



## Home Improvement

# Horrendous Crimes are Everywhere... even in Summit County

*By Sherri Bevan Walsh  
Summit County Prosecutor*

I am sometimes approached by people at the grocery store, mall, or community meetings and asked about how busy we are, if crimes are up or down, or about certain cases that have been resolved. During those encounters I typically speak in broad terms, as I realize that the horrors of some of the crimes my office deals with are that much more shocking to people who do not work here every-day. Having said that, I would not be truthful if I didn't confess that there are days and cases that get to all of us.

This year, my office handled more than 4,500 criminal cases in Common Pleas Court and over 7,000 juvenile cases in Juvenile Court. The county Prosecutor's Office only handles felony cases, those that are the most serious, rather than misdemeanors that are handled at the city level. We had 193 cases go to trial this year, and our felony conviction rate - being found guilty at trial or pleading guilty prior to trial - was 96%, where it has remained constant for several years.

In our 2009 Year End Review newsletter, we identified 13 cases as "Most Notable." (For a full copy of the newsletter, see my website at <http://www.co.summit.oh.us/>

prosecutor.) The cases I am about to share with you are very disturbing and are crimes most of us cannot imagine in our worst nightmare. I do not mean to shock you, but thought a window into our world would share some of the types of crimes that we deal with every day, and try not to take home with us at night.

*Hersie Wesson*

Wesson's crime is indeed a heinous and senseless one. He brutally murdered his 81-year-old neighbor and left his wife for dead. The victim's wife only survived because she played dead to escape further injury, but may never fully recover from her physical injuries, much less the emotional ones. A three judge panel sentenced Wesson to the death penalty. Hersie Wesson was the only person sentenced to death in Ohio this year.

*Virginia Johnson*

Johnson was sentenced to seventeen-years in prison - one year for every year of her daughter's life - because she allowed and assisted her boyfriend in raping her daughter from the time she was 13. The boyfriend killed himself during the investigation. Johnson pled guilty and is serving her 17-year prison sentence in Marysville. She was ordered to not have any contact with her daughters.

*Jason Knapp, Dale Perdue*

Unfortunately, this office is accustomed to child rapists (at least as accustomed as one can become to this horrible crime). We don't, however, often have cases of babies being raped.

In two unrelated cases, Perdue and Knapp both raped two-year old baby girls. Knapp was sentenced to Life without parole and Perdue was sentenced to Life without parole until after serving 40 years. At his age, we expect he will never see the outside of prison walls again.

*Michael Knudson*

Michael Knudson killed his mother and brother and set the family house on fire. We don't often see the murder of two family members at one time. Knudson was sentenced to 22 years to Life in prison. His siblings did not want him to spend the rest of his life in prison and asked the judge for a shorter sentence than the State requested.

*Daniel Tice*

Tice epitomizes the reason for our Domestic Violence Unit. He killed his wife because she was threatening to leave him, leaving three children without parents to raise them. Tice somehow survived a bullet that ricocheted off his head during his standoff with police and is now serving 23 years to Life in prison.

*John Ross, Craig Wilson, Christopher Hoffman*

These three men are in prison for killing their newborn babies. We always hope for a year when we don't have this tragic situation in our notable cases.

*Diamond Herrington, David Jackson, Earl McMorrow, Dante Sales*

These men all tried to kill a police officer. It was a rough year for our police, with more serious harm to them than noted before. Fortunately, we did not lose any officers this year and for that we are grateful.

In addition, the Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA), a division of my office, reached \$19 million in collections from individuals charged with a felony for not paying their child support. This represents child support collected by CSEA's Criminal Non-Support Unit since 2001, when it was created.

CSEA continues to be creative in its outreach efforts and has been given almost 20 awards that recognized its efforts over the years. Most recently, CSEA was recognized at the state and national levels by the Ohio Child Support Director's Association with a Best Practice Award for its development of child support workshops at churches. The National Association of Counties awarded CSEA

an Achievement Award for its Child Support Days held last year.

As we go into 2010, we look forward to another year serving the citizens of Summit County by working hard to keep our citizens safe, and by putting those who want to cause us harm in prison.

**SHERRI BEVAN  
WALSH  
Prosecuting Attorney  
County of Summit**



53 University Avenue,  
Akron, OH 44308  
(330) 643-2800

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