



# CASS COUNTY COURTS

## “HEARSAY”

VOLUME II, ISSUE IV

OCT, NOV, DEC 2018

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Baxter's Page	2
The Store	3
C.C.I.E.A. Halloween Party	3
Adoption Day	4
Memory Lane	5
Get to Know Your Co-Workers	6
Welcome	7/8
Employee Celebrations	9
Rake-A-Difference	10

## Positive Public Satisfaction Survey Results

### Over the Past Six Years, People are Very Satisfied with the Cass County Courts

Cassopolis, Michigan, January 22, 2019 –

For the sixth year in a row, the Cass County Courts received high marks from the public regarding their experiences with the Courts.

Using a survey that was administered in Courts statewide, Cass County Courts asked users questions about whether the Cass County Courts were accessible, timely, and fair, and if users were treated with courtesy and respect by Judges and Court Staff.

“Our Courts serve the public, so the public’s views are critically important in helping us make decisions on how to improve Court operations,” says Chief Judge Susan L. Dobrich. “I am very proud of the hard work put in by our Cass County Courts’ team and we remain committed to being

even more efficient, focusing on continual improved service to the public.”

Highlights from all of the surveys given in Circuit, Family/Probate and District Courts include:

- 96% of court users said they were treated with courtesy and respect by court staff;
- 94% of court users said they were treated with courtesy and respect by judges/magistrates/referees; and,
- 91% of courts’ users were able to get their business done in a reasonable amount of time.

“We use the data from this survey to make management decisions that help better serve the public,” said Court Administrator Carol Montavon Bealor. “Our goal is for every person who comes through the doors of the

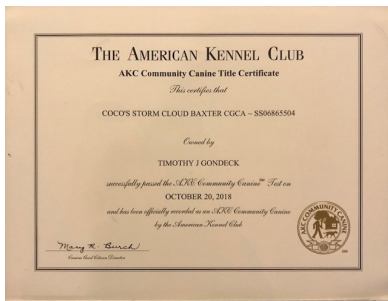
Law & Courts Building to be satisfied and treated fairly.”

Developed with input from judges and court administrators statewide and tabulated by the State Court Administrative Office to ensure accuracy, the survey enables courts to identify strengths, provide positive feedback to employees, and target areas for improvement. The survey was completed by a range of court users, including parties to cases, attorneys, jurors, and others.

The public satisfaction survey is part of a statewide initiative of the Michigan Supreme Court and the State Court Administrative Office to measure and report on court performance. From 2013 through 2018, over 120,000 surveys were completed in Courts throughout Michigan. Visit [www.courts.mi.gov](http://www.courts.mi.gov)

# Baxter's Page - Deputy Gondeck

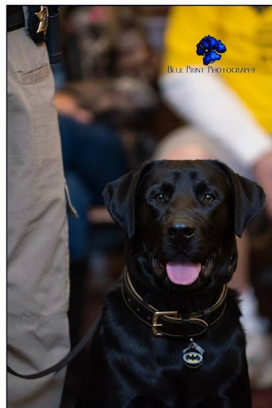
Baxter has been very busy, since the last installment of "The Baxter Column!" The most noteworthy accomplishment was the completion and passing of the A.K.C. Community Canine course, also known as Advanced Canine Good Citizen. This adds a sec-



ond A.K.C Title Certificate to Baxter's registered name! In the area of training, Baxter now moves on to A.K.C. Canine Good Citizen Urban. This program is designed to expose Baxter to elements in an urban setting, such as walking on crowded sidewalks, distractions made by loud vehicles and traffic, and becoming comfortable with things like riding in elevators or navigating an escalator. Although these may not seem relatable to Baxter's use in the Law and Courts Building it builds confidence, reinforces obedience and will ultimately make Baxter better at his job. Baxter is also making more frequent trips to work as I start acclimating him to a full work day.

Aside from training and trips to work, there have been extracurricular activities that Baxter has participated in. What started out just as daily walks with Baxter led to longer distances in an effort to prepare for our first 5K in November. On November

10th, on a ridiculously cold, windy and snowy morning, Baxter and I participated and completed the first annual Bark in the Park 5k Fun Run and Walk. The event was hosted by The Children's Advocacy Center of Southwest Michigan and held at Riverview Park in St. Joseph Michigan. The money from the event was being raised to assist the advocacy center in obtaining a therapy dog of their own! The turnout was great, considering the weather, with people from all across southwest Michigan attending with their dogs. Baxter and I completed the 3.1 mile course and proudly were not even close to being in last place!



More recently, Baxter attended the Michigan Adoption Day proceedings, November 20th, at the Law and Courts building and was a huge hit with all the children and adults that attended. Baxter loved every minute of the constant attention! Then, on December

13th Baxter and I attended the all courts meeting where it was discovered that Baxter has not become accustomed to working in the morning, and had a minor tantrum at the beginning of the meeting! I'm happy to report that the rest of the day went much better. That same day, at the invite of Hon. Mark Her-

man, Circuit Court Judge, we did a presentation/demonstration at the December luncheon for the Dowagiac Rotary Club. Baxter and I finished our lunchtime by attending the annual Toys for Tots toy drive/luncheon at the Cass County Sheriff's Office.



On a personal note, I would like to thank Dispatch Coordinator Jennifer Robinson and all the dispatchers that made Christmas stockings for all the

Cass County Sheriff's Office K9's, Faust, Nellie and Baxter and Dowagiac Police Department K9, Tole. Baxter loves his new toy and the treats! Baxter also had a visit from Santa who left a brand new leash, lots of toys and treats!

It's going to be a great way to start 2019 as Baxter will be finishing his training and preparing to be sworn into the Cass County Sheriff's Office and the Cass County Courts!



## “The Store”

Many employees contribute to “The Store” that is located in the Circuit Court File Room/Probate area. What many employees may not know is that the proceeds from The Store are used for various causes that positively impact the staff here at the Law and Courts Building and individuals in the community.

In 2018, The Store donated over \$700.00 to various causes. Recently, funds

from The Store were used to help make the holidays special for two families. We provided gifts, food, and clothing for those families in need. We also purchased clothing and Christmas gifts for an autistic child who is currently in residential placement. Once again, we also contributed over \$200 to the Adoption Day Celebration, which allowed us to provide gifts, cakes and family photos to each adoptee.

If you would like to request funds for a specific cause related to a project or department at the courthouse, please feel free to contact a Store Committee member. The committee is currently comprised of Kelley James-Jura, Cheryl Hess, Lisa Withers, Alexi Fuller, Ravan Bakeman, Sandy Tidey, and Melissa Sytsma.

Thank you for your continued support.



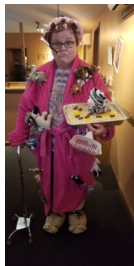
## C.C.I.E.A. Halloween Celebration



On October 25 2018, the C.C.I.E.A. held a Halloween party at Fat Cam’s restaurant in Ed-

wardsburg. Part of the festivities included a costume contest. Here are just some of the

great costumers that Cass County Court employees came up with for the evening.





# MICHIGAN ADOPTION MONTH

Giving thanks for families

NOVEMBER 2018



On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving every year, Michigan celebrates Adoption Day. This day recognizes the many adoptions that occur

in the state each year and educates the public about the adoption process and the need for foster families within our community.



In Cass County, Michigan Adoption Day was celebrated on November 20, 2018. On that date, Judge Susan L. Dobrich finalized three adoptions. She also recognized three families that had finalized adoptions previously. The children were each given their own cakes and gifts to celebrate the occasion and a

photographer was present to capture memories of the day. The families were then later sent all the photos from the day and they also each received a family pass to the Potawatomi Zoo, thanks to the CASA program.



We also welcomed many speakers on that day, including Senator John Proos, Representative Aaron Miller, Assistant Prosecutor Thomas Hubbert, Cass County CASA Director Erica Boulanger, Attorney Elizabeth McCree, and Referee Leigh Feldman. Also in attendance were local public officials, law enforcement, attorneys, representatives from Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), staff from local adoption agencies, and Court



Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers.

This was the 16<sup>th</sup> year that Cass County held an Adoption Day celebration. Since 2002, Cass County Probate Court has finalized close to 700 adoptions. These adoptions include agency adoptions, step-parent adoptions, adult adoptions, international adoptions, and direct placement adoptions.



# Memory Lane

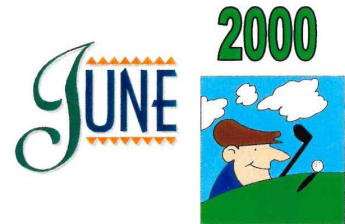
Cass County previously had a regular newsletter titled "County Connection." We recently obtained copies of the old newsletters, and

found some great articles we would like to share with the staff. Below, you will find the article from the June 2000 edition, in which our

very own Sandy Tidey, was featured as the employee of the Month!



.....*COUNTY CONNECTION*..... **Volume 5, Issue 1**



## FEATURED EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Sandra Olson is the June Featured Employee. Sandy has been with the County since October, 1989. She first served as the Probate Judicial Secretary and then transferred to District Court Judicial Secretary/ Magistrate in December, 1992. Sandy is a graduate of Dowagiac Union High School and has a Bachelor's Degree from Ferris State University. She and her husband, Glenn, have two daughters – 5 year old Hollie and two-year old Heather. Sandy enjoys gardening and spending time with her family.

Judge Deats says that "Sandy has been an important part of the Court and exerts masterful control over the caseload of all court matters, while accommodating the schedules of all parties involved. She happily accepts any job responsibility thrown to her and completes all tasks with equal ease and expertise. Sandy combines the stresses and demands of a young and growing family with the responsibilities of her job and enjoys the well-deserved respect of her co-workers and the professional community of this County." Judge Deats further indicates that "Sandy is the one who also keeps a tight rein on him and if he does something she doesn't approve of, the next week's schedule of cases mysteriously gets larger and harder!"

# Get To Know Your Co-Workers

## Tracie Kuriata

### Financial Caseworker

I started with the FOC in February of 1997 as the Accounting Clerk. In 2000, I was promoted to the Financial Caseworker position that I currently hold today. The Accounting Department today is known as the Financial Case Management Department, which is more fitting for what we do.

Managing the Tax Offset program is one of my responsibilities. This entails answering questions regarding the tax income tax refunds that we intercept from payers of support who are delinquent. Some payments will go into an exceptions hold on the account. I review those payments and determine whether we need a signed authorization to apply the payment to the payer's support obligation or if we need to refund it back to the taxpayer. I also investigate the pre-intercept report on why a child support payer's case was rejected from the tax-offset program. I make any necessary corrections and/or adjustments as appropriate, so that the IRS will accept the case. I also do administrative reviews, as required, for the tax-offset program when a payer files an objection to the notice of intent to intercept.

In the FOC, we work on a statewide computer program referred to as, "MiCSES" (Michigan Child Support Enforcement System). The system has fifty-nine types of holds it uses

to capture payments when the nightly batches run. Payments that hit a snag during the nightly processing are placed on hold. I work these holds every day and work the cases to move the money to distribute. Some of the more common holds are finding clients that have had money refunded to them and their check has been voided, i.e. bad address or a stale dated check. I process requests to MiSDU for payments that may need special distribution. I manually disburse the bench warrant and/or bond monies collected in our office. A deposit of payments that have been reconciled with MiCSES has to be done before it can be applied to a client's case. All regular payments go to our centralized collection unit in Lansing. We accept bond or contempt payments in our office. I manage the disbursement of these payments.

Client service and communication are key in our office. I handle many calls with child support payers and payees inquiring about account information. If requested, I will perform detailed audits of support accounts. In our office, you must be proficient in using several different computer programs so you can access the information you need to enter, retrieve, and modify case information as necessary. Some of these programs are systems like MiCSES, Info-Trac, Bridges, Data Warehouse, and On Base.

One of the many computer systems we interface with is Bridges - the

system used by DHHS. We use their program information for keeping certification and decertification dates for payees who go on or off assistance as that activity affects where their child support is routed. I am cross-training now to learn more of the Foster Care side of our system, which also interfaces with DHHS.

In the past year, I have been assisting to back up the Order Entry process. I have become very familiar with converting UCSO's and Judgment of Divorces into the MiCSES program.

On the enforcement side, I enter new employers for support payers. I generate income-withholding notices, such as new, modifications, terminations and/or lump sums on bonuses or large benefits that a payer may be entitled to. I review and identify cases requiring support enforcement action by sending out a non-compliance letter to the employer or referring it to the Enforcement Department for further action.

After all the years I have worked for Cass County FOC, I can say I still enjoy my job! The learning is endless with all the different systems and ongoing updates. It is a challenging yet rewarding job. I love working with all the great people in the FOC.

## **Sarah Zhang Juvenile Probation Officer**

Sarah joined the Cass County Courts team on November 19, 2018 as the newest Juvenile Probation Officer. She has been learning the ropes from Alexi. She was also able to work with Kyle for a short period before he moved on to a new phase in his career.

Sarah may look familiar to some of you as she was previously an intern with the

Friend of the Court over the summer. She is also a native to Cass County, as she grew up in Niles and graduated from Edwardsburg High School.

Sarah recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Ferris State University at Southwestern Michigan College.

In her free time, Sarah loves spending time with her husband and family. She also enjoys kayaking in the local lakes and rivers.



## **Friend of the Court**

### **Chelsea Olkowski Friend of the Court**



Chelsea joined the Friend of the Court team on October 8, 2018. She is the Review/Modification & Parenting Time Enforcement Specialist.

She is a native to Cass County, as she grew up in Cassopolis and the majority of her family reside in the area.

Before joining the Courts, she was employed at Lewis Cass ISD where she worked in the emotionally impaired classroom. She also previously worked as a home visitor

with the ISD's Parents as Teachers program.

Last summer was a busy time for Chelsea, as she married Connor Olkowski on June 8, 2018. She then graduated from Western Michigan University in August 2018 with a Bachelor's in Child and Family Development. Chelsea also holds an Associate Degree in Social Work from Southwestern Michigan College.

## District Court



### **Introducing Dawn Mallo!**

Dawn joined the District Court team in July 2018 as the Traffic/Criminal Clerk. Prior to this position, she worked at Midwest Energy. Dawn is local to the area as she grew up in Union and now lives in Jones.

Dawn is married and the couple have two adult chil-

dren. In her free time, she loves to spend time with her family and she enjoys spending time relaxing at the lake. July seems to be a good month for Dawn, as last July she and her husband celebrated their 30th anniversary and this upcoming July, they are going to be grandparents.

## Prosecutor's Office

### ***Welcome Lisa!***

On October 29, 2018, Lisa Saylor joined the Prosecutor's Office as the new Legal Secretary.

Lisa is originally from Mishawaka, but she has lived in Dowagiac for almost eleven years.

You may recognize her last name from a local restaurant, Saylor's Pizza. She and her husband, John, own Saylor's Pizza in Mishawaka. They have

owned that business for the past twenty-two years.

Lisa and John have been married twenty-two years. They have three children: Riley, Bryce, and Erick.

In her free time, Lisa enjoys shopping and she enjoys feeding her family's cows and chickens. She is also very involved in her church.



# Employee Celebrations

We would like to take the time to recognize the recent employee birthdays and employment anniversary dates.

Thank you Cass County Court employees for your years of dedicated service.



## Birthdays

### October

- ◆ Claire Collins  
10/21
- ◆ Tracie Kuriata  
10/24

### November

- ◆ Donella Kujawa  
11/6
- ◆ Cheri Dolan  
11/15
- ◆ Sara Heuer  
11/16
- ◆ Susan VanTuyle  
11/17
- ◆ Sarah Zhang  
11/22
- ◆ Judge Susan L. Dobrich  
11/26

### December

- ◆ April McKee  
12/5
- ◆ Joni Patzer  
12/31

## Employment Anniversary Dates

### October

- ◆ Linda Kramb  
10/1/2003
- ◆ Mary Parmley  
10/1/2007
- ◆ Fern Turney  
10/2/2017
- ◆ Sandy Tidey  
10/3/1989
- ◆ Tina Butler  
10/3/1988
- ◆ Nancy Brown  
10/5/1988
- ◆ Scott Wellman  
10/7/2008

### October

- ◆ Joseph Lotarski  
10/23/2017
- ◆ Lisa Withers  
10/24/2012
- ◆ Claire Collins  
10/25/1988

### November

- ◆ Leigh Feldman  
11/13/2003

### December

- ◆ Val Clark  
12/6/2005
- ◆ Karen Moran  
12/8/1998
- ◆ Melissa Sytsma  
12/18/2006
- ◆ Cheryl Hess  
12/20/2004
- ◆ Diana Jurgenson  
12/26/2013
- ◆ Susan VanTuyle  
12/29/2004



Cass County Law and Courts Building  
60296 M-62, Cassopolis, MI 49031  
(269) 445-4454

## CASS COUNTY COURTS “HEARSAY”

VOLUME III – ISSUE IV  
OCTOBER, NOVEMBER,  
DECEMBER 2018

If you are interested in writing an article for the newsletter, have a story of interest, or an upcoming event that you would like to have mentioned in the next newsletter, please contact Kelley James-Jura at [kellej@cassco.org](mailto:kellej@cassco.org)

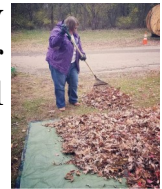
## Rake-A-Difference



On November 8, 2018, some Cass County Court employees put down their pens, left the courthouse, and picked up a rake or leaf blower in order to help the United Way Rake a Difference Program.

Specifically, Dee Duszynski, Claire Collins, Alexi Fuller, Kyle Koster, Julia Smith, Linda Kramb, and Joseph Lotarski volunteered their time for this project. They spent hours on that cold November day raking leaves for seniors in the

area. Many thanks for their hard work!



Next year, we hope to put a team together again for this program. So keep an eye out for information on this project next fall!

