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SHELBY COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT

JUDGE JAMES STEVENSON

The year 2017 was busy for the Common Pleas Court. This was the first year for mandatory e-filing for most kinds of cases, both civil and criminal. E-filing provides access to the courts 24/7. Attorneys are required to register and use the e-filing system. Pro se parties, those without attorneys, are encouraged to register and use the e-filing system. If they are unable to do so, the clerk's office will assist them with filing. As with any new process, there have been glitches and problems from time to time, but most problems have been resolved. We are constantly working with our software vendor to refine the process. Overall, the transition to e-filing appears to be a success.

The court's criminal docket continues to be busy. There were 312 new felony cases filed in 2017. Including pending cases at the end of 2016, a total of 445 cases were handled in 2017. Drug cases continue to occupy much of the court's time. Approximately 80% of our cases are drug charges. If crimes caused by drugs, such as thefts, robberies, and breaking and enterings are factored in, then most of our cases are drug related. The most noted criminal case in 2017 was the Troy McRae murder case. At the conclusion of a three-day jury trial, McRae was found guilty of aggravated murder and sentenced to life in prison.

The state continues to restrict the court's sentencing options on low-level felonies. For several years now in an effort to reduce prison populations, the state has mandated that certain low-level felons under certain circumstances be sentenced to community control, i.e. probation and to local incarceration instead of prison. That obviously puts a strain on local resources including our local jail and the court probation staff.

Because of the increased obligation to keep low-level felons out of prison, the Court sought and was awarded a Justice Reinvestment and Incentive Grant. This grant is from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, Bureau of Community Sanctions. The grant provides performance based funding to courts to adopt evidence-based practices to reduce the number of offenders on probation supervision who violate their conditions of their supervision. The Court has hired additional personnel for more individualized attention to probationers. The grant will also assist probationers with drug addiction issues by providing treatment and housing, with the goal of reducing recidivism.

Our civil docket has also been busy. In 2017 there were 243 new civil cases filed. Of those new cases, surprisingly, 109 were foreclosures. New cases filed also included 22 workers' compensation and 2 professional liability. The remainder of cases were a mixture of personal injury, property damage and contract cases.

The Domestic Relations Division of the Common Pleas Court had 202 new filings. There were 325 hearings held in 2017 and 139 people attended the court's parenting program. Attendance at a parenting program is mandatory for those parties who have filed for a divorce or dissolution, who have children born of the marriage.

In April, Magistrate Gary J. Carter served on a judicial panel at the 5th Annual Family Law Institute, a two day seminar for attorneys, sponsored by the Ohio State Bar Association. Magistrate Carter served on the panel with Judge Elizabeth Gill from the Franklin County Domestic Relations Court and Magistrate Steve McKinley from the Richland County Court of Common Pleas. Over 100 attorneys from around the state spent almost two hours listening to the judicial officers discuss the best practices to be used when handling domestic violence and stalking civil protection orders.

In all it was a busy and productive year for the court. We look forward to another year serving the justice interests of Shelby County citizens.