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State lauds innovative employees  
 Awards recognize upgrades in service, savings

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KATIE WARD THE OLYMPIAN Money-saving suggestions from several state employees saved the state's taxpayers more than \$565,000 last year, Secretary of State Sam Reed said Friday.

One employee found two state departments were mailing the same paperwork to business owners. Another found a way for some disabled people to qualify for federal instead of state benefits. A third wrote a computer program that eliminated hours of work.

Reed and State Auditor Brian Sonntag honored those employees and others Friday at an Innovation in State Government Awards ceremony at the Department of Labor and Industries.

Fifteen individuals were recognized for their suggestions that saved money, increased efficiency or improved work processes.

Suggestions with the highest impacts:

-**Tim Feist**, Department of Social and Health Services warehouse supervisor, proposed that food-handling training be incorporated in the annual training for caregivers at Western State Hospital who might serve foods to patients. Feist's suggestion, expected to be implemented this month, will improve patient care by reducing the risk of infection, officials said.

-**Alex Sellman**, an engineer at the Department of Transportation, wrote a computer program that increases the speed at which information needed by surveyors is processed.

"The section process would take hours, and my frustration level led to writing it," Sellman said. The same amount of work now takes seconds with his program.

-**Hans Dettling**, Office of the Secretary of State, realized that duplicate business application packets were mailed to business owners from both the Department of Licensing and the Department of Transportation. The documents

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are now available online, saving \$47,921.

**-Mike Carlson**, senior telecommunications electronics specialist at Washington State Patrol, suggested his department purchase surplus or used laptop computers and parts for police cars through auction Web sites rather than making costly repairs or ordering expensive new parts. His suggestion saved the state \$33,705 last year.

"The repair costs were astronomical," Carlson said. "The parts were a 10th of the price to buy a new computer on eBay."

**-Loren Gomez**, a Department of Social and Health Services employee, suggested that people older than 40 with developmental disabilities be allowed to qualify for Social Security and Medicare benefits. The idea saved the state \$50,000 in the first year.

**-Clare Buckingham**, another DSHS employee, suggested a health care provider manual be made available online. The savings: \$34,500 in the first year.

**-Georgia Blair**, a Department of Licensing employee, found a way to make processing driving under the influence reports more efficient. Previously the department submitted written requests for reports to arresting officers, which were then mailed to the department. Now everything is done electronically. The state expects to save \$34,289 the first year.

The ceremony was sponsored by the Productivity Board, which helps implement ideas suggested by state employees.

The Productivity Board was created during a budget crisis in 1982 and has processed suggestions from more than 22,000 individuals.

Each year, such individuals are awarded for their contributions.

State employees can submit ideas online through the Secretary of State Web site, <http://www.secstate.wa.gov/>.

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