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Assessor Munks puts campaign aide on payroll

By **WHITNEY PIPKIN** Staff Writer

After three months of volunteer work for the Skagit County Assessor's Office, 70-year-old Ann Marie Humphreys is now drawing a county paycheck for a part-time job.

The fact she is also the campaign manager for Assessor Don Munks has raised some eyebrows, although both Humphreys and Munks insist no campaign work is being done in the office.

Munks, a Republican who is up for re-election in November, said he understands how it might appear for him to give his campaign manager a job. But, he said, there was a need in the office and Humphreys stepped forward to fill it.

Munks had to negotiate with the union to approve Humphreys' initial volunteer position. Volunteer work is permitted as long as it doesn't take work away from those in the union, said Billie Kadrmas, director of human resources and risk management for the county.

After a couple more staff members retired this summer, there was money available to hire Humphreys as a temporary, part-time employee starting Sept. 1. County policy allows temporary hiring, even in the midst of employee cutbacks elsewhere, if the position does not exceed five months and there is funding to support it.

Steve Omdal, who's running as a Democrat against Munks, said he finds the hiring "a bit inappropriate."

"Any time you're in the public eye, you have to be very cognizant of the fact that there shouldn't be favoritism and you're working for all people," said Omdal, who is a commissioner for Fire District 6.

Humphreys said she didn't expect to be hired and was simply volunteering to "contribute to the community." She said she does absolutely no campaign work during her 20 hours a week in the Assessor's Office. She's paid around \$13 an hour for her work there.

"I turn my hat around and I use my professionalism and I go back to work like I did years ago," she said.

Humphreys and Munks both live in Anacortes and carpool to the office on days they both work.

Munks said Humphreys fit right in working at the front desk and has been well received by employees and the public. She answers phones and files paperwork for employees who've become otherwise bogged down with their workloads.

The office staff consists of 18 employees, mostly appraisers, compared to 26 in 2008, Munks said. In the past year, layoffs and attrition have forced changes in how the office is run.

After Munks came on board a year ago, the office began appraising properties on a six-year cycle instead of every four years to lessen appraisers' workloads.

Changes to staffing levels have led to some reorganization and left some tasks undone. Humphreys' contract to meet those additional needs concludes at the end this year.

"The purpose is to have somebody work for that time on a part-time basis to see if it is something that needs to be hired full time or that we don't need anymore," Munks said.

Some union contracts require that departments offer laid-off employees their old jobs if they become open again, Kadrmas said.

Humphreys is not necessarily replacing another employee, Munks said, but is handling duties that have fallen through the cracks due to reorganization.

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