

The Real Prosecutor

*By Sherri Bevan Walsh
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The popularity of tv crime shows, both fictional and reality-based, has led to a greater public interest in the judicial system. An informed public is crucial to my goal of seeking justice for and protecting crime victims and the community. However, the tendency of these shows to highlight the more dramatic aspects of the judicial system has also created some confusion for those who have never been involved in a criminal case.

Jurors, for example, are often surprised at the less-than-contentious atmosphere that typically permeates a courtroom. Contrary to the usual portrayal on tv, most prosecutors and defense attorneys are able to maintain a calm and civil demeanor toward one another. Witnesses often refuse to cooperate, having bought into the

sensationalized “snitches get stitches” mentality. Even children are not immune, often believing prosecutors are the villains trying to break up their families.

My office has adopted a courtroom to community approach of initiating and participating in school and community programs to better educate the community about the judicial process in terms of case progression from arrest to conviction; the rights of the victims, witnesses and defendants; and also crime prevention strategies. By going out into the community and interacting with the public, we can better present the reality of the judicial system.

One way we reach students is by participating in the Law and Leadership program at the University of Akron School of Law. This program teaches area high school students about the legal process through presentations from professionals who practice law or

are involved in the legal system. This year, the assistant prosecutor from my office who participated received thank you notes from the students including one that said, “You gave me a new perspective on the prosecution side. I thought they were just out to hurt people and separate families, but they are more of the protectors than the inflictors.”

Another way we educate students is through our internship program. Each semester 10 to 20 students assist us by listening to jail calls, help prosecutors prepare for cases, observe trials and tour the Summit County Jail, Juvenile Court and Summit County Court of Common Pleas. And weekly brown bag lectures provide our interns with an opportunity for in-depth discussions with assistant prosecutors and victim advocates about what their jobs entail.

We also try to cultivate relationships with the adults in our community by speaking at senior group and

community organization meetings and participating in public events like National Night Out. By personally interacting with community members, we can not only dispel myths about who we are and what we do, but we can also highlight the many services and programs we offer, such as the Take Me Home program.

I truly feel that if we reach out to the community at every age, we can better help the people we serve. When citizens are fully informed of the judicial process, we can all work together for justice more effectively and with greater understanding.

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