



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway
Office of the District Attorney
Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, Cherokee County, Georgia

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Office of the District Attorney

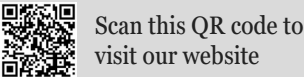
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SUSAN K. TREADAWAY

District Attorney



Thank you for your interest in the Office of the District Attorney, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, Cherokee County. I am honored to serve as your District Attorney and excited to share information about the important work that we do.

In 2024, we closed 1,464 Superior Court cases and opened 1,433, achieving an impressive closure rate of 102%. Factoring in Juvenile Court (547 cases) and probation revocations (890 cases), the total number of closed cases reached 2,901. Additionally, each year, we prosecute a handful of cases from other jurisdictions when assigned due to conflicts of interest.

During the year, we presented 38 cases in Superior Court, including both jury and bench trials. Among these were two high-profile murder cases tried back-to-back in October and November, with both sentencing hearings occurring in December. It was an especially busy time for one of our prosecutors, who was assigned to both cases. These trials attracted national media attention, resulting in live-streamed broadcasts and multiple interview requests.

Our dedicated team of 10 victim advocates assisted 4,444 victims of crime, providing essential support as they navigated through the criminal justice system.

Throughout the year, we issued 53 press releases to keep the public informed about significant cases. We also maintained an active website and social media presence and connected with the community through speaking engagements and community outreach efforts.

I would like to take a moment to recognize our employees of the year: Senior Executive Secretary Macy Etris, Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Rachel Hines, and Investigator Justin Vath. Their unwavering dedication, along with the hard work of our entire staff, continues to make a meaningful impact in Cherokee County. A special acknowledgment also goes to our service dog, Parker, who provides much-needed comfort and support to those we serve in the criminal justice system.

– District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway

A LOOK BACK ON 2024

102% Closure Rate

In 2024, the District Attorney’s Office closed 1,464 felony cases. In the same 12 months, the office opened 1,433 cases – for a closure rate of 102%. During the year, five murder cases were closed. Three of the cases went to trial, with two cases receiving national media attention.

38 Superior Court Trials

In 2024, the District Attorney’s Office presented 38 trials to four Superior Court judges, including 34 jury trials and 4 bench trials.

547 Juvenile Court Cases Closed

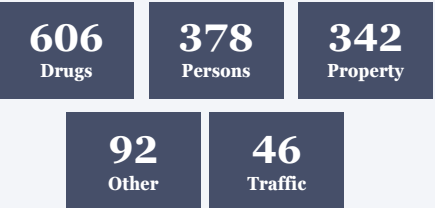
In 2024, the Juvenile Court Unit received 565 new cases and closed 547. Cases involved delinquent acts, traffic offenses, and children in need of services.

4,444 Victims of Crime Served

In 2024, victim advocates provided support and guidance to 4,444 individuals victimized by crime. Approximately 10% of all victims in 2024 were children.



Superior Court Cases Closed



In addition, 890 probation revocations were completed during the year.

5 YEAR TRENDS

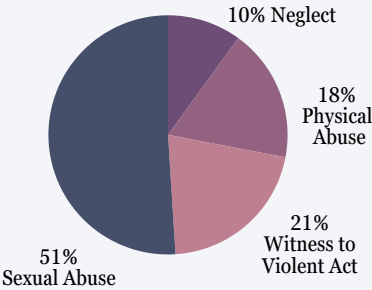
Looking Back Five Years

In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court of Georgia issued multiple statewide judicial emergency orders that suspended all in-person court proceedings. Cherokee County acted swiftly, transitioning to remote hearings to ensure that we were able to continue to resolve cases by plea. By 2024, courts had fully resumed in-person operations and were functioning normally.



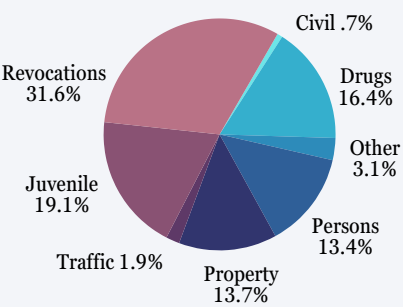
Crimes Against Children

523 Children Served

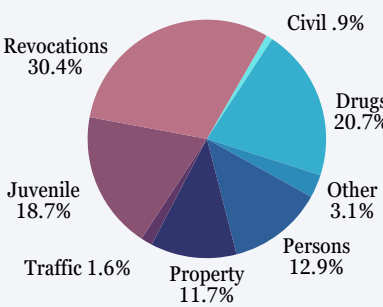


Percentage of Cases Prosecuted by Type

Cases Opened in 2024



Cases Closed in 2024



Origination of Felony Cases

Percentage Breakdown by Law Enforcement Agency

Cherokee Sheriff’s Office - 55.65%	Georgia State Patrol - 1.61%
Woodstock Police - 17.89%	Cherokee Marshal’s Office - .68%
Canton Police - 13.55%	Ball Ground Police - .20%
Holly Springs Police - 6.16%	Reinhardt University Police - .20%
CMANS - 1.86%	Georgia Bureau of Investigation - .15%
CCSD Police - 2.05%	

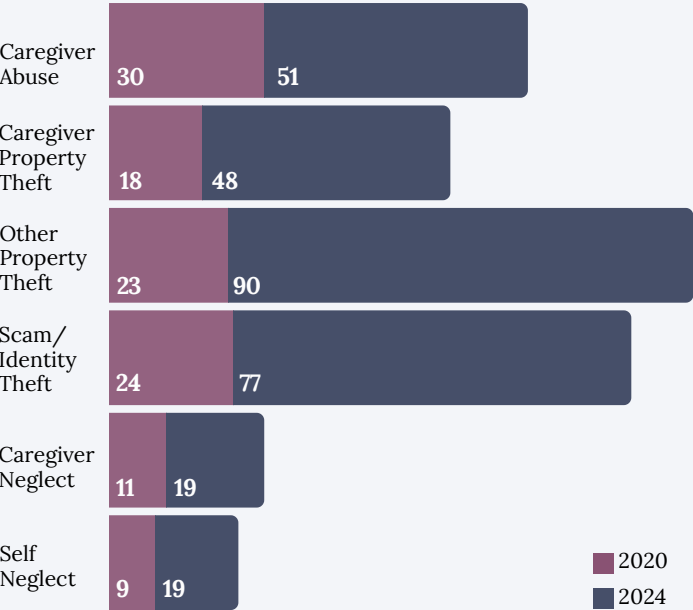
Trials By Month

January - 4	June - 4
February - 2	August - 7
March - 3	September - 2
April - 5	October - 6
May - 1	November - 4

During October and November, back-to-back murder trials took six weeks to complete.

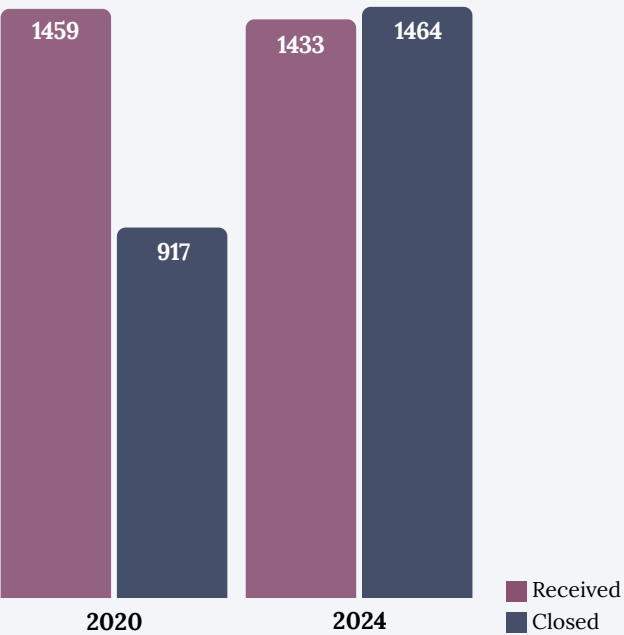
Elder Abuse - 2020 and 2025

Substantiated Claims Compiled by the Cherokee County Elder Abuse MDT



All Felony Cases Closed

2020 & 2024





MAJOR CASES & RESULTS

In 2024, our office closed a substantial number of major cases, including five murder cases and two vehicular homicides. Of the murder cases, three involved jury trials, with two murder cases tried back-to-back at the end of the year taking six weeks in total to complete. See pages 15-19.

GANG/ORGANIZED CRIME UNIT

Cases handled by the Gang/Organized Crime Unit often involve intricate networks, multiple co-defendants, and criminal activities that may necessitate the use of RICO charges. See pages 14-15.

SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

The Special Victims Unit specializes in cases that involve abuse and neglect of children, elders, and other vulnerable adults. In 2024, the Special Victims Unit presented 39.5% of the criminal trials in Cherokee County Superior Court. See pages 12-13.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT

The Domestic Violence Unit handles felony crimes charged under the Family Violence Statute and crimes involving intimate partners. These crimes carry a high risk of lethality. The five murder cases closed in 2024 all involve family members and/or intimate partners. See pages 16-17.

SPECIALTY DIVISION: JUVENILE

The Juvenile Division works exclusively in Juvenile Court, handling cases involving minors who are under the age of 17 at the time of the offense. In 2024, this Division closed 547 cases, half of which involved delinquent acts. See page 18.

SPECIALTY DIVISION: APPELLATE

The Appellate Division is committed to ensuring that convictions and sentences entered after trial are left undisturbed, and that appellate decisions involving our office guide lower courts in a manner that fully promotes the interests of justice. See page 18.

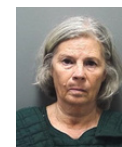
ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

The District Attorney's Office participates in Accountability Court programs and offers a Pre-Trial Diversion Program. See page 19.

Note: Age of defendants listed in case summaries is the age at the time of conviction.

MAJOR CASES

High-Profile Murder Trials



Melody Walker Farris

Life in Prison +5 Years for Murder of Husband

On Dec. 5, Superior Court Judge David Cannon Jr. sentenced Melody Walker Farris, 64, to serve life in prison plus 5 years for the murder of her husband. The trial took place Oct. 2- 30, followed by four days of jury deliberations.

On Nov. 4, the jury found Farris guilty of all charges, including malice murder, felony murder, aggravated assault, concealing the death of another, and making a false statement.

Cherokee Sheriff's Office began investigating this case on July 5, 2018, after human remains were found on a burn pile 100 yards from a home on Purcell Lane in Cherokee County. Gary Wayne Farris, the 58-year-old husband of Melody Farris, was missing at the time of discovery. The remains were later confirmed to be Mr. Farris.

The defendant told detectives that her husband had started the fire in the days prior. She also mentioned that Mr. Farris had medical problems, suggesting a medical emergency or accidental death. Signs of foul play became apparent when law enforcement found a bullet lodged in Mr. Farris' rib cage and

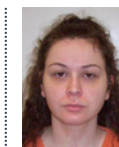
a spent bullet inside the home. Investigators also found blood spots on the home's basement floor and steps.

During the trial, the State called 36 witnesses to testify and introduced more than 1,200 pieces of evidence, including crime scene photos, digital evidence from cell phone extractions, cell phone records, cell phone tower records, Google records, and other digital evidence.

ADA Meaghan Frankish said that throughout the investigation, prosecution, and trial, Melody Farris "tainted and tarnished" her children's relationships and divided the family for her own selfish motives.

"A good man was lost on that day, and a family was forever divided. This horrifying crime will remain with us always. Our hope is that this sentence will bring some measure of peace," said DA Susan K. Treadaway.

ADA Meaghan Frankish and Deputy Chief ADA Geoffrey Fogus prosecuted this case. Cherokee Sheriff's Office investigated the case, with assistance from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, and the Cherokee County Coroner's Office, Marshal's Office, and Fire Department.



Chloe Alexis Driver

Life in Prison for Stabbing Murder of Baby

On Dec. 12, Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea sentenced Chloe Alexis Driver, 24, to serve life in prison for the murder of Hannah Nicole Driver, her 13-month-old baby. The trial took place Nov. 12-19.

On Nov. 20, the jury found Driver guilty but mentally ill of malice murder, felony murder (aggravated assault), felony murder (cruelty to children in first degree), aggravated assault, and cruelty to children in the first degree.

Driver was charged with these crimes after a stabbing that occurred on Dec. 8, 2020, in a home in the Mountain View neighborhood. Shortly after arriving at the home with her companions, Driver stabbed her baby four times with a kitchen knife, then stabbed herself.

During the trial, 21 witnesses testified, with 15 called by the State. In addition, the State presented 135 exhibits as evidence, including 911 recordings, crime scene photos, the murder weapon, and other physical evidence.

The Defense argued that Driver was insane at the time of the crime and could not be held criminally responsible. But the State presented evidence that her actions did not meet the criteria for insanity under Georgia law. A verdict of guilty but mentally ill means that the jury rejected the defendant's insanity defense and found that Driver was criminally responsible for her actions. The Georgia Department of Corrections will address the defendant's mental health needs while she is incarcerated.

The case was investigated by Canton Police Department and prosecuted by Chief ADA Katie Gropper, with the assistance of Deputy Chief ADA Geoffrey Fogus.

Two Murder Trials Generate National Media Coverage



The Melody Farris trial generated national media interest, with trial proceedings livestreamed on several channels. The day after the jury returned its verdict, jury selection began for the Chloe Driver trial. This trial was also highly publicized and livestreamed throughout. A press conference and multiple interviews followed both trials.

MAJOR CASES

Murder Cases Involving Domestic Violence



Kristopher Johnson

Life + 30 Years for Double Murder and Feticide

On Dec. 11, Kristopher Martin Johnson, 34, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea for a double murder and feticide. Superior Court Judge Tony Baker adjudged Johnson guilty but mentally ill and sentenced him to life in prison with the possibility of parole plus 30 years for malice murder (2 counts), feticide, exploitation and intimidation of disabled adult, and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony (2 counts). The Georgia DOC is responsible for addressing Johnson’s mental health needs while he is incarcerated.

On March 23, 2021, Johnson fatally shot his pregnant girlfriend, Carla Marie Payne, 30, and her uncle Thomas Richard “Doodle” Donaldson, 65, at a home the three of them shared on Old Donaldson Road. Johnson then left the home before calling 911.

Canton Police and Cherokee Sheriff’s Office responded to the 911 call and found Payne and Donaldson, deceased, in separate bedrooms. A medical examiner determined that the cause of death was homicide.

Payne had gunshot wounds to her left upper chest, left lateral chest, left lower chest, left arm, and left arm/chest. Her autopsy also determined that she was carrying a male fetus of approximately 30 weeks gestational age. Donaldson had two gunshot wounds to his abdomen and right thigh, which injured the right femoral artery. He also had gunshot wounds to his left arm, left forearm, and right forearm.

This case was investigated by Cherokee Sheriff’s Office with assistance from Canton Police. It was prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit.



Brackus Golden

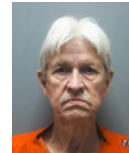
Life in Prison + 20 Years for Murder of Man

On May 9, Brackus James Golden, 26, of Canton, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea to 16 charges related to the murder of Kevin Misidi, 25, and domestic violence charges involving the mother of his child. The next day, Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced Golden to life plus 20 years to serve in prison.

Brackus pled guilty to malice murder, felony murder (2 counts), home invasion, family violence aggravated assault (2 counts), aggravated assault (3 counts), kidnapping with bodily injury, aggravated battery, possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony (2 counts), family violence battery, and cruelty to children in the third degree (2 counts). He also pled guilty to an aggravated assault strangulation charge incurred during a prior assault of the same victim.

On June 5, 2022, Golden arrived at a house where a woman lived with two children. Misidi was there also. When Golden shot at Misidi outside the home, one bullet went through a window and struck a TV. Misidi ran into the house, locking the front door and hiding with the woman and children. Golden broke into the home and forced his way into a locked bedroom where he struck the woman multiple times and beat Misidi until he lost consciousness. He then dragged Misidi by the hair and shot him outside the home. When Cherokee Sheriff’s Office arrived, Misidi was deceased on the sidewalk in front of the home. Golden had fled the scene but was located the following day.

This case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office, with assistance from Canton Police and Marietta Police. It was prosecuted by ADA Kelly Chavis with the assistance of ADA Elizabeth B. Mackey.



Charles Terry Collins

Life in Prison + 5 Years for Murder of Wife

Superior Court Judge Shannon Wallace sentenced Charles Terry Collins, 71, on Feb. 2 to life plus five years in prison for the murder of his wife, Deborah Sherry Collins, 63.

At the conclusion of a six-day jury trial that ended on Jan. 29 with a guilty verdict, Collins was found guilty of malice murder, felony murder, family violence aggravated assault, and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

On July 24, 2023, Cherokee Sheriff’s Office began investigating a shooting at a home off New Light Road. When CSO deputies arrived at the home, they found Collins holding a Smith & Wesson .38 special revolver and his deceased wife lying on the living room floor, with a gunshot wound to the neck and a knife in her right hand.

Collins told detectives that he acted in self-defense after his wife charged him with the knife, but the investigation determined signs of staging. Detectives noticed that the knife was not covered in blood, as were other objects near the victim’s body. Collins also did not render aid or call 911.

During the six-day trial, the State called 15 witnesses to the stand and presented more than 300 exhibits as evidence. The jury deliberated for about three hours before convicting Collins on all charges.

The case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit, with the assistance of ADA Elliot Stone.



Erin Stephon Arms

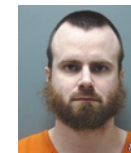
Life Without Parole for Armed Robbery of Store

On Sept. 13, Superior Court Judge David Cannon Jr. sentenced Erin Stephon Arms, 40, of DeKalb County, to life without the possibility of parole. A jury previously found Arms guilty of armed robbery.

On Nov. 22, 2013, Arms entered a jewelry store on Riverstone Parkway, wearing a mask, gloves, and a red sweatshirt. Once inside the store, Arms pointed a handgun at two employees and ordered them to get on the floor. After taking more than \$50,000 worth of jewelry, he drove away in a stolen Ford F-150 truck. He abandoned the truck and discarded clothing, which Canton Police found and collected. The GBI later linked the defendant to the clothing using advanced DNA science.

The State argued that Arms is a recidivist and should receive the maximum sentence. Judge Cannon agreed that life without the possibility of parole was the appropriate sentence, based on the findings of the jury as well as the defendant’s criminal history.

The case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and the Canton Police Department. It was prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Geoffrey L. Fogus and ADA Rebecca Visockis.



Timothy Gregory

20 Years in Prison for 2 Drive-By Shootings

On May 1, Timothy Joseph Gregory, 31, of Cartersville, entered a negotiated guilty plea to aggravated assault (2 counts), criminal damage to property in the first degree, possession of a firearm during a felony, interference with

MAJOR CASES

Gun Violence: Armed Robbery, Drive-By Shooting, Road Rage

government property, and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon (3 counts). He was sentenced to 40 years, with the first 20 years in confinement.

On May 10, 2022, Cherokee Sheriff’s Office responded to a 911 call reporting a drive-by shooting at a Carmichael Farms home. Deputies found five bullet strikes to the house and six bullet casings. No one was injured. Security cameras captured video of a blue Mazda with a concealed license plate. Two days later, shots were fired at the Department of Community Supervision in Canton. Surveillance video showed a vehicle firing at an SUV before fleeing. During the investigation, deputies conducted a search warrant of Gregory’s home, finding an AR-15 pistol, a .45 caliber Ruger pistol, magazines, ammunition, and flare guns.

This case was prosecuted by ADA Kelly Chavis and investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office, with assistance from Canton Police.



Wade McEwen

10 Years in Prison for Road Rage Shooting

On Feb. 15, Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced Wade Anthony McEwen, 63, of Acworth, to 30 years with the first 10 years in prison, followed by probation. A jury found McEwen guilty on Jan. 30, of aggravated battery (2 counts), aggravated assault, possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony (2 counts), terroristic acts, reckless conduct (7 counts), and aggressive driving.

On June 30, 2022, McEwen was involved in a road rage shooting at Woodstock Road and Highway 92. While stopped at a red light, McEwen shot 14 rounds at the driver of a BMW in the lane to his left using a Glock .45 caliber handgun. The BMW driver was

shot in his arm, side, and back, and required emergency medical care and surgery. The trial took place over the course of seven days in January.

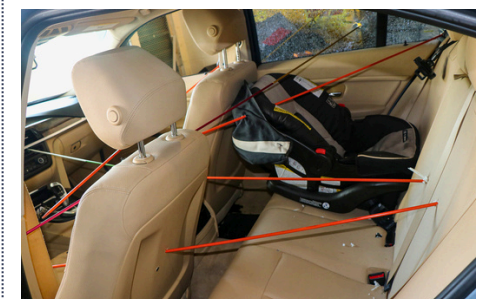
The case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Geoffrey L. Fogus, with the assistance of ADA Elizabeth Mackey.



Erin Stephen Arms: During the armed robbery, Arms pointed a handgun at two store employees and ordered them to the floor.



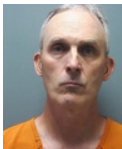
Timothy Joseph Gregory: Days after shooting a Carmichael Farms home, Gregory fired at the Department of Community Supervision in Canton.



Wade Anthony McEwen: Trajectory rods illustrate where bullets fired by McEwen entered the car and injured the driver. No passengers were inside at the time.

MAJOR CASES

Vehicular Homicide



William Abernathy

10 Years in Prison for Deadly Car Crash, DUI

On May 20, William Bryan Abernathy, 52, of Calhoun, entered a negotiated guilty plea for homicide by vehicle in the first degree (6 counts), serious injury by vehicle (6 counts), reckless driving, and driving under the influence (2 counts). He was sentenced to 30 years, with the first 10 years to serve in confinement.

Cherokee Sheriff's Office responded to a four-vehicle crash involving serious injuries at 4 p.m. on Dec. 10, 2022, on Knox Bridge Highway, just east of Field Landing Road in Canton. Abernathy caused the crash after losing control of his 2006 silver Chevrolet Silverado truck.

Earlier that day, Abernathy consumed alcoholic beverages before driving east on Knox Bridge Highway. While traveling 76 mph in a 55-mph zone, Abernathy ran onto the shoulder of the road, overcorrected, lost control of his vehicle, and crashed into the driver's side of a 2023 Hyundai Santa Fe that was headed westbound.

The impact caused the Sante Fe to spin counterclockwise into oncoming traffic, where it overturned and was broadsided by an oncoming 2008 GMC cargo van.

After striking the Santa Fe, Abernathy's truck struck a 2014 Mazda 3 headed westbound. The force of that collision made the truck and Mazda spin clockwise and come to rest in a ditch, facing east, on the westbound lane of the highway.

Witnesses reported that Abernathy had been "flying" down the two-lane highway just prior to the accident, zigzagging and attempting to pass on the shoulder of the road. When interviewed by law enforcement, Abernathy said he did not

know how the accident occurred. After CSO deputies observed the smell of alcohol and balance issues suggesting intoxication, Abernathy admitted to drinking a few beers. When his blood was drawn at 7:53 p.m. and at 9:51 p.m., Abernathy's blood alcohol level was .249 and .212 respectively. The legal limit in Georgia is 0.08.

The driver of the Santa Fe, Albert Vito Pallone, 65, and his wife Camilla Pallone, 69, died of blunt force trauma. The other two drivers survived but had to be extricated from their vehicles and sustained multiple injuries.

This case was prosecuted by ADA Pete Lamb and investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff's Office.



Patrick Thomas

6 Years in Prison for Killing Worker in Crash

On July 24, Senior Superior Court Judge Walter J. Matthews sentenced Patrick Emerson Thomas, 69, of Woodstock, to 15 years, with the first 6 years to serve in prison and the remainder on probation, for homicide by vehicle in the first degree (2 counts), reckless driving, and driving under the influence (less safe, drugs).

Thomas was convicted of these charges following a four-day jury trial that ended with a guilty verdict on June 20. Charges stem from a fatal crash on Nov. 17, 2020, in the Towne Lake area of Woodstock.

That afternoon, Thomas drove his 2018 Ford Mustang through the Eagle Watch subdivision at speeds exceeding the posted speed limit and crashed into Justiniano "Papi" Pirir-Pirir, 59, killing him on impact. Cause of death was massive blunt force traumatic injuries. Pirir-Pirir was part of a landscape crew working at a home on Eagle Watch

Drive. When the crash occurred, Pirir-Pirir was directly behind a large Isuzu landscape truck, which was parked on the right side of the road, with hazard lights flashing. After striking Pirir-Pirir, the Mustang crashed into the truck, pushing it forward and causing the car's airbags to deploy.

Thomas told Cherokee Sheriff's Office detectives that he was unable to see the truck because the sun was in his eyes. However, evidence showed the sun was not a factor and Thomas was traveling at least 13 mph over the speed limit at the time.

Thomas was not injured but showed signs of impairment. He admitted to taking a prescription medication, which is known to cause sleepiness and blurred vision. CSO deputies conducted field sobriety tests on scene, and blood drawn hours after the crash showed the medication was still in his system.

The trial took place from June 17-20, ending with a guilty verdict on all charges. Ten witnesses testified for the State, including law enforcement officers, drug recognition and forensics experts, and eyewitnesses.

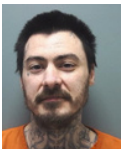
The State also presented more than 100 exhibits, including scene photos and home surveillance video footage showing the crash.

In addition to the defendant's sentence, Judge Matthews ordered 240 hours of community service, evaluation and treatment for substance abuse, no alcohol and illegal drugs, completion of a MADD Impact Panel and Risk Reduction class, and payment of a \$5,000 fine. Thomas must also surrender his license and is forbidden to drive for the duration of his sentence.

The case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff's Office and prosecuted by ADA Pete Lamb, with the assistance of Deputy Chief ADA Geoffrey Fogus.

MAJOR CASES

Drug Trafficking & Aggravated Cruelty to Animals



Dustin Garrett

25 Years in Prison and \$1M Fine for Drug Trafficking

On Sept. 30, just before his case was to go to trial, Dustin Shane Garrett, 32, of Acworth, pled guilty to charges of trafficking methamphetamine and fleeing/attempting to elude a police officer.

Superior Court Judge Jennifer Davis accepted the negotiated guilty plea and sentenced the defendant to serve 25 years in prison and ordered him to pay a \$1 million fine. Garrett was sentenced as a recidivist offender pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 17-10-7(a).



While trying to escape arrest, Dustin Garrett asked residents to help him hide from law enforcement. He possessed more than 1 kilo of meth and approximately 1 kilo of marijuana.

Charges stem from a Cherokee Multi-Agency Narcotics Squad (CMANS) investigation of suspected drug activity occurring at the Shell gas station on Highway 92 in Acworth.

On Jan. 18, 2022, after Garrett left the gas station in a black Honda Civic, a Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputy attempted a traffic stop for failure to

maintain his lane. Instead of pulling over for law enforcement, Garrett accelerated on Highway 92, weaving in and out of traffic, nearly striking multiple vehicles.

Garrett continued driving at a high rate of speed, from Old Alabama Road to Kellogg Creek Road, eventually reaching Arrington Road in Bartow County, where law enforcement lost sight of him.

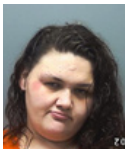
Garrett then abandoned his car on Emerald Trail and tried to escape by running into the woods. Home surveillance cameras and eyewitnesses spotted him running through yards and knocking on front doors. Multiple residents told law enforcement that the defendant offered them money in exchange for hiding him from law enforcement.

One witness told law enforcement that he saw Garrett toss a black duffle bag onto the side of a road. With that witness's assistance, CSO located the black duffle bag, as well as a blue backpack also belonging to Garrett.

The bags, which were found on Jacobs Road, contained more than a kilogram of methamphetamine, in addition to a large amount of marijuana, digital scales, and baggies.

The following day, law enforcement arrested Garrett at a Sunoco gas station in Cartersville. He had in his possession \$11,162 and the Honda Civic keys.

This case was investigated by the Cherokee Multi-Agency Narcotics Squad (CMANS) and the Cherokee Sheriff's Office, with assistance from multiple law enforcement agencies, including Bartow County Sheriff's Office, Bartow County Drug Task Force, Emerson Police Department, and Georgia Bureau of Investigation. The case was prosecuted by ADA Macelyne Williams and Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet.



Amber Kay Higdon

Prison Sentence for Aggravated Cruelty to Animals

On Sept. 12, Amber Kay Higdon, 31, of Canton, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea to seven counts of aggravated cruelty to animals. Superior Court Judge Shannon Wallace sentenced her to 10 years, with two years in confinement followed by probation. Charges stem from an investigation that began on July 27, 2023, when seven dead puppies were found abandoned in a pink plastic tote on Pine Lane near Univeter Road. Earlier that day, Higdon had attempted to surrender the puppies to the



Amber Higdon abandoned seven puppies near the intersection of Pine Lane and Univeter Road, less than a mile away from the Cherokee County Animal Shelter.

Cherokee County Animal Shelter but left after being asked for her driver's license. She then got into a car and abandoned the puppies in a tote on the roadside. The high temperature that day was 95 degrees. The puppies were too small to climb out of the tote and were in direct sunlight before being found six hours later. A necropsy revealed they died from pulmonary edema, hemorrhage, and cardiac arrest. Higdon admitted to leaving them but claimed she thought someone would find and care for them.

"Given the nature of these charges and the pain and suffering this defendant caused these puppies, prison time is justified and sends a clear message that Cherokee County does not tolerate crimes against animals," said DA Susan K. Treadaway.

SPECIAL VICTIMS

Crimes Involving Children, Elders, and Vulnerable Adults

Overview & Focus of the Special Victims Unit

The Special Victims Unit (SVU) is dedicated to prosecuting crimes involving children, elders, and other vulnerable adults. These crimes pose unique challenges due to the dynamics of the victims who may be afraid, embarrassed, or unable to report crimes committed upon them.

In 2024, the Special Victims Unit presented 39.5% of the Cherokee County Superior Court criminal trials.

SVU staff members also actively participate in organizations that monitor and investigate these types of crimes.

Led by the District Attorney’s Office, the Cherokee County Adult Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation MDT helps to protect vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation.

In 2024, this MDT reviewed 549 reports of suspected abuse or neglect of elders or vulnerable adults and determined that 303 of these reports were substantiated allegations.

SVU prosecutors represent the District Attorney’s Office on the Cherokee County Child Fatality Review Board, which reviews injury-related, sleep-related, and unexpected or suspicious deaths in children. In 2024, this Board reviewed six child fatalities.

Another important organization is the Anna Crawford Children’s Center Child Advocacy MDT, which meets to discuss issues related to child abuse.

A total of 568 children were referred to the Anna Crawford Children’s Center in 2024. Most of these children had experienced physical or sexual abuse.



Thomas North
10 Years in Prison for Man Who Stole \$1.35M from Elderly Mother

On Sept. 5, Thomas Glenn North, 64, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea to 37 charges in a case involving neglect, exploitation, and theft of an elderly woman.

Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced the defendant on Sept. 26 to 40 years, with the first 10 years in prison and the balance on probation. He was also ordered to pay back the entire sum he stole from his mother.

During the hearing, North admitted to one count of neglect to a disabled, adult, or elderly person; one count of exploitation and intimidation of disabled, adult, or elderly person; and 35 counts of theft by taking.

The defendant was charged with these crimes following a Woodstock Police investigation that began when a family member discovered that the victim’s bank account had been depleted and her assisted living facility was evicting her due to nonpayment of rent.

North, who was power of attorney for his elderly mother, failed to pay rent to the Woodstock assisted living facility where she lived, causing her eviction. Over the course of three years, North withdrew a total of \$1.35 million from the victim’s bank account and trust fund, leaving her in a position where she could no longer afford to stay at the assisted living facility.

At the plea hearing, the victim’s daughter provided an impact statement via video conferencing. She described her mother’s feelings of betrayal and said that the defendant’s greed has negatively impacted her physical and emotional health.

The State requested a sentence of 40 years with five to serve, plus restitution. The Defense argued for a sentence of 40 years on probation with restitution.

After listing to arguments from the State and the Defense, Judge Baker sentenced the defendant to 40 years with the first 10 years to be served in confinement and the remainder to be served on probation.

Judge Baker also ordered North to pay restitution in the amount of \$1.35 million, at a rate of \$50,000 per year. North is forbidden to have contact with the victim or any member of her family.

“Elder abuse takes many forms, including theft. Sadly, this is often a crime that involves family members,” said DA Susan K. Treadaway. “What is especially shocking about this case is that this defendant brazenly withdrew thousands of dollars on a regular basis until his mother was left penniless and no longer able to support herself. A lifetime of savings was wiped out in three years.”

The case was investigated by the Woodstock Police Department and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Hines, of the Special Victims Unit.

If You Need Assistance

Report suspected child abuse by calling Child Protective Services at 855-422-4453.

Report suspected elder neglect or abuse by calling Adult Protective Services at 866-552-4464.

Report scams to the Federal Trade Commission at 877-382-4357.

Call 911 in case of emergency.

SPECIAL VICTIMS

Crimes Involving Children, Elders, and Vulnerable Adults



Mariano Diego-Tercero
Rapist Sentenced to Life in Prison

On Feb. 9, Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea sentenced Mariano Delfino Diego-Tercero, 35, of Canton, to life in prison with the possibility of parole following his Feb. 2 jury conviction for charges of rape, aggravated assault (2 counts), and criminal attempt to commit rape.

Charges stem from a Canton Police Department investigation that began in November 2022, when a woman reported that she was raped by Diego-Tercero in Canton. The woman said he placed a knife to her neck while forcing himself on her. The defendant was known to the woman and her family.

During the five-day trial, the victim, law enforcement officers, and a sexual assault nurse who is an expert on trauma testified for the State. Additionally, a second woman testified about similar sexual predatory acts committed by the defendant at a different time. The jury deliberated for three hours before finding Diego-Tercero guilty of all charges.

“Statistics show that these types of crimes are severely underreported. It is not easy for an individual victimized in this way to report the crime and testify in a jury trial, telling her story to a courtroom of strangers,” said DA Susan K. Treadaway. “I feel certain that the bravery of this young woman has saved future women from being victimized in this way. Through this jury conviction and sentencing, our community is now safe from a dangerous man.”

The case was investigated by the Canton Police Department and prosecuted by ADA Alana Driscoll, with the assistance of ADA Meaghan Frankish, of the Special Victims Unit.



Bryan Lamar Gay
Life in Prison for Sexual Abuse of a Child

On May 28, Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea ordered Bryan Lamar Gay, 52, to serve a sentence of life in prison. On May 16, a jury convicted Gay of all charges, including: aggravated sexual battery (2 counts), aggravated child molestation (2 counts), and child molestation (3 counts).

On Jan. 25, 2023, a middle school child disclosed sexual abuse. The child and her younger sibling participated in forensic interviews as part of an investigation conducted by Holly Springs Police.

Other family members were also interviewed. Several people in the extended family disclosed disturbing behavior of a sexual nature involving this defendant over the course of many years.

While the charges in this case were based on incidents involving one child in Cherokee County, details of other allegations were presented to the jury through the testimony of witnesses for the State. These details showed the defendant’s extended manipulation and influence over the family.

“During the trial, this defendant testified for hours, deflecting his actions, blaming others, and trying to manipulate the jury. Fortunately, the jury saw through his lies and, instead, believed the heart-wrenching, vulnerable testimony of an innocent child who this man sexually abused,” said DA Susan K. Treadaway.

The case was investigated by the Holly Springs Police Department with assistance from the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office. It was prosecuted by ADA Alana J. Driscoll, of the Special Victims Unit.



Juan Nazario Lopez
Child Rapist to Serve 50 Years in Prison

On May 8, Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea sentenced Juan Nazario Lopez, 53, to 50 years in prison, followed by life on probation.

After a four-day trial that ended on April 26, a Cherokee County jury found Lopez guilty of rape, incest, aggravated child molestation, child molestation, and enticing a child for indecent purposes.

Cherokee Sheriff’s Office began investigating these allegations on April 16, 2023, when a woman reported that her niece was being molested by a family member. Multiple family members were interviewed, and the child and her younger sibling participated in forensic interviews.

During the plea hearing, the State introduced text messages written by the victim that proved how the defendant’s abuse significantly impacted her mental health.

“This young victim suffered immeasurable harm at the hands of a family member. Her courage in disclosing this abuse helped her to rise above this trauma,” said DA Susan K. Treadaway. “Children suffer mental health consequences when they keep dark secrets out of fear of shame or disbelief. We are thankful that this little girl could rely on her aunt to help her when she needed her the most and that a Cherokee County teacher also played a role in supporting her through this trauma.”

The case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by ADA Meaghan Frankish, of the Special Victims Unit.

GANG/ORGANIZED CRIME

Criminal Street Gang & Armed Robbery

Omar Faines, Kristopher Maxey, Nasir Stover, and Courtney Watson

Four Co-Defendants With Ties to the Bloods Are Sentenced to Prison for Armed Robbery



Faines



Maxey



Stover



Watson

On March 8, Omar Sheriff-Tyhear Faines, 20, of Acworth, Kristopher Devon Maxey, 21, of Canton, and Nasir De'shawn Stover, 17, of Holly Springs, entered negotiated guilty pleas to charges of armed robbery (2 counts), aggravated assault (2 counts), possession of a firearm during a commission of a felony (2 counts), and robbery by sudden snatching. They were all sentenced to 20 years, with the first 10 years in prison.

Courtney Anthony Watson, 19, of Acworth, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea on Sept. 20, 2023, to the same charges as well as possession of a firearm by a first-offender probationer.

Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced Watson to 30 years with the first 20 years to serve in confinement and the remainder on probation.

Judge Baker banned all four men from Cherokee County and ordered no contact with each other or with the victims. They are also forbidden to have contact with a member or associate of a criminal street gang.

At the plea hearings, ADA Kelly Chavis presented the facts as follows. On Nov. 3, 2022, at approximately 2:30 a.m., all four co-defendants went to the Waverly Park neighborhood in a silver Nissan Altima. When they arrived in the subdivision, Faines and Stover got out of the car's back seat and began walking through the neighborhood. With Watson in the passenger seat and Maxey driving, the car stopped at a home to

pick up a man and a woman known to Watson. The four then went to a convenience store to buy snacks. Afterward, Maxey drove everyone back to the neighborhood and stopped the car in front of the same home. When the car came to a stop, Faines and Stover, wearing ski masks, ran to the rear passenger doors. They brandished firearms and stole an iPhone 13 and a small switchblade from the male victim.

At this point, the armed men got into the car and drove away. Moments later, they realized that one of their cell phones had been left behind. Watson contacted the female victim and offered to exchange phones. When the men returned, the victims noticed that one of them was wearing a gold-colored Halloween mask on top of his ski mask. Watson snatched the phone from the victim's hands but did not return the stolen cell phone. The victims called 911, and the Cherokee Sheriff's Office responded to begin its investigation.

Minutes later, Holly Springs Police spotted the Nissan Altima in the Barrett Farms subdivision and detained the suspects. Inside the vehicle, law enforcement found a Taurus G2C 9mm handgun, black ski masks, the gold-colored Halloween mask, and the items

the defendants stole from the victims. Further investigation determined that all four co-defendants had ties to the Bloods. Individuals known to Maxey and Watson confirmed that they were associated with the Bloods. Then, while incarcerated in state prison, Watson reached out to Faines on a jail texting device to recruit him into the Bloods subset Sex, Money, Murder. At the plea hearing, Stover admitted that he was "jumped" into the Bloods, specifically the Rollin' 20s, at the age of 13.

"Gang crimes are nearly always violent, which was the case here when these criminals lured two people into a situation for the explicit purpose of robbing them at gunpoint. Thankfully, no one was physically harmed, but this incident is traumatic and unsettling not only to the victims but also for the community," said DA Susan K. Treadaway. "Through this sentence, four known gang members are now serving prison sentences, and have been banned from our county for the protection of our citizens."

This case was prosecuted by ADA Kelly Chavis and investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff's Office, with assistance from Holly Springs Police.



Court exhibits included Instagram photos posted by the defendants (left to right): Nasir Stover holding a gun and throwing a Bloods gang sign. Courtney Watson with a firearm and wearing the same sweatshirt he wore during the armed robbery. Omar Faines before he was recruited into the Bloods subset Sex, Money, Murder.

GANG/ORGANIZED CRIME

Criminal Street Gang & Entering Autos

Kadarius Odims, Trentavious Watkins, Shaquavion Adkins, Damonte Brown

Four Gang Members Plead Guilty to Criminal Activity; RICO Statute Used in Prosecution

Four men pled guilty to entering autos in Canton in 2019 and were sentenced to prison. All four are members of Nine Trey Gangsters Bloods, a subgroup of the Bloods criminal street gang.

Charges stem from criminal activity that occurred on Jan. 24, 2019. Just after 4:15 a.m. that day, Canton Police responded to a report of entering autos on Oconee Way. After a resident witnessed two men breaking into his car and attempted to intervene, one of the men fired shots at him.

Bullet holes were later found in a garage, home, and vehicle, and shell casings in the street. The men entered 19 unlocked vehicles. Damonte Dekeys Brown (aka Domo), 24, of Kennesaw, and Kadarius Keyonte Odims (aka Kato/Kruxial), 23, of Powder Springs, fired the shots. Shaquavion Adkins (aka Red Eye), 28, of Athens, and Trentavious Watkins (aka Epik/Big Homie Epik), 25, of Athens – both of whom hold leadership roles in Nine Trey Gangsters Bloods – were charged for their part in the crimes, which included requiring Odims to pay "dues" to the criminal street gang. Adkins and Watkins committed these crimes via text messages sent from outside of Cherokee County.

"Through strategic use of the Georgia RICO statute, we successfully prosecuted two gang leaders who never even stepped foot in our county. These men used their gang leadership positions to direct criminal activity here and, ultimately, they both pled guilty to their crimes and were sentenced to prison," said DA Susan K. Treadaway.

The indictment for Brown and Odims included 75 charges: violation of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act (2 counts), violation of Street Gang Act (47 counts), aggravated assault, possession of firearm during commission of a felony, entering an automobile (19 counts), criminal damage to property in the first degree (2 counts), financial transaction card theft, unlawful for person employed by or associated with criminal street gang, and theft by taking.

Adkins admitted that he ran a large territory of Nine Trey Gangster Bloods in Georgia. Adkins brought Watkins into the gang, and Watkins asked Adkins for permission to bring Odims into the gang. They both lined up under Adkins. Brown was an associate of Nine Trey Gangster Bloods and had committed several crimes with Odims.

The defendants pled guilty on different dates, with the final plea entered in 2024.

Brown admitted to all 75 charges and entered a non-negotiated guilty plea in 2022. Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced him to 50 years, with the first 12 years to serve in prison.

Odims admitted to the same 75 charges and entered a non-negotiated guilty plea in 2020. Senior Superior Court Judge Jack Partain sentenced him to 30 years, with the first 20 years to serve in prison.

Adkins entered a negotiated guilty plea in 2022, admitting to one count of violation of the Street Gang Act. He was sentenced to 10 years, with the first year to serve in prison. Watkins entered a negotiated guilty plea on April 17, 2024, admitting to one count of violation of Street Gang Act. He was sentenced to 10 years, with the first year to be served in confinement.

All four co-defendants were banned from Cherokee County and ordered to have no contact with the victims, co-defendants, or any known gang members.

This case was investigated by the Canton Police Department and prosecuted by ADA Kelly Chavis, of the Gang and Organized Crime Unit. Investigator Kyle Smith, formerly with Canton Police, headed the investigation for Canton Police and later for the District Attorney's Office.



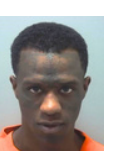
Adkins



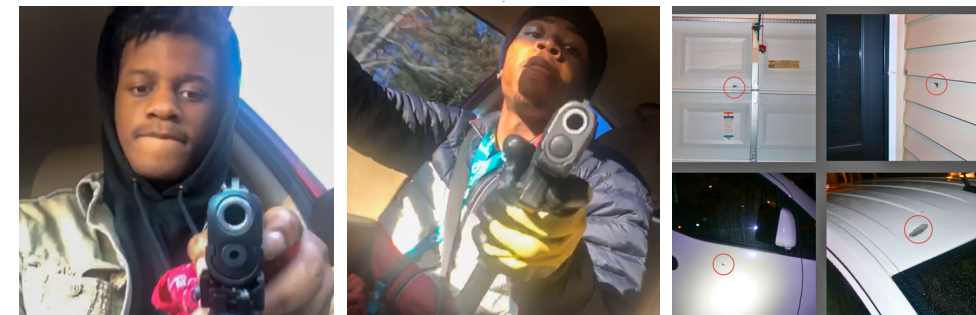
Brown



Odims



Watkins



(left to right) Kadarius Odims holding a firearm wrapped with a red bandana to show allegiance to Nine Trey Gangsters Bloods. Damonte Brown with a firearm, also wearing red to show allegiance. Odims and Brown entered multiple autos in Canton and fired shots at a resident who attempted to intervene. The third photo shows bullet holes in a garage, home, and vehicle.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Crimes Charged Under Family Violence Statute

Overview & Focus of Domestic Violence Unit

The Domestic Violence Unit is responsible for handling felony crimes under the Family Violence Statute and offenses involving intimate partners.

A total of 31% of Superior Court trials presented by the District Attorney’s Office in 2024 involved crimes charged as domestic violence.

Domestic violence cases often involve intimate partners and family members who experience escalating abuse over time. One individual frequently exerts power over the other through physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, economic, or financial means.

People of all ages and backgrounds can be affected by domestic abuse, including senior citizens and young children who witness violent acts.

Prosecuting these cases requires specialized skills and training since domestic violence victims may still love their abusers, even after enduring years of abuse. Emotional attachment can lead victims to forgive or downplay the danger they face. Victims may also retract statements or minimize the abuser’s actions.

The District Attorney’s Office chairs a Domestic Violence Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) comprised of agencies and organizations focused on domestic violence, social services, and criminal justice. This collaborative approach enables prosecutors to build stronger cases, hold offenders accountable, and ensure the safety of victims.

Members of the District Attorney’s Office also participate in the Cherokee County Domestic Violence Task Force, which works to strengthen and sustain coordinated community response to family violence in Cherokee County.



Adam Josef Cromer
12 Years in Prison for Separate DV Incidents

On April 10, Adam Josef Cromer, 32, of Canton, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea to charges related to two separate domestic violence incidents involving two different victims. Charges included family violence aggravated assault (2 counts), false imprisonment (2 counts), family violence battery (2 counts), hindering an emergency telephone call, and criminal trespass. Cromer was sentenced to 35 years, with the first 12 years to serve in prison.

The first domestic violence incident occurred on Aug. 21, 2021, in Woodstock. A woman reported that her on-again, off-again boyfriend fired two shots at her following a dispute. She was not injured but was fearful for her life. During the investigation, Cherokee Sheriff’s Office recovered Cromer’s Ruger 9mm semi-automatic handgun in the front seat of his car, with missing rounds and the odor of burnt gunpowder. Neighbors reported hearing two “pops.” A shell casing was later found in a nearby front yard.

The second incident occurred about two years later while Cromer was out on bond for the prior charges. This incident happened at a nearby home with a different woman.

Late in the evening on June 5, 2023, a verbal argument between Cromer and a woman became physical. Cromer then used his arm to place the woman in a chokehold. She tried to call 911, but Cromer took her phone and threw it out of reach. He strangled her a second time, causing her to nearly lose consciousness. She escaped by going into the bathroom and locking the door, then using her smartwatch to call 911. When Cherokee Sheriff’s Office responded, Cromer had fled the scene.

The victim had red marks on the front and left side of her neck, as well as on her upper back. Her eyes were bloodshot, and her voice was raspy. Cromer was arrested on June 6, 2023, at his Canton home.

At the conclusion of the non-negotiated plea hearing, Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced Cromer to 35 years, with the first 12 years to serve in prison. He was also banned from Cherokee County and forbidden to have contact with either of the victims.

“The violent tendencies of this defendant are deeply concerning. In both incidents, his actions could have had fatal consequences,” said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “This sentence protects our community, brings this defendant to justice, and provides the victims with the opportunity for healing.”

This case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit.

The Cycle of Violence

Domestic violence often follows a dangerous cycle: tension builds, violence occurs, calm returns, and then the tension begins again. Over time, the violent episodes tend to escalate, sometimes ending in a lethal act such as strangulation.

In 2024, every murder case closed by the District Attorney’s Office involved family members or intimate partners. Three of the defendants were charged with domestic violence.

If you or someone you know is impacted by domestic violence, contact the Cherokee Family Violence Center at 770-479-1703. In case of emergency, always call 911.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Crimes Charged Under Family Violence Statute



Bradley McDaniel
Recidivist Offender to Serve 20 Years in Prison

On Jan. 19, 2024, Bradley Scott McDaniel, 36, of Waleska, was sentenced to 30 years plus 60 months, with 20 years to serve in prison. As a recidivist, he must serve all 20 years in prison. After a three-day trial, a jury convicted McDaniel of family violence aggravated assault, false imprisonment, family violence battery (3 counts), cruelty to children in the third degree (2 counts), and simple battery.

Cherokee Sheriff’s Office investigated this case, which began on Feb. 13, 2023. That evening, McDaniel became angry and strangled his girlfriend. When she tried to escape, he grabbed her and forced her back into a camper on his property. After breaking free a second time, she was able to run to a neighbor who called 911.

While interviewing the woman, Cherokee Sheriff’s Office deputies saw visible red marks on her neck and under her chin, as well as older injuries, including a black eye and bruises on her arms. The victim told law enforcement that McDaniel grabbed her by the neck with both his hands and applied pressure. She said she thought she was going to lose consciousness. She said he held her against her will and an infant was present during the incident.

When deputies went to McDaniel’s residence to investigate, he had fled the property. McDaniel was also charged with two counts of influencing a witness after he tried to bribe the victim to change her testimony. He pled guilty to those charges at the hearing on Jan. 19.

This case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit.



Morris McCoy
Recidivist Offender to Serve 10 Years in Prison

A Canton man convicted of family violence aggravated assault and cruelty to children in the third degree (2 counts) was sentenced on Feb. 23, to serve the next 10 years in prison. A jury convicted Morris Michael McCoy, 45, of these crimes on Feb. 15, following a one-day trial.

Charges stem from a strangulation in the Walmart parking lot on Riverstone Parkway, Canton, on April 30, 2023. Canton Police Department began investigating after a witness reported that a man was strangling a woman outside a parked black SUV.

The police investigation determined that while shopping with McCoy and two children, the victim discovered that the defendant had drained their joint checking account.

The two began to argue verbally and the argument eventually became physical to the point that McCoy strangled the woman against their car as two children watched.

A total of eight witnesses testified during the trial, including law enforcement officers and an expert in domestic violence, who described the cycle of abuse common in these relationships.

Superior Court Judge Shannon Wallace sentenced the defendant to 20 years, with the first 10 years in prison. As a recidivist offender, he must serve all 10 years in prison. He is also forbidden to have any contact with the victims.

This case was investigated by the Canton Police Department and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit.



Glenn Trojanek
15 Years in Prison for Family Violence

On March 15, 2024, Glenn Erik James Trojanek, 38, of Canton, entered a negotiated guilty plea to family violence aggravated assault, family violence aggravated battery, false imprisonment, family violence battery, cruelty to children in the third degree, criminal trespass, obstruction of an officer, and terroristic threats. Trojanek was sentenced to 40 years, with the first 15 years to be served in confinement.

Charges stem from a family violence incident that occurred on July 29, 2023. On that date, Canton Police officers were dispatched to an apartment complex for an unknown trouble call. When officers arrived, they found a severely injured woman and her children in the apartment.

Cherokee County Fire & Emergency Services treated the victim on scene and took her to the hospital, where she was diagnosed with a broken tailbone. She required multiple stitches for deep abrasions on her head and face. She later told officers that the abuse began when Trojanek grabbed her by the neck and began punching her in the face. During the assault, he strangled, kicked, and stomped her, in addition to pulling her by the hair.

This case was investigated by the Canton Police Department and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit.

SPECIALTY DIVISIONS

Handling Juvenile and Appellate Courts

Juvenile Division

Juvenile Court handles cases involving minors who are under the age of 17 at the time of the offense. The Juvenile Division in the District Attorney’s Office works closely with Juvenile Court, schools, law enforcement agencies, and other organizations.

All proceedings are kept confidential to protect the child’s privacy, encourage rehabilitation, avoid harmful publicity, and enable the court to focus on the unique circumstances of each juvenile. Juvenile offenses are classified as delinquent acts, children in need of services (CHINS), or traffic offenses.

The State of Georgia imposes specific legal timelines to ensure that juvenile cases are processed within a certain period. For example, juvenile delinquent and CHINS offenses must be dismissed or petitioned within 30 days of the complaint being filed.

Prosecutors in this unit are experienced in a wide range of offenses, including sexual crimes, electronic crimes, drug offenses, and gang-related crimes.

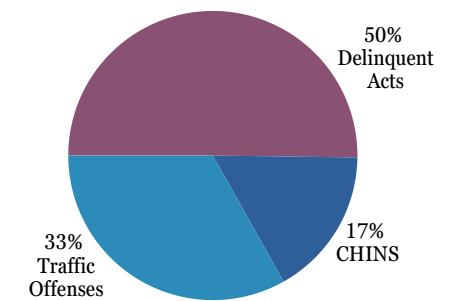
Most cases are adjudicated guilty after the child admits to the facts. The court then orders an appropriate disposition. Depending on the charges, the disposition might include probation, counseling, community service, or placement in a juvenile detention center. The primary aim of the juvenile justice system is rehabilitation. The resolution of cases often depends on community-based services and behavioral health evaluations to identify the most appropriate interventions.

A Juvenile Drug Treatment Program provides comprehensive response to young people in need of substance abuse treatment and behavioral interventions. In the five years since this program has been established, 101 juveniles have participated, including 16 in 2024.

In recent years, prosecutors in this division have seen an increased number of these offenses among juveniles: DUIs, high-speed traffic cases (30+ mph over the speed limit), sexual offenses, aggravated assaults, entering autos, systemic THC use, family violence battery, and simple battery. Another concern is a growing number of teens with serious mental health issues.

In 2024, the Juvenile Division received 565 cases and closed 547. Half of those cases involved delinquent acts, 33% were traffic offenses, and the remainder were CHINS.

Juvenile Cases by Type in 2024



When juvenile cases are not resolved by admission, the case goes to trial before one of two Juvenile Court judges. In total, six cases went to trial in 2024.

The trials involved the following charges: (1) family violence simple battery, (2) aggravated child molestation (which was transferred to Juvenile Court over the State’s objection), (3) serious injury by motor vehicle and reckless driving, (4) aggravated assault, (5) financial transaction fraud, and (6) sexual battery and child molestation.

During the year, two Juvenile Court cases were transferred to Superior Court for prosecution due to the severity of the charges.

Appellate Division

The primary goals of this division are to ensure that convictions and sentences entered after trial are left undisturbed, while ensuring that appellate decisions involving our office guide the lower courts in a manner fully promoting the interests of justice.

In 2024, the Appellate Division concluded 23 appellate cases. Of these, 17 resulted in judgments in the State’s favor, four had no impact on overall results, and two favored the defendant.

The appellate process typically begins when a defendant dissatisfied with a trial court’s decision submits a notice of appeal in the trial court. The most common appeal is from a conviction and sentence filed after a superior court’s denial of a motion for new trial. Occasionally, if the court rules against the State, our office may appeal that adverse decision to the extent that the law allows.

After reviewing trial transcripts, motions, rulings, and the parties’ briefs, the reviewing court assesses whether the appealing party has identified a legal error sufficient to warrant disturbing the trial court’s decision. After appellate review, the higher court issues a decision affirming, reversing, or vacating the trial court’s decision.

Decisions by the Court of Appeals of Georgia may be subject to further review by certiorari to the Supreme Court of Georgia. No defendant aggrieved by an affirmance by the Court of Appeals successfully petitioned for certiorari to the Supreme Court in 2024.

Appellate courts provide an opportunity to review and clarify legal issues. Georgia’s appellate courts also provide a layer of oversight, ensuring fairness, consistency, and the proper application of the law.

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

Accountability Courts and Pre-Trial Diversion

Accountability Courts

The District Attorney’s Office participates in Accountability Court programs that provide selected defendants with the opportunity to receive treatment for addictions and/or mental health, with the goal of addressing issues that may be leading to criminal activity.

During the year, 37 felony offenders were accepted and 14 graduated from Drug Accountability Court, 12 felony offenders were accepted and 9 graduated from Treatment Accountability Court, and 8 felony offenders were accepted and 8 graduated from Veterans Treatment Court.

Graduations are held throughout the year to honor those who successfully complete these programs.

Pre-Trial Diversion Program

A Pre-Trial Diversion Program offers rehabilitation for offenders who meet specific requirements to participate in the program. Eligible low-risk, non-violent offenders are presented with an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system.

By statute, individuals may participate as long as their offense does not require a mandatory minimum sentence of incarceration or imprisonment that cannot be suspended, probated, or deferred. Policies and procedures established by the District Attorney determine which of these cases are admitted.

Since August 2017, a total of 707 individuals have participated in the Pre-Trial Diversion program, with 125 people entering in 2024. In total, the program has generated \$279,750 in administrative fees, which are paid to the Cherokee County General Fund, including \$46,170 in 2024.

Highlights of TAC Program’s Formal Graduation Ceremony

On May 2, DA Susan K. Treadaway, other elected officials, law enforcement, courthouse personnel, treatment providers, and family and friends attended a graduation ceremony for four individuals who successfully completed the Cherokee County Treatment Accountability Court (TAC) program.

Established in December 2015, TAC helps defendants suffering from mental health issues that contribute to criminal behavior. TAC serves both felony and misdemeanor offenders.

The TAC team is comprised of a presiding judge, coordinator, case manager, and representatives from the District Attorney’s Office, Assistant Solicitor-General’s Office, Defense Bar, Cherokee Probation Service, Georgia Department of Community Supervision, treatment providers, and law enforcement. These individuals meet regularly to discuss the progress of program participants.

“Accountability courts change lives,” said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “By offering this alternative to carefully selected offenders, we are helping people address underlying issues so that they can become healthy and productive members of society.”

The multi-disciplinary approach of this program provides hands-on assistance to participants based on their unique struggles. At a minimum, the program takes 18 months to complete. The length of the program is determined by

individual progress, and participants do not graduate until the team believes they are ready.

During the ceremony, TAC Presiding Judge Shannon Wallace introduced the graduates, who provided a testimony of their journey. One graduate said she’s suffered mental health and addiction issues throughout her life. She said this program taught her how to make the right decisions and be accountable.

“I do not know where I’d be today if it had not been for Treatment Accountability Court. I was very lost. It seemed like maybe I’d always been lost. They helped me find my way,” she said, adding that she would likely still be “lost and broken and probably not living had it not been for this program.”

During his closing remarks, Probate Court Judge Keith Wood, who established the program, congratulated the graduates for putting in the work to make a positive change. He encouraged them to continue to prosper, to remember the tools they have learned, and to serve as an example for others.





OUR MISSION & IMPACT

MISSION TO SERVE

Our mission is to seek justice, act with integrity, and work with partner agencies to protect citizens of Cherokee County and State of Georgia. We accomplish this by prosecuting felony crimes committed within the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, Cherokee County, Georgia.

In addition to prosecuting criminal cases, we take on leadership roles in county and state organizations, offer training to law enforcement and other partner agencies, engage with community groups, and educate the public about important issues and our work through outreach, press releases, social media, and our website. At the core of our mission is a commitment to service, which is evident in the dedication our staff shows to supporting the community through outreach and service projects.

We are also committed to enhancing the skills and knowledge of our team to ensure that they remain highly trained, qualified, and equipped to maintain the level of professionalism our county expects.

OUR STAFF

By the end of 2024, the office was comprised of 71 staff members, specifically: 27 prosecuting attorneys, 21 investigators, 10 victim advocates, 8 senior secretaries, an office manager, intelligence analyst, terminal agency coordinator, diversion coordinator, and public information officer.

The attorneys prosecute felony crimes committed within the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, as well as conflict of interest cases assigned by the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia. Investigators, all of whom are POST-certified law enforcement officers, work closely with prosecutors at every stage of the criminal justice process.

Victim advocates play a crucial role in ensuring that victims are informed, present, and heard, and that the Georgia Crime Victim's Bill of Rights is upheld. They provide vital support and information to victims of crime.

Parker, our service dog, offers comfort and emotional support to crime victims, staff members, law enforcement partners, courthouse personnel, and anyone else he encounters as he moves through the Justice Center.

OFFICE NEWS

Highlights and Accolades

DA Susan K. Treadaway Sworn in to New Term

District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway took her oath of office in December during a swearing-in ceremony officiated by Judge Keith Wood.



DA Treadaway was elected to her first full term in office after running unopposed. Attending the ceremony were representatives of the District Attorney's Office as well as Cherokee County Sheriff Frank Reynolds and members of the Cherokee Sheriff's Office.

"I am deeply grateful for the trust and support that Cherokee County has placed in me. With four more years in office as District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, I will remain steadfast in my commitment to keep Cherokee safe," said DA Treadaway.

Senate Bill 335; a Cherokee County Connection

In May, Gov. Brian Kemp signed Senate Bill 335, the "Safeguarding Adopted Children from Sexual Violence Act." This bill was introduced by Sen. John Albers, who serves as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Safety. The measure was brought forth by District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway.

DA Treadaway testified before the Senate Committee on Judiciary in support of this bill, which provides that sexual intercourse or sodomy between certain family members related by adoption be regarded as incest. Incest was already illegal under Georgia law, and this legislation now includes adoptive families. In addition, DA Treadaway attended Gov. Kemp's signing of Senate Bill 472, the "Combating Organized Retail Crime Act," also introduced by Sen. Albers.

"It is a priority of my office to eradicate all forms of organized crime in Cherokee County, and we are proud to work with retailers and law enforcement to identify and prosecute these offenders to the full extent of the law," said DA Treadaway. "I would also like to thank Sen. Albers for introducing both pieces of legislation. We appreciate his partnership and efforts to ensure success in the prosecution of these types of crimes."

Employees of Year Named



In December, District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway recognized employees of the year. Honored were Investigator of the Year Justin Vath, Prosecutor of the Year Rachel Hines, and Team Member of the Year Macy Etris.

GA Board of Public Safety



Gov. Brian P. Kemp appointed District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway to the Georgia Board of Public Safety. State officials and representatives from law enforcement and the District Attorney's Office attended the swearing-in ceremony.

Canton Optimist Club and Canton Moose Lodge Recognize Staff Members with Awards



Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Hines was honored by the Canton Optimist Club.



ADA Elizabeth Mackey was recognized by the Canton Moose Lodge.



Victim Advocate Jasel Villanueva was honored by the Canton Optimist Club.

TRAINING

Ongoing Professional Development for Our Staff

Benefits of Professional Development and Training

Investing in employee education benefits everyone. It enhances skills, boosts morale, and ensures that our office provides exceptional service.

Skilled professionals are also often invited to present at conferences and speak at local, state, national, and even international events – shining a positive light on Cherokee County.

Some of the training staff members attended in 2024 included:

- Analytical Investigative Techniques
- Child Exploitation
- Child Forensic Interviews
- Child Victim Investigations
- Computer Forensic Training
- Crimes Against Women
- Crimes Against Children
- Crisis Negotiation Training
- Evidence Control Recorder EDR Research and Training
- Family Violence Investigations
- Gang & Organized Crime Training
- Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police
- GA Government Communicators
- GROC Symposium and Meetings
- Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, and the Cycle of Violence
- National District Attorneys Association
- National Law Enforcement Training on Child Exploitation
- National Organization of Victim Advocacy
- NDAC/FBI Training on Internet Investigations and Intelligence
- Prosecuting Homicides Conference
- Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia conferences
- Secret Service Investigation
- Service Dog Training
- Sex Crimes Investigation
- Stalking Investigations
- Traffic Safety/Lethal Weapon
- Victim Assistance Academy

Prosecuting Attorneys' Council Summer Conference



The annual summer conference hosted by the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia featured sessions on case law, legislative updates, human trafficking, RICO, organized retail crime, gang crime, domestic violence, and other topics. Sixteen staff members attended the conference, and DA Treadaway, Chief ADA Katie Gropper, and Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet delivered presentations.

POST-Certified Training for Investigators



Investigators with the District Attorney's Office receive mandated in-service training and conference training throughout the year. In 2024, our 21 POST-certified investigators each received approximately 40 hours of training, which is twice the state requirement of 20 hours. Investigator training included 416 hours of conference training and 420 hours of mandated in-service training.

National Organization for Victim Advocacy



In August, three victim advocates attended the 50th annual National Organization for Victim Advocacy conference. More than 2,200 people attended the five-day event, which included presentations on special needs in victim assistance, the importance of bilingual and bicultural professionals, victim advocacy ethics, transforming trauma, responses to domestic violence, and many other topics.

19th Annual Conference on Crimes Against Women



Members of the Domestic Violence Unit attended the 19th annual Conference on Crimes Against Women. Sessions included: identifying signs of domestic abuse, trauma-informed responses to domestic violence and sexual assault, recognition of and response to stalking and strangulation, preventing and responding to vicarious trauma and burnout, and collaboration in responding to crimes against women.

TRAINING

Professional Development for Local and State Partners

Specialized Training for Cherokee County Agencies



The District Attorney's Office delivered a presentation in July to local law enforcement partners including deputy marshals, animal control officers, and Cherokee County Animal Shelter staff. Training featured an explanation of Georgia animal cruelty laws as well as best practices for search warrants, custodial interviews, and evidence collection. Collaboration with these agencies ensures effective investigation and prosecution of animal crimes.

Basic Litigation Training for New Prosecutors



In April, DA Susan K. Treadaway served as an expert faculty member at the Basic Litigation Course offered to new prosecutors by the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia. During this course, faculty members help students to hone their trial skills. DA Treadaway also presented a lecture to the group entitled, "The Art of Presentation and Argument: How to Make Your Point in Court."

Georgia Gang Investigators Association Conference



The Gang and Organized Crime Unit delivered a four-hour presentation to more than 100 investigators and prosecutors at the Georgia Gang Investigators Association summer conference. The presentation illustrated best practices for the prosecution of complex gang cases and provided examples from cases prosecuted by our office. Presenters included Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet, ADA Kelly Chavis, and ADA Megan Hertel.

Gang Training Provided to GBI Academy



In November, Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet, who heads the Gang and Organized Crime Unit, traveled to the Georgia Public Safety Training Center to conduct a three-hour training session for the GBI Academy. The presentation focused on criminal street gangs, specifically O.C.G.A. statutes, case law, collection of evidence, and application of evidence to the law.

Investigation & Prosecution of Strangulation Cases



The Domestic Violence Unit held training in October on strangulation signs and symptoms, trauma-informed interviewing, documentation of strangulation cases, and changes in law in Georgia. Speakers included Rep. Mandy Ballinger, Coordinator of Georgia Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Sarah Pederson, Coordinator of Georgia Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Task Force Jay Eisner, and Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe.

Presentation Delivered to School Safety Personnel



The Atlanta Area Council for Boy Scouts of America hosted special training in July for school safety personnel as part of the organization's Youth Protection program. Dozens of school police officers from metro Atlanta participated in the training. Chief ADA Katie Gropper and GBI Special Agent in Charge Jeremy Dockins co-presented a session titled "Vicarious Trauma – Caring for the Caregiver."

TRAINING

Organized Retail Crime Training Offered to Partners

Georgia Retailers Organized Crime Alliance Conference



In August, DA Susan K. Treadaway and Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet delivered a general session presentation to attendees of the 14th annual Georgia Retailers Organized Crime Alliance conference. During the presentation, DA Treadaway shared her passion and vision for the future of organized retail crime (ORC) prosecution. Deputy Chief ADA Overstreet spoke about the importance of specialized ORC training.

Collaborative Training With State Partners



In November, Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet, Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr's Organized Retail Crime Unit, and the Georgia Retailers Organized Crime Alliance joined with other partners for training on how to successfully investigate and prosecute organized retail crime.

Organized Retail Crime Training at PAC Conference



At the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia summer conference, DA Susan K. Treadaway and Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet presented on organized retail crime. Chad McManus of the Georgia Retailers Organized Crime Alliance assisted. In a separate session, Chief ADA Katie Gropper and Executive Director of the Sex Offender Review Board Tracy Alvord presented on sex offender risk review.

3-Part Organized Retail Crime Training Module Presented to Retailers and Law Enforcement at Roger D. Garrison Law Enforcement Training Center



In September, the Gang and Organized Crime Unit provided training at the Roger D. Garrison Law Enforcement Training Center, as part of the Georgia Retailers Organized Crime (GROC) Alliance monthly intel meeting.

The Gang and Organized Crime Unit specializes in the prosecution of criminal networks that target retailers for the purpose of committing large-scale theft for resale.



During the training, DA Susan K. Treadaway and Sheriff Frank Reynolds addressed the audience, which included both retailers and law enforcement officers.

Deputy Chief ADA Damion Overstreet and ADA Rachel Murphy delivered a three-part organized retail crime training module that included a comprehensive, strategy-driven approach to effective prosecution of these crimes.



"We were pleased to offer this cutting-edge training to Georgia retailers and law enforcement officers who investigate these crimes," said DA Treadaway. "GROC understands the importance of training and collaboration, and this training was an opportunity to share information, equip partners with the tools they need to fight this crime, and build relationships to ensure successful prosecution of organized retail crime."

OUTREACH

Community Outreach and Service

Annual Senior Extravaganza



In October, the District Attorney's Office participated in the annual Senior Extravaganza, which is hosted by Cherokee Triad S.A.L.T. Council. This event provided our office with the opportunity to connect with older adults and discuss the important work we do. We also shared information on elder abuse, as well as how to avoid becoming a victim to scams.

Cherokee Triad S.A.L.T. Council was established in 2006 to bring together law enforcement agencies and organizations that provide services for senior citizens. The Council works to identify and develop educational programs to address the needs and concerns of local seniors.

Staff Members Engage with Cherokee Silver Roamers



In February, DA Susan K. Treadaway and Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Hines presented to more than 150 members of the Cherokee County Silver Roamers.

Woodstock Public Safety Academies Educate the Community



Woodstock Teen Public Safety Academy: In June, Woodstock-area teens participated in a presentation by DA Susan K. Treadaway, followed by a mock jury trial and tours of the Historic Courthouse and Cherokee County Justice Center.



Woodstock Citizens' Public Safety Academy: In October, DA Treadaway participated in the annual Woodstock Citizens' Public Safety Academy. Participants acquired knowledge of the criminal justice process, the role of our office, current crime trends, and significant cases from the past year.

District Attorney's Office Delivers Presentation on Common Scams and Fraud at Soleil Laurel Canyon



Members of our office spoke to residents of Soleil Laurel Canyon in Canton in July. DA Susan K. Treadaway and Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Hines discussed common scams, fraud, elder abuse, and other crimes that often affect older adults. Parker, our service dog, also attended the event.

OUTREACH

Community Outreach and Service

Domestic Violence Vigil Honors Survivors



On October 15, our community gathered at The Mill on Etowah for a meaningful candlelight vigil to remember those we've lost to domestic violence and honor the resilience of survivors.

Hosted by the Cherokee County Domestic Violence Task Force, the evening brought together community members, public safety officials, first responders, prosecution units, and advocates.

DA Susan K. Treadaway provided opening remarks, and Meg Rogers, executive director of Cherokee Family Violence Center, delivered the keynote address. Other speakers included CSO Chief Deputy Tommy Pinyan and Solicitor-General Todd Hayes.

Leaders from public safety and first responder agencies read aloud the names of victims and bystanders who lost their lives to domestic violence in Georgia last year. As their names were spoken, we held candles and shared a moment of silence to honor them.

Throughout the vigil, yellow silhouettes of men, women, and children stood as a stark reminder of lives lost right here in Cherokee County.

We also had the privilege of hearing inspiring stories from two survivors and recognizing those who have made a difference in assisting individuals affected by domestic violence.

Touch a Truck Brings the Community Together



Members of the District Attorney's Office in September participated in the annual Touch-A-Truck event at Cherokee Veterans Park, where we had the opportunity to talk to hundreds of local residents. Service Dog Parker especially enjoyed interacting with Cherokee County families.

National Night Out Features Education and Awareness



In October, Cherokee County residents gathered in downtown Woodstock to celebrate National Night Out, which was hosted by Woodstock Police Department. This annual tradition strengthens the bond between law enforcement and the community.

Members of the District Attorney's Office once again participated in the event, which offered a great opportunity to connect with public safety and first responder agencies, in addition to the citizens of Cherokee County.

Sequoyah Students Learn about Criminal Justice



ADA Ashley Snow stopped by Sequoyah High School in September to speak to students about careers in the criminal justice system. The presentation focused on how the District Attorney's Office works with young people affected by crime.

Presentation at Creekland Middle School Career Fair



DA Susan K. Treadaway spoke with eighth graders at Creekland Middle School at an October career fair. The students got an inside look at what a career in prosecution entails and had the opportunity to meet Service Dog Parker.

The Cherokee Chamber of Commerce organizes this event every year for middle schools in the Cherokee County School District. Local professionals from a variety of occupations speak to students to provide a glimpse at future career paths.

OUTREACH

Community Outreach and Service

Service Dog Parker: Bringing Comfort and Support to Individuals Affected by Crime

About a year ago, Service Dog Parker joined our office to provide comfort and support to victims of crime. Parker has a unique ability to help people navigate emotion and stress, providing a sense of calm in a way that only he can.

Whether in Superior Court or Juvenile Court, Parker and his handler, Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, from the Domestic Violence Unit, are readily available to offer support. While victims and witnesses await hearings or trials, Parker becomes a trusted companion, often engaging in a game of catch or simply offering a comforting presence. His gentle nature provides a much-needed distraction.

Recently, a child, who was deeply traumatized by the crimes committed against him, struggled to speak about his experience. After meeting Parker, the child's demeanor shifted, and he found the courage to share his story. With Parker sitting behind him while he testified, a weight was lifted from the child's shoulders. As the child walked out of the courtroom, he patted Parker in gratitude.

We've witnessed firsthand how Parker can ease the distress of both children and adults who arrive at our office in tears. Parker's presence brings a sense of calm, offering comfort when it's needed the most.

Parker's impact goes beyond providing companionship. He is trained to recognize and respond to distress. When individuals experience panic attacks, Parker instinctively alerts and grounds them, helping them to regain a sense of control.

During a particularly emotional hearing, Parker gently moved from one family member to the next, offering a solid lean to provide support, and alerting to those who were especially anxious.



In addition to his work within the Justice Center, Parker serves an important role in community outreach. He engages children and adults at community events, bringing smiles and laughter wherever he travels. His presence draws people in and encourages conversation with our staff.

When the occasion warrants it, Parker can often be seen wearing accessories to celebrate. Whether he's sporting a

birthday hat, eclipse glasses, a shirt for domestic violence awareness, or a holiday costume, Parker remains the consummate professional.

Parker's role in our office is far more than "just" a service dog. He is a constant source of comfort, strength, and healing. In a place where difficult and often painful stories are shared, Parker reminds us that moments of peace and kindness are still possible.

Beyond the Courthouse: Community Service

Throughout the year, staff members engage in service projects and donation drives. These initiatives not only foster teamwork and boost morale but also support the community and strengthen connections with local organizations and partners in the criminal justice system. Here are some of our 2024 projects: a coat drive for Cherokee Children's Haven, a summer food drive for MUST Ministries, a school supply drive for Cherokee Family Violence Center, and a Christmas gift drive for the Malon D. Mimms Boys & Girls Club.



*The Office of the District Attorney is committed to seeking justice,
acting with integrity, and working with our partner agencies
to protect the citizens of Cherokee County
and the State of Georgia.*