



SHERRI BEVAN WALSH

Summit County Prosecutor

Newsletter

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Message from the Prosecutor



Prosecutor
Sherri Bevan Walsh

Like most working mothers, I wear several hats in my life. Most of you know me as the Summit County Prosecutor, but I am also the mother of two boys, ages six and nine, one of whom has a diagnosis of Autism.

April is **Autism Awareness Month** and instead of writing on crime issues, I wanted to focus on the other very important job in my life, being a mother and an advocate for my son.

I am on the board of the Greater Akron Chapter of the Autism Society. Locally, our chapter worked with ClearChannel Outdoor to produce 10 billboards that feature educational messages about autism.

"Intelligent. Unique. Autism." Intelligent: At one time, it was believed that 75 percent of individuals with autism were mentally retarded. Recent research reveals that number is way too high. While these individuals cannot always express their knowledge and intelligence due to their language difficulties, it is important not to underestimate their abilities. Education and early intervention is the key to unlocking their potential.

Unique: Individuals with autism are also unique because they are different. Not wrong, not dumb, just different. Accepting those unique differences is another reason to bring more awareness to autism.

Autism: Autism Spectrum Disorders represent an entire spectrum of disorders that are characterized by varying degrees of impairment in communication skills, social interactions, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior. The sub-messages on each billboard are really about patience, support, and acceptance of individuals on the spectrum. One says **"Making friends is harder with autism. Be a friend."** One of my biggest fears is that once my son reaches middle school, he may be bullied and misunderstood. Talk to your children about individuals with disabilities and how to treat them with understanding and respect. Our children want friends just as other children do, they just need some extra help making them.

Another message is **"People with autism see the world differently. Don't we all?"** This billboard features a 13-year-old teenage boy who can tell you more than most adults about the September 11 tragedy. He has an unusual memory for "disaster" facts, and is a very interesting boy to speak to...but he is different than most teens who do not share this intense interest. Take the time to learn their unique point of view.

"One in 150 kids has autism. Offer your support." This message highlights the importance of friends and family supporting not only the individual with autism, but their families. Autism is a very intense diagnosis to be given as a parent.

Of all my jobs, autism and its impact on my son and our family is one of my most challenging. With community tolerance, patience, and support, my job is a lot easier.

Tough Prosecution

On September 6, 2007, John Simmons, 38, of Barberton, raped his live-in girlfriend at knifepoint and punched her in the face.

Following a bench trial, Judge Elinore Stormer convicted Simmons of **Rape**, a felony of the first degree, and **Domestic Violence**, a felony of the third degree, on March 11.

He was sentenced on April 23 to 20 years in prison. He was found to be a Repeat Violent Offender and was classified as a Tier III Sexual Offender.

Great job on this conviction, Assistant Prosecutor Angela Walls-Alexander!



DID YOU KNOW?

My Office partnered with **Summit County Sheriff Drew Alexander** last April to launch **Take Me Home**, a law enforcement program to assist individuals who would have communication difficulties in a law enforcement situation.

Since that time, we have moved forward on several levels. First, I hired a part-time Take Me Home Coordinator, Leslie Knoblauch. Leslie has been reaching out to schools, assisted living centers, group homes and other community groups to reach as many families with loved ones who have been diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, Alzheimer's, Down Syndrome, and any other developmental disabilities that impair communication.

Second, although we initially targeted individuals with autism (immediately partnering with the **Greater Akron Chapter of the Autism Society of America**, which has provided volunteers, key tags and other resources), last September we entered into a partnership with the **Alzheimer's Association, Greater East Ohio Area Chapter**, to focus on senior citizens with dementia.

Finally, we held our first **Take Me Home Advisory Board** meeting in February, where representatives from every Summit County police department made themselves available to discuss coordination of the program. The database now houses almost 500 individuals and is growing daily.

Take Me Home is a free resource to anyone in Summit County. For more information, or to register, please call Leslie at 330-643-8741.

Questions? E-mail Laurie Cramer:
cramer@prosecutor.summitoh.net

We're on the Web!
www.co.summit.oh.us/prosecutor

April Top Cop



Chief John Conley
Cuyahoga Falls Police Department

Honorable Mention: Chief Mark Wentz
Northfield Police Department

Nominated by: Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh

Thanks to the leadership of **Chief John Conley**, the **Cuyahoga Falls Police Department** is the first department to work with my Office to implement a 16-week training on the Take Me Home program for all of its Officers. Chief Conley also allotted time for his Officers to watch a training video on how to best interact with individuals with autism in a law enforcement situation.

A close second by only a couple of weeks, **Chief Mark Wentz**, of **Northfield Police Department**, also provided training for his Officers to learn how to implement this important program. His department also watched the training video on autism.

Our Officers on the front lines are key to the success of the Take Me Home program. A special thanks to our partner, Sheriff Drew Alexander and his Deputies, and to all of the departments involved with Take Me Home. Together, we are making a difference.

Way to go, Top Cops!



1 in 150 children is diagnosed with autism.
1 in 104 boys is on the autism spectrum.
67 children are diagnosed per day.
A new case is diagnosed almost every 20 minutes.
More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes and cancer combined.

Go to www.AutismSpeaks.org to find out more about Autism.

MEET OUR TAKE ME HOME COORDINATOR LESLIE KNOBLAUCH

Position: Outreach Coordinator,
Take Me Home

Hire date: September 2007

Hometown: Dover, Ohio

Education: BA in Business, Ohio
Dominican College; Gerontology
Certificate, Columbus State

Little known fact:
I enjoy cooking.

Background: I have worked as a birthday party consultant for special needs children, a gymnastics instructor for special needs children, and an activities volunteer director for an assisted living center. I have also worked for Suicide Prevention Services, CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence, and Central Ohio Psychiatric Hospital.



GUILTY!

*Congratulations to Assistant Prosecutors **Tom Bown (2), Jessica Didion, Becky Doherty, Greta Johnson, Margaret Kanellis, Brian LoPrinzi, Angela Poth-Wypasek (2), Mike Todd, Mike Tripi, and Angela Walls-Alexander**, who each had juries return **GUILTY VERDICTS** at trials in March!*

GREAT JOB, ASSISTANT PROSECUTORS!

That's Outrageous!



On March 31, **Robert Murphy**, 45, of Stow, pled guilty to two counts of Rape and one count of Inducing Panic.

When Stow Police and Metro SWAT arrived at Murphy's Kent Road residence on October 29, 2007, Murphy engaged them in a standoff for approximately five hours. Police were there to arrest him for the rape of a 15-year-old girl. The girl and her mother had been at Murphy's home, visiting his roommate, when he entered the bedroom the girl was sleeping in and raped her.

After the story ran in local newspapers, a teenaged family member came forward and told police that Murphy had sexual assaulted her starting when she was six years old.

Murphy will be sentenced by Judge Thomas Teodosio on May 2.

Congratulations, Assistant Prosecutors Beth Aronson and Margaret Kanellis, for prosecuting this outrageous crime!