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Preacher found guilty of stealing from church



Defender program launched

Cases moving through system in 'timely fashion'

BY RONNIE MOORE
STAFF WRITER

One of the desired results behind the creation of the Georgia Public Defender program for indigent defendants is already being realized, local officials said.

"Without a doubt, the program will move cases and defendants through the system in a more timely fashion," Catoosa County Sheriff Phil Summers said. "Attorneys from that office

are visiting the jail daily, and we are seeing an improvement because of their efforts."



David Dunn

The Look-out Mountain Judicial Circuit's chief public defender, David Dunn, said he is pleased with how his staff has adapted to unforeseen issues in starting a new program.

He has offices in each of the circuit's four counties — Catoosa, Walker, Dade and Chattooga — and the public defender program officially began Jan. 1.

Sheriff Summers said he has already seen the defenders make a difference in the release of suspects from jail, by the setting of bonds, more timely pleas and the setting of trial dates.

Mr. Dunn said under the old court appointment system of defense attorneys for indigent inmates, forms had to be filled



Public defender Shawn Bible talks with an inmate as Catoosa County Sheriff's Department officer Julia Fairchild watches through a door Monday at the Catoosa County Jail.

STAFF PHOTO BY TIM BARBER

out, and the process could easily take a week before a defendant was assigned an attorney.

He said he is pleased with the high degree of cooperation his people have received from the district attorney and the sheriff's departments in the circuit.

Mr. Dunn said a major headache in launching the new program was dealing with the bureaucracy of a state agency.

He said the past seven months of selecting personnel and gaining budget approval and office space from four separate counties has been "a learning process."

As the chief public defender, Mr. Dunn, a former assistant district attorney, moved from being the only attorney in a private practice to running an office with 14 employees spread across four

counties.

"My folks have performed tremendously in working to create a new office and, with some new individuals straight out of law school, simultaneously learning to be a lawyer," he said.

Mr. Dunn said he is convinced defendants are receiving better representation than before under the old appointment system.

"The program is too new to make any claims, but I have little doubt we will cut into the court caseload over a period of time," he said.

Defenders in the Ringgold office are attorneys Michael Brush and Shawn Bible.

The pair have set a routine of regular morning visits to indigent suspects recently arrested and housed at the Catoosa Coun-

ty Jail.

"We are gradually building up case files of clients as those arrested since Jan. 1 and found to be indigent are being assigned to us," Mr. Bible said.

He said the sheriff's department in Catoosa County provides space for the public defenders to meet and advise those who have been arrested.

"I thought I might like to be a prosecutor, but Mr. Dunn convinced me to come to this office," Mr. Bible said. "I'm from Ringgold. I think I made the right decision."

Mr. Brush, a defense attorney before joining the office in January, said he enjoys the work and "wants to make a difference."

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