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JUSTICE JOURNAL

Presented by the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office
Gina DeGenova, Prosecutor

New self defense program aims to educate Mahoning County

On September 28th, 2023, Mahoning County Prosecutor Gina DeGenova launched her new program called S.T.O.P., which stands for Self Defense Trauma Informed Outreach Program. Under S.T.O.P., area residents will receive tips and training on the essential components of self-defense in a safe, trauma-informed environment. This program was developed through collaborations with many area service providers including Mercy Health, YSU Campus Recreation, COMPASS Family & Community Services and the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation. The course is being taught by Mercy Health Chief of Police and certified self-defense instructor, Ryan Bonacci and will be offered several times each year in different parts of Mahoning County. There is no fee to take this class.

Under S.T.O.P., participants receive training on three core components: (1) education on local laws & local victim services; (2) awareness and confidence building; and (3) physical training. The goal of this course is to increase the confidence of participants to enable them to use the skills learned in response to any potential conflict and/or violent incident.

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News Around Town

New self defense program aims to educate, protect Mahoning County

Each year, tens of thousands of people across the United States fall victims to aggravated assault. According to Prosecutor DeGenova, “while my office prosecutes those who commit these crimes, I also believe we have an obligation to educate and provide our residents with the skills they need to recognize a dangerous situation and how to help stop it.” This is especially true of college students, where studies show that one in every five students will experience some form of assault during their time in college. These staggering statistics, according to DeGenova, is why her office elected to launch S.T.O.P. at Youngstown State University. DeGenova noted “Having young adult children of my own, I can appreciate how important it is to provide this information to college students. If these techniques help prevent one person from becoming the victim of assault, I view it as a success.”

S.T.O.P. will empower residents in a supportive & encouraging environment, and teach participants what resources are available if they or somebody they know is experiencing violence at home. Courses were held at the Andrews Student Recreation & Wellness Center for YSU students and the CLWCC (Community Literacy Workforce and Cultural Center) in Campbell. There will be another session open to the public on November 1st at the Jewish Community Center of Youngstown.

Participants will receive a free t-shirt and drink cover.

If your organization would be interested in hosting a course, email the office at: prosecutor@mahoningcounttyoh.gov.

For more information and to register your interest for future sessions, visit: <https://prosecutor.mahoningcounttyoh.gov/programs/stop-self-defense-courses/>



OFFICE NEWS

New Appointments

Jeffrey Murphy was born in Beaver County, PA. Jeff completed an undergrad in Physics in 1999 which led him to a career in the Geographic Information Systems in 2009. Jeff is no stranger to working for Mahoning County, previously working in GIS from 2011-2021 before graduating from Cleveland State University College of Law in 2021. Jeff graduated with cum laude honors. He started with the Prosecutor's Office in 2023 as an Assistant Prosecutor assigned to the Civi Division. He also serves on the boards of various non-profits, including Lit Youngstown and the Burke School of Irish Dance. In his down time he enjoys sailing, writing and playing games with his children.

Elliousa Baier is a dedicated professional with a passion for education and law. Lucy graduated from Youngstown State University with a Bachelor of Science in early childhood education. Her teaching career began with kindergarten classes at Youngstown City Schools, and she later taught 1st grade at St. Christine's School. In 2016, Lucy achieved another milestone by graduating from Akron Law School, setting the stage for her legal career. She has valuable experience working at both the Youngstown City Prosecutor's Office and in private practice. Lucy diverse background in education and law reflects her commitment to making a positive impact on her community and the lives of others. Lucy joined the Prosecutor's Office in August 2023 and is assigned to prosecute child neglect abuse, and depenency cases initiated by Mahoning County Children Serivces.

As a Mahoning County native, Daniel Yozwiak is proud to be serving our community. Daniel joins the office as a Criminal Division Assistant Prosecutor assigned to our VAWA unit. Prior to joining the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office, Daniel worked as a staff attorney at Community Legal Aid in Akron, Ohio. During his time there, Daniel represented victims of domestic violence in seeking protection orders, resolving custody disputes, and other related civil matters. Upon graduating from Canfield High School, Daniel obtained his B.A. from Kent State University, and ultimately earned his J.D. from University of Akron School of Law.

This quarter our office brought on Jacqueline Johnston as an Assistant Prosecutor in the Civil Division. Jacqueline Johnston completed her undergraduate degree from Ohio University in Criminology and Psychology and then went on to graduate from Cleveland State University College of Law in 2012. She began her legal career in Cleveland practicing litigation and criminal law. Jacqueline moved to the valley in 2016 and practiced litigation at Harrington, Hoppe & Mitchell before joining the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office.



Assistant Prosecutor
Jeff Murphy



Assistant Prosecutor
Elliousa Baier



Assistant Prosecutor
Daniel Yozwiak



Assistant Prosecutor
Jacqueline Johnston

OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach

SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE

Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing beds for children in need, plays a vital role in Mahoning County, Ohio. Their commitment to ensuring that every child has a safe and comfortable place to sleep is highly commendable. The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office, recognizing the importance of this mission, volunteered for a bed-building event to benefit local children. This act of service reflects the deep compassion and dedication of the office's staff, as they understand the profound impact a good night's sleep can have on a child's well-being and future. The volunteer work undertaken by the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office resonates deeply within the community. It signifies a shared commitment to the welfare of the county's children, fostering a sense of unity and care among its people. We extend our sincere gratitude to Sleep in Heavenly Peace, the numerous organizations that support their cause, and the selfless volunteers who dedicate their time and effort to continue this remarkable tradition of improving the lives of children in Mahoning County.



OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach

SOJURN TO THE PAST

Prosecutor DeGenova and Director of Communications Alan Rodges were invited, by Penny Wells, the Mahoning Valley Director of Sojourn to the Past, on a journey to learn about the history of America's civil rights movement and hear the stories of the families directly affected by segregation, Jim Crow laws, and slavery. This trip was a truly an enlightening experience.

During this journey, Prosecutor DeGenova and Mr. Rodges connected with victims of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, which killed 4 children, and injured 20 others. They were able to speak with bombing survivor, Sarah Collins Rudolph and Minnijean Brown-Trickey, a civil rights activist and one of the first black students to desegregate schools in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Another major impactful element of the trip was The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, which was built in Montgomery a short distance from a rail station where tens of thousands of black children and adults were trafficked in the 1800s. The museum provides a comprehensive history of the transatlantic and domestic slave trades, the 12-year Reconstruction period after the Civil War, the more than 4,000 lynchings up to 1950, codified racial segregation during the Jim Crow era and mass incarceration in the 20th and 21st centuries. A haunting display includes shelves filled with jars of dirt that marked spots where black Americans were lynched; besides being hung, many were also shot, drowned or burned. Several of the crimes occurred in Ohio, including that of William Taylor, who was lynched in 1878 in Sandusky. Calling it an "era of heartbreak," DeGenova said, the museum amply and dramatically displayed the lack of "basic human rights like what we should have," (Sept 28, 2023, Vindicator and author Sean Barron). Addressing the impact of the trip, Mr. Rodges said "It's hard to tell what impacted me the most, but it was moving to walk on the same path as the Children's March and to be in the shoes of Martin Luther King in Memphis," (Sept 28, 2023, Vindicator and author Sean Barron).

Thank you to Penny Wells and Sojourn to the Past for this amazing opportunity and for their continued efforts in education and black American history.



OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach

NONVIOLENCE WEEK

Chaney High School students helped kick off Ohio Nonviolence Week by spreading messages of peace and love outside the courthouse through their sidewalk chalk work. Chalk the Walk is a yearly art event that allows students to express their messages of nonviolence through art that everyone can enjoy. This year, our office helped students by giving them a tour of the Mahoning County Common Pleas Courthouse. Students talked to Judge D'Apolito, Prosecutor DeGenova, and Mahoning County Commissioners, Carol Rimedio-Righetti, Anthony Traficanti and David C. Ditzler during their tour. The group then enjoyed time drawing on the sidewalk outside of the Mahoning County Common Pleas Courthouse, sending messages of peace, love, and nonviolence. Thank you to everyone involved with this year's Chalk the Walk.



Nonviolence Week in Ohio serves as a crucial initiative to foster unity and peace within the community. The annual parade, featuring active participation from the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office, YSU athletics, Youngstown City Schools, and community leaders, symbolizes the collective commitment to addressing and eradicating violence. The events of nonviolence week not only showcased the dedication of local authorities, but also emphasized the importance of open dialogue and community engagement in tackling the pressing issue of violence prevention.

OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach



Prosecutor DeGenova also engaged in discussions with local and regional members of our labor community to outline Mahoning County's efforts to combat tax fraud in the construction industry.



The Ohio Association for Justice Women's Caucus invited Prosecutor DeGenova as a guest speaker. The organization looks to inform the public about the dangers of human trafficking and new legislation being put into place to help prosecute those that commit this heinous crime.



Canfield Lions Club invited Prosecutor DeGenova out to speak about the Prosecutor's Office and the new programs that we have implemented. Prosecutor DeGenova discussed S.T.O.P., the Special Needs Registry, and Hope, our comfort therapy dog, and our Senior Resource and Wellness calendar.



Our office was invited to participate in the **Safety Forces Appreciation Picnic**. It was an informative event that included first responders and organizations around the county. Thank you, Poland Township Police Department for your service and for hosting this event.

OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach

Something to Crow About!

The 177th Annual Canfield Fair in Mahoning County, Ohio, continues to stand as a testament to the enduring power of tradition. Year after year, this cherished event brings the community together, celebrating the rich history and agricultural heritage of the region. For the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office, participating in this wonderful occasion holds profound significance. It provides a unique opportunity to connect with the community on a personal level, fostering trust and camaraderie. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Canfield Fair Board of Directors, as well as every business and organization that generously contributes resources to ensure the success of this remarkable gathering, embodying the spirit of unity and tradition.



CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

Marsy's Law Training

Prosecutor DeGenova and Chief of Criminal Ralph Rivera spoke to officials about recent changes to Marsy's Law. Over 50 officials attended, representing agencies throughout the county and Ohio.

Marsy's Law, named for Marsy Nicholas, who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend in 1983, was enacted by voters in November 2017 as an amendment to Ohio's Constitution. California was the first state to adopt Marsy's Law in 2008; Ohio is the sixth state to adopt the constitutional amendment, also known as the Ohio Crime Victim's Bill of Rights. In April 2023, the Ohio Legislature expanded victim protections under Marsy's Law with newly enacted and amended laws.

More information on updated Ohio Victims' Rights Laws can be found on our website.

Thank you to all the law enforcement officials who attended the Marsy's Law training.



CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

Notable Cases

State v. Miller

Assistant Prosecutors Jennifer Paris and Katherine Jones successfully prosecuted 38-year-old Jerome Miller, who has been found guilty of multiple drug charges, including possession of more than 1,800 grams of Cocaine. The Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Task Force initiated their investigation into Miller in 2021. Miller was found guilty of the following charges: Possession of Cocaine, a First-degree Felony with a Major Drug Offender Specification; Possession of a Fentanyl-related Compound, a Second-degree Felony; Aggravated Possession of Drugs, a Third-degree Felony; and Possession of a Fentanyl-related Compound, a Fourth-degree Felony. Before trial, Miller pleaded guilty to three counts of Trafficking in Cocaine and three counts of Trafficking in a Fentanyl-related compound. Miller will be sentenced at a later date.



Assistant Prosecutor

Jennifer Paris



Assistant Prosecutor

Katherine Jones

State v. Bruno

A Boardman man, Michael Bruno Jr., 49, has been found guilty of murder and guilty of a firearm specification in the tragic case of his 74-year-old father, Michael Bruno Sr., back in September 2022. Michael Bruno Jr. has been sentenced to life in prison with eligibility for parole after 18 years. The victim's son was apprehended by police outside the home and subsequently entered his plea. The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office extends its heartfelt appreciation to Jennifer M. Paris for her unwavering commitment to justice in this case, ensuring that the perpetrator is held accountable for this heinous crime.



Assistant Prosecutor

Jennifer Paris

CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

For well over a decade, the Academy of Continuing Legal Education through the efforts of Academic Coordinator Attorney Christopher J. Mallin has facilitated a seminar for Ohio election officials and attorneys who practice in the area of election law. Ohio Law requires the Ohio Secretary of State to establish a program for the instruction of members of boards of elections and employees of boards in the rules, procedures, and law relating to elections. Under Ohio Law each board of elections member and employee is required to complete the training program within six months after their original appointment or employment, and to receive continuing education once every four years thereafter. Attorneys are also required to complete twenty-four hours of continuing legal education training every two years that must also include training on attorney professional conduct.

The Academy Election Law Seminar typically is presented bi-annually and provides current and crucial information on court decisions affecting Ohio Election Law, recent election law legislation, Ohio Secretary of State Directives, SOS Advisories, campaign finance, and the Ohio Elections Commission's authority and procedures.

Since 2009, Chief Assistant Prosecutor Linette Stratford has presented the ethics and attorney professionalism portion of the seminar. Attorney Stratford, who is also an adjunct professor of Ethics and Philosophy at Youngstown State University, provides instruction on the topics of Disciplinary Issues for Attorneys Who Hold Public Office and Ethical Considerations for Attorneys Representing County Township and Local Government Agencies.

The Academy Election Law seminar attracts election officials, elected prosecutors, assistant prosecutors, private attorneys and law makers from across Ohio. We thank Attorney Mallin for his dedication and work to provide vital input for all attendees to insure fair and accurate elections in Ohio.

The next Academy of Continuing Legal Education Ohio Election Law Seminar will be held on December 6, 2023 in Richfield, Ohio. For more information contact The Academy of Continuing Legal Education Christopher J. Mallin, Esq., Academic Coordinator, 367 North Cleveland Avenue, Mogadore, OH 44260-2101 tel. (330) 592-4513; fax (330) 628-5326 or at AcademyofCLE@aol.com, CJMallinEsq@aol.com <http://AcademyofCLE.com>



July 26, 2023 Election Seminar 2023.1 at Richfield, Ohio. Shown (from left to right) are MCPO Chief APA Linette Stratford, Academy Academic Coordinator Attorney Chris Mallin and MCPO Senior Counsel Lori Shells-Simmons.



CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

A quick response and hard work from Senior Attorney, Lori Shells-Simmons and Assistant Prosecutor Kristie Weibling and several other county agencies recently helped a child with disabilities in a crisis situation find a safe place. Thank you to Mahoning County Children Services and MCBDD supervisors and employees, Probate Judge Robert Rusu and his staff, and representatives of Akron Children's Hospital, Job & Family Services, and Cadence Care. These organizations continue to show the perseverance it takes to protect the children of Mahoning County and Ohio.



Pictured (Left to Right): Assistant Prosecutor Angela Battaglia, Probate Judge Robert Rusu



Senior Attorney
Lori Shells-Simmons



Assistant Prosecutor
Kristie Weibling



NEWS AROUND TOWN

County honors beloved Beaver Township official

“Richard “Rick” Martin, 65, passed away peacefully on Monday, August 28, 2023, after a short medical battle. A graduate of Chaney High School in 1975, Rick’s dedication to serving his community was unwavering throughout his life.

Shortly after high school, Rick joined the Austintown Twp. Police Department as a part-time officer before committing to a full-time role with the Beaver Township Police Department, where he served with distinction and respect until his retirement in 2005, achieving the rank of Detective Lieutenant. His commitment to civic duty didn’t end with retirement.

Rick continued to contribute to his community by becoming the Chief Zoning Inspector, a role he held with pride and dedication until his passing. He tirelessly worked to improve Beaver Township, leaving an indelible mark on the place he called home.

The Mahoning County Prosecutor’s Office and Mahoning County extend their heartfelt gratitude to Rick for his years of service. His contributions to law enforcement, zoning, and his unwavering commitment to making Beaver Township a better place will never be forgotten.

Throughout his years in law enforcement and zoning, Rick’s infectious personality, characterized by a jovial demeanor and a joyous laugh, earned him the friendship of nearly everyone he met. He will be remembered for the strong bonds he forged and his willingness to go above and beyond for his friends, embodying the true spirit of the law enforcement brotherhood and sisterhood.

Rick cherished his family and the Beaver Township Police Department and Zoning Department. Our deepest condolences are with his family and friends.



Pictured: Richard “Rick” Martin