



Fall 2021

# The Docket



Sharen Wilson – Criminal District Attorney

What’s happening in Tarrant County is truly unacceptable.

Here, family violence is the third most frequently committed crime in the county.

This October, we will launch our annual campaign – for the fifth year in a row – to draw awareness to how prevalent, and just plain wrong, this brutality is.

Our campaign is called “Not in my County.”

Offenders are being put on notice that if they abuse their partner in Tarrant County, we will prosecute their case. Fighting Intimate Partner Violence is one of my top priorities.



You’ll see pictures and videos sharing the “Not in my County” message on Facebook and Twitter.

Our goal is to educate the public about domestic violence and share information about resources that are available to victims. And we’re doing it during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Join us and stand against this violence.

Very Truly Yours,  
*Sharen Wilson*  
Sharen

## Cold Case: Life Sentence

A nearly 50-year unsolved murder in Fort Worth was finally put to rest on August 24, when Glen McCurley, 78, changed his plea to guilty of the capital murder of Carla Walker three days into his trial. Judge Elizabeth Beach sentenced him to life in prison.



Carla Walker’s sister Cindy Stone and brother Jim Walker with Assistant Criminal DA’s Kim D’Avignon and Emily Dixon, along with CDA Investigator Chris Lachance after sentencing.

Carla Walker, 17, was abducted, sexually assaulted and strangled after a Western Hills High School Valentine’s Day dance on February 17, 1974. Her body was found three days later in a culvert on Pearl Ranch Road near Benbrook Lake.

This case drew national attention because it went unsolved for four decades before advancements in DNA technology linked McCurley to Carla Walker. McCurley was arrested in 2020.

"Because the Fort Worth Police never gave up, justice for Carla has finally come," Sharen Wilson said.



Fort Worth police detectives whom have worked on the Carla Walker murder case since 1974

## Bond Election



Voters soon will head to the polls to cast ballots on proposed constitutional amendments, bond packages and more.

One item on the Tarrant County ballot: A \$116 million bond program to build a new CDA office with no tax increase. That proposal calls for building a new CDA Office Building on part of what is now the Tarrant County Plaza parking lot. The new building would have secure office, meeting and parking space for CDA employees, victims and witnesses.

If the CDA Offices move out of the Justice Center, the now overcrowded building can be reconfigured to create courtrooms, jury rooms and space for court personnel, attorneys and those who are called for jury duty.

This is the first bond election that impacts the entire CDA office since the 1987 bond package led to the Tim Curry Criminal Justice Center, then called the Tarrant County Justice Center, which was built and opened in 1991.

When the Justice Center opened, Tarrant County's population was 1,170,103 and the CDA Office had 179 employees. There were seven misdemeanor courts, eight felony courts and two or three magistrates. That year, 34,992 criminal cases were filed.

The county's population now is 2,064,060 and the CDA Office has 344 employees, 299 in the Justice Center and the rest spread among four other buildings. There are 10 misdemeanor courts, 10 felony courts and 14 magistrates. In 2020, 43,638



criminal cases were filed, despite the pandemic.

Tarrant County's population is projected to be 3 million by 2030. A new felony court – the 485th – will open in January 2022, which means the CDA will need six more Assistant

Criminal District Attorneys, one more investigator and one more staff member.

Please research the pros and cons of this proposal and vote as you see fit. The election is November 2, 2021.

## Senior Synergy

Our Elder Financial Fraud team and Community Outreach Coordinator Amy Bearden spent July 1 at the Will Rogers Memorial Center for the Senior Synergy Expo, handing out information to all who were interested in learning more about this team.

We were among the county offices that set up a booth for the one-day free event geared to promote healthy living in Tarrant County.



**Elder Financial Fraud Team (l/r)  
Investigator Dara Couch, ACDA Lori Varnell  
and Investigator Ronald Bonham**

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## Interns

This summer, we were glad to have 18 interns from law schools to assist our prosecutors. Here are a few thoughts from one of our interns, Ravyn Simmons, Texas A&M School of Law, about her summer experience:

"My time as an intern in the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's Office was an experience that greatly aided my understanding of criminal law," she said, adding that she learned how powerful testimony could be.



"Most importantly, I was able to talk to prosecutors and hear just how passionate they are about the work they do," Simmons wrote. "Every prosecutor I spoke to was happy about the work they were doing and felt like they were truly helping their community. This has been an invaluable experience for me that will surely aid me as I progress in my legal career."

## Intrepid Investigators

Our office has 49 investigators, all peace officers, who handle a slew of work ranging from helping prosecutors research and prepare cases for trial to making the workplace safe.

In addition to their regular duties, our investigators recently helped track down people owed restitution money in Tarrant County.

When someone is ordered to pay restitution, the money is sent to Tarrant County. Employees then forward that money to the victims. But if the victim moves, that money can pile up in the county's restitution account.

Some of our investigators recently tracked down people due restitution money. Out of roughly \$15,000 worth of restitution checks, they found the owners who were due about \$12,000, CDA estimates show.



Our investigators also attended the 40-hour Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) Mental Health Officer training because we want to make sure they can successfully communicate with those suffering from mental health crises and de-escalate any situations that arise.

The training covers common symptoms, such as behavioral and emotional cues, key characteristics of disorders such as PTSD and schizophrenia, as well as safety techniques and communication skills for peace officers to use when interacting with those in a mental health crisis.

"Some of the most difficult situations we face as investigators involve emotionally charged individuals," said Maria Hinojosa, chief investigator in this office. "With that in mind, we felt it best that all investigators receive Mental Health Peace Officer training to hopefully identify those individuals who may need additional assistance outside of the criminal justice system and get them to the resources they need.

"It's important to be prepared."

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## Inspiring tomorrow's leaders



A group of students in the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps, a national youth leadership development organization, met with attorneys and staff for three days in July to learn about the criminal justice system and how it works.

They listened to prosecutors talk about topics ranging from White Collar to Gang crimes. They watched defendants accept plea arrangements in court. They spent time with the SWAT team and Sheriff Bill Waybourn.

"This was awesome," said LTJG C. Abby Bounds, a retired Fort Worth police officer and municipal court judge in the city of Robert Lee who is the Officer in Charge of this group. "Every night we do mock trials. This has been a blast."

This program, sponsored by the U.S. Navy, is geared to build leaders of character by offering hands-on experience and training.

These cadets, who range in age mainly from 13 to when they graduate from high school, are in training to potentially become JAG officers, who work with legal matters involving the military. This cadet program was created in 1962 to "create a favorable image of the Navy on the part of American youth."

## Guilty Life imitates TV show "A Stranger in My Home."



**Jose Galindo Mendoza**

A Tarrant County jury, August 25, sentenced Jose Galindo Mendoza to 20 years in prison after convicting him of burglary of a habitation while committing assault.

Assistant Tarrant County Criminal District Attorneys Demetrice Lopez and Allyson Kucera guided the jury through security camera video and testimony from the victim detailing how Mendoza invaded the young woman's home by crawling through a window. The victim testified she had fallen asleep on her couch watching the crime show "A Strager in My Home," and was startled awake when Mendoza put his hand over her mouth and choked her with his other hand before demanding sex.

Kucera told the jury "the young woman was lucky to have escaped alive," showing security video of Mendoza dragging her half-naked body across a living room floor. After testimony from a woman who used to live with Mendoza about how he brutally abused her, Kucera asked the jury to "send a message and prevent this man from ever doing it again."

The jury did just that.

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## Appreciation



Thank you H-E-B/Central Market!

We appreciate that your company again has provided snacks, water and various supplies for victims in Tarrant County.

The TCCDA's Victim Services team works to help victims through the criminal justice process. That includes providing victims – and their families – with a relaxing area to wait before or after testifying during trials or hearings. The snacks, water and coffee provided by H-E-B/Central Market, and approved by the Tarrant County Commissioners Court in June, are available to victims there.

Thank you, H-E-B/Central Market for being a great community partner and helping make victims in Tarrant County more comfortable.

## Honors

We are proud to announce that this office won three Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties (NACo) this year. The awards, which recognize innovative county government programs, are for:

- Prosecutors in High School, a virtual class that teaches students about the criminal justice system. (ACDA Matthew Jackson, Community Outreach Coordinator Amy Bearden)
- Prosecuting Adult Sexual Assaults by creating a better path to prosecution that begins with how police officers file cases and deal with victims and extends to how prosecutors handle and prosecute cases. (ACDAs Kim D'Avignon, Emily Dixon)
- A new Intimate Partner Violence intake process that streamlines the evaluation of misdemeanor domestic violence cases and improves the victim outreach process. (ACDA Allenna Bangs, Felony IPV Team and Investigators and Misdemeanor Attorneys)



"I am very proud of the people in my office who created and brought to life these programs," Sharen Wilson said. "These programs make a difference in our community."

The awards, all in the Criminal Justice and Public Safety category, were presented July 11 at a luncheon during NACo's Annual Conference and Exposition in Prince George's County, MD.

"This national recognition shows just how much the CDA's office cares about the citizens of Tarrant County," Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley said. "From teaching students about the criminal justice system, to improving a victim's experience during a very difficult time, these CDA office programs are invaluable to our community."

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## Recognitions

### CDA staffers receive honors and appointments



**Kim D'Avignon**

ACDA Kim D'Avignon was named to serve on the Prosecutor Working Group for the Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force.

The goal of the task force is to develop an informed, collaborative

response to sexual violence experienced by children and adults in Texas.

This will include recommending the best ways for the state to investigate and prosecute sexual assault and pinpointing areas where trauma informed principles and approaches can be incorporated into prosecutorial policies.



Investigator Bruce Blaisdell received the Director's Distinguished Group Award from the U.S. Marshals Service. The award recognizes his contributions to the North Texas Fugitive Task Force Alpha Team, Northern District of Texas, which helped, among other things, reduce violent crime and increase drug, gun, money and vehicle seizures in 2019 and 2020 despite reduced staff levels.



**Angel Williams**

ACDA Angel Williams received the President's Award from the Tarrant County Bar Association for her work on the Tarrant County Bar Brown Bag Continuing Legal Education Committee.

This was her first year to chair the committee and she helped expand CLE topics and bring in more diverse presenters – all during a pandemic.



**Gary Fuller**

Retired Office Manager Gary Fuller received the 2021 Unsung Hero Award from Mothers Against Drunk Driving. MADD recognized Gary for facilitating the TXDOT grant we received allowing us to do No Refusal in Tarrant County. We were able to expand the program from nine holidays in Tarrant County to 50 days a year. That led to more than 5,000 DWI arrests.