

SIDNEY PROGRESS EDITION—JANUARY 2020

SHELBY COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT

2019 was a year of transition for the court. Gary Carter, who had been the domestic relations court magistrate for 28 years, first hired by Judge John Schmitt in 1991 and continuing upon my taking the bench in January 2007, was elected judge of the Sidney Municipal Court. To replace Judge Carter, I appointed Kristina Morris domestic relations magistrate effective January 2, 2020. Magistrate Morris has much experience in domestic relations law and is a valued addition to the Common Pleas Court.

2019 saw increases across the board in new filings in the court. 132 new civil cases were filed in 2019 opposed to 98 in 2018. There were 366 new criminal cases arraigned compared to 358 in 2018. As usual, the bulk of the criminal cases were drug related; either drug possession, drug trafficking or other crimes committed because of drug use and addiction.

The court had a very busy trial schedule in 2019. Although there are cases scheduled for trial almost every week of the year, most cases resolve before the day of trial. In 2019, the court had ten criminal cases and 3 civil cases go to jury trial. The criminal cases resulted in 4 guilty verdicts, 2 not guilty verdicts, 1 mistrial (the jury was deadlocked and could not reach a verdict) and 3 cases where the defendant entered a guilty plea during the pendency of the trial. Three civil cases also went to jury trial, with the jury finding for the plaintiff in two cases and the third case settling during the trial.

The opioid crisis affects Shelby County as it does most counties across the state. The state legislature is currently considering various means to deal with this problem. In this court, we use a variety of tools to try to help persons with addiction. Those tools include local drug counseling and more intensive treatment programs including lock down facilities like the Western Ohio Regional Treatment and Habilitation Center (W.O.R.T.H). Incarceration in local jail or prison may be necessary. It is often true that a person will not come to terms with their addiction until they hit rock bottom. And, there are persons who use their addiction as an excuse to continue to commit crimes. The court must always balance the needs of the individual with the needs and the right of the community to be protected.

This court's domestic relations division was very busy again in 2019 with 399 hearings being held and 147 persons attending parenting classes. The caseload of new filings jumped from 288 in 2018 to 320 in 2019. Most troubling is that the largest increases in filings were in

domestic violence civil protection orders. There were 43 new domestic violence cases filed in the court in 2019.

Overall, it was a very busy and successful year for the court in 2019 as we continue to serve the needs of the community in the administration of justice.

Shelby County Common Pleas Court

Judge James Stevenson