

**Wadsworth Municipal Court Judge Steve McIlvaine, by Kate Feeks, Courthouse Reporter for CZ Court Reporter at [www.czcourtreporter.com](http://www.czcourtreporter.com)**



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“Wadsworth was my father’s home town, my father and mother lived here when they first got married.” Judge Stephen McIlvaine explains the history of Wadsworth and his family connection to the town where he serves today as Wadsworth Municipal Court Judge.

Born and raised in Dover, Ohio Judge Stephen McIlvaine is the youngest of four children. He credits his parents for shaping him into the father and person he has become today. “I had a very close family; my parents were very active and encouraging to us growing up.” He explains it was his brother Jim who took him under his wing and got him interested in learning about the Law.

In 1975, McIlvaine graduated from Muskingum College, New Concord, Ohio with a Bachelor of Arts degree. In 1978 he went to Ohio Northern University, Pettit College of Law, and received his Juris Doctor and by November of that same year he was licensed to practice Law by the Ohio Supreme Court. In 1982, he was admitted to the United States District Court, Northern District of Ohio.

In 1977 he married his wife Sarah and started a family of his own. “We came to Wadsworth in February of 1979 and given that we had family already here, people already knew my name so it really was a perfect place to make a start”. McIlvaine started as an attorney in Wadsworth while at the

same time raising his two sons Jacob and Alexander. Knowing from experience how much it meant to him having his parents so involved in his life he in turn wanted to be there for his children. "I was fortunate enough to never miss an event for my kid's; I was even a room mom at that time!"

In 1997, Judge McIlvaine was appointed Judge of the Wadsworth Municipal Court by Governor George V. Voinovich and he was elected for the unexpired term in 1997. In 1999 he was elected to a full term and was re-elected in 2005. He is a faculty member of the Ohio Supreme Courts education arm, the Ohio Judicial College and currently serves on the Criminal Law and Procedure Committee for the Ohio Judicial Conference. He is a member of the Medina County Bar Association and the Association of Municipal/County Judges of Ohio, Inc.

For the past 13 years Judge McIlvaine has not allowed plea bargaining in drunken driving cases. This policy was originally started in the Wadsworth Municipal Court by Judge McIlvaine's predecessor, Judge James L. Kimbler, who now serves as a Medina County Common Pleas Judge.

In addition to these drinking and driving topics, Judge McIlvaine and his court handle other programs organized to educate teens and underage drinking.

A zero tolerance policy for underage possession of alcohol was started a few years ago after a survey was done at the Wadsworth High School. Judge McIlvaine was asked to sign on in support of this policy and educate kids picked up for under age consumption.

The first offenders in these cases are offered a program under Judge McIlvaine's court. The program requirements are as follows; twenty four hours of community service, fifteen days home arrest, and attend a two hour program on Saturday mornings called Alcohol Awareness. "If the offender completes all of these things then I'll dismiss the charge" McIlvaine explains.

This program is used as an educational process so that these kids have a chance to learn from a decision instead of immediately being faced with a record.

After explaining the success of his Zero Policy for Alcohol program, McIlvaine continues to explain another program he provides in support of educating teens and what the consequences of their actions will mean in a real court of law.

Every other year just before prom, Judge McIlvaine and his court make a

visit to the Juniors and Seniors at Wadsworth High School. Inside the school gymnasium, a mock court room is set up and a two hour session of actual court sentencings are handed down by Judge McIlvaine. Mr. Kibler, head of the program at Wadsworth High School, explains to the students that they are about to witness the consequences people face in a real court of law.

The participants for these hearings are voluntary and they are set up in advance. "I consider this a great public service for them to carry out." They are only offered twenty four hours of community service credit for setting an example in front of the kids.

The local cable company is set up to record and televise this two hour session. "This is Wadsworth Municipal Court in action. We hold actual court and give four to five sentencings ranging from an OVI Case, multiple offender case, drug case and an underage drinking case. I will do actual sentencings as we do in the municipal courtroom" explains McIlvaine.

At the end of the sentencing the offenders are taken out and sent back to the court to meet with the probation department. Judge McIlvaine will then address the students and open the floor to questioning, allowing them to express how they feel after witnessing real people paying consequences for their actions. "It's been fun and we have gotten great feedback. Teachers have said the kids are talking about us well before we arrive and long after we leave."

Most importantly, these programs open the door for these students to share what they are really thinking and talking about with each other. It is a great opportunity for them to feel comfortable and get the facts of what can really happen to them.

Judge McIlvaine put it best when reflecting on the advice he had given to his boys as teens, "When you want to do something, think of what the consequences will be and if you are willing to accept it then you should make your decision."