



SHERRI BEVAN WALSH

Summit County Prosecutor

Newsletter

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53 University Avenue
6th Floor
Akron, OH 44308
Phone: 330-643-2800
Fax: 330-643-8277

Message from the Prosecutor



Prosecutor
Sherri Bevan Walsh

We recently prosecuted a case that reminded me of how much friends and family of homicide victims need their day in court. While giving victims a voice in the judicial system is one cornerstone of my administration, it is sometimes challenged by external factors that we can't always control. I recently had such a dilemma in a 33-year old homicide case of a young couple.

Edward Edwards, 77 and originally from Akron, was a habitual criminal who wrote me from a Wisconsin jail saying he had information about a 1977 murder of two young people in a Norton park. He was in a Wisconsin jail awaiting prosecution for the murder of another young couple in Wisconsin. Eventually, he confessed to Norton Police and one of my investigators that he killed a couple in Norton. We believe that one of the reasons for his confession was because he wanted to spend his prison time in Ohio.

The most common question I was asked (and asked myself) was why would we bring him back and pay to keep him in an Ohio prison? Why not leave him in Wisconsin where he would be given a life sentence and never be heard from again? The answer: the families of these two young people needed the opportunity to face Edwards and to tell him how losing their loved ones forever changed their lives. Only in that courtroom, and for that day, would Edwards have to listen. After that, such a man likely would never give his victims a second thought.

For 33 years, Judith Straub and Billy Lavaco were two young lives taken by an unknown person. Like most crimes reported in the media, we knew how they were killed and that they were left for others to find on that hot August night. We knew that they left behind grieving families. None of the media truly describes what that person meant to their family and friends. Suddenly, they are no longer a person but the victim in a murder. Their lives up to that point are left out of the headlines, and for the most part, out of the case as it proceeds through the criminal justice system. Loved ones wait for months, and in this case years, to be heard.

In order to heal, surviving family members need to be heard. They too have become victims. Their life as they knew it was stolen. They were left feeling powerless. For many, telling the defendant of the impact restores some of the control the defendant took. The criminal is forced to listen, just as the victims have been forced to cope. In addition, having their moment to speak in court to express their emotions validates the trauma they experienced.

In the case of Judy and Billy, I don't think there was a dry eye in the courtroom when their families spoke. Thirty-three years later, it was as if the murders had happened yesterday. Judy's brother, nine at the time of the murder, was a little boy again as he talked about his big sister and the memories of her prized match box car collection. Billy's sister couldn't get through her tears to finish her statement, instead giving it to one of my victim advocates to read.

For these and many more reasons, we brought Edwards back here to face his crime and its wake of victims. It was the right thing to do.

Tough Prosecution News

I can't believe the year is almost half over. The number of trials is constant with 73 already this year. All told, we have prosecuted approximately 1,408 cases so far this year. Here are a few updates for 2010:

- Officer Josh Miktarian's family finally saw justice on June 23 when the man responsible for his murder was sentenced to the death penalty. We have another death penalty case underway and anticipate more this year.
- Cleotis Gilcrest, the man known for assaulting his girlfriend when she didn't make him a ham sandwich, was sentenced to eight years in prison. He was given more prison time because he was on probation for a previous domestic violence charge. Teamwork with law enforcement pays off on domestic violence cases.
- Jackie Taylor, who robbed an elderly man of his social security check and hit him with his gun, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for this and having cocaine in his possession. Drugs always seem to lead to other crimes.
- Michael Winland will spend the rest of his life in prison after being sentenced to 50 years to Life for some of the most egregious sex crimes this office has seen. His co-defendant's trial has been continued to an undetermined time.
- Thug Travonte Davis was sentenced to 18 years for shooting an Iraqi War veteran home on leave. Unfortunately, we've seen too many cases of our veterans being victimized while home.
- Davarius Allen will be an old man by the time he serves his 46 years for a robbing and rape spree at the University of Akron. Our university police are working hard to ensure student safety.

**Keep up the great work
prosecutors and police officers!**

Questions? E-mail Laurie Cramer
cramer@prosecutor.summitoh.net

We're on the Web!

www.co.summit.oh.us/Prosecutor/Index.htm

Top Cop!



Top Cop: **Det. John Canterbury, Norton PD**
Nominated by: **Assistant Prosecutor Mary Ann Kovach, Chief Counsel**

The **Norton Police Department** achieved a major victory when it solved the 33-year-old homicide case of Judith Straub and Billy Lavaco. The young couple was murdered in 1977 and the case sat cold for all these years. **Det. John Canterbury** was instrumental in solving it after Edwards sent a letter to Prosecutor Walsh saying he had additional information on the case. Det. Canterbury, along with prosecutor's investigator Mark Anderson, took the letter and Norton's case file and headed to Jefferson, Wisconsin to interview Edwards. Det. Canterbury's immediate response and diligence resulted in a lengthy confession from Edwards.

This confession opened the flood gates to a plea in the Wisconsin case. For nine months, Edwards denied the Wisconsin homicides only to change his plea to guilty when Wisconsin used our confession to file a "similar acts" motion in the killings of their two young people.

In addition to solving this crime, Edwards' guilty plea also cleared a previously accused man in this case who had carried the burden of being accused all these years. Although the grand jury at the time did not indict him of the charges, the cloud of suspicion never was lifted until these homicides were solved. Kudos, Detective Canterbury!

Edwards, 77, is now serving 20 years to Life in an Ohio prison for murdering Judy Straub and Billy Lavaco. Edwards has since confessed to killing his 25-year-old foster son in Geauga County as well. When this one fell, he toppled. Good riddance and great job, Top Cop!

Way to go, Top Cop!

GUILTY at TRIAL!



Congratulations to Prosecutors Mike Cody, Tom Kroll, Angela Poth-Wypasek, Mike Rickett, Norman Schroth, and Chad VanOrman, who obtained **GUILTY** verdicts at trial in May.

MEET ASSISTANT PROSECUTOR RICK KASAY, APPELLATE DIVISION

Hire Date: January 21, 2001

Hometown: Johnstown, PA

Law Degree: University of Akron



Background: Law Clerk, Judge Ed Mahoney, 9th District Court of Appeals, 1977-1980; Court Administrator, 9th District Court of Appeals 1980-1984; Private Practice 1984-2001, also a Magistrate in Cuyahoga Falls, Akron and Barberton Municipal Courts. Bachelors Degree in Psychology from Penn State University. Served in the United States Army, three years.

Little Known Fact: I kept many snakes and tropical fish as pets in grade school and high school. Now I enjoy vegetable gardening, especially tomatoes.

Most memorable case: *State v. Paul Greer*, where I represented Greer in the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court of Ohio; Greer was the first capital case in Summit County after the reenactment of the death penalty. Since working in the Prosecutor's Office, I'd say *State v. Donald Craig*, where I represented the State in the Supreme Court of Ohio and U.S. Supreme Court in what was the first of two death sentences Craig received.

I look forward to representing the State in *State v. Ashford Thompson*, who was recently convicted of murdering Officer Josh Mik-tarian and given the death penalty, in his appeals to the Supreme Court of Ohio.



THAT'S OUTRAGEOUS!

It's pretty low to steal from the disabled!

Jawaid Tabassum, 43, of Tallmadge, owner of South Street Express, was found guilty by a jury on June 29 for Theft from the Disabled. When a 49-year-old mentally disabled man cashed his winning \$1,000 scratch lottery ticket, Tabassum only gave him \$700 back and kept the rest. He'll be sentenced on July 30 and we hope his jackpot includes time in prison.

A person should be able to get lost without being accosted!

A middle-aged woman from Wooster attended a dance in Akron with a friend on January 17. After the dance, she got lost on Arlington Road on her way to a late night dinner. When she got out of her car to check her location, Kenneth Johnson, 42, of Akron accosted her. He tried to get her keys and tried pushing her back into the car. She was able to fight him off, but not before he stole her cell phone. Johnson was found guilty by a jury on June 23 of Robbery and will be sentenced on July 8. Lock him up!

Now that is outrageous!