

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch Community Court Session At Hartford

WINTER 2006-2007 News & Updates

Produced by Chris Pleasanton, Vol. 8, Issue 4

COMMUNITY COURT 2006 REVIEW

2006 was another exciting year at the Community Court in Hartford, full of new developments and continuation of existing successful initiatives. The most prominent change was the installation of the Honorable E. Curtissa R. Cofield as the Presiding Judge, replacing Judge Jorge A. Simón, who moved on to a new judicial assignment in the Family Court at 90 Washington Street. He remains a friend and advisor to the Community Court, and we are all thankful for his three-and-a-half years of leadership.

Judge Cofield has brought a new direction to the Community Court, working with key staff to develop initiatives to address underage drinking and truancy. She is also working to address the issue of youth involved with the criminal justice system and has expanded the women's holistic health program to include mentoring and therapeutic horse grooming.



The Community Court has also continued its fruitful relationships with many local service providers including: Community Health Services, the ADRC Latino Outpatient Counseling Center, the local shelters, and area police departments and municipalities.



In addition, the Community Court has forged several new relationships, most notable with the Boys and Girls Club of Hartford, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and the Urban League of Hartford.

We are very excited to begin 2007 working with so many significant organizations and, most importantly, the communities within our jurisdiction. Best wishes for a healthy and successful 2007 to you all from the Community Court in Hartford.



2006 was the 2nd Busiest Year Ever at the Community Court in Hartford!

2006 turned out to be the second busiest year in the Community Court's history with 8385 new cases docketed for arraignment during the calendar year. 2001 remains the all-time highest level with 9234 new cases, and 2002 comes in third with 8249 cases.

COMMUNITY COURT STATISTICS

FALL 2006

SEPT

OCT

NOV

	SEPT	OCT	NOV
Total New Cases	764	608	631
Community Service Hours	2724	2778	2520
Social Services Referrals	201	154	129
Referrals to Mediation	64	74	77
Rate of Compliance	89%	91%	90%
Suburban Caseload	12%	16%	20%

STAFF NOTES



Samantha Benjamin

The Community Court would like to welcome Field Supervisor Samantha Benjamin to the Community Court's Community Service Team. Employed by Community Partners in Action, Samantha supervises the Community Court's community service defendant work crews. In addition to her work at the Community Court Samantha will be graduating from Springfield College in May 2007.



Carmelo Hernandez

The Community Court would also like to welcome Field Supervisor Carmelo Hernandez to the CPA Community Service Team. A retired veteran of the Hartford Police Department, Carmelo will be joining Samantha and her colleagues supervising the Community Court's community service defendant work crews.



Marty Demers

Another addition to the Community Court Team is Judicial Marshal Marty Demers. A recent inductee into the Suffield Athletic Hall of Fame, Marty is very active in local hockey, officiating at many Hartford Wolf Pack and college games, as well as having been a officiating linesman at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York.

OFFICIALS FROM CHINA INTERN AT COMMUNITY COURT

Last fall, the Community Court in Hartford was pleased to host internships for Ma Lingxi and Zhang Chuan Wu, officials from China who were visiting the United States as part of an exchange program through the U.S.-China Business Center at Central Connecticut State University.

Mr. Ma is Vice General-Director of the Shandong Provincial Justice Department and Mr. Zhang is Director of the People's Government Yicheng District in Zaozhuang City.



Above: Zhang Chuan Wu, Chris Pleasanton, Hon. E. Curtissa R. Cofield, Ma Lingxi.

Mr. Ma and Mr. Zhang worked with Court Planner Chris Pleasanton at the Community Court for over a month, spending two days per week learning how the Community Court addresses low-level crimes through social services and community service. Mr. Ma and Mr. Zhang also met with Judge Cofield and many members of the Community Court staff to learn more about their individual jobs. They also observed numerous court sessions.

"It was a great honor for us to host Mr. Ma and Mr. Zhang," Chris Pleasanton said. "We shared our knowledge and experience but were fortunate to learn a great deal about China from our new friends as well."

ANTHONY STRAMBLER RECOGNIZED BY CPA



Sometimes we take it for granted that we see our co-workers and colleagues every day. Even when some take a day off or have a short illness, it often seems like they never were gone. In the case of Anthony Strambler, Assistant Project Manager of Community Partner's in Action's Community Court Community Service Team, the reality is that he has never been gone.

At their annual meeting in December, CPA recognized Anthony for his perfect work attendance and presented him with a certificate of recognition.

"Anthony is a hard-working and conscientious young man," Judge Cofield said. "We are very glad to see him honored for his efforts."

At left: Anthony Strambler with his CPA perfect attendance award.

HARTFORD COMMUNITY COURT: EIGHT YEARS LATER

(A Cautionary Tale by Assistant State's Attorney Glenn Kaas)

When Judge Raymond Norko first approached me in 1997 to be his prosecutor in the proposed new Hartford Community Court, I wondered whether or not there would be a sufficient number of cases to sustain the court on a full-time basis. We opened the doors in November 1998 and began quite modestly. At first, we were actually able to offer a defendant the option to do community service **on their very first appearance date**. And, we routinely had difficulty filling the 25-person daily capacity.



Glenn Kaas in Wyoming Summer 2006

Since we were among the first full-time, complete-jurisdiction Community Courts in the country, we regularly had visitors from afar come to observe our operations. When planning ahead for such a visit, we would make an effort to continue cases to that visitation date, to “beef-up” the dockets in order to show the full range of our activities and available services. I can recall discussions with Judge Norko back then wherein we both hoped the caseload would continue to pick up and keep this then “experimental” court in business, and keep me here as its full-time prosecutor. Business has built steadily from there, and a few years ago we expanded our catchment area, adding some of the surrounding smaller towns with the closure of the GA-16 geographical court.

Cut to the present: In early October 2006, the Community Court processed case number 60,000. A case which aptly represents the kind of things we do. The defendant, upset about kids trespassing on his property, threw a few beer bottles at them to scare them away. He missed the kids, they got away. The bottles landed in the street and shattered. The man will now be doing some community service to help clean up those very Hartford streets he helped to litter. Unfortunately, I had to schedule his community service almost **forty-five days** into the future due to our present volume of cases. The Hartford Community Court is consistently the fourth or fifth busiest of twenty-two criminal arraignment courts in the state when motor vehicle cases are excluded (the Community Court does not handle motor vehicle violations unless they are a small part of one of the cases in our jurisdiction). In August 2006 alone of this year we handled over 1,200 new cases.

And I’m still here as the original and only prosecutor. As the old saying goes: **Be Careful What You Wish For, You Just Might Get It!**

While our caseload can be daunting at times, I am happy to say the dreams and aspirations we had for the Community Court have come true in a much greater fashion than we could have ever imagined. We are providing a meaningful judicial response for the “quality of life” crimes which hurt local neighborhoods and we have connected many, many people to the services they have needed which not only helps them, it reduces their involvement in criminal activity.

In that way, I am grateful that we have received what we wished for back in 1998. Here’s to the next eight years!

RAY CUATTO: AN UNSUNG HERO

A Public Defender Who Makes a Big Difference in a Quiet Way

In Malcolm Gladwell's 2000 book on social change, 'The Tipping Point', one of the concepts of social change he discussed was what he called the "Law of the Few. In other words, big changes in society such as behavioral attitudes or fashion trends are often set in motion by relatively few people. In the Community Court, one of the biggest examples of one person changing the lives of many is Public Defender Ray Cuatto.

Ray, who has served as the Public Defender in the Community Court since 2001, works hard not only in protecting the rights of his clients in the courtroom, he also works hard to connect those who are in need with social services programs that often help them lead healthier and more productive lives, as well as reduce their recidivism in the criminal justice system.

A 1981 graduate of Western New England College, Ray first worked in the criminal court clerk's office from 1978 to 1986, when he became a Public Defender in April 1986.

"I call Ray Cuatto an unsung hero because he does not draw a lot of attention to himself, but he works effectively to help his clients get the best possible opportunities through the court," Judge Cofield said. "He strives to provide help to his clients who want and need assistance and remains vigilant in protecting their rights within the judicial process."

"The relationship between a judge, prosecutor and defense attorney are commonly adversarial in many traditional court settings but, in the Community Court I see that relationship being more like a team," Judge Cofield explained. "For example, State's Attorney Glenn Kaas will often relax his prosecutorial stance to allow a defendant to enter a rehab program when he regularly would be asking for jail time. On the other hand, Mr. Cuatto understands that a rehab program might be in the best personal interests of his client and, while that may increase their exposure to the courts in the short-term, in the long run it will likely reduce their involvement with the criminal justice system."

"In my short time at the Community Court I have seen several cases where Mr. Cuatto's clients have succeeded and made a change in their lives for the better," Judge Cofield added. "Much of their success comes from the work Mr. Cuatto has done on their behalf and I applaud his efforts, as well as those of Mr. Kaas."



Public Defender Ray Cuatto

THE COMMUNITY COURT WORKS TO COMBAT UNDERAGE DRINKING

The Community Court in Hartford deals with various charges associated with underage drinking, from illegal liquor purchase to minor in possession of liquor to illegal minor loitering.

In September, the Community Court had several students from the University of Hartford and several other local schools come before it on two separate occasions to answer to the above charges. While not an unusual occurrence (the Community Court has handled many underage drinking cases of kids from many of the local high schools, colleges, and communities in its jurisdiction throughout the years), the number of students and the close proximity of time between the arrests, led Judge Cofield to the conclusion that more than community service was needed to address this issue.

Working together, Judge Cofield and Court Planner Chris Pleasanton reached out to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Governor's Prevention Partnership, several local schools and community leaders to find a meaningful course of action that would not only hold underage drinkers accountable for their actions but also educate them on the negative impact drinking can have on their lives. What resulted was the development of the Community Court's Underage Drinking Initiative.

Beginning with the students arrested in September, Judge Cofield is requiring each student to read a gender-specific book on alcoholism, write an essay and read it to the Court on his or her return date. For males, the book they are assigned is "From Binge to Blackout: A Mother and Son Struggle With Teen Drinking" by Chris Volkmann, Toren Volkmann, Edward A. Malloy and Cardwell C. Nuckols. For females, the book is "Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood" by Koren Zailckas.

Students are then required to attend a MADD victim impact panel or "Hard Truth" presentation. MADD has also agreed to conduct two presentations each year at the Community Court for underage drinkers who come before the court, one in the spring, the other in the late fall.

Underage drinkers will also be required to perform community service to resolve their cases. In the matter of the University of Hartford students, Judge Cofield wants the students to directly impact in their immediate community, so she is requiring many to paint the inside of the local Boys and Girls Club near neighboring Bowles Park. Also realizing that many of the students have talents that could be utilized effectively in schools, Judge Cofield gave the option to several of the students, mostly education majors, of tutoring at Fox Middle School to fulfill their community service obligation.

The University of Hartford has played a significant part in addressing this matter. Dean J. Lee Peters met with Judge Cofield and Mr. Pleasanton to share Dean Peters' concern and willingness to work with the Community Court to address underage drinking. Dean Peters is now requiring every University of Hartford student facing underage drinking charges to meet with him personally to discuss the impact such behavior has on the school and the community. Per his suggestion, Judge Cofield also mandated the students to participate in the University of Hartford's substance abuse evaluation and assistance program, called the Oasis program.

continued next page

COMBATTING UNDERAGE DRINKING

continued from prior page

“Underage drinking is taken very seriously by the Community Court,” Judge Cofield said. “Some students, and even some parents, view it as a right of passage, but the bottom line is it is against the law for an individual under the age of twenty-one to possess or drink alcohol, and for good reason. They do not know how to handle it.”

“Sadly, I was proven right when one of the youngsters who recently came before my court on an underage drinking charge was killed while driving under the influence, before we could work with him,” Judge Cofield continued. “I do not want any parent or student to ever have to face such a situation, including myself. That’s why I brought my own son to MADD’s ‘Hard Truth’ presentation at the University of Hartford.”

“We are very grateful to Robin Cullen of MADD, Steven Ristau of the Governor’s Prevention Partnership, Dean Peters of the University of Hartford, and many others who have supported the Community Court’s effort to address underage drinking,” Chris Pleasanton added.

A Note on Underage Drinking From Assistant State’s Attorney Glenn Kaas

We have seen an upsurge of cases involving minors in possession of alcohol. While on its face the existing statute seems quite innocuous (\$250-\$500 fine), we at the Hartford Community Court nonetheless treat such violations seriously. A simple fine (which we do NOT otherwise accept) is insufficient. And, there are increased, and potentially much more serious, consequences for those who provide false affidavits as to age or possess false identification.

Recently, Judge Cofield has mandated attendance at MADD impact panels and assigned reading regarding the use, and abuse, of alcohol. Only after completing both, PLUS community service, will a defendant’s case be successfully resolved.

And of note, the legislature has also manifest its feeling as to the seriousness of the problem. The Senate and The House recently amended the underage drinking statute to include private property. They also increased penalties (up to one year in jail) for those who allow minors to possess alcohol on private property or who fail to take reasonable efforts to halt such possession.

Entering into a bar on a fake ID, or sneaking some beer from the fridge with your buddies, or hosting a party for your kids (“They just won the state championship....and it’s only a beer or two) is simply no longer considered “college hi-jinx” or “rite of passage” behavior.

Possession of alcohol by minors is a crime and will be treated as such.



WOMEN'S HOLISTIC HEALTH GRADUATION SUCCESS

Two Consecutive Classes with 100% Graduation Rates!

The Community Court is pleased to announce the second consecutive Women's Holistic Health class to achieve a 100% graduation rate. Both the October and December 2006 classes each graduated the four women who participated in each session.

Designed to introduce women charged with prostitution to a way out of that lifestyle, participants are required to attend two weeks of afternoon classes at the Community Court conducted by staff from Paul & Lisa, Inc., and perform court-supervised community service each morning. Participants are also required to remain drug-free for the duration of the program and submit random drug-testing to ensure their compliance.

"I am very pleased at the success of the last two Women's Holistic Health classes," Judge Cofield said. "It is a testament to the meaning of giving deserving people a chance to turn their lives around, the internal strength of these women, and the hard work of the Paul & Lisa staff."

MEET THE WOMEN'S HOLISTIC HEALTH FACILITATORS



Denise Holloman is the lead facilitator of the Women's Holistic Health Program. She has worked for Paul & Lisa since 2004 and is a recent graduate of Springfield College. Before Paul & Lisa, Denise worked for the Capitol Region Education Council at their Center for Creative Youth Program at Wesleyan University.



Christine Dubicki is also a facilitator in the Women's Holistic Health Program. She is a graduate of Providence College and earned a masters degree at John F. Kennedy University in California. Prior to working with Paul & Lisa, Christine was a school teacher and counselor.



Barbara Daggett is the newest facilitator in the Women's Holistic Health Program. Prior to working for Paul & Lisa, Barbara worked for the Arizona Department of Social Services as a Program Evaluation Specialist for seven years. Barbara is also a graduate of the University of Arizona.

JUDGE COFIELD PRESIDES OVER MIDDLE SCHOOL TRUANCY COURT

Truancy from school is a daunting issue that can have disastrous effects on a student's academic career. School, police and community leaders have searched for meaningful ways to address the issue of truancy and, in Hartford, one such initiative is underway: truancy court.

Judge Cofield has volunteered to preside over the truancy court at Hartford's Quirk Middle School, where she hears truancy cases every Wednesday morning. Several other judges' have volunteered to preside over truancy courts in other Hartford schools.

The truancy courts are not traditional courts with the powers of incarceration, and have no official connection to the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch. Rather the truancy courts are local initiatives by Hartford schools and strive to hold students accountable for their unexcused absences, while getting at the underlying issues that may be the cause of their truancy. For some students, the reason for their absences has little to do with a willful disobedience. Instead it is often a social issue such as lack of resources for decent clothes or being bullied on the way to school that leads a student to skip school.

"Working with students is one of the best ways a Judge can be involved with giving back to the community," Judge Cofield said. "I find it very rewarding to work with the kids and help them get back on track in their academic careers."

HPD CHIEF ROBERTS VISITS COMMUNITY COURT



The Community Court in Hartford was honored to be visited by Hartford's Chief of Police Daryl Roberts on November 20th. Judge Cofield and Chief Roberts discussed many of the criminal issues facing Hartford, particularly those involving young offenders, such as truancy and gang involvement, and pledged to continue the good working relationship the organizations have shared since 1998.

"Chief Roberts is very committed to the safety of Hartford and its neighborhoods," Judge Cofield said. "He is very committed to helping our young people grow up safely. I am very pleased to work with the Chief and other community leaders to address the issues affecting our community."

HARTFORD AREA SHELTER DIRECTORS MEETING AT COMMUNITY COURT

On November 2nd, the Community Court hosted the monthly meeting of the Hartford-area shelter directors. Led by Mark Hightower, Director of the McKinney Shelter, local shelter directors, social service providers, and others meet to discuss issues facing the homeless and shelter community. Chris Pleasanton of the Community Court frequently attends these meetings.



This November meeting was attended by Judge Cofield and featured a presentation by John Sims of Advanced Behavioral Health that covered the services available through his organization.

“We were very pleased to host the shelter directors meeting and are excited by the positive response many of the shelters have to working with us,” Chris Pleasanton said. “We often work with several of the same people and, by working together, we can better connect them to the services they need when appropriate.”

Pictured at left: Raul Acevado and Sonia Brown of CRT, John Sims of ABH, Chris Pleasanton of Community Court, Mark Hightower of McKinney Shelter, and JoAnne White of South Marshall.

COMMUNITY COURT CONTACT INFO

Please feel free to email the court at:

Hartford.Commcourt@jud.ct.gov

and visit the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch website at:

www.jud.ct.gov

Fall 2006 COMMUNITY SERVICE

**WORK
SITES**

SEPTEMBER

September 1 FOODSHARE

September 5 Nelton Court, Acton Street, Russ Street, Ebony Horse Ranch

September 6 Washington Street, Hudson Street, Russ Street, Laurel Street

September 7 FOODSHARE

September 8 FOODSHARE, Pope Park

September 11 FOODSHARE, Pope Park

September 12 Bowles Park, Madison Avenue, Greenwood Street, FOODSHARE

September 13 Mansfield Street, Enfield Street, Capen Street, Garden Street

September 14 Capitol Avenue & laurel Street underpasses

September 15 Park Terrace, Laurel Street, FOODSHARE

September 18 Babcock Street, Russ Street, Vine Street, Putnam Street, Affleck Street, Lawrence Street

September 19 Acton Street, Westland Street, Main Street, Nelton Court

September 20 Bond Street, Garden Street, Lincoln Street, Jefferson Street, Madison Street, Affleck Street

September 21 FOODSHARE, Sherbrooke Avenue, Wadsworth Street, Vine Street

September 22 FOODSHARE

September 25 FOODSHARE

September 26 Capen Street, Enfield Street, Mansfield Street

September 27 Westbourne Parkway

September 28 Laurel Street, Affleck Street, Park Street, Broad Street

September 29 FOODSHARE

OCTOBER

October 2 Westland Street, Love Lane, Garden Street

October 3 Buckingham Street, Grand Street, Wadsworth Street

October 4 FOODSHARE

October 5 Ebony Horse Ranch, Vine Street

October 6 FOODSHARE

October 10 Nelton Court

October 11 Avon Folley, Orange Street Park

October 12 Wadsworth Street, Grand Street, Buckingham Street

October 13 Bushnell Park (marathon set up, litter)

October 16 Blue Hills Avenue

October 17 Barnard Park (South Green)

October 18 Niles Street, Orange Street Park

October 19 Ebony Horse Ranch, FOODSHARE

October 20 FOODSHARE, Capitol Avenue and Laurel Street underpasses

October 23 Vine Terrace

October 24 Nelton Court, Mahoney Village

October 25 FOODSHARE, Babcock Street, Madison Street, Putnam Street, Lawrence Street

October 26 Ebony Horse Ranch, FOODSHARE

October 27 FOODSHARE

October 30 Jefferson Street, Madison Street

October 31 Nelton Court, Washington Street

NOVEMBER

November 1 FOODSHARE

November 2 Capitol Avenue and Laurel Street underpasses

November 3 FOODSHARE

November 6 Lawrence Street

November 7 Nelton Court

November 8 Affleck Street, Laurel Street and Capitol Avenue underpasses

November 9 Sisson Avenue, Orange Street, Orange Street Park, Cherry Street

November 13 FOODSHARE, Laurel Street and Capitol Avenue underpasses

November 14 FOODSHARE

November 15 FOODSHARE, Pliney Street

November 16 Westbourne Parkway

November 17 FOODSHARE

November 20 Standish Street, FOODSHARE

November 21 Lawrence Street, Russ Street, FOODSHARE

November 22 Capen Street, Mansfield Street

November 24 FOODSHARE

November 27 Laurel Street, Hawthorne Street

November 28 Garden Street, Mather Street

November 29 Mather Street

November 30 Ebony Horse ranch, Vine Street, Ward Street, Affleck Street, Jefferson Street

**COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT HOTLINE
756-7000
PLEASE CALL WITH YOUR PROJECT**

STATE OF CONNECTICUT JUDICIAL BRANCH

**COMMUNITY COURT
SESSION IN HARTFORD**

WWW.JUD.CT.GOV

WINTER 2006 - 2007 NEWSLETTER

IN THIS EDITION...

*2006 Review, Truancy, Underage Drinking, HPD Chief Roberts visits,
State's Attorney and Public Defender articles,
Women's Holistic Health success, staff notes, statistics, and more*

State of Connecticut Superior Court
Community Court Session in Hartford
80 Washington Street
Hartford, CT 06106

