

PRESS RELEASE

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**State Honors Bill Hobson with Affordable Housing Lifetime Achievement Award**

Tacoma, Wash. — On Oct. 20, William G. “Bill” Hobson was honored with the 2010 *Margaret M. Sevy Affordable Housing Lifetime Achievement Award* presented before an audience of 350 colleagues by the Washington State Housing Finance Commission citing Bill Hobson’s sustained work and exceptional contribution, inspirational vision, and unwavering commitment to affordable housing in Washington.

In addition to its highest honor, the Commission presented six *Friend of Housing Awards* to three individuals and two organizations, including the Downtown Emergency Service Center, or DESC, where Hobson works.

The 17th annual *Friend of Housing Awards Reception and Ceremony* took place October 20 at the Hotel Murano in Tacoma as part of the *Housing Washington 2010* conference on affordable housing.

“Bill Hobson has work with unwavering commitment to the homeless and very low-income clients he serves for more than 25 years,” said Kim Herman, executive director of the Commission. “His contribution to end homelessness in Seattle has been enormous, and we delighted to honor him with a lifetime achievement award.”

Background

In 1982, Hobson resigned from his position as Chair of the Political Science Department at the University of Puget Sound to pursue social justice and the issues affecting under-privileged people around the world.

After traveling extensively through Latin America for two years, he returned to Seattle and joined the staff of DESC as an entry-level shelter counselor in order to learn first hand the issues related to homelessness. At that time, DESC was five years old and one of Seattle's largest emergency shelters.

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During the late 1970s the number of homeless people increased rapidly and DESC was formed to provide an emergency response to homeless men and women struggling with serious disabilities such as mental illness, chemical dependency, physical disabilities, development disabilities and other significant illnesses and vulnerabilities.

When Hobson became the agency's executive director in 1988, it was his assertion that an emergency response alone was insufficient. Survival services were definitely the first step, but as he watched the same people return after stays in jail, Harborview Medical Center, or Western State Psychiatric Hospital, he knew a more comprehensive approach was needed to break that cycle.

Under Hobson's stewardship, DESC added services, including comprehensive clinical programs, street outreach, case management, crisis respite and state-licensed chemical dependency treatment. They also developed highly successful supportive housing programs for the most disabled and difficult-to-house individuals in Seattle.

Hobson never considered changing his career path again. He fully dedicated himself to achieving the highest goals for his clients, colleagues and community. He made sure that homeless men and women with major mental illnesses and addictions stayed in the forefront of the community's consciousness.

He effectively promoted the idea that assisting adults suffering from chronic and persistent mental illness or chronic inebriation can be done in ways that amount to smart public policy. His agency has demonstrated that—with intensive support services—disabled, marginalized and chronically homeless people can stabilize, obtain and successfully maintain housing, and become independent and involved members of the community.

DESC invented and developed the 1811 Eastlake project, named after its location, which houses 75 formerly homeless alcoholics, mostly at public expense. A 2006 released study found that 1811 Eastlake improved residents' lives and it actually saved Seattle more than \$2 million a year.

As former Seattle City Council member Peter Steinbruck commented after a council vote to site a homeless service center in a DESC building, "I doubt there's another city in the U.S. that demonstrates a stronger commitment to the dire needs and dignity of homeless people." Hobson has embodied that commitment in his life's work.

The Margaret M. Sevy Affordable Housing Lifetime Achievement Award

The award is named after Margaret M. Sevy, a long-time advocate for affordable housing, who was committed to strengthening communities and the quality of life for people in need of affordable housing. Margaret was employed with the Commission for more than 15 years before she died in 2002. Margaret was respected for her 'no nonsense' attitude, her personal integrity and her concern for others. She approached challenges with creativity and ingenuity.

Washington State Housing Finance Commission

Washington State Housing Finance Commission is a publicly accountable, self-supporting agency dedicated to increasing housing access and affordability and to expanding the availability of quality community services for Washington state residents.

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