



Skagit County NEWS DIGEST

Law & Justice Council hears report regarding jail alternative programs

On any given day there are about four dozen individuals participating in alternative programs after sentencing for crimes committed in Skagit County.

In a February 11 report to members of the Skagit County Law & Justice Council, Sheriff's Office Sergeant Ron Coakley noted a local commitment to jail alternatives ranging from community service to electronic home monitoring.

Alternative programs, Coakley emphasized, are generally less expensive than full-time incarceration. And at a time when the jail is routinely populated at capacity, such programs provide welcome options to the courts.

"Our community service program is one of the most successful in the state," said Coakley. "Our partnerships with area cities and other organizations have been very productive. We have a 95 percent success rate once we get these low-risk offenders in a program."

Examples of alternative programming include:

- ❑ Community service, which allows a sentenced individual to participate in a work program with law enforcement partners including SKAT (public transportation), parks and public works departments in the County and cities.

- ❑ Work release, in which case

inmates are housed at the jail but are given the opportunity to leave for work and/or school.

- ❑ Electronic home monitoring, which involves an "ankle bracelet" and restricts sentenced individuals to their homes.

- ❑ "One Day Offender Program," offered several days each year to first time DUI offenders. This alternative involves a day and night at the Skagit County Fairgrounds, during which time offenders can serve their one-day sentence, undergo an alcohol/drug assessment and attend a mandatory eight-hour alcohol/drug class.

- ❑ Residential substance abuse treatment, an in-house program largely funded through a federal grant. Skagit

is the only county in the state currently receiving federal grant funding for a jail inpatient substance abuse treatment program.

Sergeant Coakley noted that every person who has been sentenced in Skagit County goes through a comprehensive risk assessment before consideration of an alternative program over straight jail time. He and several other Council members emphasized the vital role performed by jail staff in making the alternative program a success.

County Commissioner Ron Wesen invited Coakley to make an alternative programs presentation to the Board of Commissioners so area residents could see it on Skagit21 Television.



Sheriff's Office Sergeant Ron Coakley (center) makes a jail alternative programs presentation to members of the Skagit County Law & Justice Council.