



# Newsletter

Volume 22, No. 1

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

March 2010

## Honorary Board

- \* Cynthia Doyle
- \* James G. Exum, Jr., Esq.
- \* Shirley Frye
- \* Yvonne Johnson
- \* McNeil Smith, Esq.

## Advisory Board

- \* Dave Clark, Esq.
- \* Kearns Davis, Esq.
- \* Paul Gibson, II
- \* Rev. Z.N. Holler
- \* Bynum Hunter, Esq.
- \* Robert O. Klepfer, Jr., Esq.
- \* James F. Morgan, Esq.
- \* Mary Rakestraw
- \* Norman Smith, Esq.
- \* Katherine G. Stern
- \* Don Vaughan, Esq.

## Board of Directors

- \* Ednaly K. Hurley, Pres.
- \* Kathryn M. Cline, VP
- \* Laura Cohen, Secretary
- \* Dianne Nickles, Treasurer
- \* A. Mark Roberts, Past Pres.
- \* Diane Davis
- \* Steve Hayes
- \* Patricia Maguire
- \* Jewel Mitchell
- \* Peter Schwartz
- \* Lee Staton
- \* Pat Thomas

## Emeritus Board

- \* Richard Kania, PhD.
- \* Virginia Kerr, Founder
- \* Pearl Thompson

## Development Director

Jennifer Criscuolo

## Administrative Director

Robert Shupe



## Court Watch bids farewell to Stan!

At a recent dinner at Mimi's Cafe, Board Members, staff and volunteers gathered to say farewell and thank you to Court Watch's long time Board Member, Stan Sprague who retired in December of 2009. During the last 20 years Court Watch of North Carolina has been fortunate to have Stan Sprague serve on its Board in a variety of roles including President and Treasurer. Many of the current programs and services Court Watch provides are because of his hard work.

Stan (pictured below with his family) was honored by many in our community that understand his commitment and dedication to Court Watch. Among the attendees were Commissioner Paul Gibson (pictured above with Stan), Council Member Mary Rakestraw, Senator Don Vaughan, Virginia Kerr (founder of Court Watch of NC), Cynthia Doyle, Bynum Hunter, Steve Pearsall, Mark Roberts, Kat Cline, Laura Marsh, Jennifer Criscuolo, Diane Davis, Lowell Davis, Pat Thomas, Dianne Nickles, Allison Cosmos, Tiger Cosmos, Bob Shupe, Carol Shupe, Celine Sprague and Lee Staton with his children India and Miles. Many spoke of Stan's accomplishments and had some fun at his expense. Stan ended the evening by saying "Court Watch is in good hands and he is proud of what Court Watch has been able to accomplish."



## Court Watch to Evaluate Guilford County Judges

Court Watch has initiated its 2010 Judicial Evaluation project, which will assess the performance of District and Superior Court Judges in District 18. The report is intended to help inform Guilford county voters on their choices for the upcoming November elections. The last Court Watch evaluation of Guilford County trial judges was done in 1992. [Help us fund this much needed project!](#)

## Our Mission...

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

## Guest Column: Why We Need a Supervised Visitation Center?

By: Susan Wies, Director of Victim Services, Family Service of the Piedmont



The opportunity for safe, predictable, and structured fun time with a separated parent is the dream of many children. For over three years in Guilford County children could live that dream. Harmony House of Family Service of the Piedmont offered a supervised visitation and supervised exchange program from 2005 through 2009.

The service started in Jamestown with services 4 days per week (Thursday — Sunday) then grew to serve 6 days per week and added locations in High Point and Greensboro. Harmony House served children with various needs. We helped children reacquaint themselves with a safe but formerly absent parent prior to going out on visits alone. We helped children with highly conflicted parents have safe contact. We helped children who were afraid of what one parent might do to the other feel safe and sure that we as grown-ups had a solid plan to make Harmony House a conflict-free zone. Harmony House staff knew we were building resiliency into children. We knew that the community and court system were very supportive and even more, appreciative. But we also came to know that we needed a new plan about how to afford this service. It costs to create safety.

For three years, Harmony House was the only viable option for safe visitation and exchanges in Guilford County on evenings and weekends. Professionals facilitated one hour visitations or simple safe exchanges in a home-like setting where negative talk about the child or parents was not tolerated. Harmony House closed its doors in 2009 when the financial burden of continuing the program became too much. Parents who had formerly received Harmony House services continue the call and check in about their custody issues, and always state that if we get the service back they need it badly.

One service detail that is expensive is also one that made the service so safe. We need law enforcement at Harmony House during all service hours to help parents understand that there is no option for showing unsafe behaviors. Our paid law enforcement officers were and are forbidden from working as volunteers. During service the officers showed their tremendous dedication by going beyond the call of duty to help parents feel good about seeing their children, even if it wasn't on the parents' own terms. They made it clear that the law is here to help by securing the general location of Harmony House after hours and on weekends, during hours when most other service sights have emptied. There is no substitute for sworn law enforcement officers at this service.

We pay later when we don't afford a safe and structured setting for custody exchanges and visitations. In Suwanee, GA last month a man stabbed his estranged wife to death during a custody swap in a Wal-Mart parking lot. The couple's daughters, ages 6 and 8, were present when the stabbing took place. In Frederick, MA several families over a six month period were reported as having ongoing child custody disputes that resulted in death. There are other reports of attempts at murder-for-hire and attempted murders as well.

The way that parenting time, child support, and other legal separation issues are "settled" seems to exacerbate the conflict rather than resolve it between litigants who have a child in common, be they separated parents or separated families via Child Protective Services. There should be substantial concern over the murder-suicides, premeditated murders, attempted murders, murders-for-hire, and drastic number of suicides that are occurring in families that are involved with domestic relation suits and courts.

Harmony House can provide not only the safety piece but also a warm, welcoming visitation space with toys and activities for children and parents to engage in together. Harmony House also provides concrete and objective information to the courts about these high-conflict custody cases. The courts had received this information via case reports created by Harmony House staff. Guardian Ad Litem reports also regularly contained information captured from Harmony House visitation notes. We provided equal regard for the child and parent, particularly when one parent had been victimized by the other.

Harmony House provided a special and important way of breaking down certain community problems. We did it for three years and we can do it again. We built resiliency to counter the children's risks from whatever situation led to the requirement of direct supervision. We decreased time and energy spent by police responding to custody disputes. We provided a reliable information feed to the courts to enable more sound decision making. But that has all stopped. Given that neither the child abuse rate nor the divorce rate seems to be declining, I ask that we as a community find the solution to bring this greatly needed service back to children in Guilford County.

## 2009 Annual Report

### Highlights from 2009:

**Pro Se Instructional Packets:** Court Watch has compiled Guilford County Pro Se packets to help people file Pro Se Visitation Motions. (Pro Se is for people who cannot afford a lawyer i.e. who are representing themselves). The three instructional packets that include forms are Pro Se Motion to Modify an Existing Visitation Order, Pro Se Child Visitation-New Action and Pro Se Contempt Motion for Visitation. (All available on our website)

**Contested Judicial Elections Campaign Analysis:** Seventh bi-annual report was completed in 2009. We are the only organization in the state that regularly makes a detailed analysis of these elections across the state.

**Brochures Distribution:** One of the many services Court Watch provides is publishing several brochures to inform the public. In 2009 we distributed over 1,000 brochures to individuals and organizations that serve the community. Two new brochures were completed in 2009:

- 1) Reports of Parental Child Abuse & Neglect providing information about what happens once child abuse is reported and Social Services gets involved.
- 2) Termination of Parental Rights provides information on what happens when a petition is filed to terminate your parental rights and what steps you can take to decide whether to contest the petition.

**Court Monitoring:** In 2009 we sent monitors to the Guilford county courts over 20 times. We are now revamping our training session for potential monitors. Our Board will review the training at the March Board Meeting.

**Process Server Program:** We continue to hire a Private Investigator to find non-paying parents in Guilford County. In 2009 we served 10 sets of papers that the Sheriff's office was unsuccessful in serving. This number is up from 2008. To be more effective, we have partnered with Brooks, Peirce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard, LLP to use their resources as a locator service.

**Most Wanted Poster:** In 2009 we mailed 4 posters to over 600 locations (in Guilford, Rockingham, Randolph, Alamance & Davidson Co.) with 12 different pictures of absent parents who were seriously behind in paying child support. We received many leads on these pictures and immediately reported any information to the CSE Agent who handled the case.

COURT WATCH 2009 FINANCIAL STATEMENT			
INCOME		OPERATING EXPENSES:	
Individual Donations	\$3,437	Salary/Wages	\$12,617
Board/Advisory Board	2,860	Rent	4,285
Endowment Income	3,434	Postage/Printing	2,244
Awards Banquet (gross)	4,602	Phone/Internet	2,182
Foundations	4,250	Supplies	1,019
Combined Campaigns	1,226	Awards Banquet	1,869
Miscellaneous	2,106	Miscellaneous	2,374
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$21,915</b>	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$26,590</b>

### Court Watch Interns:

TerryAnn Joyner, our **winter** intern, is a senior at ECPI College of Technology. She is a Criminal Justice major with a previous degree in Business Systems Administration. Her most recent volunteer experience was at Reading Connections, in Greensboro where she tutored adult students in literacy. While completing her 144 hours here at Court Watch in the day, she also attends class at night, works part time at the U.S. Postal Service, takes care of her family of five, and still manages to maintain a 3.2 grade point average. During her internship, she enjoyed compiling and learning about the Pro Se motions. While monitoring court, she was able to provide Court Watch with valuable insight into the process.

Kathy Shue, our intern this **spring**, is a senior at Guilford College. She is a Criminal Justice major with a minor in Political Science. Her volunteer experience includes working with youths with anger management problems related to their parents, school, and their peers. Her extensive volunteer experience also includes working with the Non-Profit Alamance County Dispute and Youth Services and the Alamance Co. Juvenile Justice department. She received an award for her service in 2009 to the Non-Profit Alamance County Dispute and Youth Services in Graham, NC. We look forward to working with Kathy this Spring.

## Court Watch of North Carolina

P. O. Box 10971  
Greensboro, NC 27404  
336-275-2346  
courtwatchofnc@bellsouth.net

## Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.  
U. S. POSTAGE PAID  
GREENSBORO, NC  
Permit No. 917



### *News & Notes...*

- **Board Meeting Notice:** The next board meeting will be held on May 3rd at the Court Watch Office.
- **Human Race:** Join Court Watch's Team and walk, run or support us on March 20th.
- **Website:** Now you can donate to Court Watch online! Please visit us at [www.courtwatchnc.org](http://www.courtwatchnc.org)
- **Volunteer:** Call our office if you want to volunteer at a Hopper's Games this season.

### Court Watch is grateful to all our supporters who made donations in 2009.

#### Benefactor (Donations \$250 and up)

Kathryn Cline  
Kearns Davis, Esq.  
Ecolab Foundation  
Greensboro Bar Foundation  
High Point Community Foundation  
Rev. Z.N. Holler  
Bynum Hunter  
Isaacson, Isaacson & Sheridan, LLP \*  
Junior League of Greensboro  
The Michel Family Foundation  
Mary Norris Preyer Fund  
Mary Rakestraw  
St. Francis Episcopal Church  
Lanty Smith  
Katherine Stern  
Systems & Methods \*  
William Stern Foundation  
Tannenbaum-Sternberger Foundation  
Toleo Foundation  
Wal-Mart Battleground \*  
Wal-Mart Elmsley  
Wal-Mart Wendover  
Michael and Katherine Weaver  
Weaver Foundation

#### Patron (Donations \$100- \$249)

Michael Abel \*  
Edward Benson  
Janet Ward Black \*  
Patricia and Pete Cross  
Cynthia Doyle  
Jim Exum Jr., Esq.  
Linda Falls, Esq.  
Ben Farmer, Esq.  
Henry and Shirley Frye

Paul Gibson, II  
John Gordon  
Mark Gray, Esq. \*  
Chip and Kay Hagan  
Jonathan and Nahomi Harkavy  
Molly Howard, Esq.  
Sam and Anne Hummel  
Hughes Family Foundation, *In Honor of Paul Gibson*  
Robert Klepfer, Esq.  
Seth and Hazel Macon \*  
Marlene Pratto  
Replacements \*  
Mark Roberts  
Robert Shupe \*  
Norman Smith  
Shirley Spears  
Stan Sprague  
Rev. Dale Walker  
Ward and Smith, P.A. \*  
Michael Wenig, Esq.

#### Sustainer (Donations \$50- \$99)

Ed Cobbler—ELC  
Betty and Ben Cone  
Jennifer Criscuolo \*  
Diane Davis \*  
Jerry Eagle  
Erwin Fuller Jr., Esq.  
Tracy and Phyllis Gibbs, *In Honor of Mary Rakestraw*  
Jack Green, Esq.  
Lynn Gullick, Esq.  
Ednalyn Hurley  
Jack and Virginia Kerr \*  
Joe and Pat Maguire  
Laura Marsh  
Harriett Miller \*

Doug and Maureen Murray  
New Garden Moose Lodge  
Dianne Nickles  
Lee Staton \*  
Allen Trelease  
Judge Teresa Vincent \*

#### Supporter (Donations \$25 - \$49)

Richmond and Doris Bernhardt  
Lewis Cheek, Esq.  
Ester Dallmann  
Rick Elmore, Esq.  
Sandra Goldman  
Greensboro Paralegal Assn.  
Joseph Gruendler  
Irene Harrington  
Charlotte Hurwitz  
Jerry Hyman  
Susan Joyner \*  
Yolanda Leacraft  
Jewel Mitchell  
Ellen Olson  
Barbara Osguthorpe  
Kimberly Pass \*  
Larry Pearman, Esq.  
Janet Plummer  
David Rosenblutt, Esq.  
Betty Roth  
Peter Schwartz  
Dr. Robert Sevier  
Susan Stephens  
Pat Thomas  
Bill Trivette, Esq.  
Nancy Wells  
Jack Zimmerman

\* *Banquet support only*