

The Court Reporter

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

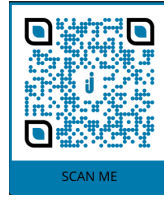
For anyone who aspires to public service, they need to look no further than the example provided by the Sykes family. Barbara, Vernon, and Emilia Sykes have represented their constituency from Akron City Council chambers, to the Ohio General Assembly, and to the halls of Congress. It was only fitting that they were selected to be depicted on a banner that was unveiled in late February describing their achievements throughout their careers. Perhaps Congresswoman Emilia Sykes encapsulated the recognition best when she said, "We are a family of service."

Also in this newsletter, you'll read about a unique service one our employees offers the youth in the Detention Center. Kathy Hullum took it upon herself to create a book club, inviting the youth in the Detention Center an opportunity to broaden their education by reading books and sharing their views of the content. It also provides a forum to express themselves in a group setting where there is common ground beyond the Detention Center. I share Kathy's hope that they develop a love of reading that they can enjoy for the rest of their lives.

Linda Tucci Teodosio



Judge Teodosio



SCAN ME

[Juvenile Court Honors Sykes Family with Banner](#)

On February 22, 2024, the Summit County Juvenile Court unveiled a banner recognizing the contributions to the Summit County community of Akron School Board Member Barbara, State Senator Dr. Vernon, and Congresswoman Emilia Sykes. The ceremony took place at 4:30pm in the main lobby of the William P. Kannel Juvenile Court Center.

With family members, friends, elected officials, and Court staff looking on, Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio presided over the ceremony.

"Today, we are thrilled to recognize three people who have had a tremendous impact locally, statewide, and nationally," said Judge Teodosio. "They are extraordinary individuals who just happen to be from the same family."

Judge Teodosio then introduced Malcolm Costa, Executive Director of the Akron-Summit Community Action Foundation and a close friend of the Sykes family. Mr. Costa outlined the many achievements of the honorees. Chief among them were Barbara Sykes becoming the first woman of color to be elected to Akron City Council and would later serve in the Ohio House of Representatives; Dr. Vernon Sykes was noted for his 40-plus years in public service as an Akron City Councilman, State Representative, and State Senator; and their daughter, Emilia Sykes, who served in the Ohio House of Representatives and became the first person of color elected to represent Ohio District 13 of the United States Congress.

After Mr. Costa's remarks, Judge Teodosio asked the honorees to join her as they unveiled the banner, entitled, "The First Family of Akron Politics: Barbara, Dr. Vernon, & Emilia Sykes". After the unveiling, each of them were invited to make some comments.

Barbara Sykes: "I can't think of a better honor than this. Because there is nothing better than saying, to me, that I represented my community, I represented my culture, and my race in a way that all of you are proud of."

Dr. Vernon Sykes: "We stand here because of so many of you who are here today. Your support, your advice, and your friendship have meant so much to us through the years, and I am honored to represent you."

Emilia Sykes: "This is truly a family of service. I am so thankful to have been given the opportunity to serve as a member of Congress, but I'm mostly thankful to be a member of this beautiful, diverse, fantastic community."



Family friend Malcolm Costa outlined the accomplishments of the Sykes family.



From left, Barbara, Vernon, and Emilia Sykes and Judge Teodosio stand before the banner honoring the family for their community contributions.

The banner will be displayed in the main lobby of the Juvenile Court Center for a year and then be moved to another position in the building. The banner is part of the Juvenile Court's on-going observance of Black History and Women's History Months in February and March, respectively. The banner project first began in 2006 when the Court produced a banner with the image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and below it, a Pledge of Peace. Visitors to the Court were asked to sign the banner and students across Summit County were sent the Pledge of Peace, which they signed and returned to the Court. Both the banner and the collection of the pledges were sent to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in Washington, D.C., where the banner was displayed. Three years later, Women's History Month was coupled with Black History Month.

Banners have also honored Akron School Board Member Helen Arnold, NAACP Director Emeritus Ophelia Averitt, Coming Together Project Director Dr. Fannie Brown and the Beacon Journal's Pulitzer Prize-winning series, "A Question of Color," Akron Deputy Mayor Dorothy Jackson, and Judge Carla Moore. On three occasions, the Court deviated a bit from its central theme. Judge Mary Cacioppo and Councilman Ed Davis were honored for being trailblazers in their respective disciplines, Judge Cacioppo for first woman to serve as assistant law director in the city of Akron, and first female chief prosecutor, and Mr. Davis for being elected as the first Black Akron City Councilman. The Court also commemorated the dedication of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. monument. Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor was honored last year.

The Sykes family banner will be displayed in the main lobby of the Juvenile Court Center for a year and then moved to another position in the building.

[Court Staff Member Creates Book Club in Detention Center](#)

Trust is a fragile thing. Even in the most normal of circumstances, trust can be fragile in nature.

Kathy Hullum understands this. In her role as a Re-entry Coordinator, she works with youth who have been in a detention facility and prepares them to return to their community. There is a wariness many youth apply to working with a person from a juvenile court system that sent them to a detention facility for the offenses they committed. Ms. Hullum works hard to get to know the youth on her caseload, pinpoint their interests, and forge a rapport with them. Such breakthroughs are key to formulating a plan that would make them better equipped to be sent home.

Ms. Hullum also works with youth in the Juvenile Court's Detention Center. Many of them are there for a substantial amount of time. She began to think of ways to engage them and provide an educational and social outlet for them outside the Detention Center classrooms.

It was then she thought of Dolly Parton. Yes, Dolly Parton. Ms. Hullum is a great admirer of the music megastar, but her admiration goes beyond her music. Parton started The Imagination Library, which donates selected books to youth every month all in an effort to promote literacy.



Kathy Hullum stands in the Detention Center library where the book club she created meets each Thursday afternoon.

Ms. Hullum was intrigued. Why not begin a book club that meets periodically? Let the youth choose the topic and she would select a book from the detention library that best addresses it.

"Research has indicated that many of the kids that come to us through what is termed the "school-to-prison pipeline" struggle with literacy," she said. "Working with them, I have found that many of them are very intelligent, but they don't reach their potential perhaps because of presentation, or the material doesn't interest them. That's where I felt that a book club could fill that void."

She took the idea to Judge Teodosio. It was an easy decision. Before she entered law school, Judge Teodosio earned a Bachelor's Degree in Education, so any idea that can enhance learning has her ear. In fact, when Judge Teodosio began her administration of the Court in 2003, she noticed there was less than 500 books in the Detention Center library. Working with the Akron Public Library and other sources, within a year or so the count totaled over 5,000.

Once she had Judge Teodosio's blessing, she met with Detention Superintendent Melissa Gerney to discuss logistics and format.

So, the template was in place. The only thing needed was participation. That's where that trust issue comes into play.

"I was so enthusiastic about this idea because I know how well Kathy works with the kids," said her supervisor, Kevin Floyd. "I've seen how she builds relationships with them, and from that, she has developed a trust level that was so important to getting the project started. When the kids found out Kathy was going to work with them, it was more appealing for them to participate."

It was three years ago when Ms. Hullum first introduced the book club in the girl's wing (it no longer meets because of the limited amount of girls in the unit). Gradually, young men in both male wings who were performing at acceptable levels in detention were invited to begin attending their own book club session. When the youth began to discuss the sessions with other youth in the units who were not participating, there was an overwhelmingly positive response and the sessions were eventually open to all.

"To be honest, I couldn't have been more pleased with the interest the book club generated," she said. "It strengthened my belief that, given the opportunity, these kids are eager to try something new; to challenge themselves."

Now, each Thursday from 3:30pm to 5:30pm, Ms. Hullum conducts the book club. This isn't in her job description. She does not get compensated for the time she devotes to the book club. What she does receive is the satisfaction of seeing the concept develop and thrive. She considers it important that the book club belongs to the youth. Even when it came to naming the club, she left it up to them. They didn't disappoint. The book club is called, "Mindreaders."

It's an appropriate name, because what Ms. Hullum enjoys most about the books they have read is the discussion it inspires within the groups during every session. The discourse has included topics from who is the greatest basketball player of all time, Jordan or James, to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, to the differences and similarities of various religions.

Ms. Hullum moderates the discussion, but she is careful not to include her opinion or shape their beliefs to hers. The only thing she wants from them is to let their mind be open to new things, to other opinions, to let their imaginations flourish.

"I want them to use their minds, make their choices, challenge their intellect," she says. "I see their willingness to express themselves growing each week. And, for those who aren't as eager to join the discussions, I encourage them to put their reflections in writing. I am often touched when I read them, and I tell them so."

The evolution of Mindreaders has resulted in some of the youth chosen to enter leadership training in the Detention Center. From that, two youth have been appointed as ambassadors who aid others with their homework.

"The peer-to-peer interaction has worked," stated Ms. Hullum. "I've seen the confidence of the ambassadors grow, but more importantly, I've seen the same in the youth they work with."

It's really just a matter of trust.

