

The Ohio Judicial Family Network

In 1998, during my husband's campaign for re-election to the Supreme Court of Ohio, I had the opportunity to talk with husbands and wives of judges throughout the State of Ohio. Most were enjoying the many positive experiences related to their role as the spouse of a judge but some spoke of negative aspects associated with this position. The rigors of campaigning, security concerns at home and at the court house, feelings of isolation, ethical questions, and raising children in the public arena were some of the issues that were mentioned.

The spouses agreed that it would be helpful if the Supreme Court would offer a program of support for the judicial families in our state. In May of 2000, with the support of my husband, Chief Justice Thomas Moyer, a twelve member steering committee of spouses of experienced judges was selected to develop a program for the spouses and partners of judges new to the judicial system. The committee was diverse as to age, gender, race and political affiliation. Representatives from both rural and urban areas were included as well as spouses of judges from all jurisdictions.

This dedicated committee designed a program called the Ohio Judicial Family Network (OJFN) which exists to identify the needs and concerns of judicial families in Ohio and to offer a supportive network and educational opportunities to the spouses/partners of judges and their families. Three educational programs are offered each year. Two daytime programs are planned for spouses of judges new to the judiciary and are held at the time of the new judge orientation programs. A reception is planned for judges and spouses the night before each OJFN daytime session. Annually, the Judicial Family Network offers a program for spouses and partners of new and experienced judges at the time of the state judicial conference. Details of our programming are listed below.

In Ohio, we are fortunate to have a dedicated court staff person, Ruth Ann Newcomer, who helps develop and implement our programs. Having the same staff person from year to year provides our organization with continuity and a sense of familiarity that is invaluable to the continued development and success of our program.

By providing the spouses with three formal educational programs, a mentoring program and a list of available resources, the Ohio Judicial Family Network sends the message that the judiciary cares about the families of judges and is available to them whatever their needs. It has been rewarding to know of the many friendships that have developed from this association of spouses of new and experienced judges.

The professional life of a judge, for the most part, is very serious and stress-producing. Spouses report that job-related tension is often brought from the courthouse into the judge's family life. For this reason, we include humor in our programming through speakers, skits and shared judicial family anecdotes. The Steering Committee believes that humor in programming helps relieve some of the stress that our meeting attendees feel related to their role as the partner of a judge.

On this Judicial Family Institute website you will find a list of other states with programs for judicial families, each having a style of programming that fits their particular needs. This website provides the opportunity for us to learn from one another as we continue to develop and strive to improve our programming.

I wish you the very best as you begin planning a program of support for the judicial families in your state. It can be a most rewarding experience for all who are involved. Please contact Ruthie Newcomer or me with any questions you might have as you begin organizing your program. We will be glad to assist you in any way we are able.

Sincerely,
Mary Moyer

Ohio Judicial Family Network

Mission Statement

The Ohio Judicial Family Network (OJFN) exists to identify the needs and concerns of judicial families in Ohio and to offer a supportive network and educational opportunities to the spouses and their families.

Goals

1. The OJFN will develop and present programs and activities to address issues judicial families may encounter and to offer strategies for responding to the issues.
2. The OJFN will generate opportunities for spouses and partners of judges to meet and interact with one another in order to foster informal networks of support and communication.
3. The OJFN will support a resource contact [mentor] program for the spouses and partners of judges, offering resources to judicial families through personal interaction and group activity.

Website

<http://www.sconet.state.oh.us/Court-Relations/OJFN/default.asp>

Steering Committee

There are 17 members representing the Ohio judiciary's diversity on the OJFN Steering Committee. We strive to include men and women and differences in community size, age, race, political affiliation, court jurisdiction and the number of years in a judicial family.

Steering Committee Subcommittees

1. Ethics.
2. Resource Contact [Mentor] Program.
3. Judicial Family Programs.

Materials Sent to Spouses/Partners of New Judges

1. A letter from the OJFN Steering Committee Chair welcoming the spouse/partner of the new judge to judicial family life.
2. A letter from the Supreme Court of Ohio staff liaison to the OJFN Steering Committee welcoming the spouse/partner of the new judge to Ohio's judicial family and explaining the OJFN programs.
3. The OJFN Resource Notebook (250 pages) containing information about the Ohio judicial system, judicial salaries and benefits, swearing in activities, the Judicial Family Institute, stress management, security away from the courthouse, ethics, substance abuse, and public family life.

Program Topics for Spouses/Partners of New Judges

1. "My Spouse Is A Judge. Now What Do I Do?"
 - 1.1 Judicial family life.
 - 1.2 Ethical issues relating to judicial family life.
 - 1.3 Security strategies away from the courthouse/family and residential security.
 - 1.4 Fiscal considerations.
 - 1.5 Supporting children in judicial families.
 - 1.6 Myers Briggs Type Inventory.
 - 1.7 Substance abuse and mental health issues in the legal profession.
 - 1.8 Judicial employee benefits.
2. "We Are A Judicial Family. Now What?"
 - 2.1 Families managing public lives.
 - 2.2 Prioritizing and scheduling.
 - 2.3 Responses to media and critics.
3. "How Not To Put Your Foot In Your Mouth"
 - 3.1 Ethics and family matters.
 - 3.2 Living with Lawyers (author).

Programs for Partners of Judges Attending the Ohio Judicial Conference Annual Meeting

1. Security measures away from the courthouse.
2. "Managing Judicial Family Stress; Three Short Stories" (humorist).
3. Tour of the Ohio Judicial Center.

Financial Support

Ohio program presenters are usually from Ohio, experts in their fields, and speak for no fee or a limited honorarium. The Supreme Court provides lunches for the meetings. The Steering Committee members are reimbursed for their mileage and occasional hotel lodging, although we attempt to start meetings and programs at 10:00 AM and end no later than 3:00 PM so participants can avoid an overnight stay.