



March 2014

# News from the Criminal Division

## Message from Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh

**A**t the end of August, I unveiled an innovative new feature of my office that aims to assist child and special needs victims of crime: a facility dog named Avery II.

Over the past six months, Avery has gone from a novelty to a familiar face around my office and the courthouse. In fact, he has become somewhat of a celebrity. He has his own Facebook page ([Facebook.com/SummitCountyProsecutorAveryII](https://www.facebook.com/SummitCountyProsecutorAveryII)) with almost 1,100 likes. He has been featured on newscasts and in newspapers and magazines. He has his own trading card. A professor from Kent State University is even writing a case study on Avery's work!

Avery has met with numerous children and adults. He has sat at the feet of three children as they testified in two trials. In addition to trials, Avery has accompanied children to competency hearings, meetings with prosecutors and sentencings. Avery also provides valuable encouragement and support to participants in Turning Point (drug court) and Valor (veterans) Court. All told, Avery has provided assistance at close to 50 meetings and court sessions.

The effect that Avery has on victims and terrified witnesses is truly remarkable. These children have endured and seen horrific events, and they are visibly upset. They often seem to be almost pulled into themselves as they sit in our reception area. Yet after meeting with Avery, these children actually ask when they can come back to see him!

When child victims play with Avery, they are able to momentarily escape their trauma. Seeing children who

have been through indescribable experiences smiling and laughing and acting like normal kids, when they were shaking and unable to meet your eyes just moments before, makes it a little easier to keep dealing with the horrible things we see every day.

On a more personal note, Avery has had an unintended but positive impact on my employees. No matter how much you try, sometimes you can't help but take to heart the injustice we see on a daily basis.

Witnessing firsthand the violence and cruelty humans are capable of inflicting on one another eventually takes an emotional toll. Avery is always happy to visit with an employee who needs a little cheering up!

You might expect a dog in the office to be a distraction or even a nuisance. However, he is specially trained for his work. When he's not in court or visiting with a child, Avery relaxes in his quiet area in his trainer's office. He's so calm, you almost forget he's here sometimes!

Of course, just like humans, sometimes Avery needs to take a break. Employees are happy to engage him in a quick game of fetch or take him to Starbucks for a coffee break.

The response to Avery within the legal community has certainly been encouraging -- especially now that he's had time to prove his worth. Several other Prosecutor's Offices have contacted me for information and advice on how to obtain their own facility dog. And we've even received positive feedback from defense attorneys.

Stay safe,



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# Tough on Gangs

One of the most violent gangs in Akron has been effectively disbanded, thanks to a concerted effort between my office and the Akron Police Department's Gang Unit.

A group operating in the North Hill neighborhood of Akron, known as the FOG, was especially dangerous. Unlike most gangs, this one seemed to have no motive behind its violence.

After a lengthy and thorough investigation, the Gang Unit identified the main leaders of the group and presented my office with solid evidence that led to convictions and lengthy prison terms.

The two more notable convictions were against FOG members Corey Hardison and William Dawson. Hardison was sentenced to life in prison for murdering a Bhutanese immigrant so that he could move up in rank. Dawson shot at a car when the driver flashed her lights to alert Dawson and his buddies, who were walking in the middle of the road at night, of her oncoming car. The driver was hit with several bullets, one of which doctors were unable to remove. Dawson was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

My office and the Gang Unit didn't rest with the adult members of the FOG. We discovered that, not only were juveniles in the gang, but some of them held leadership positions.

We charged three juveniles with Participation in a Criminal Gang, a felony of the second degree. The Gang Unit, led in this effort by Detective Mark Hockman, presented such strong evidence that all three juveniles admitted to being FOG members.

Gang charges are extremely difficult to prosecute, especially when the defendant is facing no other charges.

The first difficulty is the legal definition of a gang. The Ohio Revised Code defines a gang as a group of at least three people that commits felonies and/or acts of violence as one of its main activities and has an identifying name, color, sign and/or symbol. Additionally, gang members engage in a "pattern of criminal activity."

Once the State has proved that the offender is part of a gang and not merely a group of friends, then the State must prove the charge of Participating in a Criminal Gang. This charge says that the offender was aware that his gang engages in criminal activity and committed an illegal act to further the gang's goals.

Thanks to the hard work and determination of everyone who worked on this case, especially Detective Hockman, we were able to reach a milestone in gang prosecutions in the city of Akron and Summit County.

## Tough Prosecution

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

### **Dontay Taylor, age 23**

- Murder
- Firearm Specification
- Felonious Assault (three counts)
- Having Weapons Under Disability
- **Sentenced to life in prison**
- **Eligible for parole in 2052**

### **Filip Konstantinovich, age 49**

- Rape
- Kidnapping
- **Sentenced to 15 years in prison**
- **Tier III Sex Offender**

## Guilty at Trial in February

Congratulations to the following assistant prosecutors for obtaining guilty verdicts at trial last month:

*Jon Baumael*

*Dustin Roth (2)*

*Nik Buckmeier (2)*

*Jennie Shuki*

*Aaron Howell*

*Omar Siddiq*

*Brian LoPrinzi*

*Ryan Stickel (3)*

*Kevin Mayer*

*Mike Todd*

***Great job, prosecutors!***

**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).



# March Top Cop

## Top Cop: Detective Scott Lietke

Nominated By: Assistant Prosecutors Jon Baumel and Aaron Howell

Detective Scott Lietke has been assigned to numerous homicide cases involving complex crime scenes and uncooperative witnesses. That was the case on the evening of July 23, 2012, when Detective Lietke was called to the Embassy Lounge after multiple shots were fired into the nightclub.

Earlier that evening, Dontay Taylor was in a heated argument with the club's manager after being denied entrance. Taylor grabbed a gun from a vehicle and fired eight times into the club. Rahsaan Price, a 38-year-old father, was shot in the neck and killed while working on his laptop at the bar. Two other people, an employee and a patron, also suffered gunshot wounds and were rushed to a nearby hospital.

Although numerous witnesses were present inside and outside the club, they were either unable or unwilling to identify the shooter. Detective Lietke persevered and was able to locate two people who had left the club with Taylor.

Despite their hesitancy and fear of retaliation, Det. Lietke convinced them to be forthcoming with what they had seen. The driver of the vehicle identified Taylor as the shooter, and the other passenger provided crucial information implicating Taylor in the crime.

Detective Lietke's efforts in the case continued even after Taylor was indicted for the murder of Rahsaan Price. Detective Lietke helped locate the identifying witness who had fled to Virginia and convinced

him to return and testify at the trial. When that witness was challenged at trial as being too far away from the shooter to provide an accurate account, Detective Lietke went to the club during the midnight hour of a snowy night and took pictures and measurements of the parking lot to solidify the prosecution's case.

As a result of Detective Lietke's hard work and perseverance, Dontay Taylor was convicted of Murder and two counts of Felonious Assault. Taylor was sentenced to life in prison and will not be eligible for release for 38 years.



**Way to go, Detective Scott Lietke!**

## Agency Spotlight:

## Big Brothers Big Sisters of Summit, Medina and Stark Counties

Are you looking for a way to directly and positively impact the life of a child in the community?

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Summit, Medina and Stark Counties matches adults with children between the ages of six and 18 who could benefit from the friendship and guidance of an adult role model.

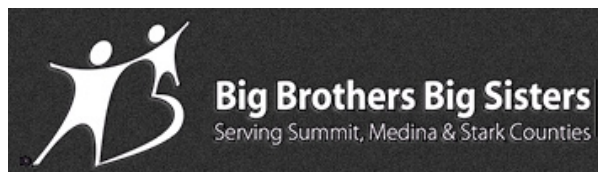
By providing children with a mentor, the organization aims to help kids achieve educational success, avoid risky behaviors and increase their confidence.

Established in New York City in 1904, Big Brothers Big Sisters is proof that you don't need a lot of money

to make a difference in a child's life. While Big Brothers Big Sisters does offer special events for "Bigs" and their "Littles," even simple activities like taking a walk in the Metro Parks can help improve the relationship between a child and his adult role model.

Thank you to the staff of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Summit, Medina and Stark Counties, as well as the many volunteers, for the work you do for our area's youth!

For more information, including how to become a big brother or big sister, please visit [www.BBBSSMC.org](http://www.BBBSSMC.org).



# Meet an Employee: Alyse Ziga



**Hire Date:** October 2013

**Title:** Victim Advocate

**Hometown:** Akron, Ohio

**Fun Fact About Me:** After talking about it and saying I'd do it for the last several years, I finally bit the bullet and signed up for the Akron Half Marathon this year!

**Education:** I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology with a focus on Criminology from Ohio University.

**Background:** Before the Victim Services Division, I worked at the Summit County Child Support Enforcement Agency as an interstate case worker.

**Job Duties:** I help crime victims understand the court process and provide them with services to help them deal with their situation. I keep them updated with how the case is progressing and what to expect. I attend court with them for support during trials, hearings, sentencings and other meetings. I also convey their wishes to the prosecutor.

**My Most Memorable Case:** The two rape cases that I've been involved in have been the most difficult, memorable and yet rewarding cases thus far. They both involved young children, and while I couldn't imagine anyone hurting these innocent beings, I was and still am amazed at their strength and pure honesty. While trying to calm the nerves of the older sister before testifying, I couldn't imagine being in her place. After her testimony, I tried my hardest to explain how brave she was for what she did. An hour later, as they were leaving, she hugged me and said I was like her big sister since she didn't have one. This is definitely something I will never forget.

**Why I Wanted to Join the Prosecutor's Office:** The criminal justice system can be a very complicated, scary and long process. Someone who has recently been victimized may shy away because they're confused and think that their case doesn't matter. Their case does matter and their voice should be heard.

I have found I get the most enjoyment out of helping people, especially those who don't have anyone else or feel like the odds are stacked against them. One of my goals has always been to reduce criminal activity so the number of victims and people affected by crime decreases as well. I believe I'm in the right place right now to do my part.

## Female Self-Defense

Summit County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh and Sheriff Steve Barry are hosting a **FREE** female self-defense class at The Job Center (1040 E. Tallmadge Ave in Akron) on Wednesday, April 2 from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

The class is open to women of all ages and is absolutely free with no registration required. Come alone or with friends.

For more information, contact April Wiesner at (330) 643-8386 or [wiesner@prosecutor.summitoh.net](mailto:wiesner@prosecutor.summitoh.net).

**\*County Employees: You can earn 70 Vitality Points for attending this class!**

## Calling all Salon Professionals!

Are you a salon professional who wants to help fight domestic violence?

The Battered Women's Shelter of Summit and Medina Counties is offering a free seminar called Cut It Out for salon professionals to learn how to recognize clients who are victims of domestic violence and how to support them.

The training is free. All salon professionals who attend will receive two CE credits.

For more information, contact Brittany at (330) 860-5635 or [BrittanyP@scmcbws.org](mailto:BrittanyP@scmcbws.org).

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