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JUSTICE JOURNAL

Presented by The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office
Paul J. Gains, Prosecutor

Welcome to the first edition of the Justice Journal, a quarterly newsletter of the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. As the late British statesman Benjamin Disraeli said, *Justice is truth in action*. This office is committed to achieving justice through the hardworking efforts of its phenomenal team of lawyers and staff. The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office is the largest law firm in Mahoning County. The Criminal Division prosecutes over 8,000 criminal cases each year from state, local and other law enforcement agencies. These include crimes ranging from homicides to misdemeanors to traffic offenses. The Civil Division represents Mahoning County boards, elected officials and all fourteen townships and handles nearly 4,000 matters annually including contract review, litigation and township matters. We created this newsletter to highlight the incredible work our office is doing to protect the public, facilitate the performance of public services and engage the community we serve.



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OFFICE NEWS

OFFICE PROMOTIONS

We are pleased to announce the following promotions to our management structure: Gina DeGenova Zawrotuk, Chief Assistant Prosecutor, Legal/Public Information Officer; Jennifer McLaughlin, Chief, Criminal Division; Ralph Rivera, Assistant Chief, Criminal Division; Robert Andrews, Senior Trial Counsel; and Michael Yacovone, Grand Jury Prosecutor.

In her new role, Chief Assistant DeGenova-Zawrotuk will be more visible on the criminal side of the office and will work with law enforcement on the many and varied legal issues presented in the Criminal Division. She will also work with staff, county and township officials, law enforcement agencies, the judicial system, and the public to communicate and implement policies that will facilitate the administration of justice.

Criminal Division Chief McLaughlin and Assistant Chief Rivera will manage the Criminal Division, including the common pleas court, juvenile court, and the county courts. They will administer office policies regarding all aspects of the Criminal Division, and implement measures to ensure that the division runs effectively and efficiently.

Senior Trial Counsel Andrews will utilize his thirty-plus-years' trial experience to mentor and co-counsel with his fellow assistant prosecutors in all five felony division courts. He will also spearhead training for assistant prosecutors and law enforcement.

As the Grand Jury Prosecutor, Attorney Yacovone will review all cases that are bound over from the county and municipal courts and all direct presentments. He will also work with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to prepare cases for presentations to the Grand Jury.



Gina DeGenova Zawrotuk



Jennifer McLaughlin



Ralph Rivera



Robert Andrews



Michael Yacovone

OFFICE NEWS

WORKING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

During the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic presented our entire community with challenges. These challenges also impacted the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. Despite state mandated closure orders, our office remained open, like many of yours, and our employees continued to provide services. Fortunately, in 2019, with the assistance of the Board of Mahoning County Commissioners, this office moved to the Matrix virtual case management system that included replacing desktop computers with laptops. Each laptop has the ability to connect directly with the county's server through a virtual private network. And the most important aspect of the Matrix system that we could not have foreseen, was that it created the ability for our staff to work remotely while having access to all documents contained within the county's network.

MORE ABOUT MATRIX

Matrix was introduced in the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office as an innovative new case management system for our Criminal and Civil Divisions. Matrix Pointe Software is a Cleveland based company who is the leading provider of case management software in Ohio for prosecutors, being utilized in over 30 counties across Ohio. This web based system allows our prosecutors, victim/witness coordinators and support staff to access cases any time they have internet connection, and even anywhere, with the use of a computer or smartphone application. Moving from paper files to this digital case management system, we have been able to effectively integrate and streamline communications across the entire justice system of the Mahoning County. Both law enforcement officials and defense counsel across the county have access to their own Matrix portals where they can enter and analyze their respective case.

One of the key features that our Assistant Prosecutors enjoy is the interoffice connectivity that comes with Matrix. Whether there are multiple prosecutors on a case, or someone is covering for the other, everyone has access to all documents in each case therefore eliminating duplicate documents, notes, or files. By having digital copies of all documents, we have become more sustainable as an office by cutting down the need for paper copies.

The Matrix System also saves time. The system can automatically generate notifications of hearings for victims and track statistics. And Matrix is a one stop portal for law enforcement and our county and township clients to update cases and provide and receive communications and documents. Matrix also allows for system improvements that adapt to our specific needs and comply with the constant changes to law and the criminal justice and legal system. Overall, the introduction of Matrix to the office has had an overwhelmingly positive effect on workplace productivity, consistency and communication.

OFFICE NEWS

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Linette M. Stratford

The members of the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office serve the community in many ways outside of their work in the office. In each edition of the Justice Journal, we will share some of our interests and accomplishments.

Along with her duties as Chief Assistant Prosecutor, Attorney Linette M. Stratford also serves as an adjunct professor at Youngstown State University where she teaches Business Ethics and Philosophy of Law. Recently, Attorney Stratford, along with her partner Dr. Homer Warren, authored a professional article that was accepted for publication in the International Journal of Business Ethics Education. The article, titled *Producer Mindset First, then Teach Business Ethics*, advances a need for a change for the consumption mindset of consumerism to one that identifies with who we really are—*Producers*. The article is the latest

in a series of outside publications produced by Attorney Stratford which includes two books, a chapter in a marketing textbook and a paper and presentation at the Second Global Conference on Creating Value held at Fordham University, Gabelli School of Business and Customer Value Foundation, New York, N.Y.

Criminal Division Chief Jennifer McLaughlin and Assistant Chief Ralph Rivera participated in the Interdiction for Protection of Children training held on April 13 and 14, 2021, at the Oakhill Renaissance Place. This course was designed to make patrol officers, investigators and victim service personnel aware of the variety of resources available to assist them in establishing the status of a child who may be missing, exploited, or at risk of exploitation and what course of action are immediately available.



Jennifer McLaughlin and Ralph Rivera

On March 4, 2021, Chief Assistant Prosecutor Gina DeGenova Zawrotuk and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and Law Enforcement Liaison Nicholas Modarelli, were nominated for membership into the Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Executive Association, Inc. by Mahoning County Sheriff Jerry Greene. Chief Assistant DeGenova Zawrotuk and APA Modarelli graciously accepted the invitation for membership. The MVLEEA is a nonprofit corporation created to promote law enforcement professionalism through training and education.



Left: Gina DeGenova Zawrotuk
Right: Nicholas Modarelli

CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

TOP COP

Many of the cases we prosecute are difficult. We see the worst of humanity and the horrible things one person can do to another. Thankfully, we have dedicated law enforcement officers who work with us to find truth and justice. One of those officers is Detective Sergeant Michael Lambert of the City of Youngstown Police Department. Sgt. Lambert's tenacious drive when investigating cases helped our office secure convictions on three murder cases.

In the case of *State of Ohio v. Dashonti Baker*, Dashonti Baker was charged with the aggravated murder of Raevonne Faircloth-Thomas. Sgt. Lambert reviewed and analyzed cell phone data that ultimately placed Baker and Faircloth-Thomas in the same area at the time of her murder. This evidence was critical in obtaining a Baker's conviction. Similarly, in *State of Ohio v. Brian Donlow, Jr.*, Brian Donlow was charged with the aggravated murder of Christopher Jackson and attempted murder and felonious assault of Carlos Davis. Sgt. Lambert obtained social media messages that ultimately led to Donlow being identified as one of the men who entered Jackson's vehicle just before gunfire came from the backseat and into Jackson and Davis. And in *State of Ohio v. Brian Donlow, Jr. and Stephon Hopkins*, Donlow and Hopkins were charged with the murder of Brandon Wylie. At the time Wylie's murder occurred, law enforcement was having a difficult time identifying potential suspects. That was until Sgt. Lambert got involved. Through his knowledge of prior gang activity, coupled with his background regarding criminal associations, Sgt. Lambert was able to identify Donlow and Hopkins from surveillance footage taken from the scene of the crime.

Sgt. Lambert is invariably prepared to present his cases to juries, and, most importantly, is always available to help his fellow officers in cases outside of his jurisdiction. Great job and thank you Detective Sergeant Lambert!



FUN FACTS

Did you know that in the country of Somoa, it is indeed a crime to forget your wife's Birthday!

In Switzerland, it is against the law to flush the toilet after 10 p.m. in an apartment building.

In Batlimore, Maryland, it is illegal to bring a lion to the movies.

CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

NOTABLE PROSECUTIONS

State of Ohio v. Robert Boyd

Robert Boyd was sentenced to 24 ½ years in prison after a jury found him guilty of two counts of rape, one count of gross sexual imposition, two counts of disseminating matter harmful to juveniles and nine counts of illegal use of minors in nudity-oriented material or performance. In 2017, Boyd met a 17-year-old boy through social media, drove the victim to his house, and sexually assaulted him. Boyd also met another teenage boy on Craigslist in 2017. They started texting one another, and Boyd sent explicit photos to the boy, leading to charges of disseminating matter harmful to juveniles. In addition, Boyd victimized a third teenage boy who spent time at the Boyd residence. Boyd forcibly sexually assaulted this boy, the youngest of his victims, while everyone else in the house slept. A search warrant revealed child pornography on Boyd's electronic devices. The case was investigated by Boardman Township Police Department and the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The case was tried by Jennifer McLaughlin, who serves as Chief of the Criminal Division, alongside Assistant Prosecutor Caitlyn Andrews, and former Assistant Prosecutor Steven Yacovone.



Jennifer McLaughlin



Caitlyn Andrews

State of Ohio v. Maurice Redrick, Marquise Torres-Wills, Joquaun Blair, Johntez Scrivens, Burton McGee, Martize Daniels and Larenz Rhodes

One life sentence and 113 years of collective prison time were handed down as punishment for the shooting of Crystal Hernandez. On January 24, 2019, Hernandez was shot through the neck with a round from an AK-47 type rifle after five young men unloaded at least 55 rounds at her apartment. When Crystal was found, her three year old son was asleep on her chest. Through the efforts of law enforcement, seven men were indicted for their respective roles in Crystal's death. Ultimately, six of the defendants pled guilty to various offenses and were sentenced, collectively, to 113 years in prison. Larenz Rhodes, who was identified as the individual who fired the fatal shot based on statements and ballistic evidence, was found guilty of the murder of Crystal after a 10 day jury trial conducted during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. The trial involved over a dozen witnesses and hundreds of exhibits. Rhodes is currently serving a life sentence, with no possibility for parole for at least 33 years. This case was investigated by the Youngstown Police Department, led by Detective Sergeant Rick Spotleson, with the assistance of the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The case was tried by Senior Trial Counsel Robert Andrews and Assistant Prosecutor Kevin Trapp.



Left: Robert Andrews
Right: Kevin Trapp

CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

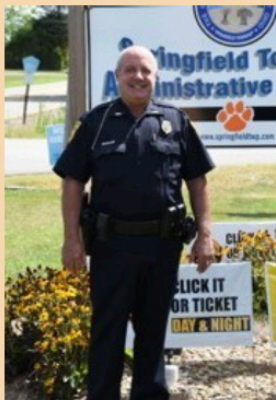
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (DD) AWARENESS MONTH

March was Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. During that month, Boards of Developmental Disabilities across Ohio held events to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all areas of community life. They also raised awareness of the barriers that people with developmental disabilities still face in connecting to the communities in which they live. In support of DD Awareness Month, the Mahoning County Board of Developmental Disabilities held its “I AM” campaign. The “I AM” campaign was designed to remind us that we are not defined by a disability, but by our unique characteristics and all the amazing traits people love about us! In order to showcase who we are, the MCBDD delivered photo-op frames to its clients, as well as to provider agencies and others who service DD clients across the county. The Mahoning County Prosecutor’s Office, which serves as legal counsel to the MCBDD, was honored to participate in the “I AM” campaign. Here is the link to our staff pictures.

<https://youtu.be/imeVks8-rrk>

TOWNSHIP CORNER

Congratulations to Springfield Township Police Chief Matthew R. Mohn on his recent retirement. Chief Mohn served as a law enforcement officer for 36 years and as Chief of Police for 21 years. Thank you for your service! You will be missed!



Succeeding Chief Mohn is Township Officer Ray Fellows, who was appointed Chief by the Trustees at their meeting on April 21, 2021. Mahoning County Prosecutor Paul J. Gains administered the oath to Chief Fellows. Best of luck to you Chief Fellows!



C.A.R.E.S ACT FUNDING

During 2020 and early 2021, our Civil Division Prosecutors provided guidance on more than 160 requests for legal assistance, and played a vital role in the administration of nearly \$27 million dollars of federal aid. In particular, our office worked with the Board of Mahoning County Commissioners to expend \$13,841,284, and with our 14 Board of Township Trustees to expend \$13 million dollars of federal aid awarded through the C.A.R.E.S Act. With the help of our staff, local government officials were able to utilize these federal funds to benefit local small businesses, community organizations, and residents.

Most importantly, Mahoning County did not have to return any funds to the State or Federal Government because it made timely appropriations of all C.A.R.E.S. Act monies, meaning that our community received the maximum benefit of the program.

CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

FRAUDULENT UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION CLAIMS

Unemployment claims throughout Ohio continue to rise, and at the same time, fraudulent unemployment claims have also increased at an alarming rate. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, an estimated \$63 billion dollars has been paid out in fraudulent unemployment benefits. Due to the implementation of policies and procedures designed to report fraud suffered by its employees, at the time of this publishing, Mahoning County has paid less than \$5,000 in fraudulent unemployment claims.

The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office, with the assistance of the Mahoning County Auditor's Office, the Mahoning County Sheriff's Office and other law enforcement offices, developed a reporting protocol that helped stop more than 70 fraudulent claims from being processed. While this reporting procedure was designed to address fraud committed against employees of Mahoning County, it may also be utilized by any person who is the victim of unemployment compensation fraud.

Step 1: Anyone who did not file for unemployment compensation benefits, but receives a notice from the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Service stating that claim has been filed in your name should report the fraud by entering it into the Ohio Unemployment Fraud Portal. The portal can be found with this link <https://odjfs2.secure.force.com/OUIOFraudEmployerReportingPortal>. When submitting a claim, you will need to enter your First and Last Name, Social Security Number, Date of Birth, Full Home Address, Phone Number and Email Address. Generally speaking, the Ohio Unemployment Office will typically stop payments on claims flagged as fraudulent by either the employer or the employee. However, we have found that it is most effective to also have your employer report the fraud into the portal.

Step 2: Any unemployment forms you receive, such as the "Request for Separation Information", should be returned with a notation that this form pertains to a fraudulent claim.

Step 3: You should file a complaint with your local police department reporting the fraud and obtain a copy of the report for your records.

Step 4: You will receive a copy of the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services Fact Sheet regarding Identity Theft. This should also be retained for your records.

Step 5: Report the fraud to your credit reporting agency.

After falling victim to unemployment compensation fraud, you should monitor your credit report to ensure new credit is not opened in your name. For more information on the U.S. Department of Labor's recommendations regarding unemployment fraud please see <https://www.wkyc.com/article/money/unemployment-fraud-tips-to-avoid/95-893d7b58-0b79-4714-a600-51d031f8f809>