

THE COURT REPORTER

June 2008

Volume 4 Issue 3

A Message from Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio



I was honored to be invited to participate in a promising statewide initiative recently. The first Ohio Summit on Children took place on May 1st and 2nd in Columbus. The goals of the Summit centered on enhancing the safety, well-being and permanent home environments of Ohio children.

I was part of a Summit County team that included some outstanding community leaders: Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Board Executive

Director Don Davies, Child Guidance & Family Solutions President Elaine Harlin, incoming Akron Public Schools Superintendent David James, County Executive Russ Pry, Summit County Children Services Executive Director John Saros and Akron Public Schools Superintendent Sylvester Small. This group has been charged developing an action plan that must be submitted in 90 days.

The Ohio Summit on Children was co-chaired by Gov. Ted Strickland and Supreme Court of Ohio Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer, which indicates the commitment and importance applied to this project. The Summit concentrated on assessing local and state

strengths and challenges, identifying service gaps and developing local plans for improvement in delivering services to Ohio's children.

The Ohio Summit on Children was an important first step toward addressing some important issues and challenges facing communities here and across the State of Ohio. I am encouraged by what I learned in Columbus in early May and I look forward to taking part in the planning sessions that will occur over the next several months to continue the collaborative process.

Linda Tucci Teodosio

Women's Board Holds 25th Annual Style Show

"Hat's Off to You" took on a dual meaning at this year's Women's Board Style Show on April 24th at Guy's Party Centre. It was not only the theme of the event, but it was also a term that could be applied to the acknowledgement of the individuals who have made the event an annual success as it marked its 25th year.

Event Chair Tedi Fink had the bittersweet task of recognizing the work of Jayne Laundrie who conceptualized the event and was its driving force for years. Sadly, Ms. Laundrie passed away 11 days prior to the event.

There was another milestone announced at the Style Show: the Women's Board is observing its 50th anniversary in October. The Women's Board was the first of its kind in Ohio and it remains a unique presence in juvenile courts across the state and across the nation. Board President Deanna Clark thanked all the past presidents who provided the leadership necessary for the Board to continue its volunteerism, fund-raising and philanthropy for the benefit of the Court.

The Style Show is one of the primary fund-raising functions the Board conducts. Ms. Fink mentioned in her introduction of Judge Teodosio that when the Judge assumed the Juvenile Court bench, it resulted in an infusion of interest in the Style Show and other events.

"People notice when the Judge is involved because they respect her so much," said Ms. Fink. "They would buy tickets simply because Judge Teodosio supported us. They wouldn't even care what



Judge Teodosio presents plaque to Board President Deanne Clark observing Board's 50th anniversary.

the ticket was for; they just wanted to be involved in something she was a part of."

In her remarks, Judge Teodosio offered her congratulations upon the two milestones as well as her admiration for the Board.

"So much of what we do at the Court is touched by the time and talent of the members of the Women's Board," she said.

After presenting a plaque commemorating the Board's 50th anniversary to Ms. Clark, Judge Teodosio then announced that the Court has enlisted the help of County Executive Russ Pry to introduce legislation to Summit County Council to dedicate the third floor Mediation Room as a permanent memorial in honor of the Women's Board.

"It is the perfect place to recognize the Women's Board," said Judge Teodosio. "It's a place where problems are solved, where mediation brings people together. The Women's Board supports that ideal by being kind and by being supportive."

Volunteers **Acknowledged** **at Reception**

"It is such a pleasure to be able to do something for you in return."

Those were a portion of the remarks from Judge Teodosio as she addressed a group of 40 individuals who were praised for their commitment to the Court at its Volunteer Recognition Reception on April 28th in the Court's first floor conference room.

Volunteers from the Child Responsibility Project, Citizens Review Board, Teen Court, True North, Victim Services and the Women's Board were invited to the Court. Their invaluable contributions throughout the year were acknowledged by the Court staff members who worked most closely with them throughout the year.

With 2006 recipient Nancy Patton looking on, Judge Teodosio revealed the 2007 honoree as the

Attorney Help Desk Off to a Great Start

On March 19th, the Summit County Juvenile Court opened its Attorney Help Desk to the public for the first time. The response couldn't be more encouraging.

The Attorney Help Desk is designed to assist the public with specific areas of the juvenile justice process. Local attorneys have agreed to staff the Help Desk. The fees to provide this service are generated through the Court's Special Projects fund. The attorneys offer assistance on the completion of forms such as Grandparent Affidavits, Petitions for Change of Legal Custody, Preparations of Subpoenas and Precipes for Service of Process and do so at no charge to the public.

The Help Desk is available every Wednesday from 1pm until 4pm. The public must come to the William P. Kannel Juvenile Court Center and sign in at the front desk of the main lobby. They will be served on a first-come-first-serve basis and most consultations last about 15-20 minutes.

"I have been very pleased by the response we have received from the public and the attorneys who are willing to participate in this program," said Judge Teodosio. "We realize how difficult it is to navigate through the paperwork required by the juvenile justice system without the benefit of an attorney. We believe the Help Desk can offer the public an option that before now was unavailable to them. We hope the Help Desk becomes a staple of the kind of services the Court offers."

In the opening six weeks, over 60 people have taken advantage of this new service.

Court's Volunteer of the Year for 2007.

Carol Kohar of the Women's Board, known affectionately as "The Party Lady," looked stunned when it began to dawn on her that she was the person the Judge was describing in her introduction.

Ms. Kohar and other members of the Women's Board organized treat nights for youth in detention who were performing at positive levels. But Ms. Kohar took it a step further. She began to introduce educational elements into the treat nights; anything from teaching dinner etiquette, bringing in community leaders and athletes to speak, teaching youth how to complete job applications, making jewelry, fashioning no-sew blankets for Family Resource Center clients and running a spelling bee, just to name a few.

Such is her commitment to the Court, noted Judge Teodosio, that even when she was in a dentist's chair, she produced



Judge Teodosio awards plaque to the Court's 2007 Volunteer of the Year, Carol Kohar.

something positive for the Court: she convinced her dentist to donate toothbrushes and toothpaste to be used in the detention center.

"Carol Kohar brings energy, purpose, caring and creativity to her volunteerism," said Judge Teodosio. "She is the same as all of you here tonight. She performs her volunteerism not for reward or recognition, but for the good of the kids, the Court and the community."

In Memoriam



Michelle Williams

How often have we read in an obituary that a person died "after a courageous battle with cancer." So many times, they are just words on a page because we didn't know the person. However, we at Summit County Juvenile Court can now apply some real meaning to those words.

Probation Officer Michelle Williams passed away on March 16th at the age of 54. She leaves behind a loving family, a host of friends and a group of colleagues at the Juvenile Court who will forever have her example of will and bravery in the face of insurmountable odds to treasure and emulate.

Michelle was absolutely devoted to her job. She considered it her dream job and she did everything in her power to make sure she came to work everyday, even when it was apparent that her disease had weakened her body. Her spirit, however, was indomitable. Michelle might have been small of stature, but she had the heart of a titan.

Many of her co-workers became friends. She was able to continue to make and develop relationships throughout her life. She is missed every day. But, also she is remembered every day by those who she worked with and those who worked with her and knew her best. Here are some of those people and some of their comments as they remember Michelle:

Kandy Hixson: "In her final days she left the world with a legacy of courage, grace and beauty. I will always be forever grateful to have shared her final journey here on Earth with her and eternally grateful for the lessons she taught me about my life and its meaning."

Curtis Howard: "She lived every day as if she was going to make a difference. And she did make a difference, in her caseload, in the court system and in the community. Her spirit will continue to make a difference through the lives she touched."

Keysha Myers-Murphy: "Although a complex woman I like to think of her as wise beyond her years. We spent a lot of time together talking, debating ideas, but mostly laughing. Her spirit was fresh and authentic. She was very inquisitive and congenial with a sometimes idealistic view of the way the world should be. I would often challenge her on those ideals, just as often as she would remind me of the importance in striving for virtuousness. I learned many lessons from her life, and that is a gift I'll treasure forever."

Jeff Pope: "Michelle would call about one of her kids working CRP. 'Hey Popey, when will you get to my kids?' And before you know it we are talking about my family, are the kids ok, how are they doing in school? Michelle would help you if you need it but don't cross her. Michelle was real and you don't see that much, and I miss that."

Raylene Pruszkowski: "Michelle was my adventure. She quietly taught compassion for others, courage and strength through adversity; all the while struggling every day to put one foot in front of the other. Michelle's sense of humor at times would only belie the seriousness of her illness and we would enjoy that moment without reservation. I know our roads will surely become one again. Michelle will be waiting there wearing her pink boots. Thank you Michelle for the adventure!"

Court in the Community Visits Innes Middle School

Summit County Juvenile Court continued its Court in the Community program when it transformed the library of Innes Middle School into a courtroom. Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio heard two cases that day and the only thing the two defendants had in common was the

charge:



Judge Teodosio discusses truancy case at Innes Middle School.

Both boys were enrolled at Innes and both were identified by the school as chronic truants. A chronic truancy is a student who has

missed school for seven consecutive days and/or 15 days in a month. Also, the mother and father in the first case and the mother in the second were also charged with Failure to Send which could result in the parent(s) receiving a penalty of a \$500 fine, 70 hours of community service, mandatory mediation and counseling and posting a bond that would assure that their child attends school.

In the first case, the frustration of the parents was clear. Their son did well in school in the past, but he had become increasingly indifferent to school to the point where he never went and if he did, he soon left the building.

After hearing the explanations of the parents, Judge Teodosio was firm in her comments to the youth.

"I don't understand your actions. Your parents obviously care for you. You look like you haven't missed a meal. You're dressed well. You don't seem to be lacking intelligence. Your father works hard to provide a good home for you. Why would you do this to them? Why would you jeopardize your future simply because you don't want to go to school?"

The youth shifted his gaze away from the Judge, stared toward the window, shrugged and mumbled, "I don't know."

After it was clear that was all the youth had to offer, the Judge asked him if he wanted to admit to or deny the truancy charge. He decided to deny

Cont'd on Pg. 4

William P. Kannel Juvenile Court Center
650 Dan Street
Akron OH 44310



Cont'd from Pg.3

it and the Judge set a pre-trial date. The parents would continue to try to find the proper documentation that would prove that made their best attempts to get their son to attend school.

The second case was markedly different. A 6th grader and his mother told the Court how their family was recently beset with serious family illness, financial setbacks and personal illness to the youth. After the boy admitted to the truancy charge, it was reported that the youth did very well when in school but the recent misfortunes had a traumatic effect on him.

"You can't control your family's problems," the Judge told the youth. "You can help yourself and your family by doing what's best for you and you can do your part by going to school."

Judge Teodosio also suggested that he talk to a trusted teacher or a member of the clergy to help ease his emotional burden. In the meantime, the Court would work with the family and the school to clear up some unexcused absences which the mother said she could erase through documentation.

"I think sessions like this in the schools are important on many levels," said Judge Teodosio. "It shows the community that their schools are addressing truancy. It shows that the Court is concerned and pro-active about the truancy issue. It shows the students in the school that Juvenile Court is serious about enforcing the truancy laws and it shows the defendants and their parents that the Court is willing to work with them to get them back into the classroom."