



**FROM THE OFFICE OF  
SUMMIT COUNTY PROSECUTOR  
SHERRI BEVAN WALSH**

# THE SENIOR NEWS

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE**

Domestic violence does not discriminate. Male or female, rich or poor, young or old, domestic violence literally happens everywhere in one form or another. Take, for example, the case of Mickey Rooney. Earlier this year, Rooney, whose Hollywood career spans almost nine decades and more than 300 films, filed a court protection order against his stepson Chris Aber. The 90-year-old Rooney accused him of withholding basic necessities, like food and medicine, while exploiting him financially. During his testimony Rooney stated, "Over the course of time, my daily life became unbearable...I felt trapped, scared, used and frustrated. But above all, I felt helpless. For years I suffered silently, unable to muster the courage to seek the help I knew I needed."

Rooney's testimony was an eye-opener regarding the scope of elder domestic abuse, an underreported crime thought to cost millions of older Americans nearly \$3 billion a year. Additionally, the American Psychological Association estimates that more than two million elderly adults suffer from abuse, either physically or financially, often at the hands of family members. However, the actual figure is likely to be much higher, as a large number of incidents go unreported every year. According to Rooney, one of the main reasons incidents go unreported is because you are not just dealing with your own fears but you are also dealing with family relationships. "Because of your love for other family members, you might feel hesitant to come forward," he said. Because of this, lawmakers around the country have decided to raise awareness on domestic violence against

the elderly, as well as domestic violence in general.

At the conclusion of his testimony, Rooney reached out to all individuals of his age. "To those seniors and especially elderly veterans like myself," he said, "I want to tell you this: You are not alone and you have nothing to be ashamed of. If elder abuse happened to me, it can happen to anyone. I want you to know that you deserve better."

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## **SUMMIT COUNTY PROSECUTOR RECEIVES \$749,949 DOMESTIC VI- OLENCE GRANT**

The Summit County Prosecutor's Office was awarded a two-year grant from the Department of Justice that will help fund the Office's Domestic Violence Unit. Part of the grant will also support Summit County's new felony domestic violence court, the first of its kind in Ohio and one of only a handful in the nation. For the Prosecutor's Office, which has worked to establish this specialty court for the past few years, it is a big step in the right direction to help protect our community. The court, like other specialty courts, will focus solely on one type of offense, in this case felony domestic violence. However, unlike other specialty courts, offenders will not have the option of having charges dismissed upon successful program completion. The overall goal of the court will be to hold offenders accountable, increase the safety of victims and ensure consistency in the way these cases are handled. The court aims to reduce recidivism rates as well as protect the citizens of Summit County.

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## CRIMINALS CAUGHT PREYING ON THE ELDERLY

My office recently handled three cases that demonstrate the extent to which criminals will go to steal someone's life savings.

The victims in these cases are not to blame for the acts committed against them. A criminal check on these three criminals would not have shown a past of criminal behavior. By reporting these crimes, the victims prevented another person from being victimized.

Christina Valentino received a two-year prison sentence for stealing nearly \$10,000 from a 65-year-old woman. Valentino abused her caretaker position and violated her employer's trust by stealing and using her credit cards for her personal use.

Ruth Helderlein received six years in prison, and her boyfriend Rodney Ford received five years, for stealing a 63-year-old man's \$50,000 coin and stamp collection. Helderlein was the victim's caretaker.

Shannon James was sentenced to three years in prison for swindling an elderly couple out of \$18,000. James was a heroin addict who asked the couple for money to pay court costs for a shoplifting charge. James gained sympathy from the couple by claiming the State of Ohio was going to take her child away from her.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- For every one case of elder abuse that is reported, a suspected 12 cases are unreported.
- In most elder abuse and neglect cases, the perpetrator is usually a family member.
- If you suspect or are a victim of elder abuse, you can call Summit County's Adult Protective Services at (330) 643-7217

## WHAT IS ABUSE?



The Ohio Supreme Court has identified five types of abuse that can happen later in life: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, psychological or emotional abuse and economic exploitation. To better protect yourself and your loved ones, it is important to be able to identify the warning signs of abuse.

Physical abuse can be recognized through unexplained bruises or other suspicious injuries or by sudden changes in behavior (person is extremely upset, withdrawn, unresponsive, fearful, etc). Sexual abuse can be identified by unexplained injuries, derogatory references to intimate body parts, sexual assault or unexplained instances of sexually transmitted diseases. Neglect is shown through abnormal weight loss, poor personal hygiene, unattended medical concerns or over or undermedicating. Emotional abuse takes the form of intimidation, humiliation, ridiculing or threatening. Finally, economic exploitation can be identified by unusual bank activity, a new authorized signer on an elderly person's account, a change in beneficiaries or increased spending on credit accounts.