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# News from the Criminal Division

November 2012

## Message from Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh

You have probably seen me and my staff in your town over the years. I believe one of the best ways to improve the community is by being an active member.

Summit County is a special place for me. It's where my husband and I chose to raise our two sons. This community has a lot to offer, and I try to experience as much as possible. And I encourage my staff to also get out and be active in the community.

I believe that if you get to know your neighbors and take an active interest in your surroundings, you become invested in your community. And your community becomes invested in you.

I believe that is true for businesses, nonprofit agencies and government offices, too. Although I and most of my staff live in Summit County, this office as a whole is part of the Summit County community. That's why I put a strong emphasis on community outreach.

We often have an informational booth at fairs like the Summit for Kids and Senior Health Fair, we give presentations on sexting and bullying at area schools, we participate in the National Night Out Against Crime and show our support at many other community events.

What most people rarely see is the behind-the-scenes work we do to support the community.

My office has a Community Relations Committee that organizes events and activities to support Summit County. Working in this office, you see first-hand how someone's life can be ripped apart by tragedy -- not just by crime, but by drugs, unemployment and illness.



Our Community Relations Committee gives us a way to provide help to those in need. We serve hot lunches at Open M, ring the bell for the Salvation Army, collect donations for the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank and other nonprofit organizations and buy gifts for those who can't afford to put anything under their Christmas tree.

November and December are our most active months for charitable efforts, but throughout the year we are actively participating in and supporting Summit County. I am proud of the work my staff does, both in and out of the office. Together, we are part of a larger community.

Stay safe,

*Sherri B. Walsh*

# Tough Prosecution

Here are just a few of the defendants who will be out of our community for a lengthy period of time, thanks to the hard work of my assistant prosecutors:

## Deward T. Hammett, 34

- 18 years in prison for robbing an elderly Akron couple

## John Pritchard, 53

- Life in prison for murdering his ex-girlfriend
- Eligible for parole in 2030

## Anthony Shellman, 29

- 17 years in prison for two separate robberies

## Randy Legg, 20

- Seven years in prison for his role in the death of Akron toddler Patrick Lerch

## Durell McDowell, 22

- Eight years in prison for Aggravated Robbery, Robbery and Intimidating a Witness

## And the Winner is...

Congratulations to Jenna Ford, an eighth-grader at Spring Hill Junior High School! Her poster won the 2013 Safety Kids Calendar Contest.

Jenna's poster, which urges people to "end the silence on domestic violence," will be featured on the cover of the 2013 Safety Kids Calendar and displayed on a billboard.

The first-prize winner for each of the 12 rules for staying safe will also be featured in the calendar and posted on a billboard. The winners also will tape public safety messages to air in December on WBNX the CW.

Congratulations to all of the winners, and thank you to every student who submitted a poster.

And thank you to all of our judges and sponsors, Christi Nichols from WONE for emceeding our awards ceremony and ClearChannel for donating billboards.

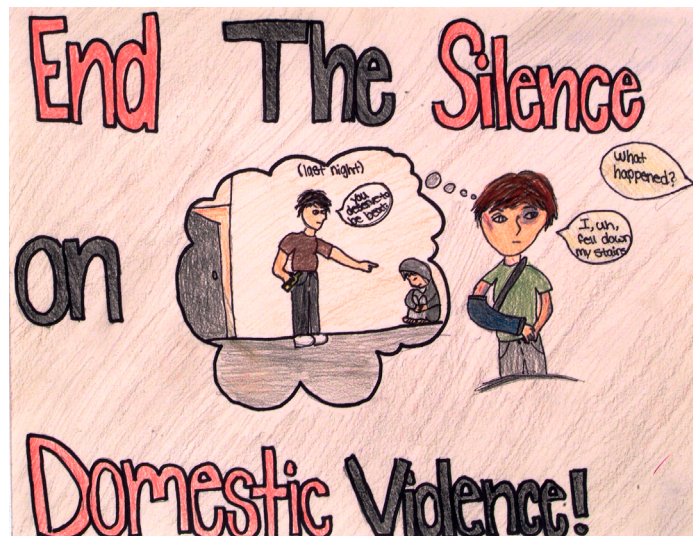
Check my website for information on next year's Safety Kids Calendar Contest.

The 12 rules for staying safe are:

1. Trust yourself! Don't give in to peer pressure.
2. Don't do drugs.
3. Don't use alcohol.
4. Never play with guns.
5. Don't smoke.
6. Never give out personal information in chat rooms.
7. Don't talk to or go with anyone you don't know.
8. Say NO to unwanted touch.
9. Never tell anyone you are home alone.
10. Say NO to gangs.
11. Stop bullies in their tracks. Always tell an adult.
12. Violence at home is never okay! Your home

should be a safe place.

You can see all of the winning posters on our website.



# November Top Cop

**Top Cop: Patrol Officers Joe Horak and Sean Taylor**  
**Nominated By:** Assistant Prosecutors Brian LoPrinzi and Greg Peacock



Police officers never know what surprises await them when they start their shifts. This is especially true of patrol officers.

Last February, Patrol Officers Joe Horak and Sean Taylor were the first officers to arrive at the house on St. Leger Avenue in Akron where 17-month-old Patrick Lerch died. What they found inside the house was horrendous. A filthy home, a rat-infested meth lab in the basement, and a plate of chicken wings in the baby's crib. And they found Patrick, a malnourished and severely bruised baby, dead of a meth overdose.

It was a situation that, fortunately, few encounter.

Officers Horak and Taylor were thorough and professional in dealing with the aftermath of Patrick's death. And they were both excellent witnesses at trial.

Officers Horak and Taylor were exemplary in their investigation and decorum throughout the pendency of this case. They both immediately realized the seriousness of the situation when they arrived on St. Leger Street and reacted accordingly. During grand jury, suppression hearings and trial, both officers demonstrated confidence, integrity and compassion. They were instrumental in bringing to justice those who harmed Patrick Lerch.

Patrick's mother, her boyfriend and two other men who were in the home when Patrick died are serving lengthy prison sentences for their roles in Patrick's death.

Heather Lerch, Patrick's mother, will not be eligible for parole until 2034. Randy Legg, Heather's boyfriend, is serving seven years in prison. Ronald Legg, Randy's brother, will be eligible for parole in 2039. Alan Kostra, a friend who was at the house for Patrick's final days, will spend the next nine years in prison.

**Way to go, Officer Horak and Officer Taylor!**

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## Agency Spotlight: Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank

Founded in 1982, the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank feeds approximately 180,000 people each year. The Foodbank does this by distributing food to member agencies in Carroll, Holmes, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas and Wayne Counties. Last year, the Foodbank distributed enough food to provide close to 15 million meals.

If you think hunger is a problem that only affects people in other parts of the world, consider these sobering facts. One-third of all people served by the Foodbank are under 18. Half of the Foodbank's clients have had to choose between buying groceries or paying utility bills. Over the past five years, the number of Americans who are hungry has almost doubled.

Every March, my office joins other County offices in the Foodbank's annual Harvest for Hunger campaign. Last year we collected a couple barrels' worth of food. We hope to collect even more next March.

As we shift from back to school mode into the holiday season, I ask you to think about those in our community who wonder how they'll be able to feed their families.

From mid-November to mid-December, the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank runs a special campaign, called Hunger-Free Families, to provide food for families in need. The Foodbank has many events planned to increase donations during this campaign. Visit their website, [www.AkronCantonFoodbank.org](http://www.AkronCantonFoodbank.org), for more information on how you can help.



# Meet Investigator Ben Bergeron



**Hire Date:** June 2012

**Title:** Investigator

**Hometown:** San Diego, CA

**Education:** I have an Associates of Arts in Criminal Justice and a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology and Justice Studies. Both degrees are from Kent State University.

**Background:** I served 10 years in the United States Navy in the navigation field. I completed four tours in the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. I left the service in 2007 and began my career in law enforcement with the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Department, where I was assigned to the jail. In 2008 I relocated to Ohio to work first as a patrolman with the Newcomerstown Police Department and then as a law enforcement ranger for Metro Parks, Serving Summit County. After three years with the Metro Parks, I decided to pursue higher education on a full-time basis, although maintained my law enforcement status as a special deputy with the Summit County Sheriff's Office. I recently completed school with a bachelor's degree in Criminology and was fortunate enough to continue in my career in the criminal justice field as an investigator with this office.

**Fun Fact About Me:** I may be the world's greatest player in the 1980s game Galaga.

**Job Duties:** As an investigator, I conduct investigations to aid in successful prosecution. I locate, interview and transport witnesses and victims involved in cases. I assist the Domestic Violence Unit in obtaining statements or confessions from suspects housed in the Summit County Jail. I process subpoenas, court orders and search warrants for various agencies within the county. I also process cell phone and smart phone technology used for gathering evidence.

**Most Memorable Case:** My most memorable moment was not a case I was working, but rather coming to the aid of a coworker. One afternoon I found one of my coworkers unconscious and unresponsive. Using my training, I was not able to determine any signs of life. I administered CPR for approximately two minutes and was successful at getting the oxygen flowing again. Fortunately, he had a full recovery and is doing fine to this day. I was awarded the Life Saver Award for my efforts by the Summit County Sheriff's Office. Being able to help someone in a positive way like this is the reason I chose to get into law enforcement.

**Why I Wanted to Become an Investigator:** I want to make a positive difference in our community. I have a passion for working in the criminal justice field. Throughout my experience with the various agencies I have worked for, I have learned to love the investigative side of things. I enjoy taking bits and pieces of information and figuring out how they all connect. I like working with multiple agencies and prosecutors in collaborating efforts to seek justice for the community and victims of crime.

## Guilty at Trial in October

Congratulations to the following assistant prosecutors for obtaining guilty verdicts at trial in October:

Jon Baumoel

Angela Poth-Wypasek (2)

Nik Buckmeier

Dan Sallerson (2)

Joe Fantozzi

Colleen Sims

Elliot Kolkovich

### 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](mailto:hart@prosecutor.summitoh.net).

Contact the Summit County Prosecutor's Office

53 University Avenue

Akron, Ohio 44308

330-643-2800

[www.co.summit.oh.us/prosecutor](http://www.co.summit.oh.us/prosecutor)