

## Protect Yourself From Crime

### by Sherri Bevan Walsh, Summit County Prosecutor

As the Summit County Prosecutor, I am very much aware of the crimes being committed in our communities. The crimes you read and hear about represent only a very small number of the crimes being committed. Last year, my office prosecuted 4,668 adult defendants who committed felony crimes in Summit County. Felony crimes are the most serious crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, kidnapping, drug offenses, child abuse and burglary.

My office also prosecuted more than 7,000 juveniles for offenses ranging from

misdemeanor crimes to felony crimes. Most of the individuals prosecuted by my office were charged with more than one crime.

It is important to realize and accept that none of us are immune from becoming a victim of a crime. I realized this myself on Feb. 21, 1986, when I became the eleventh of 13 women who was attacked in broad daylight by a serial rapist in Akron. I was luckier than many of the other women as I was able to fight off my attacker and my injuries were minor. Although this occurred 21 years ago, it is an experience I have never forgotten and often share with other people with the hope of providing valuable advice.

At 8:30 that morning, I was cleaning snow off my car. I observed a suspicious man pass by me on the sidewalk. I had a gut feeling that something about him wasn't right, so I watched him for a few minutes but was not worried since it was daylight and I was in a public area. When I got into my car, I did not lock my door. Within seconds, my door opened and the same man grabbed my throat and began choking me. I immediately reacted by hitting him, kicking him, and screaming as loud as I could. I made such a commotion that, after a few minutes, he panicked and ran away.



*Sherri Bevan Walsh, Hudson resident and Summit County Prosecutor.*

I learned several things from this experience:

Rehearse a plan in your mind where you tell yourself what you will do if something like this ever happens to you. I had thought about this possibility before I was ever attacked and because I had a plan, I was able to react quickly. There is no time to think when something like this occurs and if you have never thought about it, you are less likely to react.

If you are in a public place where other people are likely to hear you, scream as loud as you can and do anything you can to draw attention to the situation. Criminals do not want to get caught and most will panic if you are making a lot of noise.

If you have a gut feeling that someone or something is not quite right, do not ignore it because your instinct is probably right. Most victims of crime have told me that they had a bad feeling about the criminal and wish they had not ignored their instinct.

Do not assume you are safe just because it is daylight and you are in a public place. There are almost as many crimes committed during the day as there are crimes committed at night.

Always lock your car door.

After my attack, I blamed myself for the incident for not being more careful or cautious. I now know that self-blame is a very normal reaction for those who have been a victim of crime. Although most victims continue to blame themselves, they are not to blame. The criminal is to blame. However, because we live in a society where crime continues to occur, we must do everything possible to minimize our chances of becoming the next crime victim. ∞