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JUSTICE JOURNAL

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

Prosecutor's Office collaborates with YSU to bring a fresh partnership to Mahoning County

Prosecutor DeGenova and the Sokolov Honors College held a press conference at YSU this quarter to highlight the results of a partnership between the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office and YSU's Community Engagement Initiative.

For the 2023 Fall Semester, Prosecutor DeGenova along with other members of her staff, collaborated with the Sokolov Honors College at YSU to give students some insight into the work of the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office and its role in the community.

Prosecutor DeGenova worked with Mollie Hartup, director of Sokolov Honors College at YSU, to develop the course material as an experiential learning opportunity for students in Hartup's Magazine Editing and Production honors seminar.

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News Around Town

Prosecutor's Office, YSU Welcomes New Partnership

Throughout the semester, students in the course met with key individuals in the Prosecutor's Office, attended site visits and worked with office staff to develop stories outlining functions of the office. Selected stories included:

- Understanding the training process for the Prosecutor's Office comfort therapy dog Hope;
- The role of the Prosecutor's office in the response to the East Palestine Train Derailment; and
- The positive collaborative work with the Mahoning County Drug Court

The students' stories will be published on the Prosecutor's Office website and in this quarterly Justice Journal. The students also worked to organize the press conference.

Prosecutor DeGenova said, "Research has shown that engaging youth in community initiatives can help build skills and networks that can assist them in the future. I enjoyed working with Professor Hartup and her students this semester and I hope they found the experience rewarding. I look forward to continued partnerships in the future."

The Office of Community Engagement at YSU has worked diligently to increase student engagement in the Mahoning Valley through community partnerships. The goal of these partnerships is to establish mutually beneficial relationships with local organizations and businesses to create more experiential learning opportunities for YSU students. This will culminate in YSU's application to the Carnegie Foundation Elective Classification for Community Engagement.

"We appreciate being able to partner to provide these opportunities to extend the learning of these students in support of community organizations' missions," said Amy Cossentino, dean of the Sokolov Honors College and associate provost for Strategy and Engagement. "We welcome future opportunities for collaboration."

Local non-profits, businesses, and government entities interested in developing partnerships to support YSU's community engagement efforts are encouraged to contact communityengagement@ysu.edu.



OFFICE NEWS

Office welcomes back seasoned Prosecutors

This quarter the office welcomes back Prosecutors Kevin Day and Jennifer McLaughlin-Bonish. The two seasoned, well versed prosecutors both briefly left Mahoning County for other opportunities. Now, they look to usher in a new special unit that will protect the citizens of Mahoning County.



Assistant Prosecutor

Jennifer McLaughlin -Bonish



Assistant Prosecutor

Kevin Day

County congratulates newly sworn in prosecutors

A congratulations is in order for two of our office's newest prosecutors. Kyle Hilles and Anthony Carbone have been working as legal interns in our office.

After graduating from law school and passing the Bar exam, their hard work has finally paid off. On November 15, 2023 the two young attorneys were sworn in during a short ceremony at the Mahoning County court in Austintown.

Family, friends, and colleagues were there to witness the ceremony. Congratulations to Attorneys Hilles and Carbone as they continue to work hard for the state of Ohio and Mahoning County!

The two attorneys will continue working in our office as criminal prosecutors.

Thank you, again, to Judge Hunter and the Mahoning County Austintown court staff for being accommodating.



OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach

Prosecutor's Office holds 3rd annual Domestic Violence Awareness Donation Drive

This is the now the third year that our office sponsored this Domestic Violence Awareness Donation Drive. Once again, South Range High School students helped orchestrate this year's successful drive. The drive helps victims and organizations in the Mahoning Valley. This year, Austintown Fitch and Salem Schools also helped to collect items benefitting victims of domestic violence. Prosecutor DeGenova highlighted the initiative's success, noting "Over the past three years, we have collected and donated over 17,000 items and thousands of dollars to assist victims of domestic violence. This initiative has brought me in contact with some amazing students and I am honored to have met and worked with them on this project."



Community members, students and the prosecutor's office showcase the donation items from the 2023 drive.

From left to right: **Isabella Caruso** (Program and grants coordinator), **Audrey Walker** (Operations Manager at Sojourner House), **Nickie Ostic** (Christina House Community Outreach Liaison), **Jeannie Sensenbaugher** (Case Manager Christina House), **Prosecutor Gina DeGenova**, **Solena DeJesus** (South Range High School student and Key Club Co-Leader), **Quincy Bailey** (South Range High School student and Key Club), **Linda Turnage** (Judicial Advocate Compass Family and Community Services)



OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach

19th annual “I Am Important” Poster contest



Prosecutor DeGenova pictured with Judge Dellick and members of the Mahoning County Juvenile Court Advisory Board, and students from various valley schools.

The Mahoning County Juvenile Court Advisory Board held their 19th annual poster contest, “I Am Important,” this quarter.

The contest is meant to help the next generation illustrate their importance as contributing citizens of not only Mahoning County but Ohio, America, and the world.

The contest accepts entries from across Mahoning County.

Prosecutor DeGenova was a guest speaker, and she talked about the significant role the next generation will play in our country and how important parental support can be.

The contestants had a chance to see their art displayed in the Butler Institute of American Art!

Thank you to Judge Dellick for continuing this welcoming tradition and to all the students who participated and contributed their artwork for the world to see.

National Adoption Day



November is National Adoption Awareness Month. During this month, courts, child welfare agencies, and community child advocates come together to support foster care adoptions and create families! This year, Judge Rusu and his wonderful court administrative staff put together a moment that these two families will never forget. The two children were adopted during the 10th annual Adoption Day celebration. The families were welcomed to musical performances, a speech from Judge Rusu and Richard Tvaroch, the Executive Director of Mahoning County Children Services and more. The afternoon was a fantastic event that allowed families and those who advocated for these children to celebrate the creation of a new family bond.

OFFICE NEWS

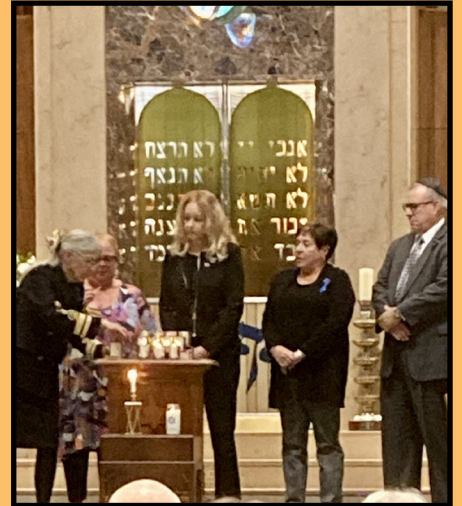
Community Outreach



Prosecutor Gina DeGenova and Sheriff Jerry Greene are teaming up once again, to raise awareness about **senior citizen safety and wellness by providing free calendars containing helpful resources and information.** Anyone interested in obtaining a calendar can reach out to the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office via phone (330)740-2330 ext. 7396 or email prosecutor@mahoningcountyoh.gov or to the Mahoning County Senior Services Unit via phone (330) 480-5078 or email bschaeffer@mahoningcountyoh.gov



We're grateful for the opportunity to attend the **Crime Watch meeting in Beaver Township with Prosecutor DeGenova and our future comfort therapy dog, Hope.** Prosecutor DeGenova shared insights on our office, ongoing efforts, and Mahoning County's crime prevention initiatives.



October 27th marked five years since the mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Community leaders around the valley gathered to remember the lives lost that day. Dozens of people gathered inside Temple Ohev Beth Sholom in Youngstown to honor the Tree of Life shooting victims. Those who attended participated in a candlelight vigil while the names of each victim were read aloud.

S.T.O.P. Continues successful classes



In 2023, our office was able to create something extraordinary. S.T.O.P. is a self-defense, trauma informed program that allows participants to learn basic self-defense techniques in a safe environment. We are happy to finally share it with residents within Mahoning County. We've been so thankful for all the community partners who have helped start this self-defense program. We plan to offer more free classes at the start of 2024. If you want to join our free class, please visit our website or check our social pages periodically for updates.

OFFICE NEWS

Community Outreach

Prosecutor to hold Town hall series

Prosecutor DeGenova is excited to launch community town hall meetings to be held across Mahoning County in 2024.

The series will provide information about her officer's work with law enforcement and community partners to advance public safety throughout Mahoning County. At each session, Prosecutor DeGenova will provide information on various facets of the criminal justice system, the Grand Jury process, the newly created Special Victims Unit, and community programming initiatives.

Residents are invited and encouraged to attend. DeGenova said, "I look forward to sharing my insight and to creating an informal and accessible environment for community members to provide input that will assist in improving the safety of the residents of Mahoning County."

Throughout 2024, the town hall series will be hosted at various locations across Mahoning County, ensuring accessibility for residents from different neighborhoods. Light refreshments will be provided.

Town Hall Schedule:

Craig Beach, Jackson Township, Milton Township: Monday February 12th, 2024 at 6:30PM Jackson Township Community Center, 10613 Mahoning Ave, North Jackson, Ohio 44451

Ellsworth: Wednesday March 6th, 2024 at 6:30PM Ellsworth Fire Hall 6036 S. Salem-Warren Road, North Jackson, Ohio 44451

More dates will be scheduled across Mahoning County. For more information see our website.



Hope's Corner



This quarter marks a big time in the life of Hope, our future comfort therapy dog. She was rescued on Christmas Eve of 2022 and it has been one year since her life has changed, and she also changed the lives of those that she's touched. Hope has come a long way since she was kept in an outside kennel in freezing temperatures with no access to food or water. This year, Hope will take her required test to come on to the Prosecutor's Office full-time. Check our website and social pages periodically for more information on Hope and her journey!

Scan this QR code to follow Hope's journey on Instagram!



YSU students highlight Hope's training

Student writer: **Millicent Chovan**

Mahoning County Prosecutor Gina DeGenova offers a powerful program with a mighty pup, Hope! Hope's purpose is to provide comfort for the victims of the prosecutor's office, making it easier on them when going to court and having to face the offender. Hope is still in training but is doing very well and is a victim herself. My peers and I had an in-depth discussion about Hope, her purpose, her training, where she came from and her job in the future with her trainer and Alan Rodges, Director of Communications for the office.

Prosecutor DeGenova prioritized finding a rescue, and in December of 2021. Hope was identified by the Trumbull County Animal Welfare League and Jason Cooke of Health Hearts and Paws. She was rescued from a puppy mill, a place where her only purpose was to breed more puppies. Once she was rescued, her demeanor changed drastically. She seemed happy and given hope for a better life. Hope is only one and half years old and has already been through so much. The prosecutor hopes her story can be a sign of hope for other victims. This is the goal for all the people she can help, even students on campus. I believe Hope with the support of Prosecutor DeGenova and Rodges, can help victims across Mahoning County.

Rodges is the head of community outreach for the Mahoning Prosecutor's office. He works to find ways to get the community more involved in the work of the office. He designs the website, and he introduced us to Hope. Having Hope around the county as well as Youngstown State University makes everyone feel safer and more supported. Victims of crime, for example, may have to relive traumatic experience again while being constantly questioned during a trial, which can take a toll on the victim. Hope's purpose would keep the victim at ease and help with anxiety.

Some other things Hope can do once she passes her test are accompany victims on the stand while testifying and while at other court proceedings, attend community outreach events, visit local schools, and assist social workers at CSB. Hope can visit domestic violence shelters and can be called in by local law enforcement to accompany victims during disclosures and interviews. YSU could book her for a future event such as Puppypalooza. She can come in during students' most stressful time, finals week, and hopefully relieve some stress by cuddling and being an obedient dog.

Notable Cases

State v. Johnny Serrano

Johnny Serrano, age twenty-four, was sentenced to 11 to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to his involvement in the shooting death of Yarnell Green. Serrano plead guilty to the following Involuntary Manslaughter Firearm specification Having Weapons While Under Disability In September of 2022, Serrano shot and killed Yarnell Green on West Federal Street in Downtown Youngstown after an argument at a local bar. After the two left the bar Serrano waited for Green to exit the bar where he shot and killed him. Green died shortly after being shot. Serrano was sentenced to 11 to 15 years behind bars for his actions last September. Good work to Assistant Prosecutors Martin Hume and Jennifer Paris who prosecuted the case.



Assistant Prosecutor
Jennifer Paris



Assistant Prosecutor
Martain Hume

Notable Cases

State v. Steve W. Green

Prosecutor Gina DeGenova, Criminal Division Chief Robert Andrews, and Assistant Prosecutor Caitlyn Andrews successfully prosecuted twenty-seven year-old Steve William Green in the vicious murder of Ashley Marie Lockhart, age twenty-seven. The incident took place in Austintown at the Compass West Apartments. The investigation, initiated by the Austintown Police department, and in collaboration with both Youngstown and Boardman PD, aided in the defendant being found guilty of Aggravated Murder with a Weapon Specification, Murder with a Weapon Specification, Tampering with Evidence, Domestic Violence, Rape, and Extortion. The defendant was sentenced to life without parole.



Assistant Prosecutor
Caitlyn Andrews



Prosecutor
Gina DeGenova



Chief, Criminal
Robert Andrews

State v. Shamara C. Green

Shamara C. Green, age thirty, was found guilty of Involuntary Manslaughter with a Firearm Specification, in the tragic death of thirteen-year-old victim, London Jones. The defendant plead guilty to the charges and was sentenced to a minimum of seven years to a maximum of nine years in prison. The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office would like to thank Assistant Prosecutor Michael Rich for his sound negotiating skills and in finding a fair and just resolution to such a somber incident.



Assistant Prosecutor
Michael Rich

YSU students highlight the importance of Drug Court

Mahoning County Drug Court Offers Hope and Light for Drug Offenders

Student writers: **AnnaBelle Boone, Wyatt Ginger, John Alexander, Emily Vero Maxwell McEndree**

YOUNGSTOWN – The Mahoning County Drug Court, with the guidance of Judge John Durkin and the assistance of the Mahoning County Prosecutor’s Office, is offering a sense of hope for nonviolent drug offenders.

The Mahoning County Drug Court was created in 1997 to keep offenders out of jail and reduce recidivism rates. Representatives from the Prosecutor’s Office noted that drug offenders were coming in and out of jail like a “revolving door.” To remedy this, the Drug Court program was established and has been successful ever since.

On any given day, the Prosecutor’s Office sees a wide variety of felony drug offenses—both high and low-level of offenses. The distinction here is individuals considered for Drug Court are usually first-time offenders and are always non-violent. The Prosecutor’s Office takes a “case-by-case” approach, but these guidelines are always in place when considering if one is eligible for Drug Court.

Drug Court has a 60% graduation rate and a 9% return rate. This high rate of success is the direct result of the level of services that are offered within Drug Court, and the level of commitment that the individual gives to the program. The sense of “hope” for the individual falls in the supportive nature and holistic approach taken within Drug Court. Participants plead guilty upon entering Drug Court. Should an individual not successfully complete the program, the judge may proceed to a sentencing hearing. This incentivizes the individual to follow the program’s rules, and to comply with their treatment plans.

The process of Drug Court is broken down into four phases: Orientation, Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III. In Orientation, participants are given information about Drug Court and are scheduled for an assessment to determine the best level of treatment dependent on the level of drug usage. Phase I consists of Treatment, which varies widely depending on the individual. Phase II of the program focuses on building Life Skills to prepare participants for life after Drug Court. Phase III, the final phase of the program, is a Transition phase that prepares those in Drug Court to transition back into life beyond Drug Court.

Judge John M. Durkin has been serving the Drug Court program for over 25 years. Judge Durkin leads Drug Court every Wednesday at 8:30 a.m. sharp at the Mahoning County Court of Common Pleas on Market Street. While proceeding with Drug Court, Judge Durkin knew the name and story of every single offender. A visitor noted that he, “treated each individual with respect and dignity,” regardless of any offense they may have committed.

YSU students highlight impact County's impact on East Palestine train derailment

The Mahoning County Hazardous Material Response Agency

Student writers: **Francis DelColle, Francisco Rivera-Ocasio, Chase Dedomenic, Cruz Mobley**

The Mahoning County Hazardous Material Response Agency is a small, all volunteer team composed mainly of fire-fighters. The agency, which was formed in the 1980s, is a verified level II hazmat team. The agency is responsible for the handling of hazardous materials (i.e. flammable, liquids, corrosive substances, toxic chemicals, compress gasses, etc.) in the Mahoning County and neighboring regions. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Deputy Chief Joe Toporcer, who detailed the agency's experience in responding to the East Palestine train derailment.

On the evening of Friday February 3rd, 2023, a thirty-eight car freight train owned and operated by Norfolk Southern derailed in East Palestine, Ohio. The train cars, which were carrying hazardous materials (such as vinyl chloride, butyl acrylate, various combustible liquids, and large loads of plastic) began to burn shortly after the derailment. The local fire department, neighboring fire departments, and the Mahoning County Hazardous Material Response Agency arrived on the scene once the cars began to burn.

Toporcer described how disturbed he was when he was first made aware of the derailment, saying "My first thought was 'Oh Jesus'." He noted that his crew, who typically handles isolated cases of smaller scale hazards, had never been faced with a disaster of this scale. He explained that, at the time, was not sure if they were equipped to handle it. The chemicals and liquids that the train was transporting were not only combustible but were also incredibly toxic. "There were around 60,000 gallons of flammables in those train cars," Toporcer explained. The agency, alongside various fire departments, worked day and night to subdue the fire and contain any hazards from spilling out.

While not all of the containers were burning, the heat surrounding the containers caused the containers' relief valves to malfunction. Toporcer further explained how the malfunction of the relief valves, coupled with the extreme temperatures around the containers, raised concerns that a chain of explosions could occur. To compound this problem, the exceptional heat caused the plastic and other materials being carried by some of the containers to melt and emulsify into what Toporcer described as a "mystery goo." Toporcer and several other first responders had to navigate the flames in order to block off the slow moving goo before it could spill into a nearby river. By the following Monday, the decisions had been made to isolate and detonate the cars. "We got the order from the governor to expand the evacuation radius to one mile before the detonation," Toporcer said. During the three days when first responders were trying to contain the flames, the chemical discharge produced by the conflagration caused serious damage to their equipment. According to Toporcer, the chrome on their trucks began to flake off, their equipment began to corrode, and their protective gear began to "turn a yellowish-green color and fall apart." With the assistance of the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office, the Mahoning County Hazardous Material Response Agency and the local fire departments represented by the Prosecutor's Office, were able to recover the cost of the damage to their equipment and still have the ability to bring further claims in the future if necessary.

Toporcer added that various agreements were also made between the local community and Norfolk Southern in order to recover what was lost in the disaster. Norfolk Southern paid for the housing of everyone in the area who had to evacuate. They further agreed to pay for any treatment the first responder may need if they encounter any health issues related to the derailment. Norfolk Southern has also begun development on a First Responder Training Facility in East Palestine. Overall, the Mahoning County Hazardous Material Response Agency played a crucial role in managing the aftermath of the train derailment. Despite being a small team entirely composed of volunteers, the agency has consistently demonstrated their ability to swiftly and effectively contain and neutralize environmental hazards.

NEWS AROUND TOWN

Longtime Prosecutor leaves for City

Lori Shells-Simmons has been a career prosecutor within this office for over 30 years. After passing the Ohio State Bar Exam in November 1991, she joined the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office as an Assistant Mahoning County Prosecutor assigned to the Mahoning County Juvenile Court. As a result, Juvenile and Family law became her passion, always striving to ensure that justice was the result. After being assigned for ten years in juvenile court, she was transferred to the Court of Common Pleas for 2 years. After that, she moved to the Mahoning County Children Services Board where she worked tirelessly to protect children from abuse, neglect, and various other dangerous situations. In 2022 Attorney Shells-Simmons was promoted to Senior Counsel. In December of 2023, Lori accepted the position in Youngstown as the city's Law Director. As sad as we are to see Lori leave this office, we offer our congratulations and are excited for the new chapter in her career!



Pictured: Former Mahoning County Senior Counsel, Lori Shells-Simmons



Lori Shells-Simmons and multiple employees at the Prosecutor's Office celebrating Lori's new position and saying their last goodbyes in the workplace.