

The Medina County Common Pleas Court Community Service Program, by Kate Feeks, Courthouse Reporter for CZ Court Reporter at www.czcourtreporter.com

The Medina County Common Pleas Court Community Service Program is built around a positive concept that gives back to our community in so many different ways. Approximately 140 -200 offenders are placed in the Court Community Service each year in Medina County. Together, Judges James L. Kimbler and Christopher J. Collier of the Medina County Court of Common Pleas, put offenders under the jurisdiction of the Medina County Adult Probation Department, which in turn places them into this practical program.

Community Service is an opportunity for an offender that is convicted or pleads guilty to non-violent felony, to perform service work in the community. Depending on the crime, an offender can be sentenced up to 250 hours of service. Typically, an offender is sentenced to 24 to 48 hours of service and is required to pay a reasonable fee to cover their participation into the program.

Not-for -profit agencies such as the Medina County Home, park districts, The Ohio Army National Guard, among many others, put work aside for probationers. Some of these responsibilities include: painting, lawn maintenance and gardening, planning events and activities for seniors. Many of these agencies need the help and do not have the means to hire it out. The program saves thousands of dollars for these agencies in hired labor each year. The total hours worked for a year is 4,694 at \$7/hour for a savings value of \$32,858.00 for these agencies.

Once the offender is organized and understands the rules and responsibilities required of them, they are immediately assigned to an agency where they are to complete their duties. They are required to work eight hours each week, for three weeks. Each agency has a supervisor who is well informed of each offender. They work closely with the court coordinator and inform them of any failed attempts to complete their program.

So many offenders complete the program and have positive outcomes from their experiences. Some offenders may be offered employment and hired at the agencies that used them. Other offenders just simply enjoy helping others and want to go back to volunteer their time.

Another way the Community Service program gives back to our communities is through the probationer toy drive for needy children. Founded by Mr. Len Jackson, a probation officer from Dalton Georgia, the toy drive became an idea of his when he noticed a lot of probationers had been working too many hours a week and they couldn't find time to complete their community service. He thought of a way for those offenders to complete their community service obligation.

Those probationers that were ordered to do 24 hours of community service would only work 12 of those hours. For the remaining 12 hours, they are to purchase items for needy children. The probationer would receive one hour of credit for every \$6.85 they spent on an item for a child. The total cost is \$82.20 for their 12 community service hours. This idea Mr. Jackson thought would be a great alternative and in turn would give so much back to the community. The Medina County Adult Probation Department has used this type of program for offenders who aren't able to get all of their hours completed within the time period allowed.

The Community Service Program is beneficial to so many of our citizens. It is one fine program that takes a negative situation and is able to turn it into such a positive outcome for all.