

Check presentations are usually ho-hum events, but the one Thursday at the Washington County Sheriff's Department was a win-win-win, according to United States Attorney Joseph H. Hogsett.

Nearly \$30,000 that was seized in a drug arrest more than two years ago, was split three ways among local agencies. The Washington County Sheriff's Department, the prosecutor's office and the Indiana State Police will each receive a little more than \$9,000 to help fight the drug war.

"I see this as a win-win-win situation," Hogsett said. "Drug money is taken from the people who deal. So you are depriving them of their ill-gotten gains of their drug trafficking. That's a win. The money is ultimately returned to local law enforcement, who take the money and use it for further drug-related prosecution and enforcement. That's the second win. The third win is that the tax payers aren't paying for it. The drug dealers are in essence subsidizing greater law enforcement in Washington County."

On January 7, 2010, members of the Washington County Drug Task Force executed a search warrant on a home in Borden as part of an investigation into cocaine trafficking in the Washington County area. In the course of that search and the subsequent prosecution, more than \$50,000 was seized.

There was a claim on the \$50,000 and a court ruled that all but \$20,000 was used in the trafficking of cocaine, thus turning \$30,000 over to local agencies.

". . . We will now take this money that was used for bad purposes and use it for good," said Prosecutor Dustin Houchin.

Hogsett said it's unusual that people associated with dealing drugs puts in a claim for the money that is seized.

. "Candidly, in most drug seizures, when you are seizing cash, it's rather unusual that the cash is contested," he said. "When you get drug money, everyone has a right to make a legitimate claim to that money, a lot of the drug dealers don't make a claim. In this case there was a claim, and the court ruled that the other \$20,000 could legitimately be considered non-drug related.

"More often than not, money seized is turned around in six to nine months, but because this matter was contested, it took two years," he said.

Combs said the claim was filed by a construction company and if not for the work of Hogsett's office, it would have been difficult to obtain.

"With the federal government's assistance we've been going on with our daily business, (Prosecutor) Dustin (Houchin) has been doing what he has to do and they carried the ball forward for us in this case," Combs said.

Houchin said the money will be used for things like covert equipment, money for controlled drug buys and things of that nature.

"The only thing this money is used for is drug enforcement," he said. "We don't use it for other parts of the law, but having it does free up resources that we might use in other areas. I think it's a deterrent, to take someone's money from this drug activity. It shuts down the whole operation. Then it allows us to take that money that was used for bad and turn it around to be used for

good productive uses.

'The forfeitures that we've gotten have made a difference in our fight against drugs.'

Combs, Houchin and Hogsett all praised the cooperation of all three entities.

Hogsett was especially complimentary of the work done on the local level.

"The level of cooperation we have enjoyed with the Sheriff and the prosecutor's office in Washington is probably as good as we have with any county in the state," he said. ". . . We probably have more interaction, as a federal prosecutor's office, on more cases on a per-capita basis with Washington County than any other county in the state. That speaks volumes about the elected leadership in the county.

"While we can play a helpful and supportive role, we are only as good, we are only as capable, we are only as effective as federal law enforcement officials as the local law enforcement leadership is."

Combs said the same can be said for Hogsett's office. He said the U.S. Attorney has been a valuable asset.

"Every time that we have called for help, not only from (Hogsett's) offices, but also the agencies under his office, we've gotten nothing but cooperation," Combs said. "It's great to get back this money, because it assists us in our drug fight, but our drug fight is not just against drugs, because the same people who are dealing in drugs, are stealing our people blind."