

BIOGRAPHY OF BILL ELFO
SHERIFF, WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON
By Linda Nathan

SHORT VERSION

The days of Matt Dillon and Dodge City are gone forever. Today's sheriff must be law enforcer, leader and community model, administrator and civil servant, creative strategist, educator and emergency specialist—with fingers in every pie from animal control to international trade. Such a man recently became Sheriff of Whatcom County. Bill Elfo stepped into the position vacated by Dale Brandland in January 2003 with impressive credentials and enthusiastically recommended by local leaders. Blaine City Manager Gary Tomsic said Elfo was “the finest police chief or sheriff he had worked with in 30 years as a city administrator.” Elfo, who first became a police officer in 1974, came to Blaine as its police chief in 1996. “I have been a supervisor or a commander of virtually every facet of law enforcement,” he said. “I have a passion for this work.” Highly trained, community oriented and creative, at age 47 Sheriff Elfo has a striking record of accomplishments, including over 2,300 hours in training courses. He has a Master's in Criminal Justice (4.0 GPA), a J.D., was a Police Academy instructor, and was the Police Commander/Captain of the Pompano Beach Police Department in Florida over 300+ employees. In 2000, he was admitted to the Washington State Bar. He also is known for coming right alongside his people, whether it's on the streets or in personal matters. As the new sheriff, Elfo's first priority is improving county jail facilities, a constant source of frustration during his time as Blaine's chief. A second priority will be streamlining the department. Elfo also works closely with his wife Zulma, a former policewoman. They have two children, Billy (12), who was adopted from Russia, and Elijah (8), and attend St. Anne's Catholic Church in Blaine.

LONG VERSION

The days of Matt Dillon and Dodge City are gone forever. Today's sheriff must be law enforcer, leader and community model, administrator and civil servant, creative strategist, educator and emergency specialist—with fingers in every pie from animal control to subsidized housing and international trade.

Such a man recently became Sheriff of Whatcom County.

Bill Elfo stepped into the position vacated by Dale Brandland in January 2003 enthusiastically recommended and with impressive credentials. “He seemed to us a very safe choice,” said County Council member Seth Fleetwood. Blaine City Manager Gary Tomsic sent a glowing recommendation to the Council, saying Elfo was going to be a “great sheriff” and that he was the finest police chief or sheriff he had worked with in 30 years as a city administrator. And Jon Sitkin, Blaine City Attorney, called Chief Elfo an excellent administrator and a tremendous law enforcement advocate.

Elfo first became a police officer in 1974 and came to Blaine as its police chief in 1996. "I have been a supervisor or a commander of virtually every facet of law enforcement," he said. "I have a passion for this work." Highly trained, community oriented and creative, at age 47 Sheriff Elfo has a striking record of unusual accomplishments. A few highlights include:

- Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police, Blaine (1996-2003)
- Completed the prestigious FBI Northwest Command College
- Program Chair and Faculty/Advisory Board Member, Whatcom Community College Administration of Justice and Paralegal Program
- Established a law enforcement Explorer Post, providing hundreds of hours of service opportunities for local youth
- Juris Doctorate, 1988
- Master of Science in Criminal Justice (4.0 GPA)
- Police Commander/Captain, Pompano Beach Police Department, Florida, where he served as police legal advisor and close advisor to the police chief on all operational and administrative matters for 300+ employees serving an ethnically diverse community of over 80,000
- Served on Florida's Marine Patrol
- Served with mounted police on horses
- Worked against vice in the streets, while going to school for his degree
- Police Academy Instructor
- A sergeant at age 25 of a very large police department with 300+ people

Elfo has completed over 2,300 hours in training courses in the area of public management, personnel administration, law, criminal investigation and law enforcement operations. In 2000, he added to his credentials yet again by being admitted to the Washington State Bar. At the same time, he is known for coming right alongside his men and women, whether it's helping to direct traffic in emergencies or personal support in difficult circumstances.

As the new sheriff, Elfo's first priority is improving county jail facilities, a constant source of frustration during his time as Blaine's chief. "The jail's going to be a big part of this job, a top priority," he said. A second priority will be streamlining the department.

However, Sheriff Elfo not only brings extraordinary training and experience to the position he currently fills; he brings an additional benefit unusual for a modern sheriff: his wife is an enthusiastic and trained member of his team. Zulma and Bill met at the Police Academy in Florida, where she was a student in a class he was teaching. As a professional policewoman who specialized in investigating insurance fraud, Zulma Elfo is already at work forming a police wives' club among the department's members to boost morale and provide instant support for those lonely and difficult times police family members know so well. Together they bring 39 combined years of training and experience to police work.

The Elfos and their two sons, Billy (12) and Elijah (8), love Whatcom County. As Zulma enthusiastically says, "We can raise our family far away from a high crime rate and big city overcrowding." The highlight of their marriage of 15 years was a trip to Russia near Volgrad to

adopt Billy 10 years ago. Billy, who was 2-1/2 at the time, couldn't walk, and the Russian orphanage director ruled that he was too handicapped to be adopted out. "We prayed and prayed," says Zulma, "and a miracle happened." The next day the director decided we could take him if we gave him (the director) our large vinyl suitcase! Apparently such items are very rare in Russia. We jumped at the opportunity and brought Billy home in 1993. At age 3 he had surgery, and today he is a happy, healthy child who plays football, basketball and all the sports. He also wants to be a doctor so he can help others. In 1994, Zulma discovered she was pregnant with Elijah, who is 8 today. The family attends St. Anne's Catholic Church in Blaine.

But Zulma isn't just enthusiastic about being a team member of the Sheriff's Department. She's even more enthusiastic about her husband's role in his family. "He makes us feel that, no matter how important his position is, we come first. He calls during the day to make sure we're okay. We feel it. That's just who he is. He loves the challenges, something different every day. He wouldn't trade what he's doing."

The Elfos were vacationing in New York City just 3 weeks before Sept 11, 2001, and so they have an unusually keen appreciation of what the terrorist attack has wrought upon America. As Sheriff, Bill attends all of the meetings spearheaded by the federal government concerning Homeland Security and is prepared to network as emergencies arise.

Elfo said. "I relish the opportunity to have the highest law enforcement position in the county and to continue serving its citizens." Anyone can be a supervisor, but it takes the culmination of training, experience, and passion and wisdom to make a strong leader. As such a leader, Chief Elfo is already bringing the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office into the future.