

THE COURT REPORTER

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A Message from Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio



The Summit County Juvenile Court is on the threshold of expanding its services by offering youth and family strengthening programs to those who have been exposed to the juvenile justice system.

Very soon the Family Resource Center, which is a project funded by the Summit County Department of Job and Family Services (DJFS), will be operational. It will offer a unique blend of resources and systems to our families and youth. By utilizing case management, follow-up and the many resources available in the Summit County community, the Juvenile Court will be better able to help our young people face, accept and, hopefully, conquer challenges while offering a helping hand throughout the process.

Case management services will be available to address teenage pregnancy and parenthood, school and work issues, re-entry into the community following long-term commitment in the detention center and domestic violence issues.

Since Summit County Council's recent approval of the \$460,000 DJFS grant, the Court has been busy preparing to accommodate the Family Resource Center. It is an exciting time at the Court because we can further extend our reach into the community and support the families it serves.

It truly has been a collaborative effort. Without the invaluable assistance of the county's Department of Job and Family Services, the Family Resource Center would remain a mere concept. The hard work and determination of Court staff drove this project to a meaningful result.

The Guardian ad Litem Program will also expand to serve an additional 300 abused and/or neglected children as a result of a \$490,000 DJFS grant.

While the CASA/GAL Program will continue to rely on its extraordinary volunteers to act as advocates, the Court will also have a paid staff of social workers to perform the GAL case management services. The expanded GAL Program will continue its goal of protecting the best interests of a child throughout the court process.

It is also an extension of the Court's philosophy of being a partner in the community, an agent of positive change and progressive programming that benefits not just the children it serves, but the citizens of Summit County as a whole.

Linda Tucci Teodosio

COURT EMPLOYEES PITCH IN FOR "REBUILDING TOGETHER"

Seven Court employees, including Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio, volunteered for this year's Rebuilding Together-Akron effort, helping renovate a home in Akron's North Hill section on April 29th.

Stephanie Borak, Lisa Zeno Carano, her husband, Pat, Magistrate Brad Christman, David Horner, Jennifer Petrucelli, her husband, John, and Steve Stahl joined Judge Teodosio at the site. They were assigned to scrape, prime and paint the basement of the home.

Rebuilding Together-Akron, formerly Christmas in April, is in its eleventh year of renovating homes in Summit County. What used to be a single-day event in April has evolved into a year-round initiative. On April 29th alone, 18 homes throughout the county were renovated. The organization expects to renovate its 500th home this summer.

"I think it is important for the Court to look beyond the walls our place of work to serve the community," said Judge Teodosio. "I was very happy to see the level of participation from our staff this year and I hope it continues with even more volunteers next year."

That would suit Rebuilding Together-Akron Director David Hannan just fine.

"In order to accomplish our mission, we have to create and maintain strong relationships within the community," Hannan said. "I couldn't be happier that Judge Teodosio and the staff at Juvenile Court decided to help us achieve that mission."

Hannan added that the organization is always looking to increase its list of volunteers. Because of the growth of the program, there is some training required to participate. It entails a two hour session once a month for four months. For more information about the organization, contact Hannan at 330-643-2726 or visit its Web site at: rebuildingtogether-sc.org.

COURT IN THE COMMUNITY CONTINUES IN TWO SCHOOLS

Near the end of the 2005-2006 school year, the Summit County Juvenile Court had a bit of unfinished business to tend to: truancy. The Court's ongoing Court in the Community Program was held in two schools in late April and early May.

The first session was conducted in the library of Barberton's Highland Middle School. Magistrate Tavia Baxter presided over five truancy cases. The first case before her got off to a "rousing" start. As Magistrate Baxter explained the plea options and types of disposition the student could receive, the student was less than attentive. In fact, a pronounced stretch and an obvious yawn brought the Magistrate's explanation to an abrupt halt. She fixed her gaze on the student, who suddenly became decidedly more alert.

That set the tone for the hearings. Each student had their excuses for not attending. Some were the garden variety type: failure to be able to get out of bed, dislike of school. Others were more serious: personal or parental illnesses, fear of bullying, parental indifference.

Magistrate Baxter's questioning coaxed details from each student. Parents who were ordered to the hearing on a Failure to Send charge were allowed to give their reasons for their child's truancy. In the end, none of the explanations were enough to excuse their actions. Among the dispositions Magistrate Baxter levied were orders to attend school or face the forfeiture of a \$100 bond the parent had to post, family counseling and community service. A physician's note was required to be produced if an illness prevented attendance.

Then came the last hearing of the day.

A 14 year old who had missed 53 days of school sat before Magistrate Baxter. His excuse was the old stand-by: "I don't like school". Then Highland Assistant Principal Erica Knowles informed the Court that the student in question lived directly across from the school.

"I beg your pardon?" an incredulous Magistrate Baxter asked.

She turned her attention to the student and his mother and informed them both that the situation was totally unacceptable. Even police intervention couldn't convince the boy to go to school, she was told.

So, the young man was ordered to go to school for the remainder of the year

without missing and write a letter of apology to Ms. Knowles. His mother was fined \$172 and ordered to post a \$200 bond that would be forfeited if her son missed any school through December 31st of the upcoming school year. The mother was also ordered to attend The Parenting Project, designed to aid parents to handle a variety of issues they confront every-day.

"It seems to me your child is the one in charge at home," said Magistrate Baxter.

Afterward, Ms. Knowles expressed her feeling that the Court in the Community had real value.

"I think it's important to be able to bring the families in before the situation gets completely out of hand," she said. "By having the Court come here, it shows that we are committed to addressing this issue."

She added that the Court's presence in the school had added benefit.

"Don't think for a minute that the students don't understand what's going on here," said Ms. Knowles. "It's all over the school. It's a topic of discussion and all of them know they don't want to be in there. It's definitely made an impression on them."

It was Judge Teodosio's chance to leave an impression on four truants who appeared before her in the Little Theater of Cuyahoga Falls High School.

The first case involved a student who didn't attend school because he suffered from allergies and illness. Judge Teodosio asked both the student and his parents why treatment wasn't pursued to stem the effects of the allergies. She then engaged the student in a more conversational tone and learned of his love of animals. The Judge ordered him to return to school and to perform commu-

nity service that involved working with animals.

The second student said he had no excuse for missing school. He noted his difficulty in juggling his work schedule with his school work. Judge Teodosio had a solution: she ordered the student to obtain a daily planner so the student would be better organized. She also ordered him to fashion a list of reachable goals: getting to school, doing homework, staying on-task, etc.

The third case was laced with sadness. Though a good student, her truancy was, in part, due to a series of unfortunate, sometimes tragic, circumstances. The entire family was currently in counseling to try to work through it. The student also felt alienated from her classmates because of her absenteeism. So, Judge Teodosio ordered that the family remain in counseling and that the student enroll in a summer sports camp with her classmates so she could become better acquainted with them before next school year. The Judge set the case for a summer review to see how the student was doing.

The fourth student had recently given birth to a child. She also admitted that she was battling a drinking problem. The Judge calmly asked the girl about her situation and wanted assurances from her that she was winning that battle with alcohol. The Judge stressed the importance of being a good parent and a responsible person. She ordered the girl to enter Life Skills and to work on a child care plan so she could return to school. She also ordered the girl to attend a parenting class.

"I think today's hearings showed that there are so many causes of truancy," said Judge Teodosio afterward. "But the one thing these students have in common is the real need to get back into the classroom and resume learning. They might think their situations are difficult now, but they'll only be magnified later because of their lack of an education."

COURT NAMES EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR

Three Juvenile Court staff members were recognized as Employees of the Year on May 25th. Juvenile Court, Domestic Relations Court and County Council held their Employee Recognition event in Council Chambers.

With colleagues, friends and family members looking on, Group Counselor Bryan Bryce, Traffic Clerk Ursula Gould and CASA/GAL Outreach Coordinator Esther Thomas learned of their awards as Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio made their introductions.

First to be recognized was Ursula Gould, who works the Traffic window at the Court. Ursula began working for the Court at the Family Crisis Center in December 1979. When the Center closed its doors, Ursula transferred to Dan Street in the Clerk's Office.

The Traffic window is one of the busiest sites in the entire Court and Ursula handles the volume of visitors in a quiet, assured, responsive way.

JUDGE TEODOSIO WINS DISTINGUISHED CITIZEN AWARD

A portion of the Alpha Gamma Delta Fraternity Purpose reads, *"To understand that wisdom be vouchsafed to me; to welcome the opportunity of contributing to the world's work in the community where I am placed because of the joy of service..."*

Perhaps that passage, more than anything else, best describes Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio's philosophy in her 25 years of legal service, the past eight years of which have been spent on the bench. It was because of her program innovation and community-mindedness that the Alpha Gamma Delta International Chapter was compelled to name Judge Teodosio as one of four Distinguished Citizen Award winners. She was cited for her work in the field of Government/Law. She received the honor at the fraternity's international convention held June 22-25 in Indian Wells, CA.

According to the Alpha Gamma Delta guidelines, the Distinguished Citizen Awards are given to fraternity alumna who have made outstanding contributions and achievements in their professions, given outstanding volunteer service in their community or religious faith and demonstrated in their personal lives the possession of high ideals. She has previously won awards for her service to The University of Akron's AGD

Omega Chapter. Judge Teodosio is the first member of Omega Chapter to win the Distinguished Citizen Award, which has been bestowed to AGD alumnae annually since 1959.

In her tenure, thus far, Judge Teodosio's innovative programming at the Court has received praise and, in one particular instance, national attention. Judge Teodosio's Crossroads Program has been recognized as a viable model for its treatment of youth suffering from co-occurring disorders and its collaboration with area agencies. This specialty docket of the Juvenile Court deals with youth that have an affective mental health disorder such as major depression and bipolar disorder, are substance dependent or both.

Judge Teodosio was also cited for many other programs she has initiated at the Court, such as the Teen Court, the expansion of the Court library and Project: Greenhouse Affect, which introduces detainees to the methods and skills of gardening and landscaping.

Her community involvement is extensive. Judge Teodosio has served as a member or volunteer for over 50 civic and professional organizations, boards and committees, including President of the Board of Governors for the Akron Bar Association Foundation and The University of Akron School of Law Alumni

Association. She has also been a member of the Criminal Justice Advisory Board, the Catholic Youth Organization, First Friday Club of Greater Akron and the county's Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board.

In recognition of her community service, she has been recognized as the Public Official of the Year for both District 2 (Summit County) and the State of Ohio by the National Association of Social Workers, received the Award of Achievement from the Six District Educational Compact and was the recipient of the Harold B. Stubbs Humanitarian Award for Government. Previously, she has been named Business Person of the Year by the Stow-Munroe Falls Chamber of Commerce and one of the most influential women in Northeast Ohio by Northern Ohio Live magazine.

Still, when she got word of the Alpha Gamma Delta recognition, she was more than a little surprised.

"Alpha Gamma Delta's Distinguished Citizen Award is one of those honors that other people get. I never dreamed that I'd be chosen," said Judge Teodosio. "I was honored and humbled at the same time. To be a part of such an amazing list of women who have won this award in the past is something I'll cherish forever."

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As Judge Teodosio said in her introductory remarks, "She is thorough in a job that requires thoroughness."

Upon receiving her High Point Award, Ursula commented, "I was brought up to do your job and do it well. I feel blessed to be working at Juvenile Court. Not every day is perfect, but every day is a blessing."

Bryan Bryce was honored next. He has been at the Court for nearly three years, starting as a part-time Group Counselor in Detention. His aptitude and attitude soon caught the attention of supervisors and when a full-time position opened up, Bryan expressed an interest in it and his hiring was almost an afterthought.

Bryan was lauded for his willingness to learn as many facets of the job as possible and he always ready to help a co-worker regardless of the situation.

Said Judge Teodosio: "He is especially interested in conveying to our youth

the importance of learning life skills and the youth in detention are drawn to him. He has developed the trust and respect of the co-workers and the youth he works with."

In his remarks, Bryce said, "I am honored to receive this award, but I accept it on behalf of my co-workers. They have helped me so much since I began at the Court."

Esther Thomas was introduced next. She closed a successful law practice to move to Akron and begin work at the Court under a grant furnished by the National CASA Association. Esther coordinates outreach efforts on behalf of the Court's CASA/GAL Program. She plays an integral role in promoting volunteerism in the program. Since Esther began, volunteerism in the CASA/GAL Program has increased by 20%. Additionally, she was just one of 25 people nationwide to be selected to attend the National CASA Leadership Conference.

Judge Teodosio noted, "Esther brings a perfect blend of communication skills,

leadership ability, intelligence, common sense and tenaciousness to her job. She is a gifted teacher, trainer and recruiter with a true commitment to her work and to the children who benefit from her work."

Judge Teodosio had one more award to bestow. Although he is not a member of the Juvenile Court staff, Judge Teodosio recognized the work of Maintenance Supervisor Kevin Bing, who parlayed his management skills and degree in Horticulture into the development of a garden that was almost entirely planted and nurtured by volunteer youth who were in Detention.

Judge Teodosio called Bing forward and handed him a plaque with the inscription: *To Kevin Bing - In recognition of his outstanding dedication and expertise in developing the garden that has become an educational tool for the youth in the Detention Center. His devotion to this project has been exemplary and the Court gratefully acknowledges his contributions and commitment.*

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COURT SPEARHEADS TASK FORCE

Summertime is always a concern for law enforcement agencies and the Court. Too much idle time can result in too many opportunities to engage in unlawful activity.

It was that concern that prompted the Court to join with the Summit County Prosecutor's Office and the Akron Police Department to form the Youth Offenders Task Force. The task force has met three times in the last month and a half after initial meetings with members of Akron City Council and representatives from city hall. Those meetings spurred the creation of the task force.

The focus of the task force has been how to reduce juvenile crime. The task force decided the best way to attack the problem was to detect and disperse large gatherings before things could escalate into problems. Curfew violators would be targeted by police officers during their patrols. Random curfew sweeps are being planned. For its part, the Court will have additional staff available to process the anticipated increase of curfew violators who will be processed and held at the detention center until their parents or guardians can pick them up.

The Court is prohibited by federal law from holding youth in the detention center who are considered status offenders. Such offenses include unruliness and truancy. However, just because the status offenders weren't detained doesn't mean their involvement with the Court ends with their release.

"The Court is going to set up a series of docket days where a Court Magistrate will devote a good portion of the day hearing those cases," said Judge Teodosio. But the concerns of Judge Teodosio and the task force go beyond status offenses. Gang activities spike during the summer months and the stronger police presence will hopefully decrease such activity.

Getting guns off the streets tops the priority list. It's a misnomer that juvenile crime has increased. Statistics show otherwise. But the most troublesome aspect that concerns the task force is that children seem to have greater access to weapons, especially guns. But Judge Teodosio hopes that there is a way to curb it.

"Crime prevention begins at home," she said. "The guns have to be kept somewhere. Parental rights include the ability to search a child's room. I implore parents to do just that. Check your child's closet and dresser drawers. Look under mattresses, anywhere you think a gun could be hidden."

The Court has a Firearm Education Program available by calling 330.643.7625. Should you be confronted with the discovery of a firearm or need assistance on how to handle a situation involving a gun, the Court also has a Gun Safety Info Line: 330.643.8811. Of course, in the case of an emergency involving a gun, 911 should always be called.

"We hope that the word gets out so that there will be a decrease in curfew violators," said Judge Teodosio. "When the word hit the streets that police were going to haul in troublemakers on the 4th of July, the number of arrests went down compared to the year before. There was very little activity. We hope this effort has the same effect."