



The Court Reporter

[A Message From Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio](#)

Volume 3, Issue 29

One of the benefits of my job is to reward someone for doing theirs well. We recognize employees each year with High Point Awards, but occasionally, I get the opportunity to promote a staff member who has demonstrated the requisite qualifications to move to another level of employment.

Such is the case with Curtis Howard, who has worked at the Court for over three decades and, I believe, is ready to assume broader responsibilities as Assistant Court Administrator. I congratulate him, and I look forward to working with in his new capacity.

I would also like to congratulate and thank the staff and students from Kent State University who have done such a remarkable job with the youth in the Detention Center with their creative writing program.

I was deeply impressed with the scope of projects undertaken by the youth in Detention under the guidance and leadership of the Kent State graduate students, many of which were displayed at the recent Learning Showcase. Dr. Kristy Pytash and Dr. Elizabeth Testa as the catalysts of the program, but it is the encouragement and the energy provided by the graduate student volunteers who provide the impetus for the youth to devote themselves to the various creative options presented to them.

The finished products are a source of pride for those who created them, and the lesson learned just from that experience - that good things result when they apply themselves - is something that we hope stays with them long after they have returned to the community.

Linda Tucci Teodosio



Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio

Contact Us:

[Howard Named Assistant Court Administrator](#)

He prepared for the opportunity for 34 years and, on July 2nd, Curtis Howard's diligence and dedication were rewarded when Summit County Juvenile Court Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio announced that Howard was being promoted to Assistant Court Administrator.

Howard began his career at the Juvenile Court in 1984 as a Detention Officer. Two years later, he was appointed as a Community Worker in the Probation Department. Howard held five positions in Probation culminating with his promotion to Chief Probation Officer in 2001.



In his new position, Howard will oversee the operations of the Probation Department, the Crossroads Program, and the Intake Department. The move also comes at a point in time when the Court is shifting its posture toward cases involving misdemeanants from dockets to diversionary programming. Such a change is in keeping with the philosophies of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) that the Court has incorporated into its case assessment policies for the past five years.

"The practices of JDAI are definitely different from how we did things when I started, but it is something I have embraced," Howard said. "The Court already has systems in place that can allow for a more seamless transition to that change. I am so grateful and excited about this opportunity."

Howard pointed to the Court's Family Resource Center, Teen Court, and Child Responsibility Project, and community-based resources that can be utilized to refer those cases.

"I plan to hit the ground running in this new job," stated Howard. "I have to. There is much to be done. I have some ideas regarding system reform to make it more effective. I hope to explore methods of what we could and should do in an efficient and meaningful manner, and I look forward to working with staff members of the different departments to affect these changes and keep the Court moving forward."

Keith Luhning has been named the new Chief Probation Officer and Bill Davis has been promoted to Probation Supervisor.

Judge Teodosio has full confidence that Howard is up to the task.

"Curtis' experience and his eagerness to become educated on the latest trends in juvenile justice have put him in a unique position to be successful," said Judge Teodosio. "He has applied what he has learned to his job in Probation, and I know he will continue to do so as Assistant Court Administrator."

["Learning Showcase" Highlights Work of Detention Youth](#)

Staff members in the Summit County Juvenile Court's Detention Center work with youth to encourage them to do the right thing. For the past six years, staff members and students from Kent State University have worked with the same youth and encourage them to do the "write" thing.

Six years ago, Kent State Professor Dr. Kristy Pytash approached Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio and broached an idea for a project that would allow youth in Detention to express themselves through creative writing. It was the belief of Dr. Pytash and colleague Dr. Elizabeth Testa that students, particularly the community's most marginalized youth, would respond to a challenging curriculum if it was properly presented to them.

Judge Teodosio is always seeking methods to expand the activities of Detention youth so they can be equipped with tangible skills once they re-enter the community, and the creative writing class was a perfect complement to that goal. Change is normally met with resistance, but that wasn't the case when the project was introduced.



Dr. Kristy Pytash addresses visitors at the Learning Showcase in the Detention Center.

"I think we gave the students a chance to detail the experiences that they've had; to be able to tell their stories and to have their voices heard," said Dr. Pytash. "They responded so positively to that opportunity it was our job to help them refine the stories they wanted to share."

Offering both prose and poetry, the youth became more engaged in the creative writing process and Dr. Pytash thinks that is a credit to the graduate students from Kent State who volunteered to work with the youth since the genesis of the program.

"Once the instructors established a trust, the students really began to show growth as writers, and they were receptive to exploring new things," stated Dr. Pytash. "It is so gratifying when we see some of the students begin to share other experiences, the good things in their lives, and it gives us a more in-depth glimpse of who they are."

When the Kent State graduate students arrive, the Detention Center become a laboratory for learning, and, according to Dr. Testa, not just for the youth in the Detention Center.

"We really have two levels of learners, the youth and volunteer students," she said. "We wanted the graduate students to be able to develop their lesson plans and chart out how they were going to engage their students, so we made it a priority to take a two-fold approach when developing the program curriculum."

The project, funded by the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, has evolved over the years. In early July, Dr. Pytash and Dr. Testa invited observers from Kent State, Juvenile Court, and community organizations to view what has been achieved. At different intervals, youth housed in separate wings of the Detention Center were brought into the display area and some of them explained the process they used in developing their creations.

While writing is still the central theme, the youth have also been invited to flex their creative muscle in other ways. They have crafted clay into small picturals, depicted Akron landmarks through art, and developed picturals and slide shows.

"When we created the curriculum, we were very conscious and very intentional about trying to introduce science, math, language arts, social studies, and civic engagement as instructional goals," Dr. Pytash stated. "We wanted to come up with projects that were more inter-disciplinary and from that, we came up with the rollercoasters."

Roller-coasters? Yes, roller-coasters.



Pictured are some of the "rollercoasters" designed by the youth in the Detention Center.

Several youth in different wings teamed up to build Rube Goldberg-type contraptions, where a marble is dropped into the top of the structure and it travels through a series of twists and turns, chutes and tracks, tunnels and funnels before exiting the bottom. Each structure was given a name. One was called, appropriately, "The Big Swirl." Another was called, plaintively and poignantly, "Life." Each one took two to three days to conceptualize and create, and observers could tell how proud the youth were with what they built.

"I think they had fun with it," said Dr. Pytash. "And that can be just as important as the creative process."

Dr. Pytash also expressed her gratitude that the Juvenile Court welcomed them with open arms so they could open minds.

"It definitely is a partnership," she said. "Judge Teodosio and the Detention staff know how important an education is, and they trust us to be here, and we deeply appreciate the opportunity to do this type of work."

Apparently, so do the youth in the Detention Center.



One of the youth in Detention created an electronic pictorial about his home town that he displayed during the recent Learning Showcase.