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Stillaguamish Tribe donates \$86,000 to preserve a prosecuting attorney's job

The Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians gives \$86,000 to fund a prosecutor's job.

By Diana Hefley, Herald Writer

There's a lot of action in Snohomish County's four District Court divisions every day.

Deputy prosecutors handle about 10,000 misdemeanor cases a year, including shoplifting, domestic violence and drunken driving.

Two years ago, before the economy tanked, the workload was divided among a dozen deputy prosecutors. Beginning in 2009 cuts were made, leaving eight prosecutors to handle 10,000 cases. That meant an additional 400 cases for each lawyer.

It also meant a backlog in the District Court, including prosecutions for driving under the influence, a problem they've since cleaned up.

Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney Mark Roe worried he'd have to cut another position in the District Court this year. So he decided to ask some neighbors for help.

That's where the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians comes in.

Tribal officials agreed to donate \$86,000 to the prosecutor's office, saving Roe from having to eliminate another District Court prosecutor or possibly moving someone handling felony cases to fill in at the lower courts.

The tribe contributed out of community spirit, Roe said.

"They know that it doesn't buy them any special treatment, and they didn't ask for any," Roe said. "They're being extremely good neighbors. This helps keep people in the courtroom and helps us keep holding people accountable for crime."

The tribe has a positive relationship with the prosecutor's office and wants to continue working on that partnership, said Shawn Yanity, chairman of the Stillaguamish Board of Directors.

"We saw an opportunity to be an active partner in the community," Yanity said. "The only thing we want is for them to continue to work hard and do a proper job for the community."

The Stillaguamish have a tribal court, through the Northwest Intertribal Court System, a partnership of tribes that share judges, prosecutors and court services. Prosecutors there, however, refer some cases to Snohomish County prosecutors to handle.

Roe said there hasn't been any increase of cases coming from the Stillaguamish or its businesses, including the casino. His office received one case last year and one in 2009. The tribe referred four cases in 2008.

"When I asked for the money, I couldn't say they were causing us any extra work," Roe said.

Instead, tribal leaders recognized that as neighbors, they have equal interest in strong DUI enforcement and domestic violence prosecutions, Roe said.

The Stillaguamish Tribe has donated money to other public safety agencies over the years, Yanity said. They have helped fire departments buy equipment used to find people in burning buildings. The tribe paid for thousands of decks of [cold case playing cards](#) Snohomish County sheriff's detectives created to help generate tips for unsolved murders and missing persons cases. They've also purchased vehicles and equipment for the county's search and rescue crews.

"We've found we can help and enhance public safety," Yanity said.

Roe said he's made a similar request of the Tulalip Tribes. He is optimistic that they will continue to show their support for the prosecutor's office.

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