

January 2011: From The Beat To The Bench Collections

The Clerk's office of the Vermilion Municipal Court attempts to collect all fine and costs in a timely manner. When the defendant is unable to pay the full amount due at the time of sentencing we normally offer a payment plan that has at least a minimum payment of \$50.00 per month. The Court then schedules a review hearing every 30 days thereafter to monitor payments. If the defendant fails to uphold the terms of his payment plan he is placed into collections and his driver license will be forfeited for non-payment.

The Court understands the financial burdens that fine and costs have upon the defendant and their families. However, it is the responsibility of the defendant to appear at all fine and cost review hearings and to make regular monthly payments. When a defendant fails to make regular payments or appear for hearings the court will forward the case to a collection service. This results in additional collection fees being assessed against the defendant.

Prior to computers and the ability to forfeit a driver license or block a registration it was very difficult to collect from defendants unwilling to pay. The Court does not forgive any balance owed simply because of the age of the case. The money is due and must be paid. The Vermilion Municipal Court has entered into a contract with Capital Recovery Systems, Inc. for the past two years for collection services. There is no cost to the court. All collection fees are paid by the defendant. The Court has forwarded unpaid fine and costs due to the court from cases as old as 1987. Capital Recovery has collected for the court \$104,233.79 in fines and costs to date.

Last year, the Court collected over \$1,018,000.00 in fine, costs, judgments and filing fees. As mentioned in an earlier article, the money received through the Clerk's office is disbursed monthly to the many agencies in the counties of Erie and Lorain, State of Ohio as well as the City of Vermilion. The City of Vermilion is also reimbursed for a portion of the salary and medical insurance premiums for the position of Clerk of Court and Judge. A portion of the salaries for the bailiff, visiting judges and prosecutor are also reimbursed to the City. The Finance Director of the City of Vermilion is responsible for seeking reimbursement from Erie County and Lorain County. Since 2004, the City has been reimbursed over \$263,000.00.

The Vermilion Municipal Court has forwarded all delinquent cases to Capital Recovery Systems for 2010. Capital Recovery, in turn, has mailed a "government refund, government obligation" letter out on January 2, 2011 to those persons submitted by this court.

To avoid the additional charge for the collection service, which is 30% of the balance due, a defendant, must pay all fine and costs by the agreed date listed on the fee agreement. In addition if the license is forfeited the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles requires a release form from the court along with a reinstatement fee before the blocks are released.

Anyone can view their case at www.vermilionmunicipalcourt.org or contact the court by phone at 440 204-2430. Capital Recovery can be reached at 1-800-693-6835.

Once again, in order to avoid a license suspension and all of the additional costs assessed for failing to pay the fine and costs a defendant must make timely payments.

The Court is utilizing our special project funds to pay the costs associated for office equipment, computer supplies and maintenance, building maintenance, legal books, vehicle maintenance, training and education. These funds are paid by those who pay filing fees on civil cases and court costs on traffic and criminal cases. These funds can only be used upon a court order signed by Judge.

We continue to work within the budget provided to us. By using the special project funds we are able to pay for items that would normally come out of the general fund.