

# The Court Reporter

## A Message from Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio

There are fortunate occasions when the Juvenile Court is blessed to have individuals who make a discernible impact on the Court and the community it serves. In this newsletter, we get to acknowledge two such outstanding people.

Recently retired Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor was the latest person who was honored with a banner here at the Court depicting her incredible career as a jurist. We were so honored that Chief Justice O'Connor could join us to unveil her banner and give us the opportunity to recount her many achievements as the state's first female Chief Justice.

Also highlighted in this newsletter is a man who prefers to be called Mr. Simon. His generosity to the youth in the Court's Detention Center has resulted in a positive reaction from the youth he tutors in recreational activities. The items he has donated and the time he has devoted to youth not only here in Summit County, but in several Detention Centers throughout the state, is deeply appreciated.



Judge Teodosio

## JUVENILE COURT HONORS CHIEF JUSTICE O'CONNOR WITH BANNER

Public service became a central theme as the Summit County Juvenile Court resumed its commemoration of Women's History Month with the unveiling of a banner acknowledging recently retired Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor's outstanding career. The event took place on March 14<sup>th</sup> at the William P. Kannel Juvenile Court Center in Akron. Juvenile Court Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio presided over the unveiling ceremony.

The banners are created to identify women who have had an indelible impact on Summit County's history. Among the past honorees have been Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Poet Laureate Rita Dove, as well as many local luminaries such as Helen Arnold, Ophelia Averitt, Dr. Fannie Brown, Dorothy Jackson, Judge Carla Moore, Ruby Nash Garnett...and Judge Mary Cacioppo.

As the ceremony began, Judge Teodosio recognized several of Summit County's judiciary who attended the event. Judge Teodosio recalled how her mentor, Judge Cacioppo, was told by a University of Akron School of Law professor that women had no place in the legal field. Undaunted, Judge Cacioppo embarked on a very successful career, becoming the first female to earn a Juris Doctorate from the university's law school, the first magistrate in Summit County history, and one of the first women elected to the 9<sup>th</sup> District Court of Appeals.

"She blazed the trail for so many of us," said Judge Teodosio. "Now, the vast majority of judges in Summit County are women. But the one who has risen to the zenith of her profession in this state has joined us today, and I cannot think of anyone more deserving of this recognition."

Among those in attendance was Chief Justice O'Connor's former colleague, current Justice Melody Stewart, who was invited to make some remarks.

"Chief Justice O'Connor is a consummate public servant who has always believed in an independent judiciary," said Justice Stewart. "She never lost sight that those of us on the bench took an oath to the Constitution, to uphold the laws of the state of Ohio, and to serve the citizens of this state."

Chief Justice O'Connor's public career ranks among the finest in Ohio history. After earning her law degree from the Cleveland State University College of Law in 1980, she entered private practice. She was appointed as a Probate Court Magistrate before her election to the General Division of the Summit County Common Pleas Court in 1993. She stepped down after winning election as Summit County Prosecutor in 1995. After four years in that capacity, she accepted an invitation from Bob Taft to run on his ticket as Lieutenant Governor. After one term, she decided to run for a seat on the Ohio Supreme Court bench, winning election in 2002. She was twice re-elected before she sought the position of Chief Justice. On January 1, 2011, Maureen O'Connor became the Court's 10<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice and the first woman in state history to hold that title.

As Chief Justice, she proved to be a visionary. Her progressive approach was lauded nationally for ordering enhancements to information technology for Court systems throughout the state, introducing bail reform, seeking equity in the conviction process, and bringing uniformity to felony sentencing entries.

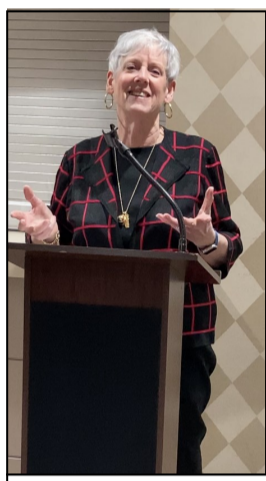
After Justice O'Connor and Judge Teodosio unveiled the banner, Justice O'Connor took the podium.

"I think this banner represents something beyond my career. I think it's important for boys and men to see this," she said. "They can see that girls and women can do and dare and dream and achieve; that they are equal and capable of doing anything they want, including public service."

Chief Justice O'Connor may be retired from the Supreme Court bench, but not public service. She indicated she planned on being a leading voice for an upcoming ballot issue that would bring fairness to the statewide re-districting process.



Chief Justice O'Connor, right, stands with Judge Teodosio, far left, and Justice Melody Stewart after the unveiling of her banner.



Chief Justice O'Connor at the podium following the banner unveiling.

## COURT BENEFACTOR AND VOLUNTEER COACH HONORED

It doesn't have to be the holiday season to embrace the spirit of giving. A gentleman who asks to be called "Mr. Simon" proves it is something that can be demonstrated year-round, and the youth in the Summit County Detention Center have benefitted from his generosity.

An Ohio resident, Mr. Simon met Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio at a CASA fundraising event in the spring of 2018. He asked the Judge what the youth in the Detention Center do for recreation and asked if he could donate two ping-pong tables. Judge Teodosio agreed to the request and, a week later, true to his word, two ping-pong tables, along with paddles and balls, arrived at the Detention Center.

The game of ping-pong is Mr. Simon's favorite, and he wanted to pass on that love of the game by volunteering to teach the youth in Detention how to play the game.

"I've never coached kids before, and I wondered how I would be received," said Mr. Simon. "But after I introduced myself, they couldn't have been kinder. They welcomed me and thanked me for donating the equipment."

In the following weeks, Mr. Simon donated something more valuable than sports equipment: his time. He was encouraged by the enthusiasm and positive energy they brought to his coaching sessions. He was thrilled to see how the youth he coached began to share his passion for the game. He often joined the youth in their games and his coaching sessions became more frequent.

So did his donations to the Detention Center. Over the next three years, Mr. Simon also donated chess sets, gaming systems, furniture, a karaoke machine, a television, and other items for the youth in the Detention Center.

All the items he has given were placed in the Rewards Wing of the Detention Center. The room is reserved only for the youth who have performed and behaved at acceptable levels during their stay. Mr. Simon calls the reward program, "Do good, feel good."

"I think it is important to offer positive incentives for the youth to behave properly," said Detention Superintendent Melissa Gerney. "When they saw the things that Mr. Simon brought in for them to use, I can honestly say it has had a positive effect. They look forward to visiting the Rewards Wing and to his visits."

He also teaches them how to play chess and encourages each of them to use the talents they possess to create a productive life when they leave the juvenile justice system. He stresses to them that confidence in themselves is vital. Standing up and speaking before a group of people, especially one's peers, can be daunting. Imagine what it must feel like to sing in front of them. That's where the karaoke machine came into play. Mr. Simon again brought a constructive message to the youth as they took their turns taking the microphone (including Mr. Simon). As the participation grew stronger, he developed the "Sing Don't Fight" program. The title is simple, but the message is powerful; that violence solves nothing.

The experience in Summit County has been so gratifying and inspirational for Mr. Simon, that he decided that he wanted to expand his coaching and donations to other Juvenile Court Detention Centers in the state. He enlisted the help of Gerney to set that plan in motion.

"I presented at the Superintendents Association Statewide Meeting and outlined what Mr. Simon had achieved in our Detention Center," she said. "Then, Mr. Simon spoke and revealed that he wanted to do the same for other Detention Centers in Ohio. The reaction he received was very enthusiastic."

And, so, his mission continues. To date, Mr. Simon has made donations to 23 Detention Centers in Ohio and makes it a point to visit each one. He also makes it a point to continue coaching and introducing the Sing Don't Fight program. He always encourages the youth he works with to point their lives in a positive direction.

"I'm fond of the saying that "it takes a village to raise a child," he says. "I am proud to be part of that village and my devotion to these kids."

His efforts and dedication have not gone unnoticed. In December 2022, Mr. Simon attended the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges' Winter Meeting and Awards Luncheon in Columbus. It was there that he received the Court Service Award for all that he done for Detention Centers in the state. So far.

"I think the fact that Mr. Simon continues to donate items and coach the youth in Detention Centers across the state points directly to his heart," said Judge Teodosio. "Some would say he's done enough already. But, I think he'd say he was just started."



The ping-pong tables donated by Mr. Simon, who enjoys coaching the youth in the Detention Center how to play the game.



Pictured is the furniture Mr. Simon donated to the Detention Center. The furniture was placed in the Rewards Wing of the where youth who have behaved well have earned the right to participate in recreational activities.