



Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr.

eNewsletter

Volume 5, Issue 3

A Word from City Attorney Pfeiffer

As we begin to wind down another busy year that saw our office defending the city and protecting our community, it's always important to reflect on the many ways our attorneys and staff work on behalf of Columbus residents. Whether it was fighting in court to protect our drinking water supply or working with state and local officials on a host of new legislative proposals, our office is helping make a positive impact both locally and statewide.

In this issue you will be able to learn about how our office is working to educate the public about ways to help prevent "ghost" properties from haunting Columbus neighborhoods, a phrase coined by one of our newest attorneys who happens to be featured in this issue's "Meet the Staff" profile on [page eight](#).

Another article marks the one year anniversary of our partnership with the [Columbus Coalition for the Homeless](#) and their social justice newspaper, *Street Speech*. Also highlighted are examples of our staff being called upon to share their expertise, guidance, and best practices at a variety of state and local training sessions, workshops, and professional gatherings.

You'll also be a click away from joining me on another virtual tour of Columbus neighborhoods in the latest installment of our "[Moseying](#)" video series. I want to extend a special thank you to [Franklin County Engineer](#) Dean Ringle and Far East [Neighborhood Pride Center](#) manager Lynne LaCour for helping us with the new episode.



City Attorney Pfeiffer with Franklin County Engineer Dean Ringle at the geographic center of Franklin County (39° 58' 10" N, 83° 00' 34" W).

Finally, I would like to recognize Anne Murray, director of our Domestic Violence & Stalking Unit and DV Squad Sgt. Rick Kethcham for receiving the [CHOICES](#) Peacemaker Award for their work in implementing the Lethality Assessment Program in Franklin County; and Chief of Staff Bill Hedrick, who was recently nominated for a Professional Innovation Award by the Office for Victims of Crime, a division of the [United States Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs](#), for his work in setting up our *JusticeNet* program.

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City Attorney Continues Season Two of ‘Moseying’ Video Series

Canal Winchester. Reynoldsburg. Pickerington. Groveport. Madison Township. The Village of Brice. Fairfield County. There are so many different political subdivisions near the southeast quadrant of Columbus—not to mention the numerous school districts—that even some residents can get confused by the mishmash of municipal boundaries.

It was with this in mind that City Attorney Pfeiffer ventured beyond the I-270 outer belt to document several Columbus neighborhoods that some may not even think are within the Columbus corporate limits, especially those areas that extend beyond Franklin County’s borders.



“I like to get out, mosey, and talk to people. As an elected official, it’s a great way to find out what’s really on the minds of the residents of our city.”

**Columbus City Attorney
Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr.**

The latest installment of the “[Moseying with Rick Pfeiffer: Exploring Columbus Neighborhoods](#)” video series welcomes viewers to go on a virtual tour of some of the more suburban, and even rural, parts of Columbus, as City Attorney Pfeiffer relies on his trusty maps to try to make sense out of all the sprawling political boundaries he comes across.

Click on the above scene to watch the latest episode of season two of City Attorney Pfeiffer’s neighborhood documentary series.

‘Ghost’ Properties Haunt Columbus Neighborhoods

Residents often ask, “What can community members do about blighted properties in our neighborhoods?”

There are a couple of answers. Calling 645-3111 to initiate a complaint with Code Enforcement is a good start. Another important, but often overlooked step, is talking to family members and neighbors about preparing a will or a survivorship deed in the event of death. If a family member who owns property passes away, probating the estate and getting the legal title out of the deceased individual’s name is critical.

Otherwise, it may turn into a “ghost” property. A “ghost” property is a property where the owner has died, but there was no adjudication of the estate with the Franklin County Probate Court.

Many times our office finds that the deceased owners were once contributing community members, decent neighbors, and responsible property owners. In most cases, the property in question is a single-family home that served as the primary residence of the owner. However, with the death of the owner, the property is left unoccupied and unmaintained for months or even years.

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Our [Zone Initiative](#) attorneys are tasked with bringing the owners of blighted properties to court in an effort to get them to abate the nuisance. “Ghost” properties pose a special kind of challenge because the property deteriorates rapidly once it’s left vacant and unmaintained and the person whose name is on the title is dead, and the current owners (heirs or devisees of the deceased owner—typically the deceased person’s family members, relatives or close friends) are either difficult to locate or don’t have the means to fix the property.

When the property remains vacant and unmaintained for a period of time, it becomes much more difficult for the heirs or devisees to fix or sell the property. In most instances, the deterioration of the property likely could have been prevented had the family members probated the estate immediately upon the death of the owner and took charge of the situation.



Example of a “ghost” property—the owner was a tragic victim of homicide and the direct heir of the estate is a minor.

For example, Donna Lee Campbell owned 2855 Fern Avenue since 1972. It was her primary residence until her passing in January of 2015. There has been no probate of the estate. The property did not have a history of serious violations of city codes; there had been a few zoning issues over the years, but each time the orders were complied. By all accounts, Ms. Campbell was a good resident and neighbor.

Since her passing, the property has been vacant and has quickly deteriorated. The city has had to re-secure the property five times since April. On multiple occasions, police officers had to arrest and/or escort vagrants from the property. The property that Ms. Campbell called home for more than forty years is now, unfortunately, a “ghost” property haunting the community.



Some squatters outside 2855 Fern Ave.

Residents can help decrease the number of situations like Ms. Campbell’s from occurring in the future by helping raise awareness about the importance of estate planning and by ensuring that their deceased family members’ estates are probated as soon as practically possible.

For those who need help getting connected with a probate attorney, a good starting point is the Columbus Bar Association at 877-560-1014. Some

additional resources include the Legal Aid Society of Columbus (for elderly and low-income individuals) at 888-246-4418, the Capital University Legal Clinic (law students help with will preparation, with cases accepted in August and December) at 614-236-6245, and Pro Seniors, Inc. (a free legal hotline for Ohioans age 60 and over) at 800-488-6070.



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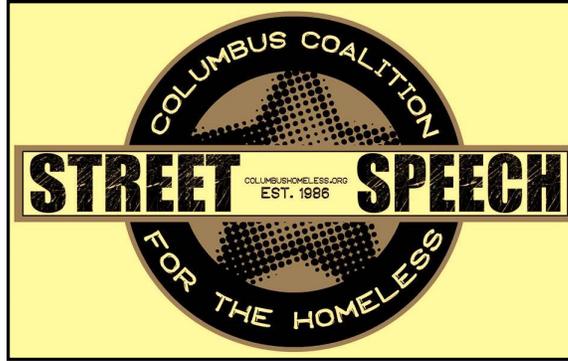
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Community Partnership Continues

It has been more than a year since City Attorney Pfeiffer announced a joint effort between his office and the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless to publish a regularly occurring criminal justice column in the monthly newspaper *Street Speech*.

The City Attorney provides varied content from month to month, with the overarching goal of helping educate the public about the criminal justice system, highlighting resources available to assist victims of crime, and bringing offenders with arrest warrants to justice.



“We are very grateful and honored to be heading into year two of our partnership with the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless,” said City Attorney Pfeiffer. “Along with our stated goals, we also want to bring more awareness of *Street Speech* and its mission to larger segments of the Columbus community.”

Since the City Attorney’s first contribution to *Street Speech* debuted in September 2014, the articles have helped bring wanted serial shoplifters, animal abusers, con artists, and chronic drunk drivers to justice.

Also, *Street Speech* vendor Joseph Ramirez was featured in a poignant story by WBNS 10TV that helped provide inspiration to others struggling to overcome homelessness.

Street Speech was featured in the news again after vendor Theresa Ferrell had her purse, with her ID and all her weekly earnings from selling newspapers, stolen from her while she was shopping for groceries.

WBNS 10TV investigative reporter Glenn McEntyre became involved and ran a lead story on the evening news about Theresa’s plight. The report included surveillance video from the grocery store, helping authorities identify and arrest the thief. The story also elicited a heartfelt outpouring of support for Theresa from the public.

“Our partnership with the City Attorney has been beneficial in far more than Theresa’s case,” said Jess Peacock, editor of *Street Speech*. “It has lent credibility and provided much needed community exposure to our program.”

According to City Attorney Chief of Staff Bill R. Hedrick, who helped establish the partnership with the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless, future columns will focus on initiatives such as the ones announced earlier this year like the domestic violence lethality assessment program and the City Attorney’s new public service announcement program.

Hedrick’s recent nomination for an award from the DOJ’s Office for Victims of Crime was due in part to his efforts in helping forge innovative partnerships such as the one between the City Attorney’s office and *Street Speech*.

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News and Notes

Columbus Division of Police Domestic Violence Squad Sgt. Rick Ketcham (*second from right*) and Anne Murray, director of our Domestic Violence and Stalking Unit (*far right*), receiving the Peacemaker Award from CHOICES.

Anne and Rick were recognized for their work in making Franklin County the first in Ohio to implement the Lethality Assessment Program to help predict and prevent intimate partner homicides.



Assistant City Attorneys Wes Phillips and Bill Sperlazza (*standing*) giving a presentation on nuisance abatements to the Ohio Municipal League last month. The audience consisted of elected officials—including mayors, council members, and trustees—from around the state.

Victim Advocate Michelle Grizzle from our Domestic Violence and Stalking Unit presenting at the Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio (SARNCO) Volunteer Training.

The training provided 45-hours worth of sessions about the dynamics of sexual assault and the resources available to survivors.



Stalking Unit staff members Dave Fox, Gil Leffler (*standing*) and Kendra Wiechart spoke about cyber stalking across cultures at the Center for Family Safety and Healing. Other panelists included Kathy Chen of Asian Community Services, Stefanie Day of DWAVE, and Lauren MacDade of BRAVO.

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Director Anne Murray speaking with Sibel Korkmaz, a participant in the Swedish Social Work Program through the Columbus International Program (CIP). Anne discussed our DV system, our philosophy of prosecution, available community resources, and the differences between



our criminal justice system and the Swedish system with Ms. Korkmaz, who stayed in Columbus for a month as part of CIP's professional development and cross-cultural exchange program.



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DV Advocate Amber Howell (right) and Legal Assistant Vanessa Perkins (left) participating in the *Take Back the Power* Victim Advocacy training hosted by the Gender Equity Solidarity Society and Ohio University-Lancaster.



Chief of Staff Bill Hedrick pictured with members of the S.O.A.R. internship program, Darik Artis, Tiara McCloud and Aleah Holley.

City Attorney Pfeiffer was honored to participate in a panel discussion with federal judges Hon. Michael H. Watson, Hon. Gregory L. Frost, court of common pleas judge Hon. Stephen L. McIntosh, municipal court judge Hon. Andrea C. Peeples, and international lawyers and law school students from Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Columbia, China, Brazil, Turkey, Japan and Mexico. The event was arranged through The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.



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The Domestic Violence & Stalking Unit were out in force representing the office at the Franklin County Justice Expo Fair. Pictured are Domestic Violence advocates Marcia Paulino, Shannon White, Jessica Hatem and Aaron Lombardo and Michelle Grizzle, Kristy Lawler, Sarah Dotters and Mary Culver.



Staff members Claire Lysaght (left) and Jessica Cain (right) representing the office at the Mt. Carmel West Crime Awareness and Prevention Day.



Law and Leadership Institute interns Amani Holmes from Columbus Alternative High School and Osayaba Onaiwu from Eastmoor Academy High School with Councilmember Jaiza Page and City Attorney Pfeiffer.



Chief of Staff Bill Hedrick and Assistant City Attorney Steve Dunbar meeting with concerned citizens during the "Bringing the Courthouse to the Community" event held at the Marion Franklin Recreation Center.

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Meet the Staff

Katarina Karac may be the newest member of the City Attorney's [Zone Initiative](#), but she is not new to the office or to the neighborhood quality-of-life issues that the Zone team works to address in conjunction with the Division of Police, the Division of Fire, Code Enforcement, the Health Department, community groups, and residents.

Katarina received her first trial experience and had exposure to the Zone Initiative and some of the high profile hotel/motel cases the office litigated while she served as a law clerk in the Columbus City Attorney's Civil Division while attending law school.

She grew up in Skokie, IL and decided she wanted to pursue a legal career around the time she graduated from high school. With a scholarship awarded to her for academic achievement and business acumen, she entered the University of Illinois-Chicago and was drawn to public service even as an undergraduate. While earning a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in History, Katarina served as an ambassador for the Council on Legal Education Opportunity, an organization that promotes the inclusion of minority and economically disadvantaged students in the field of law.

She also served as a fine arts teacher, mentor and tutor at the Metro Achievement Center for Girls in Chicago, teaching hip-hop and ballet classes, and working with inner-city school students to help them achieve personal and academic goals.

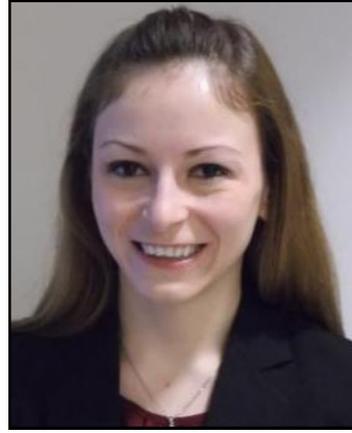
Katarina then entered The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, where she became a Public Service Fellow, vice president of education of the Public Interest Law Foundation, and managing editor of the *Entrepreneurial Business Law Journal*.

She also served as a judicial extern in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, Northern District of Ohio and as a legal intern at OSU's Civil Litigation Clinic.

After passing the bar exam, Katarina began working for the Licking County Prosecutor's Office, where she provided legal counsel and representation to 26 townships and county agencies on various civil matters. She also worked closely with the Planning Commission, the Board of County Commissioners and the County Engineer on economic development projects.

In February 2015, she jumped at the chance to come back to the Columbus City Attorney's office, serving as a Zone Initiative attorney in the city's busiest zone, which covers South Linden, North Linden, the University Area, and Clintonville.

She appreciates having the opportunity to continue serving the public, working with residents, and coordinating efforts with a variety of city agencies to solve problems, both big and small, that affect the community.



Katarina Karac

Title: Assistant City Attorney

Education: Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, J.D.; University of Illinois-Chicago, B.A.; Niles North High School, Skokie, IL



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Citizen Action

Our prosecutors deal with serious criminal activity on a daily basis, but occasionally they come across what can best be described as some more light-hearted fare. Such is the curious case of the “*Downton Abbey* Addict.”

Branden Joseph Deel, 30, of the city’s east side, was dubbed the “*Downton Abbey* Addict” due to his habit of stealing DVD and Blu-ray box sets of the popular British drama.

His exploits have garnered [international attention](#), and he now has a new warrant for his arrest after previously serving time in jail in August for stealing dozens of box sets worth thousands of dollars from several Franklin County retailers. He also was incarcerated earlier in the year after being convicted of similar crimes in Delaware County.

According to court records, Deel began his *Downton Abbey* disc binge on January 1, 2014 when he stole 12 DVD box sets worth a total retail value of \$560.88 and has continued to target retailers since.

Deel’s two-year crime spree seems to have been interrupted only by intermittent periods of incarceration and it appears, upon release, he picked up right where he left off. After serving time in jail in Delaware County in February and March of this year, Deel was released and found himself back in jail, this time in Franklin County, in August. He was eventually released, placed on probation, and given a 180-day suspended sentence.

Apparently undeterred, Deel was caught stealing 12 DVD box sets and other items valued at \$655.86 from a northwest Columbus retailer on October 12, 2015. He was able to escape by reportedly jumping into the rear passenger side window of a getaway car driven by a female accomplice.

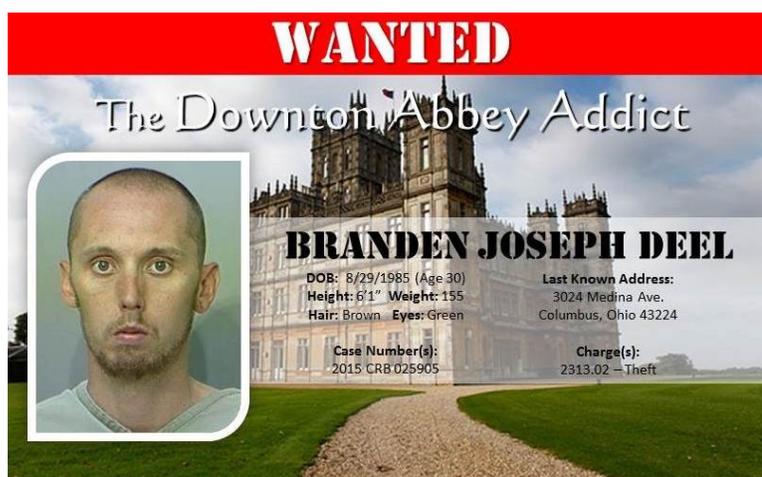
Authorities can’t say whether Mr. Deel is binge watching *Downton Abbey* or selling the box sets for drug money, but they acknowledge that either way he seems to have better taste than most thieves.

Along with multiple counts of theft, Deel’s past criminal history includes charges of felony drug possession, obstructing official business, tampering with evidence, felony weapons possession, criminal trespass, and recklessly causing serious physical harm.

Anyone with information on Branden Joseph Deel is asked to contact First Assistant City Prosecutor Bill R. Hedrick at 614.645.8874 or brhedrick@columbus.gov.

“It’s not often we prosecute someone for trafficking episodes of *Masterpiece Theatre*.”

**Chief of Staff and First Assistant City Prosecutor
Bill R. Hedrick**



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