

Public defender's office praised on 10th anniversary

by LARRY BROWN
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The Seattle-King County public defender's office has benefited all citizens, not just indigents, Chief Justice Robert F. Utter of the State Supreme Court said last night at an anniversary dinner.

"Thank you for your vigilance in the past 10 years," Justice Utter told more than 230 lawyers and guests.

Justice Utter said the public defender's office is deserving of its recognition as one of the top three programs in the nation.

Charles E. Silberman, a journalist who turned a Ford Foundation-funded study into a book, "Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice," wrote that Seattle can serve as a benchmark for the nation in

the effort to provide high-quality representation to indigent defendants.

Justice Utter had praise for lawyers from the office who have brought legal challenges and tests to clarify the law in such areas as capital punishment and aiding and abetting crimes. He said the appellate division of the office has made sure that individual rights are protected at each step of the system.

He also recognized the success of the office in legislative areas, including work on the new juvenile code.

Robert C. Boruchowitz, the public defender, said The Defender Association represents more than half of the accused persons in King County who are charged with crimes or face civil commit-

ment proceedings and are unable to afford private lawyers.

From 1969, when there were five staff persons, including three lawyers, the office has grown to a staff of 81, including 45 lawyers, handling more than 10,000 cases a year in city, county and state courts, Boruchowitz said.

John Darrah, the first public defender, now a Seattle Municipal Court judge, traced the growth from the time Model Cities funding was available only to represent indigents charged with misdemeanors in Municipal Court.

Judge Darrah said lawyers from the office have sued judges seven times to get them to follow the law, and have won each lawsuit.

John Junker, a professor at the University of Washington School of Law, and a major developer of

the office, praised the many past and present lawyers who have helped "tens of thousands of poor people, and stood by their side at times when they needed it."

Boruchowitz announced the creation of the Sarah Lytle Memorial Internship Program. Ms. Lytle, who was a lawyer in the office for five years, died earlier this

year. Money has been placed in an account, with the interest to be used each year to support an intern to work in the public defender's office during summer months.