

The stars align for a new law school in Tacoma

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Since 1999, the South Sound has had a hole the shape of a law school in its higher education system.

That's when the University of Puget Sound shipped off its law school to Seattle University for a sum rumored to exceed thirty pieces of silver.

But the long dry spell of legal scholarship could end in 2015, thanks to the efforts of community leaders who are working to create a new law program tailored for the needs of this area. The idea is to raise \$2.25 million in local startup money to plant a stem of the University of Washington Law School on the campus of the University of Washington Tacoma.

The local money would fund three years of staffing, after which the UW Law School would cover the paychecks itself.

The plan looks promising from a multitude of angles:

- Much of what the new school would need is in place now. The UWT has the classrooms and is already paying the overhead.
- The proposed faculty — UW law professors — are already at hand, just up the road in Seattle.
- As an extension of the University of Washington Law School, the Tacoma program would be accredited the day it opens.

- The potential demand has already been proved by the prior success of the late, lamented University of Puget Sound Law School.
- The concept falls squarely within the mission of the UWT — which Chancellor Debra Friedman defines as an “urban-serving university.”

That last point deserves elaboration. Friedman sees the UWT as an academic engine that helps turn the gears of the South Sound, not as a refuge of disconnected scholars. Her vision reflects the many ways the UWT strengthens regional institutions — providing teachers and administrators to area school districts, MBAs and digital experts to area companies, registered nurses to area hospitals and so on.

A UWT law school would play precisely the same role.

The United States might have more lawyers than it needs at the moment, but the South Sound does not.

Prosecutors, state and local governments, law firms and companies are expected to face a shortage of legal talent in a few years. The Washington State Bar Association is packed with baby boomers on the eve of retirement.

The stars are aligned for a law school to serve students with family and job connections to the South Sound.

It’s been done before, successfully. And this time, it wouldn’t get sold up the freeway.