



FROM THE OFFICE OF
SUMMIT COUNTY PROSECUTOR
SHERRI BEVAN WALSH

**A MESSAGE FROM PROSECUTOR WALSH
BRIGHTER DAYS AHEAD!**

It's 2021! We made it! It hasn't been easy as we approach the one year mark of when Coronavirus upended our daily lives. We are all facing challenges and struggling to make it.

I can tell you things will be better. I have personally gone through many hardships and know there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I even contracted COVID-19! Recovery was not easy and I am still feeling the effects of the virus. However, I am better and thankful I survived.

Those struggles give me strength to continue fighting for you and Summit County.

The Coronavirus is making that fight more difficult than ever before. The pandemic has delayed many court proceedings, meaning victims have to wait even longer to get justice. My victim advocates remain in constant contact with victims and their families. However, the delay caused by the pandemic can cause greater stress.

I want to assure you that my office will do everything we can to assist victims and fight for their rights. Just know that justice delayed is not justice denied.

I am also concerned that, as we approach one year of living with the Coronavirus pandemic, crime victims might be less likely to report what happened. I do urge everyone, if you are a victim of a crime, please report it. Not only can it bring you justice, but it can also potentially prevent additional crimes from being committed.



Summit County has several agencies to assist victims of crime:

**Summit County Victim Assistance
24-hour hotline—330.376.0040**

**Summit County Battered Women's Shelter
hotline—330.374.1111**

**Rape Crisis Center of Summit & Medina Counties
hotline—330.434.7273**



One area we have seen a big jump in is the number of homicides throughout Summit County. My office currently has 73 open homicide cases. In 2020, Akron saw 50 homicides, the most murders the city has seen in the past decade.

My office continuously re-evaluates how we work with local law enforcement to hold people accountable as well as find solutions in order to reverse those numbers. In 2021 my office is adding three prosecutors who will spend a majority of their time reviewing and prosecuting crimes involving gun violence in our community. They will also track gun violence across the country to see what more we can do. Our mission is to make our community a better and safer place for families and crime victims as we seek truth and justice for all.

One of the best ways to stop violence in your community is to speak out if you see something or know something. Law enforcement needs your help to fight crime.

Brighter days are ahead. We cannot lose hope and must push for a better future. Take a moment to help your neighbor.

And as always, stay safe.

Sherri B. Walsh



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IN THE COMMUNITY

COVID-19 VACCINE SCAMS!

The COVID-19 vaccine is slowly making its way throughout Summit County and surrounding areas.

Getting vaccinated is vital in helping stop the spread of this dangerous and potentially deadly disease. However, criminals are now using this as an opportunity to steal your identity and your money.



Here are signs of a potential vaccine scam:

- You are asked to pay to get your name on a list to get the vaccine.
- You are asked to pay to get the vaccine early.
- Callers offering to sell or ship doses of the vaccine directly to you.
- No legitimate vaccine distribution location will ask for your Social Security Number, bank account, or credit card number.

For more information on Summit County's plan to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine, head to <https://www.scph.org/>. Summit County Public Health has also set up a registry for people to receive information on how to schedule an appointment for the vaccine. That website is <https://www.scph.org/covid/vaccine>.

You can also call Summit County Public Health at 330.926.5795.

Don't Fall for a COVID-19 Vaccine Scam

- You cannot pay to be put on a vaccine list.
- You cannot pay to get early access to the vaccine.
- No health care worker or insurance company employee should request personal information, like your Social Security number or bank account, to schedule you for the vaccine.
- Double-check any "too-good-to-be-true" news or claims.

When in doubt, contact your physician, the health department or the ODH COVID-19 Call Center.

SCPH: 330-926-5795
ODH COVID-19 Call Center: 1-833-427-5634



2020 BY THE NUMBERS:

- 2,717 TOTAL DEFENDANTS
- 2,559 FOUND GUILTY OR PLED GUILTY
- 94% CONVICTION RATE
- 14 TRIALS
- 73 OPEN HOMICIDE CASES

ZOOM MEETING SAFETY!

For most of us, our lives are completely different than they were a year ago. Things which seemed unlikely are now commonplace, as we approach one year of living with the Coronavirus.

For instance, in-person meetings have been replaced with some sort of video conferencing. The Summit County Prosecutor's Office conducts most court hearings through video conferencing.

We also want to make sure you are safe while meeting with others utilizing programs like Zoom or Microsoft Meet.

The phrase "Zoom-bombing" has popped up. That's where someone "breaks" into your Zoom meeting and shares obscene content or makes derogatory statements. But you can take basic precautions to prevent these embarrassing, and potentially dangerous, situations.

- Use a Meeting Password
- Use Waiting Rooms
- Lock Meetings
- If Someone Uninvited Joins Meeting—Have Host Remove Them
- Don't Share Meeting Link on Social Media





AVERY'S CORNER

EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

I hope everyone is having a great start to the new year. I know it's been tough. I miss you all. We can get through this together.

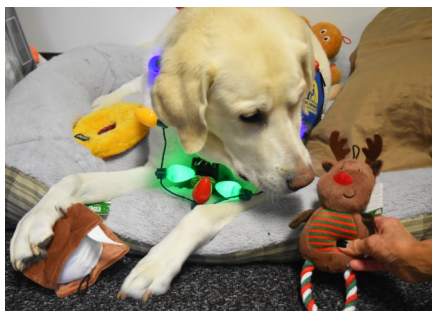
That's why I love meeting with my new hooman friends. I recently got to meet a new friend. She survived after having some bad things happen to her.



I sat with her for a while and helped her. She was really nice and I'm glad I was able to spend some time with her.

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday. I know it may have been a little different this time. I miss my hooman friends.

My holiday was made brighter by my good friend Sallie. Sallie was my puppy raiser and I love her so much.



She sends me stuff! Lots of stuff!

I got lots of new chew toys—my favorite!

Thank you Sallie. I hope everyone had a great holiday.

I am sad I couldn't spend time with my good friend Santa. I always wanted to be one of his reindeer!

I've visited Santa just about every year.



So here's a picture of me with jolly 'ol St. Nick from a while ago.

"AMBASSADORS' CORNER"

We fight to Make Sure That Everyone is Treated with dignity no matter what their circumstances...We are Ambassadors for Equity and Social Justice.

The Summit County Prosecutor's Office Ambassadors for Equity and Social Justice Committee was formed in 2020 and is comprised of 13 diverse individuals. These individuals are not only diverse in the color of their skin, but also in their gender, age and their position in the Summit County Prosecutor's Office. The Ambassadors meet bi-weekly and work together to address the systematic racism that exists in our society.



Ambassador Judith Lee says, "Equal does not mean that we are all the same. Each of us is different in our own special way but we also have the common qualities that make us all humans. So, each of us should be treated with respect and dignity and treat others in the same way. Everybody has the right to protection from all forms of violence caused by reason of their race, color, language, sex, religion, political, national, or social origin, property, birth, or another status."

Each month you will find an article written by the Ambassadors that discusses issues of equity and social justice. If you have any suggestions or comments, please contact our Community Outreach Prosecutor, Tania Nemer at tnemer@prosecutor.summitoh.net.

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[SummitCountyProsecutorAveryII](https://www.facebook.com/SummitCountyProsecutorAveryII)



Help Us Go Green!

Contact Melanie Hart at hart@prosecutor.summitoh.net to receive this newsletter by e-mail



TOP COP

NEW FRANKLIN DETECTIVE MICHAEL HITCHINGS NOMINATED BY ASSISTANT PROSECUTORS BRIAN LOPRINZI & FELICIA EASTER

Relentless.

It's just one word but perfectly describes the actions of this month's TOP COP—New Franklin Detective Michael Hitchings.

The case dates back to 2012 and the murder of Ashley Biggs. The 25-year-old was beaten and strangled.

In 2013, Her ex-husband, Chad Cobb, pled guilty in connection with the murder and is currently serving a life sentence.

But Det. Hitchings knew there was more. He knew Cobb had help. In 2019 Hitchings finally had enough evidence to have Cobb's wife at the time of the murder, Erica Stefanko, arrested.

In November of 2020, a Summit County jury found Stefanko guilty in connection with Ashley's murder.



Det. Hitchings reviewed piles of evidence, interviewed Cobb numerous times in prison, had countless conversations with Cobb and Stefanko's family, and most of all, never gave up.

There were also three crime scenes to process and review. Plus the evidence had to be meticulously preserved.

Although it took more than eight years after her murder, justice came once again for Ashley Biggs.

Erica Stefanko now faces a sentence of life in prison.

Great job and congratulations Detective Hitchings!!!

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to Elliot Kolkovich for being honored as the 2020 Summit County Prosecutor's Office Employee of the Year!

Since being hired in 2012, Elliot has become the go to problem solver, especially with MATRIX, our case management system. Elliot started in our Juvenile Division and quickly transitioned to our Criminal Division. He has a tremendous work ethic, is intelligent and quick on his feet, and is always willing to help wherever it is needed.



Congratulations again, and thank you for your dedication to the office and citizens of Summit County.

STALKING AWARENESS

As we begin a new year, there is something which impacts millions of people in the United States but many times is ignored — STALKING.

January is Stalking Awareness Month. Each year 7.5 million Americans are victims of stalking, often with devastating consequences.

The hope is that by talking about stalking, people have an increased understanding of the crime.



VictimsofCrime.org/NSAM

Stalking victims are often forced to move frequently in an attempt to escape and to avoid their stalker. Visit www.stalkingawarenessmonth.org to learn more about ways you can protect yourself.

WHY I'M A PROSECUTOR

JOSEPH MITTICA

"Why I'm A Prosecutor" gives our prosecutors the chance to tell their own story and why being a prosecutor is so important to them.

Even with a new year upon us, their dedication to the community, and to finding truth, hasn't changed.

Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Mittica who works in our Criminal Division, talks about why being a prosecutor is so important to him.



• WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A PROSECUTOR?

The best part of being a prosecutor is that the job is always different and always a challenge. No matter what is on my docket for the day I am going to make a change for the positive in someone's life. That is always exciting and keeps you interested in the work.

• WHY DID YOU BECOME A PROSECUTOR?

I became a prosecutor because of my grandparents. They were tremendous role models. The lessons they taught me was do what is right and serve the community. Being a prosecutor allows me to accomplish those lessons on a daily basis. Becoming a prosecutor has been a goal of mine for a long time and has always been something that has intrigued me.

• WHAT'S THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF BEING A PROSECUTOR?

The most difficult part of being a prosecutor is when you have to communicate with the victim how long the process will take. Our goal is to get justice as quickly as possible. However, the justice system can be slow, especially with the recently implemented COVID protocols.

You can watch Joseph's complete video on our website, Facebook and YouTube page.

SUMMIT COUNTY COURTHOUSE GOES NATIONAL!

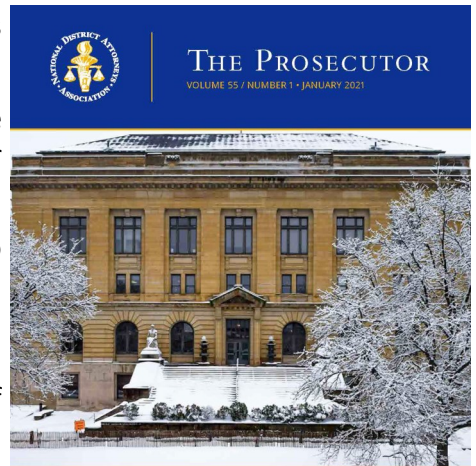
The Summit County Courthouse has been around for over 100 years. Now it's in the national spotlight for its beauty.

The National District Attorney's Association chose a picture we took of the Courthouse and placed it on the cover of the agency's national newsletter "The Prosecutor".

Each month, NDAA chooses either a local county courthouse or location to showcase on it's publication. And for January, they asked us!

The Prosecutor is read by thousands of people across the country.

Even with the chilly landscape, lots more people are able to see the beauty of the Summit County Courthouse.



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