



Summit County Prosecutor's Office News from the Criminal Division

September 2011

A newsletter for residents of Summit County from the Summit County Prosecutor's Office

A CONVERSATION WITH PROSECUTING ATTORNEY SHERRI BEVAN WALSH



What is the toughest part of your job?

One of the toughest parts of being a prosecutor is seeing the pain that crime inflicts on victims and

their families. Many people assume constant exposure to violence numbs you to the emotions that go along with it, but that's simply not true. It's as difficult today as it was when I was a new assistant prosecutor.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

This job has many rewards, but I think the best is getting justice for the victim. Even when the case doesn't go the way we want, it is still important that victims be heard and have their day in court. For me, it's about seeing victims live through the system, come to terms with everything that has happened and then reclaim their lives when they come to the realization that, as painful as their loss was, they survived.

What should people know about your job?

People are usually amazed to learn that we prosecute more than 4,000 felony cases every year. I want people to know that we treat every one of those cases as if it is the most important case we have ever handled. Because for every victim, their case is the most important case on the docket.

I also wish people understood that legal and ethical considerations dictate what we must and cannot do. While a case is ongoing, there is a lot of information that we cannot release to the public. So when the media reports that my office declined to comment on a case, that usually means we are legally barred from discussing it.

On the other hand, we are ethically required to give the defense attorney all of our information, even if that helps the defense and hurts the prosecution. It is the prosecution's responsibility to ensure a fair trial.

Why did you choose this profession?

I've wanted to be a prosecutor since my first year of law school back in 1982! I love to help people and champion the side of truth and justice. And according to the U.S. Supreme Court, the prosecutor is the only attorney in the legal system with an obligation to represent justice and, therefore, to always do what is right.

What are you most proud of with regards to this office?

I am most proud of the outstanding work and dedication of everyone who works with me, from everyone at the nationally-recognized Child Support Enforcement Agency to the prosecutors, victim advocates, secretaries, investigators and administrative staff.

They all tirelessly fight for justice, both in and out of the office and courtrooms, often for low pay and no external recognition. They are motivated by a higher cause and are the most dedicated and passionate people I have ever met.

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HELP US GO GREEN!

If you currently receive this newsletter on paper and would like to receive an electronic version instead, email Melanie Hart at Hart@prosecutor.summitoh.net.

SEPTEMBER IS SENIOR SAFETY AWARENESS MONTH

Since 2002, our office has recognized September as Senior Safety Awareness Month to highlight the many ways in which senior citizens can be vigilant about their financial and physical safety. We regularly give safety speeches to senior citizen organizations, send out monthly scam alerts and publish an annual Senior Safety Calendar full of crime prevention tips.

We kicked off Senior Safety Awareness Month on September 2 at the Akron Zoo for the Senior Safari.



Upcoming senior events include the Summit Senior Expo at the Summit Mall on September 16 and a WAKR-sponsored luncheon at the Tangier Restaurant on December 6.

Check our website for more upcoming events, crime safety tips and helpful links.

If you would like Prosecutor Walsh to talk about crime safety with your organization,

or to request a 2012 Senior Safety Calendar, contact Merle Payne at (330) 643-7915 or payne@prosecutor.summitoh.net.

THE FINAL WORD ON WILLIAMS-BOLAR

My office has received many calls, emails and letters from people upset with the outcome of Kelley Williams-Bolar's clemency request. I share their frustration. Although I feel that justice has not been served in this case, I am also concerned about the message and precedent the governor set in his decision.

Among the questions I've been asked are: How is this fair to the other families who worked with the school district to rectify the problem? Will other people convicted of similar felonies also be given a "second chance?" Why bother having a jury and Parole Board if the governor can simply change a conviction?

Many people feel that the governor overstepped his bounds and demonstrated a certain amount of arrogance in going against the jury's finding and the Parole Board's recommendation. Some have lost faith in the judicial system.

The system isn't perfect. But it isn't broken.

One ruling does not endorse lying and cheating. One ruling does not mean taxpayers are not worth fighting for. One ruling does not mean it's ok to break the law, even if you think you have an excuse.

While the governor's action is discouraging, everyone in my office will continue to work hard to ensure justice for the citizens of Summit County.

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

My office recently participated in National Night Out, an annual crime and drug prevention event. This was our fourth year participating, and the turnout from the community was outstanding.



This program allows prosecutors to go out to different areas in the community and speak to residents about the importance of block watches and reporting crime when they see it, as well as explaining the many services the Prosecutor's Office offers.



For more information about National Night Out, visit <http://www.nationalnightout.org/nno/>.

STAND DOWN FOR HOMELESS AND DISPLACED VETERANS

Volunteers from my office participated in the fifth annual Stand Down for Homeless and Displaced Veterans event on September 13, 2011. We gave out toiletries, grocery store gift cards, socks, snacks, playing cards and other assorted sundries donated by Summit County Prosecutor's Office employees.

TOP COP

Top Cop: Akron Police Detective Jerry Gatchett



Nominated By: Assistant Prosecutor Greta Johnson

When the sexual abuse of a three-year-old was reported, Detective Gatchett tirelessly worked to locate the defendant. After speaking with many individuals, including the defendant, he discovered that the defendant was hiding in Columbus.

Rather than taking a statement over the phone or simply signing an arrest warrant, Detective Gatchett went to Columbus and secured a recorded confession.

He also went the extra step and convinced the defendant to agree to release his medical records, which sealed his fate when they showed he had infected his victim with gonorrhea and Chlamydia.

Detective Gatchett's perseverance resulted in a plea to Rape and a sexual offender behind bars for the rest of his life.

That's why Detective Jerry Gatchett of the Akron Police Department is September's Top Cop.

Way to go, Detective Gatchett!

MEET AN ASSISTANT PROSECUTOR



Name: Justin Richard

Hire Date: November 2007

Hometown: Muncie, Ind.

Law School: Ohio Northern University

Background: I attended Ball State University for my undergraduate degree in Criminology. During college, I worked at the Delaware County Prosecutor's Office in Muncie, Ind.

Prior to attending law school, I was employed by the State of Florida as a Child Protective Investigator. During law school, I worked as an intern for both the Kenton City Municipal Prosecutor and the Hardin County Prosecutor.

Something People Don't Know About Me: When I am not at work or in court, I am probably at the ballpark. Of the 30 teams in Major League Baseball, I have seen a game in 26 different stadiums.

The last four stadiums on my list are Texas Rangers in Arlington, Texas; Minute Maid Park in Houston and Dodger Stadium and the Anaheim Angels' stadium in Los Angeles.

Most Memorable Case:
State of Ohio v. Efrem Johnson

Twenty-four year old Army SPC Jacob Courie was home visiting his family on leave from Iraq when he and a male cousin went to the University of Akron campus to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Shortly before midnight, Courie had a verbal altercation with a man on the street, Efrem Johnson.

As a result of the strictly verbal argument, Johnson ran to his home several blocks away and retrieved a shotgun. Johnson returned to the area where the argument occurred, hid the shotgun and searched the area for Courie and his cousin. After locating them, Johnson taunted the men, luring them to a retaining wall where he had hidden his weapon. As the men approached, Johnson pointed his weapon at them and shot Courie in the abdomen.

Courie died shortly after the attack from his gunshot wound.

After the jury visited the crime scene, Johnson pled guilty to Aggravated Murder and was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole until he has served at least 26 years in prison.

GUILTY AT TRIAL

Congratulations to the following assistant prosecutors!
They obtained guilty verdicts at trial in August.

Jon Baumoeel
Mike Cody
Jay Cole

Felicia Easter
Aaron Howell
Steve Neumeyer (3)

Angela Poth-Wypasek
Colleen Sims