



January 2014

News from the Criminal Division

Message from Prosecutor Sherrri Bevan Walsh

Pop culture has long been criticized for its frighteningly unrealistic portrayal of love. The love-struck man relentlessly pursuing the uninterested object of his affection until she finally gives in. The ex-lover who floods his former flame's inbox and phone with emails, calls and texts begging for another chance. The comically obsessed girl who incessantly tails the object of her desire, even breaking into his apartment to snoop through his belongings.

While this behavior is portrayed as harmless to be funny in a romantic comedy, the reality of these actions is nothing to laugh at. Aggressively pursuing a former, current or potential lover is not flattery. It's stalking.

Imagine receiving a slew of unwanted phone calls, texts, letters and emails. Imagine being followed and spied on. Imagine the same person constantly waiting for you and showing up everywhere you go. Image this invasion of your personal privacy. For the 6.6 million Americans who are victims of stalking each year, this attention is terrifying.

As a prosecutor, I am all too aware of the seriousness of stalking. In 20 percent of cases, a stalker uses a weapon to either threaten or harm his victim. In the worst cases, the victim is killed.

But even those who are not physically harmed by their stalker suffer emotionally and financially. Victims often miss work or relocate because of the stalking. They experience depression, anxiety, insomnia and other negative psychological effects as a result of the stress of being stalked.

Although most people tend to think of stalking victims as women, one out of every 19 men has been stalked at some point in his life. Nearly 75 percent of stalking victims know their stalker.

As technology continues to rapidly evolve, stalkers are gaining new methods. The prevalence of GPS tracking on electronic devices and social media apps like Facebook and Instagram make it easier than ever to be unwittingly tracked.

Within the fields of law enforcement and criminal justice, our understanding of stalking continues to grow. Over the past few decades, we have made great advances in the way we treat stalking victims and offenders and how we investigate and prosecute their cases.

We are also working to educate the community in the hopes of reducing the number of stalking cases we see each year.

If you believe you are being stalked, contact the police. You can also get help from your local women's shelter or victim agency. In Summit County, contact the Battered Women's Shelter at 888-395-4357 or the Victim Assistance Program at 330-376-0040. These agencies can work with you to develop a safety plan.

Stalking is a serious crime that can have deadly results. To learn more about stalking, visit StalkingAwarenessMonth.org.

Stay safe,



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Thinking Outside the Box to Help Victims

When thinking about the work our office does, most people probably think of either sending criminals to prison or collecting child support. And we certainly do do both of those!

However, our office is also very active in efforts to assist our community in other ways.

In November, a juvenile burglarized a home and stole the victim's car, which he crashed. Total damages amounted to close to \$3,000.

Sadly, the victim is a generous woman who cares for her three great-grandchildren. She also knew the juvenile very well and was like a grandmother to him.

The cost of repairing her car left her without enough money to purchase Christmas presents for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

When Assistant Prosecutor Kassim Ahmed, who was handling the case, learned that the victim wouldn't be able to afford gifts, he decided to help.

Ahmed contacted Annie Skapin, victim services coordinator for the Summit County Juvenile Court. She coordinates programming between the court and victims, such as assisting victims who are seeking restitution.

Skapin also runs the court's "Toy Project," which provides toys for needy families during the holidays. The Toy Project serves as an alternative to juveniles completing community service. Juveniles who participate in the program must purchase \$40 worth of toys. No toy guns or toys that promote violence are allowed.

Skapin put together a box full of gifts for the victim to give to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The woman was extremely appreciative of Ahmed's and Skapin's efforts.

"We see a lot of unfair and sad endings for our victims," said Ahmed. "It made my day to let a very distraught grandmother know that we could help save Christmas for her family."

Ahmed's belief in taking the extra step to help victims and the community is a common thread among my employees. We are involved in numerous community and charitable efforts throughout the year, particularly around the holidays. This year was no exception.

My office donated baskets and money to four local charity auctions. We rang the Salvation Army bell. We sponsored eight families from Open M, two families who were victims of a felony crime and one family being served by our Child Support Enforcement Agency. Our total holiday charitable contributions were more than \$1,950!

Tough Prosecution

These defendants are out of our community for a long time thanks to the hard work of my assistant prosecutors:

Corey Alan Welch, age 49

- Rape (two counts)
- Kidnapping
- Illegal Use of a Minor in Nudity Oriented Material
- Corrupting Another with Drugs (two counts)
- Gross Sexual Imposition
- Sexual Battery (two counts)
- **Sentenced to life in prison**
- **Eligible for parole in 2054 at age 90**
- **Tier III sex offender**

Cedric L. Witherspoon, age 21

- Aggravated Robbery
- Firearm Specification
- **Sentenced to 11 years, nine months in prison**

2013 Roundup

Thanks to the dedication and hard work by all of my assistant prosecutors, victim advocates, investigators, secretaries and administrative staff, I am proud to announce that we prosecuted 3,577 defendants in 2013 and ended the year with a 96 percent conviction rate!

Here is a breakdown of our cases in 2013:

- Homicides prosecuted: 23
- Homicide defendants convicted: 21
- Domestic Violence defendants: 253
- Domestic Violence defendants found guilty at trial or pleaded guilty: 247
- Child rape cases disposed: 14 -- 11 with life sentences

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.



January Top Cop

Top Cop: Detective Jeremy McGee, Tallmadge Police Department

Nominated By: Assistant Prosecutor Brian Stano

Remember that old *Dateline* segment called “To Catch a Predator”? An adult would visit online chat rooms pretending to be a teenager. When a sexual predator started to proposition the “teenager,” the teen would invite the adult to his or her home. NBC reporter Chris Hansen and a hidden camera crew were waiting when the predator arrived.

The show was compelling T.V. and resulted in numerous arrests.

Not surprisingly, law enforcement still pose as decoys to find sexual predators. Just as predators can pretend to be a teenager, undercover police officers can also conceal their identities and claim to be teens. One of those law enforcement officers is Detective Jeremy McGee of the Tallmadge Police Department.

Detective McGee has been

particularly helpful in not only conducting these investigations, but also providing my office with solid evidence to prosecute.

As one can imagine, it can be difficult to pose as a teen or a sexual predator in order to lure a sex offender, not to mention having direct contact with these offenders. Nevertheless, Detective McGee understands what information and evidence is key to securing a conviction.

As a member of the Ohio Internet Crimes Against Children task force (ICAC), Detective McGee and other members of ICAC scour the Internet for sexual predators. Funded through the U.S. Department of Justice, the task force is composed of local, state and federal law enforcement officers throughout Ohio.

Investigators within the task force

search online file sharing sites for people uploading, downloading and sharing child pornography.

The task force also visits chat rooms and websites that specialize in sexual rendezvous.

When ICAC members identify possible predators, they set up a sting similar to those on To Catch a Predator.

Although employed by the Tallmadge Police Department, Detective McGee is willing to investigate cases throughout Summit County. That level of dedication can only result in more child predators being taken off the street.



Way to go, Detective Jeremy McGee!

Agency Spotlight: Haven of Rest Ministries

Founded in 1943, Haven of Rest Ministries has grown from a small rescue mission on North Howard Street to one of the largest private social service agencies in northeast Ohio.

Haven of Rest offers more than a safe, clean place for homeless men, women and children to sleep. It offers residential rehabilitation for those ready to overcome drug and alcohol addiction. Toward the end of their rehabilitation process, participating men and

women can learn job skills through the Career Development Program. The AfterCare and Alumni Programs ensure former residents have the support they need to stay sober and maintain the positive changes they made during their stay at Haven of Rest.

Through its many programs, Haven of Rest Ministries serves approximately 600 each day.

Thank you, Haven of Rest staff and volunteers, for the good work you do every day for the less fortunate in our community!

To learn more about Haven of Rest Ministries and how you can help, visit HavenOfRest.org.



Employee of the Year: Carol Swan



Each year my office selects one employee to be recognized as our Employee of the Year. I am fortunate to say that, since I have a number of stellar employees, each year the selection is a difficult one. This year I am proud to recognize Administrative Assistant Carol Swan.

Carol has been an administrative assistant in the Summit County Prosecutor's Office for 17 years. She is loyal, extremely dependable and motivated, she can be counted on to do any assignment, and Carol supports her co-workers in any way possible. Carol's sincere dedication and willingness to help others is one of her greatest assets.

Carol is highly regarded by her colleagues. She is always rated as "Far Exceeds Expectations" on her annual review. Her colleagues say she is "perfect" and "awesome." Carol is "organized and virtually error-free, professional, pleasant and a delight to work with." "She is an excellent team player who creates a positive work environment." I couldn't agree more.

Thank you, Carol, for all your hard work! It is my pleasure to name you the 2013 Employee of the Year. Read on for more about Carol.

Hire Date: September 1996

Title: Administrative Assistant, Direct Indictment Program

Hometown: Akron OH

Fun Fact: I am very passionate about fitness. I love aerobics, pilates, yoga, belly dancing and even strength training. I'm also a big Zips basketball fan and enjoy my Florida vacations a couple times a year for relaxation.

Education: I graduated from East High School and obtained some post-secondary education while employed at the University of Akron.

Background: My first job was as a secretary at the University of Akron for literature chemists handling classified information. From there, I worked at Alside for 27 years as an administrative assistant to the vice president of purchasing. Taking various computer classes led to my employment at the Prosecutor's Office, where I was involved with the initial indictment set-up for the Direct Indictment Program.

Job Duties: I handle felony cases from the initial stage. This means preparing and scheduling for Grand Jury, issuing and filing indictments, and preparing and assisting the prosecutor at Common Pleas arraignments.

Why I Like Working at the Prosecutor's Office: I like being a part of the judicial system. I enjoy the people I work with, especially my co-workers in the indictment and grand jury unit. There is no better example of teamwork than in our fast-paced division.

Congratulations!

Congratulations to **Margaret Scott**, Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor for the Criminal and Juvenile Divisions! She was recently elected secretary of the Board of Directors of the Victim Assistance Program. Margaret has been on the Board of Directors since 2005. I am excited for her new leadership role. We are all looking forward to continued strong working relations with the Victim Assistance Program, and we can't wait for their Mardi Gras fundraiser in March!



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