



Newsletter

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A publication for friends and supporters of Court Watch of North Carolina

November 2009

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6th Annual Child Support Awards Banquet

On **October 22, 2009**, Court Watch held its annual Banquet at the Jamestown GTCC Campus. The evening kicked off with a reception and silent auction with over 40 items from local businesses, restaurants and hotels. The dinner was prepared and served by an impressive class of culinary students from GTCC. After dinner, attendees enjoyed a Keynote Speech by Janet Ward Black, Attorney at Law.

The main event was the presentation to this year's award winners. Court Watch honored the hard-working child support managers, agents and support staff who would otherwise never get their just recognition. We also honored a District Court Judge, Judge Teresa Vincent (pictured above with Court Watch President Mark Roberts). She was honored for her excellence in assisting parents in collecting child support (A list of all award winners and a picture is on page 3.)

This event is the largest fundraiser for Court Watch. Thanks to Dianne Nickles, Banquet Chair, for her commitment and dedication to making this event special for all the award winners and attendees. Proceeds from this event benefit Court Watch of North Carolina's Child Support Programs.



Grant approved with match requirement...

Tannebaum-Sternberger Foundation approved a matching grant to Court Watch for general operating expenses. This is great news during this difficult fundraising year. Court Watch must match this grant dollar for dollar. If you are interested in helping Court Watch match this grant please contact the Court Watch office.

Our Mission...

Helping children and their families who need assistance from the courts, and working to improve the North Carolina Judicial System.

Guest Column: CUSTODY MEDIATION IN GUILFORD COUNTY

By Chief District Judge Joseph E. Turner

Without a question in my mind, Custody Mediation is the best public service, outside our core function, the NC Courts have offered to our citizens. Other alternative dispute resolution efforts have offered potential and actual litigants effective and efficient means of resolving disputes over the years. However, not only is custody mediation free, it is professionally delivered, very successful, preserves the dignity of the participants and, most importantly from my perspective, has protected thousands of our children from the ravages of battle between parents fighting over custody.

Custody mediation has been used in Guilford County since 2003 after I became Chief Judge. Planning began during the tenure of Chief Judge William L. Daisy. Since its inception, 3,840 cases have gone through the mediation process in Guilford County. Since the program is free to the litigants, I have exempted only a very few cases from participation. Even when one party lives at some distance away (and may qualify for exemption), we have found that scheduling the mediation in coordination with the hearing date has resulted in pretrial agreements.

We have two outstanding Custody Mediators, Nancy Stevens and Sarah Rogers, ably assisted by their Custody Coordinator Michelle McRae, who professionally and successfully schedule, instruct and mediate in all of our cases. Ms. Stevens and Ms. Rogers have served five and four years, respectively. Because their caseload is so high, we have an additional "contracted" part-time mediator, Nina Cohen, whose experience dates back to helping create the program in N.C. It has been my observation these women look forward to coming to work each day with the hope of helping one more set of parents figure out a way to continue to be parents to their children, even though they do not live together.

There are few more ardent defenders of the American system of civil justice than me. However, I believe that our legal system does not enhance the dynamics of parents who each want more time with their child than there are hours in the day. In fact, a custody trial, more often than not, results in exacerbating the dysfunction and acrimony which results from parents being separated from each other and their child. Custody mediation, on the other hand, allows parents safely and confidentially to discuss their concerns and to attempt to

work out a resolution of the question: "What is in the best interest of our child, now that we are separated from each other, and at times when the child is with the other parent, separated from our child?"

During Fiscal Year 2008 – 2009, custody mediators in N.C. conducted 8,271 mediation sessions and drafted 5,682 Parenting Agreements, resolving issues in more than 60% of the cases. In Guilford County, 790 cases were referred to mediation and 665 of them were mediated. Parenting Agreements were drafted in 428 cases (64%) and 300 of those were executed and became court Orders. Many of those unsigned Agreements became the basis of subsequent court orders, after further negotiation and interpretation by lawyers for the parties. Custody Mediation is very successfully helping many parents and, therefore, even larger numbers of our children.

An additional benefit has been a reduction in "repeat" cases where the parties are returning to the battlefield. There is something about two parents reaching an agreement once which allows them to return to mediation with an expectation of reaching a further agreement, and they do. With the increasing number of parents who are attempting to represent themselves in Court without a lawyer, the Custody Mediation process is providing a less structured and demanding forum for resolving these difficult cases.

The only requirement of parents is that they attend the Orientation and, thereafter, one mediation session. There is no requirement that they settle their case or that they agree to anything. They must, however, attend. If they will do so with an open mind - that the process might work for them - they have a much better than even chance that it will!

Did you know...

- Judge Turner is the only judge in the state who conducts monthly Child Custody Seminars.
- In Guilford County it is mandatory for all parties in custody/visitation cases to attend Custody Mediation.

6th Annual Child Support Award Winners



The award winners (above from left to right) were Elaine Hicks, Greensboro, Alleen Horton, High Point, Susan Joyner, Greensboro, Judge Teresa Vincent, Guilford County, Maria Lewis, Greensboro, Dale Moorefield, Davidson County, Milton Williams, High Point, Jayant Joshi with Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard, LLP. Other award winners not pictured are Cynthia Dodson, Davidson County and Celena Pittman, Davidson County.

Thank You 2009 Banquet Sponsors:

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A. Mark Roberts, PhD.

NEW BOARD MEMBER

Kathryn M. Cline: “Kat” as she likes to be called, is a native of Greensboro. She has a diverse background having studied at the Ringling School of Art, but her real passion is being a Historian on the Civil War and just about all things “southern”. Kat is a long-time political activist both on the local and national level. She volunteers at the American Red Cross, the Greensboro Historical Museum, is on the Greensboro Commission on the Status of Women, where she co-chairs the committee on Domestic Violence. Makes you wonder when she finds time for her husband Mike and her two dogs? We look forward to utilizing Kat’s experience, energy and enthusiasm to help us promote the programs and services of Court Watch.

Court Watch of North Carolina

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News & Notes...

- **Board Meeting Notice:** The next three Board Meetings will be on January 13, 2010, March 3, 2010 and May 5, 2010 at 6:00PM at the Court Watch office.
- **E-Newsletter:** Want to receive your Court Watch Newsletter via e-mail? E-mail us at courtwatchofnc@bellsouth.net and put e-Newsletter in the subject line.
- **Website:** Now you can donate to Court Watch online! Please visit us at www.courtwatchnc.org

Court Watch's Board and Volunteers get hoppin'

During this difficult fundraising year, a group of Court Watch staff, volunteers and Board Members decided to roll up their sleeves and work the **Grasshopper** games to raise money for Court Watch. We raised over \$1300. Thanks to the following supporters for giving their time to make this effort a success: In picture left right, Steve Hurley, Edna Hurley, Sarah Bobo, Stan Sprague, Jennifer Criscuolo, Paul Budnick, and Bob Shupe. Volunteers not in picture: Peter Schwartz, Kat Cline, Mike Cline, Chris Cline, Dianne Nickles, Laura Marsh, Malcolm MacPhee, Mark Roberts, Lee Staton, Heather Krantz, & Gail Woods. Thanks to all the staff at CenterPlate.

