra County businesses and numerous local volunteers who made food for the officers involved in the incident.

The Sheriff's Office is working closely with Sierra County District Attorney who anticipates announcing charges soon.

Anyone with information related to this incident is asked to please contact the Sierra County Sheriff's Office at (530) 289-3700.

#