

CENTRALIA CHRONICLE

## **Drug Court Judge Nelson Hunt and Defender Paul Dugaw Recognized as Best in State**

**By Adam Pearson [apearson@chronline.com](mailto:apearson@chronline.com) | Posted: Tuesday, October 25, 2011 11:20 am**

Paul Dugaw took a \$500-per-month pay cut this year to allow Lewis County Drug Court to survive, and he increasingly works with offenders who face serious time behind bars if they can't sober up, according to drug court Manager Jennifer Soper-Baker.

On Friday, the defense attorney's peers recognized him as the best drug court defender in the state. The announcement came during an annual meeting of the Washington State Association of Drug Court Professionals in Seattle.

Dugaw was not alone.

Superior Court Judge Nelson Hunt, who presides over drug court, was recognized as the best drug court judge in the state as well.

Both men began working with drug court clients a couple years after its inception in Lewis County — 2005 — and have helped expand the program's service from first-time offenders to hardened criminals who face up to three years in prison for assault and drug-related convictions.

"My job is to help them get clean," Dugaw said Monday.

Both Dugaw and Hunt — who was not in court on Monday — pushed for the recent passage of a one-tenth of 1 percent of sales tax that supports therapeutic courts in Lewis County. The tax saved drug court as the county had placed it on the chopping block in search of trimmings to the general budget.

"I have always supported it because it saves taxpayers money and most importantly, it saves people's lives," said Dugaw, noting scientific data shows that 80 percent of people who get caught up in the gears of the criminal justice system have a longstanding addiction to drugs or alcohol. "Until people get a handle on their addiction, it's a revolving door."

There are more than 30 drug courts throughout the state, according to Soper-Baker.

At any given time on a regular basis, about 35 "clients" are working their way through drug court. As a defense attorney, Dugaw works with each client and helps them negotiate for easier sanctions — such as eight hours of community service rather than a day in jail — when they have a relapse or failed assignment.

At the same time, Dugaw will push a client to accept a sanction of 30 meetings in 30 days if it appears to be in his or her best interest toward achieving sobriety.

"He's not easily manipulated," Soper-Baker said. "Our job is to do behavior change, and he buys into that."

The average client spends about 18 months in drug court. With everyday rights waived, clients are subjected to random drug tests and searches of their homes and cars.

If a client passes drug court, the charges that referred them there are waived.

Failure means one reality: jail time or prison.

Dugaw had practiced law for 30 years as a public defender in Lewis County before getting involved with drug court. He still practices, but also spends about six hours a week in drug court.

Soper-Baker said Dugaw and Hunt have been instrumental in drug court's success.

Of Hunt, she wrote to peers in her nomination: "He has trained himself to become a master at motivational interviewing and his graduation speeches are remarkable, often leaving not a dry eye in the house. He takes the time to know every participant, yet is willing to sanction them swiftly and fairly."

Of Dugaw: "He is willing to argue the cause of keeping someone in the program when his arguments are unpopular and controversial. He fights hard for each and every participant to succeed. As Paul says, 'You've signed a dead meat contract, but I'll do the best I can.'"

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