

## Legal SCENE

By Ron Hocevar  
Scott County Attorney



### Indeed, it's been a busy year

As 2019 comes to a close, I want to provide the community with a brief overview and update of your County Attorney's Office. We currently have 50 personnel working in the office; this consists of myself, six Civil Division Attorneys, two Children in Need of Protective Services (CHIPS) Attorneys, two Juvenile Prosecutors, 15 Adult Criminal Prosecutors, one Office Manager, two Paralegals, one Victim/Witness Coordinator, two Assistant Victim/Witness Coordinators, one Drug and Alcohol Prevention Coordinator, one Systems Support Technician, and 16 Legal Support Staff. Between January and October of this year, this office has handled 3,699 adult criminal files, 927 juvenile delinquency files, and 290 CHIPS files, in addition to more than 2,600 arraignment files, consisting mostly of lower level traffic and first-time DUI cases.

Some of the more significant cases over the past year include:

- A Grand Jury Indictment against Jason Betlach for the alleged first degree murder of an 18-month-old foster child in his care. The child sustained abusive head trauma, subdural hemorrhages, and retinal hemorrhages; these injuries were ultimately fatal. Trial is currently scheduled for March 3, 2020.
- Laurie Gregor was convicted of first degree assault of a six-month-old infant, who was left in her care at an at-home daycare facility. The infant was diagnosed with a horizontal skull fracture, a sternal fracture, subdural and retinal hemorrhaging, and bruising. Following a lengthy trial, a jury found her guilty and determined the infant was a particularly vulnerable victim, and Gregor acted with particular cruelty by failing to obtain timely medical treatment for him. She was sentenced to 180 months in prison and ordered to pay \$39,413.20 in restitution.
- Rod Thompson was convicted of 19 felony counts of theft by swindle and embezzlement of public funds for his criminal conduct while employed as Superintendent of the Shakopee School District. Thompson was committed to prison and ordered to pay back all funds stolen from the School District.
- Paul Lindahl was convicted, following a jury trial, of criminal sexual conduct in the first degree and malicious punishment of a child for sexually and physically abusing a 10-year-old child. A sentencing date has yet to be scheduled.
- Sergey Balandin was convicted of first degree premeditated murder for the murder of his girlfriend. He was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole.
- Timothy Biby was convicted of attempted murder for intentionally hitting an 18-year-old motorcyclist—whom Biby mistook as the boyfriend of Biby's ex-wife—with his car. Biby was sentenced to 190 months in prison.
- Ryan Shocinski was convicted of first degree criminal sexual conduct for sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl who was staying with him and his family while her mother was out of state. He was sentenced to 168 months in prison.

One of the more notable juvenile cases handled by our office this year involves Jack Carlson, who is charged with 10 felony counts of invasion of privacy and two counts of possession of child pornography. These charges stem from allegations that Carlson surreptitiously recorded dozens of juvenile and adult females, in various stages of undress, in a middle school bathroom and high school locker room. The Court designated this case an Extended Juvenile Jurisdiction file -- which means Carlson would be subject to the juvenile court's supervision until he turns 21, in addition to receiving a stayed adult sentence. As Mr. Carlson is charged with multiple felonies and over the age of 16, this case is public. As of this writing, this case is currently scheduled for a Pretrial.



We also continue to operate a Treatment Court. Since its inception in 2016, 62 individuals have been accepted into Treatment Court. Of these, 20 participants have unfortunately been terminated from the program after receiving new charges. Fifteen, however, have successfully completed the program, and only one of the program graduates has relapsed with a new controlled substance offense. There are currently more than 30 individuals participating in Treatment Court.

In addition to our Treatment Court, we are pleased this year marks the inception of another specialty court in Scott County: Veterans' Court. With several veterans working in our office—including myself, a Navy Veteran, and two Marine Veterans: our former law clerk (now newly hired prosecutor) and our First Assistant—we felt it especially important to create a court to serve the specific needs of the veterans who have served this county and country. Through the hard work and commitment of our office -- specifically Allen Anderson, Tori Haider, and Bryce Elurman -- we received a federal grant to formalize it, and the Scott County Commissioners unanimously voted to support this specialty court. We couldn't be more proud to have this specialty court to give our veterans the assistance they deserve.

As I have written in previous articles, *Choose Not to Use* (choosentottouse.org) is a big part of this office. The mission of *Choose Not to Use* is to educate our K-12 kids about the dangers of illegal drug use and to provide them with the tools they need to say no and to make healthy lifestyle decisions. In 2017, we formed a partnership with *Courage to Speak* to provide drug prevention curriculums to our schools at no cost to the school districts. The *Courage to Speak* curriculum provides

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Families and friends enjoyed Fair food last July at the Scott County Fair. The Fair Board is always looking for additional food vendors, so if you or your family owns a food truck or other business, contact the County Fair office.

### When families gather, it's time to talk about the County Fair

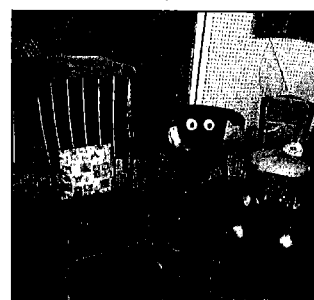
With the holiday season upon us, most of us will be enjoying extra time with family and friends... which provides a great opportunity to get everyone excited about *Fun Aplenty in 2020* at the Scott County Fair!

The holidays often open the door for some friendly competition in the family (who can buy the funniest white elephant gift, who makes the best turkey, or who has the most exciting news). With just a subtle segue, the discussion can be turned to "who can create the best things to enter in the Scott County Fair?"

This time of year, teams from one local extended family start planning the designs for next year's entries for the chair decorating category to see who is the *real* champion and winner of bragging rights for the next year. Start planning now on ways you can show off your talent and projects: <https://scottcountyfair.org/wp-content/uploads/Dept.-A-Premium-List-2019-2.pdf>.

And the holidays always equal talking about, preparing, eating, and sharing *food*. The Scott County Fair Board is always trying to get new and different foods for Fairgoers to enjoy, so if your family or someone you know owns a food truck or other business who would like to be a part of the Scott County Fair, encourage them to contact the Fair Office for more information.

Also, this time of year many people start planning family reunions, birthday parties, weddings, and graduation parties for the coming spring, summer, or fall. If you're one of those families, we encourage you to look into renting



One local family competes in the chair decorating category to see who can win the competition. Is there an area where your family could develop some friendly competition?

the beautiful Scott County Fairgrounds! Contact us at (952) 492-2436 or visit <https://scottcountyfair.org/off-season/rental-space/> for more info.

Regardless of how you spend the holiday season, we hope that it is filled with much joy and happiness, and if you are gathered with family or friends, don't forget to mention the Scott County Fair. There will be *Fun Aplenty in 2020* (July 22-26)! Happy Holidays from the Scott County Fair Board!



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ongoing, age-appropriate lesson plans which are taught by a teacher from each school. We also continue to operate the *Take It To the Box* program, where people can take their unused and/or expired medication to their local law enforcement agency for safe disposal. In 2018, this program disposed of over 3,500 pounds of medication, which would have otherwise circulated in the community.

The Civil Division has continued to represent and assist other County departments throughout the year, handling well over 500 "civil questions," which include legal guidance questions, data request reviews, and contract reviews. Great strides have been made in reducing the backlog of Tax Appeal cases, as well as addressing the 113 new Tax Appeal cases which were filed in 2019. The Civil Division has worked with the County Highway Department to resolve more than 20 condemnation cases this past year, including conducting three commissioner hearings. So far in 2019, the number of Human Services Appeal cases has doubled from past years, and we are continuing to see a slight increase in guardianship cases.

Commitment cases, initiated when a person is believed to be a danger to themselves or others and in need of treatment, continue to be challenging, due to the subject matter and number of court appearances each case requires. In addition to the general administrative work done in Child Support, our Child Support Prosecutors have made over 600 court appearances so far this year.

That's a (mostly) brief overview of the past year of the actions of your County Attorney's Office. We continue to be very busy, but I couldn't be more proud of the excellent staff working here in the office. Follow me on Twitter: @rrocevar1; Facebook: @RBHocevar; and Instagram: @ronhocevar.