

# the Courthouse Journal

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Washington Association of County Officials

Washington State Association of Counties

September 9, 2004  
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## WSAC Eastern and Western Districts to Meet at Conference, Elect New Officers

WSAC's Eastern and Western Districts will convene on the morning afternoon of October 6, 2002, immediately before the start of the WACO/WSAC Joint Legislative Conference. Though an abbreviated meeting, new officers for each District will be selected.

Traditionally, officers move up the ladder over a three-year period. The current Eastern District Vice-President is Whitman County Commissioner Greg Partch and the current Secretary-Treasurer is Stevens County Commissioner Merrill Ott. The current Western District Vice-President is Jefferson County Commissioner Dan Titterness and the current Secretary-Treasurer is Cowlitz County

Commissioner Bill Lehning.

An At-Large Representative and two alternates to the Board also need to be selected. The current Eastern District At-Large Representative is Benton County Commissioner Leo Bowman. The Eastern District alternates are Okanogan County Commissioner Mary Lou Peterson and Asotin County Commissioner Don Scheibe. The current Western District At-Large Representative is Island County Commissioner Mike Shelton. The Western District alternates are Lewis County Commissioner Eric Johnson and Skagit County Commissioner Don Munks.

See *Eastern and Western*, page 2

## A Call to Conference for WACO Members

The countdown to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Joint WACO/WSAC Conference has begun! This year promises to be the best yet – just look at the program! I enlisted the help of WACO affiliate presidents and past presidents to assist in planning the WACO program. You won't want to miss anything.

I am very excited that WACO Past Presidents Norm Maleng, King County Prosecuting Attorney, and Valoria Loveland, Director of the State Department of Agriculture, have accepted our invitation to address all of us. Their focus will take us back to the basics: the Core Mission of WACO. This will be a great refresher for all of us and

especially enlightening to newer WACO members who will then better understand the role WACO should play in your professional life.

The agenda includes two very important WACO business meetings. The first meeting on Wednesday morning will give you the opportunity to hear the Nominating Committee's report, along with the chance to meet and hear from Candidates for your WACO Board. Election results will be announced at the business meeting on Thursday after we vote on the WACO 2005 Legislative Package.

See *WACO Members*, page 2

## Register for Conference Now!

Registrations should be received by September 17!  
Mail to WACO at 206 Tenth Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98501.  
Phone (360) 753-7319, or fax (360) 664-2812. E-mail: [bbamford@wacounties.org](mailto:bbamford@wacounties.org).  
(Credit card registration available at [www.wacounties.org](http://www.wacounties.org))  
**Hotel reservations Number: 1-509-326-8000**

### The Courthouse Journal

Published weekly (during Legislative Session) and Bi-weekly (other than Session) by the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) and the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC).

We welcome your suggestions and contributions. The weekly deadline is noon Wednesday.

Direct inquiries and correspondence to *The Courthouse Journal*, 206 Tenth Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98501-1131 or [www.wacounties.org](http://www.wacounties.org).

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### Huntingford announces for WSAC Secretary/Treasurer

Jefferson County Commissioner Glen Huntingford is the second candidate to announce for the position of Secretary/Treasurer. WSAC Bylaws require that the position be alternated between the eastern and western districts of the state. This year only candidates from the western district are eligible. Carolyn Edmonds, King County Councilmember made her announcement in the May 27, 2004 *Courthouse Journal*. Commissioner Huntingford's statement follows.

Dear Commissioners and Council Members:

I am asking for your support as I announce my interest for the Washington State Association of Counties Executive Board position of Secretary/Treasurer. I feel that I am well qualified to do the job.

I have been a Jefferson County Commissioner for 12 years. For nine years, I served on the WSAC Legislative Steering Committee until I stepped aside to allow Jefferson County Commissioner Dan Titterness an opportunity to serve. I have served as the WSAC Western District President, Chair of the Timber Counties Committee, and have been a member of the Rural Counties Committee. For several years I have been a member of the Board of Directors for the National Schools and Counties Forest

Coalition, representing the Timber Counties of Washington State. I am also the current Timber Counties Representative to the State Board of Natural Resources.

I have always enjoyed working with the WSAC staff and the Commissioners and Council Members from around the State. My experience has given me a background to build on. I believe I have a good perspective of what we will be facing in the future. Please support my bid for the position of Secretary/Treasurer.

Sincerely,  
Glen Huntingford

### Eastern and Western

*Continued from Page 1*

Any County Commissioners or County Council members interested in any of these positions should contact WSAC Staff member Paul Parker, who will forward the information to the respective chairs of the Eastern District or Western District nominating committees.

### WACO Members

*Continued from Page 1*

Your participation is so important to the direction we take in the coming year.

The joint sessions with WSAC include a review of the economic outlook for Washington by

NOTE: Legislative Committee schedules and agendas can be found at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/calendar.cfm>

economist William B. Conerly, a panel to evaluate the impact of the mentally ill on county jails, and a panel discussion of the relationship of local government and the Hispanic population in our state.

I am especially looking forward to the WACO President's Reception on Wednesday night. While the commissioners are off roasting their retiring members, we will be enjoying a tropical evening in Spokane. "It's 5 o'clock somewhere," my favorite time of the day, is the theme for the event and rumor has it, the hotel will be extravagantly transformed thanks to my own County Treasurer's Association. Expect a balmy breeze, so dress appropriately!

**My President's Room will always be open. This is a great time to get acquainted with your WACO Executive Board, other members of WACO, and even the candidates for the Board positions. I'll make sure you know where to find me. Please come up, visit and relax.**

Again, I cannot tell you how important WACO is to you and how essential you are to WACO. So, meet me in SPOKANE in October!

~~ Mary Dodge,  
Douglas County Treasurer,  
WACO President

**(Each WACO Affiliate President has submitted a complete list of items of interest to their individual groups. Their articles and complete conference information is available at [www.wacounties.org/waco](http://www.wacounties.org/waco) - just click on "Courthouse to Courthouse")**

### **Emergency Management Task Force Submits Report on Local Programs**

The Washington State Emergency Management Council (EMC) last week received the final report of the "Study of Emergency Management

at the Local Program Level," prepared by the Task Force on Local Programs.

Counties are encouraged to review the report at [www.EMCTaskforce.org](http://www.EMCTaskforce.org), and submit comments to Task Force staff at [sharonf@awcnet.org](mailto:sharonf@awcnet.org) by September 30. The EMC anticipates further discussion of the Study and comments at its November 10, 2004 meeting.

By law, the EMC is responsible for assessing the preparedness of state and local Emergency Management. In 2003 the EMC created the Task Force on Local Programs to look at "the state of emergency management" in Washington's counties, cities and tribes. The study was designed to identify the strengths and the gaps in local and tribal governments' ability to mitigate, plan for, respond to, and recover from the unique combination of hazards that exist in Washington State - both natural and human-caused.

The Task Force, co-chaired by Thurston County Commissioner Diane Oberquell and Bridgeport Mayor Steve Jenkins, spent more than a year conducting surveys of all counties, cities and tribes, meeting with local program managers, and researching practices in other states.

Among the Study's findings are that, nationwide, Washington State is recognized for quality emergency management, disaster response, and recent efforts to prepare for terrorism and domestic threats. However, the results of the study also demonstrate that inconsistencies in the system of emergency management impede local abilities to ensure a basic level of disaster preparedness. Disparities in the organization, staffing and funding of local programs have led to large discrepancies in the capabilities of emergency management programs, which may

compromise effective statewide disaster response.

### **And the challenge goes up!**

**It's official! I have officially issued a challenge to WSAC and their associated groups to raise more money for the Washington Counties' Scholarship Fund than WACO.** I really don't think they can do it! WACO members are known for their generosity and their commitment to educating the children of county employees.

Since 1993 together we have raised thousands of dollars and awarded dozens of scholarships to deserving kids.

**So...who can raise the most money for the Scholarship Fund? The deadline is noon on Thursday, October 7.** We can announce the results at the banquet that evening.

**This is a recap of last year:** County clerks, \$1615; County Coroners, \$1050; Planners, \$1000; Auditors; \$910; Prosecutors, \$700; County Commissioners, \$495; association staffs, \$400; Treasurers, \$270; Sheriffs, \$230; Commission/Council Clerks, \$100; Nationwide Retirement Solutions, \$3000. Three auction items brought in \$1450 for a total of \$11,220.00. We awarded \$12,500 in scholarships.

Make your contribution now! All monies will be credited to your respective affiliate.

~~Firmly convinced that WACO will emerge victorious, I remain, WACO President Mary Dodge

### **Good News**

Thurston County received an A+ from the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) for their internet Assessor's Parcel-Look-Up System (A+) which is part of their public information program.

At the recent 2004 IAAO conference, the Thurston County Assessor's Office was presented with

the Public Information Program Award. This prestigious honor is awarded for recognition of excellence in providing information to the public about mass appraisal and property assessment administration.

## **WACME Training Announcement**

Attached to this publication you will find the course description and registration for the WACME sponsored *Bloodstain Pattern Analysis and Practical Overview* that will be held in Spokane on October 5. This will be in conjunction with the WACO/WSAC Joint Annual Conference.

Usually you would receive this announcement from the Criminal Justice Training Commission, however please note several new

changes:

- You should register yourself and your staff for this course with WACO, not CJTC. This is new.
- The class is provided at no charge but there is a separate registration if you attend WACO functions (and we encourage you to do so!).
- This is an eight hour class that begins at 8:00 a.m.

**The course is limited to 50 people. Register now!** Remember, that is with WACO! **See you in Spokane!**

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## ***General Government Issues***

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### **Attorney General and State Auditor rule interest on gas tax can be used in general fund**

In a reversal of a previous position held by the attorney general's office, and requested by the State Auditor in 2001, they have now ruled that the interest accrued on gas tax received into the county road fund may be used in the county general fund if the legislative authority so directs. For nearly three years the state auditor has been enforcing article 2, section 40 of the Washington State Constitution, which restricts the use of license "fees" and fuel "taxes" to highway purposes. However, WSAC successfully argued that the state of Washington credits 20% of the investment earnings from the motor vehicle fund into the state general

fund and if that was legal for the state then counties should have the constitutional provision applied to them equally. The attorney general's office agreed.

As a result counties may now use the interest from the gas tax for the benefit of the general fund. Not all counties do this, but if they do they must pass a resolution directing the county treasurer to deposit the funds into the general fund. Some prosecuting attorneys had advised their counties to cease transferring these funds when the AG's opinion was published in 2001. This legal opinion will allow counties to revisit the issue.

### Assessor's Express Concerns Over New Tribal Exemption WAC

At a CR-101 hearing on the Washington State Department of Revenue's (DOR) Administrative Rule implementing Chapter 236, Laws of 2004 the Washington State Association of County Assessor (WSACA) expresses various concerns with the Department's interpretation of the new legislation. This new rule describes the property tax exemption that may be claimed by a federally recognized Indian tribe for property exclusively used for essential government services. The 2004 law changes RCW 84.36.010. The rule is meant to explain the parameters of the exemption, how the exemption may be obtained, how a tribe may appeal a denial of the exemption, how essential government services is defined, and provides examples of how it all works. The hearing, which was held on September 2 in Olympia, was well attended by representatives from the Department of Revenue (Legislation & Policy Division, Property Tax Division, Interpretation & Technical Advisory Group, and Special Programs Division), the Tribes, the WSACA and the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO).

WSACA members concerns with the new rule include: 1) Unfunded Mandate; 2) Equity & Uniformity in administration; 3) Eligible Properties; 4) Administrative Segregations; and 5) The December 31 Filing Deadline. Comments began with Keith Willnauer, Whatcom County Assessor, who expressed concerns shared by many Assessors that the exemption should be more uniformly administered by the DOR

Property Tax Division rather than 39 different County Assessors. Keith felt that the legislature did not intend the exemption to be an ownership issue, but rather a use issue that would be better served by DOR since they already have a use exemption review process in place. Dave Cook, Yakima County Assessor and President of WSACA echoed Keith's issue and added additional concerns regarding what he saw as an expansion of the legislation by rule. He said the new exemption is limited to property "belonging exclusively" and "used exclusively" for "government services" which are "essential". He did not agree that "essential governmental services" included the use of bare land for forest or for historical, cultural and spiritual activities. Scott Noble, King County Assessor agreed and discussed the testimony on the bill as it moved through the 2004 Legislature. In King County another concern would be the sale lease back of Tribal owned property and how that might work in light of the new rule. Dennis Pulsipher, Chief Deputy Assessor in Thurston County agreed DOR should administer the exemption, but also expressed concerns over the application date as it is very close to the time levies are set and will definitely impact that process. He also mentioned administrative segregations proposed by the rule that would be an administrative nightmare for assessors, most of whom were eliminating accounts set up for "administrative purposes only". WACO felt DOR in writing their new administrative code, inappropriately intends to transfer this duty to Washington Counties. Another concern is the absence of exclusive

use language. WACO felt there should be requirements in the context of the exemption rule.

DOR expects to issue an emergency rule by the end of September and pledged to take all the comments presented into consideration. They also expect to continue to move through the WAC Rule process, issuing a CR-102 for further comment.

## DOC Holding Hearings on New Rules for Siting Prisons

The state Department of Corrections is proposing new agency administrative rules to integrate the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) into the DOC process for siting prisons. The new rules prescribe procedures for local government and public involvement in state prison-siting activities.

The rule being amended is WAC 137-59, and a pre-proposal statement of inquiry is filed as WSR 03-16-071 in the Washington State Register, available at <http://slc.leg.wa.gov/wsr/register>. Written comments are due by September 20

DOC has scheduled the following public hearings on the rulemaking proposal: 11 a.m., September 21 at the Everett Community Justice Center; 1 p.m. September 29 at the Yakima Community Justice Center; 9 a.m. September 30 at the Spokane Community Justice Center; and 11 a.m. October 1 at the Pierce County Community Justice Center. Complete addresses for these locations are available on the rulemaking notice filed with the Washington State Register.

## Managing and Maximizing Justice Funds

The Bureau of Justice Assistance is planning four regional conferences to provide state, tribal, and local criminal justice policymakers and practitioners with information to improve criminal justice operations, services, and programs. Each conference in the "Managing and Maximizing Justice Funds at the State and Local Level" series will:

- \* Identify current and emerging national issues that affect how formula and block grants are administered;
- \* Examine promising practices and topics of concern;
- \* Provide information and training that helps newly appointed State Administering Agency (SAA) administrators effectively manage federal resources;
- \* Review recent administrative changes that affect the financial and programmatic management of grants; and
- \* Provide opportunities to meet with the BJA staff responsible for program oversight in their respective states.

The conference will also offer participants the unique opportunity to meet directly with BJA program managers—as well as BJA's recently appointed Director, Domingo Herraiz. Given the meeting's focus on resources for enforcement, intervention, and prevention initiatives, state and local law enforcement and court, corrections, and treatment professionals won't want to miss this 2-day, no-cost event.

Conference Dates and Locations:  
South Central Regional Conference  
September 20-22, 2004  
Marriott Denver City Center  
1701 California Street  
Denver, CO 80202  
800-444-2206  
303-297-1300

Northeast Regional Conference  
September 28-30, 2004  
Pittsburgh Marriott City Center  
112 Washington Place  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
800-228-9290  
Southeast Regional Conference

October 4-6, 2004  
Renaissance Tampa International Plaza  
4200 West Columbus Dr.  
Tampa, FL 33607  
800-644-2685  
813-877-9200

West Regional Conference  
November 29-December 1, 2004  
The Benson  
309 SW Broadway  
Portland, OR 97205  
503-295-4120  
888-523-6766

For more details or to register for this valuable training, visit <http://www.ncja.org/bjaregionalmeeting.html>

## Legislative Hearings of Interest

The Legislature has set interim hearings for the week of September 20. A full list is available at [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov) or you may subscribe to be notified electronically. Some hearings of interest include:

House Criminal Justice and Corrections, 10:00 a.m. on Sept. 21, Work session on the Crime Victims Compensation Program and its reimbursement rates for medical providers.

House Judiciary, 8:00 a.m. on Sept. 21, Hearing and work session including discussion of a proposed dependent person hearsay exception and child hearsay statute. Sept. 21, hearing on proposals a specialized water court.

House Juvenile Justice and Family Law, 1:30 p.m. on Sept. 21, Work

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## ***Courts, Public Safety, Law and Justice (continued)***

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session on the examination of defense representation of juvenile court matters.

House State Government, 8:00 a.m. on Sept. 21, Work session on the progress of the building mapping project, Joe Hawe, WASPC.

### **Adoption Study Panel to Meet**

A panel established by HJR 4418 to study adoption issues will meet in public hearing for the first time on September 22 at the Senate Conference Room A/B/C and then on again on October 13, and November 10 at the same time in the same place.

Interested parties are welcome to attend or may forward their

comments to Edith Rice at (360)786-7444 or rice\_ed@leg.wa.gov.

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## ***Environment, Land Use and Resources***

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### **King County and State of Washington Jointly Adopt Regulatory Improvement Steps for King County**

Efforts to make it simpler and faster to obtain development permits while maintaining environmental protections achieved success today in King County.

The state and King County signed an agreement today under which builders, developers and homeowners in the state's most populous county will find it easier to go through the process of acquiring three often-required development permits: hydraulic project approvals, water quality certifications, and stormwater permits.

"Permit applicants in King County will be able to work jointly with state, local and federal

government agencies in obtaining a permit instead of working separate processes with all these agencies," Governor Gary Locke announced this week. "This saves time, and time is money."

King County will now use the same permit application as the state agencies and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for in-water construction. State agencies will have joint pre-project meetings with applicants to work out permit requirements. The county also will bring its standards more in line with the state standards to ease the burden on applicants.

This streamlining will be accomplished through recently signed intergovernmental agreements among the state departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, King County and, in some

cases, the Corps of Engineers. When a developer applies for a hydrology project approval to guard against polluting a nearby stream, the developer will be able to work with all the involved agencies at the same time.

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## **Public Health and Human Services**

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### **Association of County Human Services (ACHS) Meets in Ocean Shores**

WSAC's human services affiliate will be meeting in Ocean Shores from September 15 – 17 at the Shilo Inn. This is the regular bi-monthly meeting of all three sections – Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, and Chemical Dependency.

Wednesday, September 15, the Developmental Disabilities Section will meet. In the morning, reports will be given on 0 – 3, CAC and the legislative arena, and the waiver quality assurance committee. A discussion will be held on basic waiver funding issues. Immediately prior to lunch, there will be discussions and reports on the cross-systems crisis initiative, ADSA's enhanced services facility, direct payments, the transition proviso, the Washington Medicaid Integration Project in Snohomish County and agenda planning for future meetings.

In the afternoon, the Division of Developmental Disabilities will join ACHS and discussions will continue on high school transition, the OSPI interagency agreement, 0 – 3 funding strategy, program agreement workgroup, the basic waiver, APS and incident reporting committee wrap-up, direct payment, the enhanced services facility, Alan & Marr lawsuit day program report. There will also be an update from the Division Director, Linda Rolfe, including the waiver.

On Friday, September 17, the Chemical Dependency Section will meet. The morning includes work group reports such as the prevention committee, the ADATSA Advisory Communication Team, the WSAC/CD legislative package, and group care enhancement.

Immediately before lunch Central Office will provide part of their update to include the 4 – C (contract) report and the rate study. In the afternoon, DASA will continue their update including Access to Recovery (ATR), the community prevention training system, the Criminal Justice Treatment Account, Second Quarterly Report and the Brief Intervention federal grant (WASBIRT).

At this date, the agenda for the Mental Health Section on Thursday, September 16, has not been received due no doubt to Fran Lewis' luxuriating in the wilds of Cornwall, England and Bill Hardy's family commitments back east. We can assume updates will occur on the ongoing status of the nonmedicaid issue, the Joint Legislative/Executive Task Force, data collection for the various work groups especially the residential/inpatient work group, the various budget adjustments both up and down recently received from the Mental Health Division among hot topics.

The Business Meeting will be held mid-day on Thursday as well. See you all there.

# Calendar of Events

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Information</b>
Calendar of Events online – <a href="http://www.wacounties.org">www.wacounties.org</a> For your convenience training and workshops are <b>bolded</b> .			
<b><u>SEPTEMBER 2004</u></b>			
<b>CPO Training *</b>	<b>TBA</b>	<b>TBA</b>	<b>(360) 753-1886</b>
<b>WA Association of Prosecuting Attorneys – Juvenile Training Program</b>	<b>Icicle Inn, Leavenworth</b>	<b>Sept. 12 – 14</b>	<b>(360) 753-2175</b>
Washington State Association of County Assessors (WSACA) Fall Conference	Everett, Snohomish County	Sept. 13 - 16	(425) 388-3446
Washington STATE	Primary Election Day	Sept. 14	<a href="http://www.vote.wa.gov/calendar/">http://www.vote.wa.gov/calendar/</a>
County & Regional Planning Directors/City Planning Directors Joint Conference	Campbell's Resort, Chelan	Sept. 14 – 17	<a href="http://www.geocities.com/wsacrpdc">www.geocities.com/wsacrpdc</a>
WSAC Legislative Steering Committee	DoubleTree Hotel Seattle Airport	Sept. 16	(360) 753-1886
<b>WA Association of Prosecuting Attorneys – Drug Training Program</b>	<b>Icicle Inn, Leavenworth</b>	<b>Sept. 15 – 17</b>	<b>(360) 753-2175</b>
Association of County Human Services	Shilo Inn, Ocean Shores	Sept. 15 - 17	(360) 753-1886
WA Counties Insurance Pool Board	Radisson Hotel, SeaTac	Sept. 16	(360) 586-0466
WA Counties Insurance Fund Board	Radisson Hotel, SeaTac	Sept. 16	(360) 586-0466
Insurance Advisory Committee – 2005 Renewal	Radisson Hotel, SeaTac	Sept. 16	(360) 586-0466
Washington STATE	Resolutions - Last day for filing of special election to be held in conjunction with the general election	Sept. 17	<a href="http://www.vote.wa.gov/calendar/">http://www.vote.wa.gov/calendar/</a>
Washington STATE	Committee Week-end - House and Senate	Sept. 20 - 21	
<b>CPO Training – Human Resources: Understanding the Legal Issues of Managing Public Employees</b>	<b>Lacey Community Center, Lacey</b>	<b>Sept. 22</b>	<b>* See end of this calendar</b>
<b>CPO Training – Financial Management: Understanding county Government Finances &amp; Budgets</b>	<b>Lacey Community Center, Lacey</b>	<b>Sept. 22</b>	<b>* See end of this calendar</b>
<b><u>OCTOBER 2004</u></b>			
WACO/WSAC Joint Fall Conference	Red Lion Hotel at the Park, Spokane	October 4 – 8	(360) 753-7319
WACO Board of Trustees	Red Lion Hotel at the Park, Spokane	October 4	(360) 753-7319
Washington STATE	Election Results - Last day for SOS to certify	October 5	<a href="http://www.vote.wa.gov/calendar/">http://www.vote.wa.gov/calendar/</a>
WSAC Board of Directors	Red Lion Hotel at the Park, Spokane	October 5	(360) 753-1886

## ***Calendar of Events (continued)***

WSAC Eastern District Meeting	Red Lion Hotel at the Park, Spokane	October 6	(360) 753-1886
WSAC Western District Meeting	Red Lion Hotel at the Park, Spokane	October 6	(360) 753-1886
WACO Board of Trustees	Red Lion Hotel at the Park, Spokane	October 8	(360) 753-7319
ACE Committee (Payroll & HR)	Radisson Hotel, SeaTac	October 13	(360) 586-0466
EMC Task Force	WA Counties Bldg, Olympia	October 14	(360) 753-1886
<b>Mass Fatalities Incident Response Planning**</b>	Vancouver, Washington	October 18-22	(866) 623-6634

\* Info and registration on all Certified Public Official (CPO) Training - <http://www.wacounties.org/CPO/Course%20Calendar.htm>

\*\* A special Tuition-Free Course offered by the National Mass Fatalities Institute in partnership with the Clark County Medical Examiner's Office

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## Attachments

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### Rising poverty rate hits home

*Region leads national average as more Americans slip into poverty, lose health insurance*

[Virginia de Leon](#)

</news/bylines.asp?bylinename=Virginia de Leon>

August 27, 2004, *Spokesman-Review*

For 10 days, home was the cramped confines of a 1984 Volvo station wagon, parked after hours in the lot of Lincoln Heights Shopping Center. When they moved from Portland to Spokane in June, Erin Winternheimer and her two kids spent her last paycheck on a motel room in Airway Heights.

When the money ran out after a week, they ended up living in their car, eating food that didn't need to be cooked, taking turns sleeping in the back seat. "How did I get here?" Winternheimer asked herself, afraid to look her children in the eye. "How could this happen to us?" Since then, the 31-year-old has found a job and a temporary home for her family at Anna Ogden Hall, a shelter for women and children. Her story, however, is one example of the poverty affecting thousands of families throughout Spokane County and Idaho, and millions more across the nation.

According to statistics released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate in this country has grown for the third year in a row. In 2003, 35.9 million Americans lived in poverty – 1.3 million more than the previous year. The poverty rate among children rose by nearly 1 percentage point in a year, leaving nearly 13 million kids below the poverty line. Census figures also show that 45 million people didn't have health insurance coverage, an

increase of nearly half a percentage point since 2002.

In Spokane County, the percentage of people living below the poverty level has increased steadily since 2000 – from 13.3 percent three years ago to 15.9 percent last year. The census data show that nearly 17 percent of children in Spokane County were considered poor. Statewide, the percentage was slightly higher for children under the age of 5. And in Idaho, poverty affected 17.6 percent of all kids in 2003.

"The numbers are just astonishing," said Linda Stone, the Eastern Washington director for Children's Alliance. As an advocate for kids, Stone said she worries about the availability of health care, child care subsidies and other assistance for families in dire need. "There has always been a lot of conversation in Spokane about poverty, but it doesn't seem to change the reality here," she said. Like other communities across the country, Spokane has continually struggled to find ways "to support families and to make sure kids are safe, educated and well-nourished."

The rising poverty level in Spokane County is reflected in the growing need for services at area nonprofits. Employees at the Union Gospel Mission, for instance, are seeing more families than ever before. Traditionally, most of the people seeking help from the mission are men, although it also provides meals for women and children. In recent months, however, Union Gospel Mission is drawing a larger number of families and people who are homeless and unemployed for the first time in their lives, according to Kari Reese, the mission's public

relations coordinator.

In Idaho, the sharp increase in child poverty has been evident in growing caseloads for food stamps, Medicaid and emergency assistance. "Our data shows that we are serving more children," said Idaho Health and Welfare spokesman Tom Shanahan. "Families in general are not doing quite as well as they were. They may have lost a little bit of ground." In 2001, Idaho's Medicaid program, which provides health coverage for the poor and disabled, was covering 93,000 children. Last month, the number hit 114,000. The number of kids on food stamps also ballooned. In June of 2001, there were 31,000 Idaho children on food stamps; in June 2004 that had swelled to 49,000. "Basically we are seeing a lot more demand for services for children," Shanahan said. "The economy has had just as big an impact on them. When it impacts a family, it impacts the children."

Additional census data released Thursday point to other factors that inevitably affect the growing poverty levels in the area. Although the 2003 median household income in Washington State was \$46,868, the median for Spokane County was \$36,446. Among communities with populations of 250,000 or more, Spokane County ranked 211th out of 220 counties, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Meanwhile, the median income for all of Idaho was \$39,492. Figures were not available for Kootenai County, but the poverty rate for the entire state in 2003 was 13.8 percent. That figure was unchanged from 2002 but up significantly from 2001. While Washington was one of the states with higher percentages of people over 25 with bachelor's degrees at

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## Attachments (Continued)

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30.2 percent, less than 26 percent of Spokane County residents of the same age graduated from a four-year college or university. In Idaho, only 24 percent of adults have bachelor's degrees.

Policy-makers need to understand that Spokane County and Eastern Washington have a completely different set of circumstances compared with the West Side, Stone said. Washington State's median household income is boosted by the fact that the median income in King County is \$56,881. Residents of that county are also better educated. More than 42 percent of King County's population over 25 has bachelor's degrees, and Seattle is the nation's best-educated city with more than half of the adults holding college degrees. The reality on this side of the state is far different, said Stone.

While many agencies and people are working hard to help those in need, the community sometimes feels overwhelmed in its efforts to fight poverty, she said. As a culture, there is still a tendency to blame those who are suffering, Stone said. "There's something about our culture that says if you're not making it, it's your fault. That makes it hard to come up with solutions that help the whole family."

Timi Brower, administrative assistant at Anna Ogden Hall, pointed out that most of the women who end up living there never chose to be poor. Although people sometimes make mistakes, she said, their situations were often the result of bad luck and, sometimes, bad relationships. Like most mothers, Winternheimer never wanted to subject her children to life in a car. But she ultimately had no choice, she

said. The house they were renting in Portland was being torn down and they had no place to go. She had bad credit. So they drove to Spokane, where they had lived before, hoping to find work. While living out of their car, they ate mostly cereal and sandwiches, food that they were able to keep in a small cooler. They stayed at Underhill Park and other public parks until they closed at 11 p.m. Then, she'd park the car in the empty lot at Lincoln Heights. The kids – 10-year-old Crystal and 8-year-old Brian, – would take turns napping in the back of the car. Winternheimer stayed in the driver's seat and hardly slept during those 10 days. She called a number of shelters in town and waited patiently for an opening.

One night, a security guard who told her to move her car accused her of abusing her children, she said. "Being homeless isn't child abuse," she told him before driving off. "We've hit hard times. We're not bad people. We're just trying to get our lives back together." Since she moved to Anna Ogden Hall in late June, Winternheimer has found a job as a night auditor at a hotel. Her kids are registered to attend classes at Franklin Elementary. In the fall, she'll pursue an associate's degree at Spokane Falls Community College. "We're responding to people in time of crisis not by just helping them out with a hot meal and a place to stay," said Reese. "We help them find what they're good at so they can get a job and so they can find their dream."

### Number of Poor in Area Soars

August 27, 2004

by Charlene Koski, *Yakima Herald-Republic*

Yakima County's poverty rate continues to soar above the state's and nation's, according to a survey released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau. About 21 percent of the county's 223,000 residents, including about 21,000 children, lived below the poverty level — or \$18,850 for a family of four — at some point during 2003, according to the American Community Survey. That's slightly higher than last year's rate of 20 percent, significantly higher than the national rate of 12.7 percent and nearly double the state's rate of 11 percent.

The Census Bureau also released its annual estimate of how many people in the country lack health insurance. Washington's rate increased to 14.8 percent, up from 13.7 percent in 2002. The national rate was 15.6 percent, up from 15.2 percent in 2002. The Census report didn't include county rates for the uninsured, but the state Office of the Insurance Commissioner estimates about 25,000 people lack health insurance in Yakima County.

Annette Rodriguez, outreach coordinator for Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, helps low-income Yakima County residents navigate the state's health care system. She knows many people slip through the cracks — especially those in working families who make too much to qualify for state assistance but too little to pay for private coverage. But she's also seen many families get the help they need.

Anabell Zamudio, a married mother of two, is one of Rodriguez's clients. Both of Zamudio's children receive medical coupons from the state, but Zamudio and her husband, an auto mechanic, have gone without. Zamudio, who lives in

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## Attachments (Continued)

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Yakima, is worried about not having coverage. She's had stomach pains lately and her husband has a rash on his arm, but neither has gone to the doctor. Even the state's Basic Health Plan, which costs \$22.50 per month per person, and \$15 co-pays for office visits, seems out of reach. Rodriguez thinks she may be able to find a sponsor to help the Zamudios pay for the state plan. Even if she does, though, it will likely take up to four months for the family to start receiving benefits.

There are good insurance options for the extremely poor, although the wait to use them can be long, Rodriguez said. It's the working poor who have the hardest time finding coverage. According to the state Insurance Commissioner, 75 percent of the state's uninsured are employed. "There are a lot of families going without insurance," Rodriguez said.

There was some good news in Thursday's data. For example, the number of children statewide in Washington who lack insurance decreased from 14.4 percent to 13.3 percent. But representatives of the Children's Alliance, a statewide children's advocacy group, believe those figures don't reflect the true state of Washington's uninsured and impoverished, and that a state report due out later this year will give a more accurate assessment. The group believes legislative cuts made last year weren't reflected in the 2003 Census information but will show up in the 2004 Washington State Population Survey, a statewide survey taken every two years.

Liz Arjun, health policy associate for the alliance, said the "hassle factor" is likely the biggest obstacle for people trying to use government

insurance programs. "By requiring more frequent and detailed information, it just becomes a lot for them," she said. Additional Census information on Yakima County and Washington State is available at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

Amounts hospitals in Yakima County paid in 2003 to provide "charity care," or hospital care given to patients who could not pay. The private insurance system, and those who use it, absorbs the bulk of charity care expenses.

Prosser Memorial Hospital: \$109,880

Sunnyside Community Hospital:  
\$268,226

Toppenish Community Hospital:  
\$301,500

Yakima Regional Medical and  
Cardiac Center: \$1.1 million

Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital:  
\$1.3 million

Source: Office of the Insurance  
Commissioner