



Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr.

eNewsletter

Volume 1, Issue 5

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A Word from City Attorney Pfeiffer

Regular readers of this newsletter may recall that I've made several references over the last few months about the vacant and abandoned property documentary my office was producing in conjunction with [CTV](#). The documentary, called *Just the Facts*, began airing in September and I have been pleasantly surprised by the feedback we have been receiving...not only from Columbus residents who have watched it on TV, but from folks across the country who have found it via social media. The digital age is truly amazing!

If you haven't had a chance to watch the program yet, you can [read more](#) about the back story behind the origins of the documentary and get a link to view it in its entirety later on in this newsletter.

We are currently in the planning stages for the next episode of *Just the Facts*, which will focus on another of our community's most critical issues: domestic violence and stalking. You can also [learn more](#) about the largest domestic violence/stalking prevention grant our office has ever received from the federal government in this newsletter. Anne Murray, the director of our Domestic Violence and Stalking Unit, and her staff are to be commended for putting together such a thorough and comprehensive grant proposal and we look forward to working with our community partners to implement the action plan in the ensuing months.

Last month, Ms. Murray and I were honored to join Chief City Prosecutor Lara Baker and Assistant U.S. Attorney David DeVillers to meet with five prosecutors visiting from the Republic of Georgia. We discussed our approach to domestic violence cases and explained how we utilize specialized prosecutors and have domestic violence advocates staff every courtroom. The Georgians were interested in what type of information we find helpful in successfully prosecuting domestic violence cases. It appears they are going to translate and modify some of our information forms and our [Guide to Protection Orders and the Courts](#) to use for victims and witnesses back in their home country.



City Attorney Pfeiffer meeting with prosecutors from the Republic of Georgia.

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Analyzing the Causes and Effects of Neighborhood Blight

City Attorney Pfeiffer knew he had to find a way to tell the story of one of the most important issues tackled by his office and one of the greatest challenges faced by Columbus residents: vacant and abandoned properties. It's a subject he has focused on for years, including his 11 year tenure as judge of the Municipal Court Environmental Division and throughout his eight year service as City Attorney.



City Attorney Pfeiffer reviewing some of the facts on Myrtle Ave. during the filming of *Just the Facts*.

Out of 337,719 housing units in Columbus, 6117 are vacant and abandoned. The damaging effects this form of blight has on neighborhoods and the seemingly viral-like way it can spread from property to property compelled Mr. Pfeiffer to work on a documentary with the assistance of Columbus Television (CTV).

After seeing a concerned resident consistently attending City Council meetings and giving impassioned pleas about the conditions on Myrtle Avenue in the North Linden section of Columbus, the City Attorney launched a project to document every property on the street. The project subsequently focused on a particular street block between Cleveland Avenue and Greenwich Street, where 14 out of the 21 properties are vacant and abandoned. The average delinquent taxes owed on the abandoned properties is \$3,187.

“ I didn't necessarily want to single out any one neighborhood. But we didn't want to talk about this issue only in the abstract, so we felt that looking at Myrtle Avenue would allow us to provide a heartrending example of the housing crisis that impacts neighborhoods throughout our country.” —City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr.

Mr. Pfeiffer gave a presentation on “deteriorating neighborhoods” in June at the 2011 Ohio Mayors Association annual conference and noted that mayors of villages and small towns throughout Ohio were facing similar types of issues with vacant and abandoned properties as was urban Columbus. Thus, he wanted to show that Myrtle Avenue is a microcosm of the confluence of factors—multi-national banks bundling and selling mortgage assets sight unseen, out-of-state real estate speculators neglecting properties, questionable lending practices, and bad business decisions—that has led to a vacancy epidemic in areas throughout the U.S.

One particular property highlighted in the documentary, 1618 Myrtle Avenue, had been transferred 13 times since 1992. Many of the transfers occurred between California-based limited liability companies, which seemed to treat the property as just a number in a lengthy list of unseen assets in a ledger book. In fact, the neglected property was transferred twice to different Californian companies *after* a demolition order was issued on the property last year.



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The City Attorney's objective is to abate nuisances, preferably by using private resources. However, in many instances the property owners have walked away from their responsibilities and left their remaining neighbors and government to clean up the mess.

The buzz about *Just the Facts* has spread to cities such as St. Louis and New York!

Watch the documentary in its entirety [here](#)

As the documentary details, Mr. Pfeiffer and his staff were able to locate human beings responsible for only six out of the 14 abandoned properties. The other eight provided an assortment of challenges, including records showing a property still owned by an individual tragically murdered in 2009 and properties owned by artificial entities, some of which are defunct. Out of the seven other properties on the block, four are owner-occupied, one is rented, one is in the possession of the city's land bank, and the other is an old post office converted to a church by the pastors of the New Walk Church of God in Christ.

Later this month, City Attorney Pfeiffer is planning a public presentation to provide a more in-depth look at how his office tries to track down negligent owners of abandoned properties.

Next of Kin Registry

The Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles has launched an online project to allow Ohioans to provide emergency contact information before an emergency occurs. Without the new Next of Kin registry, police and fire fighters could spend hours trying to track down family members or other emergency contacts during critical situations when time is of the essence. With the registry, emergency responders can call within minutes to let loved ones know about accidents and other critical information.



The Next of Kin registry is free, voluntary, and part of a secure database accessible only by law enforcement. House Bill 392, the state legislation authorizing the creation of the registry, was initially prompted by the efforts of two mothers who tragically lost their children in a car crash. The statute specifically exempts information provided in the registry from being a public record. Thus, no one can make a public records request to obtain the information nor can the emergency contact info be bought or sold.

Anyone with a valid Ohio driver license, commercial driver license, temporary instruction permit, motorcycle operator license and endorsement, or state identification card can submit two emergency contacts. This information will only be used in an emergency situation where an individual is unable to communicate on his or her own. For more information, or to sign up for the Next of Kin registry, visit the [Ohio BMV website](#).

Families can also apply for an Ohio ID card for children by visiting any local Deputy Registrar location. Ohio ID cards for children can assist authorities in the event a child is reported missing. Photographs and other information can be easily obtained by law enforcement and distributed to the media to assist in the quick recovery in the event a child goes missing.

Information provided by the [Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles](#).



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City Attorney Gets Largest Federal Grant to Fight Domestic Violence

City Attorney Pfeiffer was proud to announce recently that a grant proposal prepared by his office to help better coordinate the inter-jurisdictional and community-wide response to stalking crimes has been accepted by the U.S. Department of Justice. The \$841,661 award is part of the Office on Violence Against Women's "Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program"—or Arrest Program—to help implement provisions of the Violence Against Women Act, which was originally enacted in 1994. It is the largest one-time award the City Attorney's office has received.

The City Attorney's Domestic Violence and Stalking Unit, led by director Anne Murray, prepared and submitted the grant proposal in February and will serve as the lead agency in utilizing the grant funds to develop a team of detectives and investigators to collaborate with prosecutors and community agencies. Collaborating partners include [CHOICES](#), [BRAVO](#), [SARNCO](#), the [Family Violence Coalition at Nationwide Children's Hospital](#), and the Franklin County Sheriff's office.

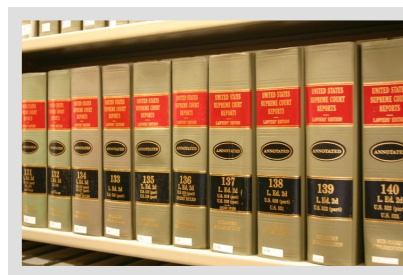
The objectives of the project include:

- continuing to implement the preferred arrest policy for protection order violations
- centralizing and coordinating groups of specialized police officers, prosecutors, and probation personnel to address stalking crimes
- developing policies with and training for police departments and prosecutors to improve investigation and prosecution of stalking cases
- assisting to improve the service of Civil Stalking Protection Orders
- coordinating computer tracking systems to improve communication between partner agencies
- strengthening legal advocacy for stalking victims
- providing equipment to investigators and prosecutors to facilitate the widespread enforcement of protection orders

The Domestic Violence and Stalking Unit provided advocacy services for 6021 victims and prosecuted 5221 cases in 2010. However, only 31 of those cases were referred to the Stalking Unit for stalking investigation. National studies indicate that approximately 60% of all domestic violence victims are stalked,

The Arrest Program grant will allow the newly developed team of detectives and investigators to conduct in-depth investigations, acquire necessary documentation, perform surveillance, gather evidence in stalking-related cases, and—along with our other community partners—provide victim safety planning to better assist underserved victims in our community.

“Stalking is an especially difficult crime to prove because it requires a pattern of behavior, and regular law-enforcement is set up to address one crime at a time. This grant allows us to organize specialized detectives and investigators to focus on these very serious crimes and help sorely underserved victims.” —Anne Murray



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State Legislature’s Changes to Criminal Laws Now in Effect

Legislation passed by the Ohio General Assembly that changes several state criminal statutes went into effect at the end of September. Of particular note for Columbus residents is [House Bill 86](#), originally introduced by Rep. Lou Blessing (R-Cincinnati) and Rep. Tracy Heard (D-Columbus), which effects the penalties for property crimes.



Per this legislation, the amount necessary to constitute a felony offense has increased from \$500 to \$1000 for the following offenses:

- Arson (R.C. 2909.03)
- Vandalism (R.C. 2909.05)
- Theft (R.C. 2913.02)
- Unauthorized use of a vehicle (R.C. 2913.03)
- Unauthorized use of property (R.C. 2913.04)
- Passing bad checks (R.C. 2913.11)
- Misuse of credit cards (R.C. 2913.21)
- Forgery (R.C. 2913.31)
- Criminal simulation (R.C. 2913.32)
- Trademark counterfeiting (R.C. 2913.34)
- Medicaid fraud (R.C. 2913.40)
- Medicaid eligibility fraud (R.C. 2913.401)
- Tampering with records (R.C. 2913.42)
- Illegally transmitting emails (R.C. 2913.421)
- Securing writings by deception (R.C. 2913.43)
- Defrauding creditors (R.C. 2913.45)
- Illegal use of WIC benefits (R.C. 2913.46)
- Insurance fraud (R.C. 2913.47)
- Workers’ compensation fraud (R.C. 2913.48)
- Identity fraud (R.C. 2913.49)
- Receiving stolen property (R.C. 2913.51)
- Cheating (R.C. 2915.05)
- Telecom harassment (R.C. 2917.21)
- Making false alarms (R.C. 2917.32)
- Falsification (R.C. 2921.13)
- Theft in office (R.C. 2921.41)
- Corrupt activity (R.C. 2923.32)
- Interference with forfeitable (R.C. 2981.07)

In other words, thieves who stole \$500 or more could be charged with a felony under the old law. Now, thieves can only be charged with a felony if they steal \$1000 or more. Since the City Attorney’s office handles misdemeanor offenses and the County Prosecutor’s office handles felony offenses, H.B. 86’s changes will likely increase the number of misdemeanor charges our office will prosecute and decrease the number of felony charges issued.

Below are the most recent statistics for misdemeanor theft filed by the City Attorney’s office. In the ensuing months, we will provide updated stats to determine how much of an impact the new state law will have on petit theft versus felony theft charges.

September 2011 Theft Stats	Year-to-Date Theft Stats
37 - merchant visits	330 - merchant visits
221- charges filed	2431 - charges filed
28 - warrants issued	318 - warrants issued
\$22,207.10 - value of merchandise stolen	\$226,894.69 - value of merchandise stolen
\$100.48 - Average value of each theft	\$93.33 - Average value of each theft

Also, in case you missed it, our office was featured in the NBC4 report by Marcus Thorpe on the impact these state changes will have on local communities in central Ohio. Watch it [here](#).

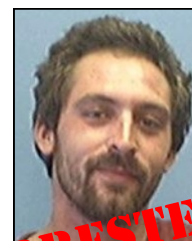
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Citizen Action

UPDATE: Our call for citizen action continues to be a success! After being profiled in last month's newsletter, **Gary L. Giffin, Jr.** was arrested and convicted on burglary and theft charges. He was wanted by multiple jurisdictions and received a 3-5 year sentence in Pickaway County.



Help us continue the success of our fugitive apprehension program! The individuals listed below have outstanding arrest warrants for multiple charges. If you have any information concerning either of them, please contact Assistant City Prosecutor Bill Hedrick at 614.645.8874 or brhedrick@columbus.gov

BRIAN E. LEGG, SR.

WANTED



Last known address: 544 Ryan Ave. • Columbus, Ohio 43223

DOB: 10-24-66 (Age 44)

Height: 5'11" **Weight:** 185

Case Numbers: 2007 TRC 112583
and 2009 TRC 108706

Hair: Brown **Eyes:** Green

Charges: 2133.01(A)(1) - OVI; 4511.19(A)(2) - Refusal with Prior Conviction within 20 years; 2133.01(A)(1)(A) - OVI - Impaired; 2133.01(A)(1)(H) - OVI Per Se, Breath "High Levels;" 2141.21(A) - Failure to Reinstate License; 2141.16(A) - Driving Under FRA Suspension; 2141.11(A) - Driving Under Suspension (two counts); 2141.12(A1) - No Operator License (two counts); 2131.33(A) - Failure to Control; 2133.03(A) - ACDA

ALLAN P. COLEMAN

WANTED



Last known address: 4266 Morsetown Ct. • Columbus, Ohio 43204

DOB: 9/14/66 (Age 45)

Height: 6'0" **Weight:** 160

Case Numbers: 2011 TRC 152013
and 2011 CRB 016356

Hair: Bald **Eyes:** Brown

Charges: 4511.19(A)(1) - OVI; 4511.19(A)(2) - Refusal with Prior Conviction within 20 years; 4510.16 - Driving Under FRA Suspension or Cancellation; 4510.11(A) - Driving Under Suspension; 4511.20(A) - Reckless Operation; 4510.12(A1) - No Operator License; 4510.21(A) - Failure to Reinstate License; 4511.12 - Failure to Obey Traffic Control Device; 2921.331(B) - Failure to Comply; 2921.33 - Resisting Arrest; 2925.14(C1) - Possession of Drug Paraphernalia; 2925.11 - Misdemeanor Drug Abuse

If you are one of the listed individuals, you are strongly encouraged to turn yourself in or contact an attorney.

The Columbus Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service can be reached at 614.221.0754 and the Franklin County Public Defender's Office can be reached at 614.525.3194.

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