

## GENESEE COUNTY CIRCUIT AND PROBATE COURTS E-NEWSLETTER

a quarterly publication

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## EMPOWERING CHANGE THROUGH INNOVATION A TALE OF TWO DEPARTMENTS

*The feature article is written by Bridget Ondocsin, Senior Court Clerk, Genesee County Clerk—Legal Division and Angela Westfall, Office Manager, Genesee County Probate Court.*

Document management is defined as a system used to track, manage, capture and reduce paper. It also has a function known as workflow that automates business processes.

Genesee County has been using a document management system known as OnBase. The individual departments that use OnBase include: Circuit Court (family division and the reimbursement office only), County Clerk, Defender Program, the Friend of the Court (FOC), the Office of the Prosecutor (family support division only), Probate Court and Veterans Services.

The **Genesee County Clerk** began using OnBase in 2009 for domestic cases.

Shortly thereafter, each domestic clerk received a new monitor, scanner and a bar coding machine. The domestic clerks received both group and individual training.

During this time the clerks worked closely with the IT OnBase Administrator to develop document types, event codes, descriptions and the overall workflow for all documents

received and processed by the Clerk. We worked together to develop the procedures to process and more efficiently manage court documents. In February of 2009 we were up and running!

The OnBase system is capable of instantaneously sending copies to other departments. The (FOC) and the Family Support Division of the Prosecutor (FSD) for example, are two departments with whom we closely work. No more waiting for inter-office mail which often took days!



The FOC and the FSD are able to file documents with the Clerk through OnBase without any hard copy filings. This saves a substantial amount of time given the volume of five family division judges.

We perform two types of functions within OnBase that promote efficiency. The first one is what we call "indexing" which is for documents/pleadings. Every document is labeled with

a bar code. The documents are then scanned, reviewed, reassembled and routed back to a clerk for posting.

Once a document is posted it is accessible to all users who have the proper OnBase permissions. The posting process links the document to each event number in our case management software. The imaged documents are available by viewing our software. Based on the event codes, documents are automatically routed to the FOC and FSD.

The second function that is advantageous is a creation of a paperless file. Since 2010 no paper filings have been received from the FOC and FSD.

The clerk plays an important role when it comes to efficiency in the court system. It can also present the biggest challenges when taking on additional digital initiatives. One frustration is that the current OnBase environment does not include e-filing or the ability to electronically send certified documents.

As a whole, the implementation of OnBase has been an asset to our office and I cannot imagine returning to our pre-OnBase work methods or working without the many benefits it provides.

# THE CHIEF SPEAKS

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Richard B. Yuille



## What's new for 2017?

One of the projects that will begin in 2017 has been in the planning stages for some time. The circuit court double jury courtroom will begin a facelift in the early months of 2017.

- The upgrades will include modification to the bench and witness box to improve sight lines for litigants and counsel.

- There will be a new ADA compliant podium, with the ability to be the central point for courtroom technology to publish documents, exhibits and photographs.

- A large (7' x 13'), permanently mounted screen will be located on the wall opposite the jury box. A witness testifying from a remote location can be

viewed from this screen, providing a nearly life size image. Likewise, visual exhibits will be large enough to read and appreciate detail.



- Counsel tables and the bench will have monitors to assist with presentation.

- Other upgrades include a new courtroom recording system, the same as the ones that have been installed in most of the probate and circuit courtrooms. By the time that the double jury courtroom upgrades are completed, all courtrooms and hearing rooms will have the newest generation of JAVS recording systems.

- The double jury courtroom will also have a sound amplification system. This was an important part of the proposed scope of work. It is challenging to install a sound amplification system, when the courtroom is serviced by a voice activated recording system.

- Lastly, existing millwork and courtroom benches will be re-finished or touched up to improve appearance.

We look forward to this project. Your patience may be necessary, as proceedings may have to be moved to alternate courtrooms for targeted periods.

2017 promises to be a good year!  
-cjrby

## TURNING THE ADMINISTRATOR CORNER

I find myself having the bitter-sweet task of saying good bye to a trusted colleague, while at the same time welcoming a new colleague with a fresh perspective.

Jim Bauer, former Probate Court Administrator/Register, left his position on November 18th to take a new job in Utah.

He will be the Trial Court Executive, 4<sup>th</sup>

District Juvenile Court, State of Utah. The trial courts are funded and operated by the State of Utah.

Jim started with Probate Court in 1999, working as a judicial advisory assistant for Judge Allen Nelson. He remained in that position through 2000 and then returned in 2001, as the court administrator. In 2005, the long serving estate analyst/

administrator, Kay Rushton, retired and a new position of Court Administrator/ Register was created.

Jim assumed that position and served until his departure. We all wish Jim well in his new endeavor.



Judge Barkey and the Probate Court staff gave Jim a farewell reception that was well attended by judges, court staff and other members

of the legal community.

**Sam Olson** is the newly hired Probate Court Administrator/ Register. Sam is from the Grand Blanc area and currently lives in Linden. He worked for Judge Barkey as a judicial advisory assistant in 2011-2012. He cites having the chance to work with Judge Barkey as one of the reasons for his return.

He graduated from the University of Michigan (AA), Michigan State University Law School and has a Master's degree in sports administration from the University of Louisville. He worked in the field of sports administration before returning to Probate Court.

Sam indicated that he will be reviewing the 2016 annual case-load report early in 2017, as well as the new Probate Court guidelines, to determine if any adjustments in processing are warranted.

In addition, he has taken over the implementation of protective glass at the Probate Court counter.

He and Jim have already exchanged conversations and emails to insure a smooth and orderly transition.

Welcome Sam and Good Luck, Jim. -bam



## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Left (clockwise) Kyle Walton, Jonathan Freshour, Sheonna Hill, William Bellor-Yeh, Owen Nash, Steve Ellis

*Kyle Walton* joined the court as a judicial advisory assistant to Judge Yuille. He graduated from Wayne State University Law School in 2016. Kyle previously interned with the Genesee County Prosecutor,

Legal Services of Eastern Michigan and Legal Advocacy for People with Cancer Clinic.

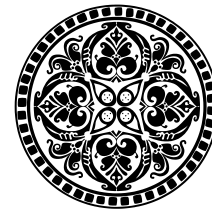
*Jonathan R. Freshour* is Judge Barkey's new judicial advisory assistant. Jonathan is a 2016 cum laude graduate from the University of Detroit Mercy Law School. During law school he earned several book awards, a distinction award for moot court competition and an award for excellence in legal writing. He resides with his family in Brighton and is trying to run as many miles as his current employer.

*Sheonna Hill* joined the Family Division team on October 31, 2016 as the Juvenile Services Supervisor. Sheonna worked for the Friend of the Court for the past 9 years as a social service worker. She also worked for Family Drug Court as a caseworker and for the Flint Board of Education as a project facilitator. Sheonna graduated from the University of Michigan in 2005 with a B.A. in Criminal Justice, and from Central Michigan University in 2009 with an M.A. in Leadership.

*William Bellor-Yeh (Bill)* joined the court as a judicial advisory assistant to Judge John Gadola. Bill received his undergraduate degree from Saginaw Valley State University and his law degree from WMU Thomas M. Cooley Law School. He previously worked for Legal Services of Eastern Michigan as both an intern and a law clerk. Bill is from Linwood, Michigan, currently residing in Grand Blanc.

*Owen Nash* started at the Friend of the Court on November 9, 2016 as a Program Clerk. Owen is currently assigned to the bench warrant enforcement area of the Friend of the Court. Owen is from the Fenton area and attended University of Michigan – Flint before coming to the Friend of the Court. Owen's extension is 2623, [nasho@co.genesee.mi.us](mailto:nasho@co.genesee.mi.us).

*Steve Ellis* joined the court as a judicial advisory assistant to Judge Geoffrey Neithercut. He graduated from Wayne State University Law School in May 2016. Steve previously worked at the Detroit Free Legal Aid Clinic, where he worked as a litigation supervisor and served as the Clinic's Director of Case Management.



- Thanks to the Building and Grounds Department, especially Director Ray Zanke, for getting all of the windows cleaned at the Courthouse. In addition, a number of the windows on the north elevation were re-caulked.

- Court administration hosted a Thanksgiving luncheon for the Building and Grounds staff on November 7th in the jury quarters, as a gesture of giving thanks for what the department does for the Court.

- Thanks to all of the judicial offices for cooperating with the court tech staff to arrange for installation of the upgraded courtroom recording systems. Each courtroom takes 4 days for re-wiring, installation and troubleshooting.

When this project is completed in mid-January, all courtrooms and referee hearing rooms will have the new product. Previous systems were no longer supported by the vendor due to age, updating was critical.

- The next *Tech Talk* will be scheduled in late January and focus on judicial advisory assistant support. Watch your email for updates.

- The "fall lineup" quiz winners (October 2016 edition) were Angela Westfall, Dustyn Koontz and Attorney KC Baran. Angela was the lucky winner of a gift certificate for her first reply, all correct answer response.

## FLINT JUDGE RECEIVES STATEWIDE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

*Oona GoodinSmith joined the staff of The Flint Journal in November 2016. A recent graduate of Oakland University, she is originally from the Detroit area. Oona is assigned to "all things court related" in Genesee County. She can be reached at [ogoodins@mlive.com](mailto:ogoodins@mlive.com); 810.262.0268.*

*Hearsay would like to welcome Oona to the area and look forward to reading more of her work in the future.*

LANING, MI -- With over 25 years of serving the children of Flint on and off the Genesee County Family Court, some may say it's simply poetic justice that Judge Duncan M. Beagle is the 2016 recipient of a statewide lifetime achievement award honoring "exceptional service to Michigan's children." Awarded at the Michigan Hall of Justice on Nov. 22, 2016 -- National Adoption Day -- the annual Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award honors the memory of



Photo with permission, MLive

Grand Ledge Judge Daniel J. Wright, an attorney and longtime leader in child support and welfare reform, who lost his battle to cancer in 2012. Wright is credited with performing the 2002 "Michigan Miracle," which upgraded Michigan's child support en-

forcement system and not only saved the State of Michigan \$142 million in federal fines, but earned the state a \$36 mil-



Photo with permission, MLive

lion refund in previous fines. In addition, Wright worked on legislation to give foster children a greater voice in decisions about their lives.

"I knew Dan Wright since I was a kid, and no one I've known mirrors his work quite like Judge Beagle," said Beagle's friend and colleague Genesee Probate Judge Jen-

nie Barkey. Together with Genesee County Judge Richard Yuille, the two nominated Beagle for the honor. "While Judge Beagle has never been credited with something so monumental as the Michigan Miracle, he is often behind the scenes of many of Flint's minor miracles," Barkey wrote in her recommendation letter to the Michigan Supreme Court. "And in a city so beleaguered as this one, those minor miracles are sometimes all we have."

Born and raised in Flint, and a third-generation lawyer, Beagle has spent 25 years on the bench. He currently serves as one of the five Family Court judges in Genesee County and presides over three specialty courts, including Attendance Court for truant students, Drug Court for neglectful parents and ADAPT Court to improve the efficiency of an increased number of pa-



Photo with permission, MLive

ternity cases.

Outside the court, Beagle is involved with the Police Athletic League, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Atwood Stadium Authority, the IMA Foundation, the Greater Flint Area Sports Hall of Fame, the Disability Network and the Flint Rotary Club.

According to Barkey, Beagle "has tirelessly attempted to keep families together when possible, and has removed children from harmful situations when unification is not possible."

"I'm very honored," said Beagle. "The real joy is the work you actually do, but I'm extremely humbled and incredibly proud to represent Flint."

"I think I've got a passion for wanting to work with people, help people and solve problems," he said. "I've got a passion for the underdogs of life, a deep love for children, and like to wake up and think about helping some family and some kids. When you get to change the system and change a kids' life, that's the real reward." Barkey says what sets Beagle apart is his immense patience, something she calls "the Beagle attitude."

"To say Judge Beagle's impact on Michigan's children has been demonstrable is to understate the matter," said Barkey. "The aftershocks of his seismic impact on this community will be felt for many decades more."

As part of the award ceremony, Beagle also sat in on National Adoption Day, an annual tradition held on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving Day, where the Michigan Supreme Court finalized adoptions and sent children to their "forever homes." -Oona GoodinSmith, article reprinted with permission

## COURT POLICY REGARDING CLOSING FOR INCLEMENT WEATHER

It is time again to remind court staff and court users, that the Genesee County Circuit and Probate Courts have a local administrative order that addresses the circumstances that may cause the courts to close during winter weather or other circumstance. [Click here for LAO 2104-5J/2014-4J.](#)

Please be reminded that local television stations are notified if the courts are closed. The court website will also be updated with closing information, [7thcircuitcourt.com](http://7thcircuitcourt.com). Follow the court on **Twitter**, @7thcourt to be notified of court closures.



Welcome to the Friend of the Court as the newest Circuit Court division to join *Hearsay*. We look forward to more articles and information. Thanks to Jack Battles and Tony McDowell for expanding our team.



## CHANGING NEEDS, CHANGING COURT: THE GENESEE COUNTY ADAPT PROGRAM

People are not getting married anymore. This is especially true in Flint, where 84% of births are to unmarried parents, which has been a steady increase over the past few decades. During the same time period, the number of divorce filings have fallen and the number of cases involving unmarried parents has risen. As families change in our community, our Courts are working to adapt to the needs of the families we serve.

Through a partnership with Judge Duncan Beagle, the Friend of the Court, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office and other state agencies, a specialty court project was developed to expedite the traditional court process and address the changing needs of modern families. The project is entitled Acquiring DNA and Paternity Timely, or ADAPT.

The ADAPT program begins with FOC staff members providing community outreach and education for unmarried parents, where they provide families with the basics of paternity establishment and support order entry. Families are also informed of the voluntary expedited ADAPT process, which includes DNA testing at the hospital or the FOC office and a shortened legal process to obtain a court order.

If families are interested in participating in ADAPT, they can sign up prenatally or contact the FOC when their baby is born. FOC staff will assist with DNA testing and also assist the family with completing a stipulated form waiving

the traditional process of a summons, complaint, and answer. The parties will receive a hearing date 6 weeks after signing up for ADAPT, where the Prosecutor's Office and the FOC will assist with the creation of an order for custody, parenting time, support, and holistic services.

*"As families change in our community, our Courts are working to adapt to the needs of the families we serve."*

Since October 2014, the FOC and Prosecuting Attorney's Office have partnered with over 180

families, providing free DNA testing, an under two month court process, and comprehensive custody, parenting time, and support orders.

Of those 180 families, DNA testing was requested 90% of the time and the alleged father was excluded as the biological father 35% of the time. When

families are aware that DNA testing is available they will request DNA testing more frequently, which offers certainty to the family and fewer post judgment issues.

Since the beginning of ADAPT, the average time for an order to be established is between 5 and 6 weeks. Considering that most of the families going through ADAPT are signing up immediately after the birth of their child, many families have a comprehensive order before their child is 2 months old.

For the families in ADAPT, this program provides an opportunity to have near immediate court orders defining their rights and roles as parents. For the Child Support Program it is a demonstration of the change that is possible when collaboration and innovation is encouraged. -tm

## EMPOWERING CHANGE THROUGH INNOVATION A TALE OF TWO DEPARTMENTS (CONT'D)

The Probate Court also began using OnBase in 2009 after an extended planning phase of several months that focused on a needs assessment, process analysis and system requirements.

All probate files are permanent records. These include guardianships, conservatorships, decedents estates, mental health

code proceedings, trusts and wills.

Historically, Register of Deeds scanned and archived records. In 2008, a scanner was purchased. With OnBase scanning, the documents now have the advantage of multiple user access.

Probate practice requires voluminous forms. OnBase has sig-

nificantly reduced form retrieval time. Hard copy files are seldom accessed.

There are 26 probate queues that are developed in OnBase. A queue represents a series of documents that are waiting for a task to be completed before they move to the next step.

Workflow is a powerful tool that

can automate repetitive tasks. It routes documents for data entry, indexing, auditing, calculating inventory fees and closing files. It is used to email assigned documents directly to different agencies upon completion and to send specific orders to Judge Barkey to electronically sign. We are far from using workflow to its full capacity. Our goal is to eventually be paperless.



# A BABY COURT OFFERS HOPE FOR FAMILIES

*Judge David J. Newblatt submitted this article to Nicholas Kristoff, columnist, The New York Times. It was selected for publication and appeared in the November 28, 2016 edition.*

As a family court judge in Flint, Michigan, I see poverty flood my courtroom in a vicious cycle of cases in dependency, delinquency, criminality, and then back to dependency. The mantra in family court is that no one should lose their kids because they're poor. The sad reality is that this happens all too often when generational poverty creates what Nicholas Kristoff calls a "broken class." Many times it falls to the courts to fix families. It would be nice if it were easy. But often courts lock up a juvenile or terminate a parent's rights and the vicious cycle continues to turn unabated. I agree that there is no "silver bullet" to solve the problems facing the poorest Americans; instead we must use "silver buckshot." This is what we are doing in Genesee County, which encompasses Flint. Creating effective "silver buckshot" in family court starts with a recognition of three truths. First, early childhood experiences, both good and bad, have an outsized effect on lifelong well-being and functionality. Second, the single biggest threat is from trauma, so it is imperative to both prevent it and treat its impact. Finally, we get better results with collaborative wraparound

models, when families trust and are invested in the process. These truths, applicable in other poverty stricken communities, are especially evident in our experiences in Flint. Our system, based on trauma-informed practice with an emphasis on early childhood, has become a model in Michigan. In the dependency system, where children come under court jurisdiction because of parental abuse or neglect, we created a special program

dren under the age of three who are in foster care is 26 percent. Baby Court has boosted reunification to 76 percent. We have a collaborative approach to determining paternity, and don't rely solely on suing fathers in a prosecutorial model. This is critical in Flint, where over 80 percent of births are to unmarried parents. We are changing the paradigm from merely chasing after "deadbeat dads" to one of engaging fathers and their ex-

To prevent at-risk girls from falling victim to human trafficking and other bad outcomes, we created Girls Court. Our Girls Court, the first and only in Michigan, works with girls between the ages of 14 and 17 who are defendants in the delinquency system. Although they have broken the law, we understand that their behaviors (substance abuse, stealing, running away, truancy and violence) are actually manifestations of trauma. In other words, trauma both explains their offending behavior and identifies them as at-risk for victimization. That is why Girls Court focuses like a laser beam on treating trauma; establishing realistic thinking, emotional regulation and life structure. By helping girls build functionality and resiliency, we are preventing unwanted pregnancies or, if they do ultimately become pregnant, preventing a new generation from coming into the system. The idea of "silver buckshot" in family court is powerful because it challenges us to do more than just make decisions based upon the way we have always done things. It forces us to treat our contacts with families as opportunities to lift up those in poverty so they can live happy, healthy and productive lives. In Genesee County, we've seen the transformations that can happen when a court thinks bigger. —*djn*



Photo credit Shelley Spivack

called Baby Court. Based upon research showing the profound impact of early childhood experiences on the brain relating to cognition, development, emotional stability and attachment, Baby Court provides infant mental health therapy and intensive wraparound services. We have successfully helped families overcome mental illness, drug addiction, domestic violence and extreme dysfunction. The national family reunification rate for chil-

tended families to have as many loving arms around the child as possible. We can establish paternity within weeks rather than waiting the months or years that it takes for a lawsuit. We want to meet all of the needs of a family in a holistic way initially, in order to prevent later dependency. Also, we can offer genetic testing immediately, thus reducing the number of wrongly named fathers.

*Congratulations to Judge Thomas C. Yeotis  
-A Tribute for a Life of Service-*

***IT IS HEREBY NOTED** that Thomas C. Yeotis was a Judge of the City of Flint Municipal Court, appointed to the Genesee County Probate Court and elected to the Genesee County Circuit Court, where he served with distinction from 1971-1998.*

***IT IS FURTHER NOTED** that Judge Thomas C. Yeotis was universally considered to be kind, compassionate and caring to the litigants who came before him.*

***IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that the Judges (and staff) of the Genesee County Probate Court and the Genesee County Circuit Court applaud, support and concur with the selection of Judge Thomas C. Yeotis to be honored for a life of service to the community and Mott Community College.*

*Judge Jennie E. Barkey*

*Judge Duncan M. Beagle*

*Judge F. Kay Behm*

*Judge Joseph J. Farah*

*Judge Judith A. Fullerton*

*Judge John A. Gadola*

*Judge Archie L. Hayman*

*Judge Geoffrey L. Neithercut*

*Judge David J. Newblatt*

*Judge Michael J. Theile*

*Judge Richard B. Yuille*

# WORD SEARCH

Y	G	I	V	I	N	G	T	S	E	N	O	H	F
P	E	R	N	R	E	E	G	M	L	C	E	A	O
P	L	E	A	S	A	N	T	A	B	G	I	R	L
A	V	W	I	C	I	E	Y	R	I	R	G	N	L
H	L	W	Z	M	I	R	I	T	S	A	A	C	O
C	O	U	R	T	E	O	U	S	N	B	H	E	Y
S	P	A	F	E	O	U	U	I	O	I	G	L	A
O	H	A	H	T	J	S	Z	S	P	Z	D	B	L
C	P	C	T	O	H	E	D	P	S	N	G	A	D
I	M	O	V	I	D	G	E	R	E	C	N	I	S
A	W	I	L	N	E	R	U	I	R	V	I	L	W
B	A	P	I	I	M	N	R	O	Y	R	R	E	M
L	B	K	E	T	T	F	T	L	H	W	A	R	M
E	E	V	I	T	A	E	R	C	Z	T	C	T	I

## I'M POSITIVE

Are you positive? You'll know for sure especially if the words in this list of positive attributes apply to you.

- |                                    |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CARING    | <input type="checkbox"/> GRACIOUS  | <input type="checkbox"/> PLEASANT    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHARMING  | <input type="checkbox"/> HAPPY     | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITE      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHEERY    | <input type="checkbox"/> HONEST    | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIABLE    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHIPPER   | <input type="checkbox"/> JOVIAL    | <input type="checkbox"/> RESPONSIBLE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COURTEOUS | <input type="checkbox"/> KIND      | <input type="checkbox"/> SINCERE     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CREATIVE  | <input type="checkbox"/> LOYAL     | <input type="checkbox"/> SMART       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR      | <input type="checkbox"/> MERRY     | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIABLE    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FRIENDLY  | <input type="checkbox"/> NICE      | <input type="checkbox"/> THOUGHTFUL  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GENEROUS  | <input type="checkbox"/> ORGANIZED | <input type="checkbox"/> WARM        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GIVING    |                                    |                                      |

Answer on Page 9



## CONDOLENCE NOTE

*Stefan Davidek*, artistic director for the restoration of the Historic Genesee County Courthouse, passed away in December. Along with the fine work of Steve Heddy, the historic courtrooms and other common areas were returned to their original splendor. This involved painstaking work and research.

Those of us who worked closely with Mr. Davidek, and many other family members involved with his work, came to appreciate his creativity, talent and soul. Being with him in his studio was a rare treat and a glimpse into his view of the world.

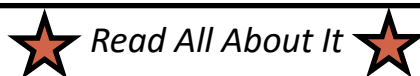
During the Courthouse Project, I heralded his arrival one morning by saying that the “maestro” had arrived. He related that to one of his daughters. I am told that the designation seemed to follow him thereafter. He was truly one of a kind, the likes we shall not see again.

A humble man, leaving a legacy of artistic expression, love of community and family. A life well lived.

- bam



Word Search Puzzle Answer



Hearsay is now available on the Circuit Court website [www.7thCircuitCourt.com/hearsay-newsletter](http://www.7thCircuitCourt.com/hearsay-newsletter)

We want to hear from you! Send us an email letting us know what you would like to see in the newsletter and feedback on the current edition. You can also submit ideas and information about activity in your department. [hearsay@7thcircuitcourt.com](mailto:hearsay@7thcircuitcourt.com)