

HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Michael Clemens, grand knight of the Knights of Columbus Corpus Christi Council 6188, recently presented a \$1,000 donation to The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region. The money will be used for The Arc's many programs, which assists people with developmental disabilities in building better lives for themselves. The Arc offers a wide variety of services to both children and adults in the Harford, Cecil and Kent counties. For more information, visit arcncr.org.



WHAT'S MAKING NEWS

TEACHERS WORRY ABOUT ALTERNATIVE TO GRADUATION TESTS

Educators are worried a last-ditch plan to save Maryland high-schoolers unable to pass graduation tests will place unfair demands upon teachers and schools while resulting in meaningless "back-door diplomas" handed out disproportionately to poor and minority students.

The Bridge Plan for Academ-

ic Validation offers project-based learning to thousands of students who have passed course work in algebra, English, biology and government, but have so far failed the accompanying tests required next year for a diploma.

- Leah Fabel

For full story, see examiner.com.

EXAMINER EXCLUSIVE

Integrity key in Anne Arundel's crime fight

Editor's note: This is part of an ongoing series that profiles top-level county law-enforcement officials, concerning their jurisdictions and what the future holds.

By **Carolyn Peirce**
Examiner Staff Writer

Frank Weathersbee, 64, has served in the Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office for more than 30 years. Starting as an assistant state's attorney in 1969, he became a deputy state's attorney in 1977 and was appointed state's attorney in 1988. He has been re-elected for five terms. Weathersbee's staff includes 43 prosecutors, two deputies and 14 victim advocates as well as investigators and public information officers. He spoke with *The Examiner* about the county's challenges and how his office can meet them.

What has kept voters confident in you?

A prosecutor's main job is to prosecute and be confident in prosecution. Integrity and honesty are important as well as being impartial and nonpolitical. We have tried to do that.

Is there one case that stands out?

The one I remember most is Scotland Williams. It was the murder of two attorneys in their summer home outside of Annapolis in 1990. It was the first real use of DNA, and we had to get the DNA approved by the court as a proper scientific tool. We were able to do that, and we got the death penalty. But it was reversed.

What about the death penalty?

There aren't many murders that qualify for the death penalty. We ask for it when it's appropriate, and we involve the victim's family in the decision-making process. We don't leave it completely up to the victims, but they're certainly an integral part of the decision and the sentencing.

You've been praised for improving victims' services. How did you do it?

We were the second office — back in 1979 — to actually begin victims' services. We did it with one person, and the attorneys resisted it at first. They felt the person was messing around in their cases. Some resented it more than



Anne Arundel County State's Attorney Frank Weathersbee discusses the details of his position, summarizes the county's crime standings and recommends reading material. - Jon Clements/For The Examiner

others, but we thought it was a good idea, and we now have the largest prosecutor-related victim services [in the state].

What services do you provide?

We have 14 victim advocates, and they do pretty much everything but try the case. They answer questions and explain the procedure. Most people have no idea what goes on in a courtroom. It's amazing, especially with all the [court and cop] TV shows, but the average person has no contact with police, prosecutors and the court. It's a brand new experience.

What improvements have you made?

When I started, the attorneys had to deal with victims, and they didn't do it very well. Our job is to get a conviction. Questions like "how do I get to court?" or "how do I get my money?" are important to the victims, but they're not on my mind. The advocate bridges that gap and is in court with them developing a bond. People call it hand-holding, but it's not. It's providing information when information is needed.

Have victim advocates ever interfered in a case?

We've had a few cases where an advocate has been called to see if [he or she] somehow changed the victim's testimony. But that doesn't happen very often, because we're very careful not to tell the victim or witness what to say.

Is it hard working with victims every day?

Victims are ordinary everyday people who have had some trauma in their lives that shouldn't have occurred. Their expectations sometimes are not realistic, and that's why advocates are important to explain the process. We've lost cases, but the victims have been extremely appreciative of the process and understood why they lost.

What could help improve prosecution rates?

There's a bill going through the legislature, and it's been tortured and torn up. But the bottom line is this: When you are arrested for any crime, DNA — rather than

fingerprints — is going to be taken. It's taken us a while, and we aren't there yet. The bill started as, if you're arrested for a felony, they take your DNA. But it should be for any crime because it's more exact than fingerprints. There are no mistakes. You eliminate the innocent, and you convict the guilty. It's the kind of identification you want. The more DNA you get, the more cold cases you can solve and make sure you're convicting the right person.

Have you ever worried the wrong person went to prison?

I've never had a case where I thought I convicted the wrong person. DNA has helped, but we have to prove them guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and that's not easy. There are a lot of people who should be in jail who are not.

All four homicides this year in Annapolis remain unsolved. Are you concerned?

Homicide is one of those crimes that you have a high probability of solving because police put a lot of

resources into it. If you go back over the last year you could interchange the victims and the defendants. They are very similar people, who come from the same criminal element — they don't talk with the police a lot. There's a certain fear factor, too. There are a lot of good people in these neighborhoods who want the crime to go away, and they would like a curfew. We need to do more to provide protection for those good people and in turn get rid of the bad ones.

Do you think Mayor Ellen Moyer's proposed curfew could help?

Some cities have curfews, and they work to the extent they can. They protect the kids by not having them on the street when they really shouldn't be. It can be a good tool, but it provides a certain penalty to people's freedom, which nobody in this country likes to have restricted. I'll support whatever decision they make. If they want us to prosecute curfew violations, we'll do it.

What crimes are clogging the courts?

Eighty percent of the cases we prosecute are the result of drug abuse. Sixty percent of the people who are arrested and go to the detention center are on drugs. Drugs are the engine on crimes. To think that it's not, you just have to come to court and watch.

How does society fix the problem?

It's a social problem that isn't fixed just by criminal law. It's not something police and prosecutors can do all by themselves. Most of the crime and drugs come from lower economic groups. People whose economy is better tend to get education, and more education leads to jobs, and jobs don't lead to crime. So how do you get people to go to school and get out of public housing? Drug court provides a real opportunity to get hold of somebody and supervise them sufficiently so that he or she can get a decent education or learn how to do a job and stay off drugs. I think it works.

Have you read any good crime novels lately?

I don't like crime novels and TV shows that deal with courts because they are unrealistic. But the John Grisham books are good.

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