

The Ohio Judicial Family Network

By Mary F. Moyer

In 1998, during my husband's campaign for reelection to the Supreme Court of Ohio, I had the opportunity to talk with husbands and wives of judges throughout 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. Some of the issues mentioned included the rigors of campaigning, security concerns at home and at the courthouse, feelings of isolation, ethical questions, and raising children in the public arena.

The spouses agreed that it would be helpful if the Supreme Court of Ohio offered a program of support for the judicial families in our state. In May 2000, with the support of my husband, Chief Justice Thomas Moyer, a twelve-member steering committee that consisted 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 in 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 the Ohio Judicial Family Network (OJFN), a program that exists to identify the needs and concerns of judicial families in Ohio and offers them a supportive network and educational opportunities. Four educational programs are offered each

year. Two daytime programs are planned for spouses of judges new to the judiciary. The programs 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. In addition, the OJFN offers a program for spouses and partners of new and experienced judges during the annual state judicial conference. OJFN also presents a program at the annual seminar (spouses are invited) for judges planning for retirement. Details about OJFN and these programs are outlined in the blueprint that accompanies this article.¹

By providing the spouses with four formal educational programs, a mentoring program, and a resource notebook, the OJFN 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 many friendships 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 our meeting attendees feel is related

to their role as the partner of a judge.

A resource we find helpful is the Judicial Family Institute (JFI), a committee of the Conference of Chief Justices. The JFI Web site at <http://jfi.ncsconline.org/> has articles of interest and a list of other states' programs.² The JFI Web site helps us learn from others as we continue to develop and strive to improve our OJFN 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 (newcomer@sconet.state.oh.us) or me (Mary F. Moyer, c/o Ruth Ann Newcomer, Supreme Court of Ohio, 65 South Front Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-3431) with any questions you might have as you begin organizing your program. We are happy to help.

Endnotes

1. 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 year to year provides our program with continuity and a sense of familiarity that is invaluable to its continued development and success.

2. Eighteen other states (including Guam), in addition to Ohio, have programs for judicial families. The states with programs are Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Washington, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Ohio Judicial Family Network Blueprint for Supporting Judicial Family Life

Write a Mission Statement

Your mission statement should be clear and concise. An example is:

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.

Create Specific Goals

OJFN has three main goals:

1. Develop and present programs and activities to address issues judicial families may encounter and offer strategies for responding to the issues.
2. Generate opportunities for spouses and partners of judges to meet and interact in order to foster informal networks of support and communication.
3. Support a mentor program for the spouses and partners of judges and offer resources to judicial families through personal interaction and group activity.

Build a Web Site Presence

Build a Web site of resources and update it often.

Examples include:

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

Create a Diverse Steering Committee

There are currently eighteen OJFN steering committee members who represent Ohio's judicial diversity. The committee includes men and women who reflect differences in community size, age, race, political affiliation, court jurisdiction, and the number of years in a judicial family.

Build Subcommittees

Develop subcommittees to focus on specific areas. OJFN convened the following five:

1. Ethics
2. Judicial Family Programs
3. Judicial Family Teen Program
4. Resource Contact (Mentor) Program
5. Web site

Send Information to Spouses/Partners of New Judges

Communication is key. Consider sending welcome letters and a resource book. OJFN sends out the following:

1. A letter from the OJFN steering committee's chair welcoming the spouse/partner of the new judge to judicial family life.
2. A letter from the OJFN steering committee's staff liaison 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, stress management, security away from the courthouse, ethics, substance abuse, public family life, and the Judicial Family Institute.

Develop Programs for Spouses/Partners

Develop stand-alone programs for the partners and families of new judges. Consider the following topics:

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 Family and residential security (security strategies away from the courthouse).
 - 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 Ethical issues affecting the family.
 - 3.2 Living private lives in the public arena.

Program topics and activities for new and experienced judicial families might include:

1. Security measures away from the courthouse.
2. Managing judicial family stress.
3. Celebrating the positive aspects of judicial family life.

4. Touring the state's judicial centers.
5. "Coffee and conversation" to provide opportunities for judicial spouses/partners to meet and interact.

Consider Collaboration with Judicial Associations in Your State

In Ohio, OFJN presents "Emotional Impact of Retirement on the Judge and Family," a segment of the Ohio Judicial Conference's retirement planning seminar.

Consider the Costs of Programming

Ohio program presenters are usually from the state, experts in their fields, and speak for no fee or a limited honorarium. Presenters have included members of the OJFN steering committee, Ohio's judiciary, the Supreme Court of Ohio staff, The Ohio State University faculty, and the Ohio Lawyer Assistance Program staff, in addition to psychologists and a county sheriff. The Supreme Court of Ohio provides meeting meals and steering committee members are reimbursed for their mileage and occasional hotel lodging. The meetings and programs usually start at 10:00 AM and end no later than 3:00 PM so participants can avoid an overnight stay. ■