

TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Dennis Watkins, Prosecuting Attorney

Repeat violent offender newsletter

UPDATE: Oct. 14, 2026

Commemoration luncheon marks 40 years of Trumbull's CHILD ASSAULT PROSECUTION UNIT 1986-2026

A celebration luncheon was held Thursday, Oct. 8, 2026, at the Café 422 in Warren to mark the forty years of work of the Trumbull County Prosecutor Office's Child Assault Prosecution Unit.



Prosecutor Watkins and CSB Executive Director Marilyn Pape spoke to the luncheon crowd about the CAP team accomplishments over 40 years.

Some 75 people attended, with most having contact with the unit over the decades.

Trumbull County Children Services Executive

Director Marilyn Pape and Prosecuting Attorney

Dennis Watkins honored the work of past and current social workers, professionals, prosecutors, police and victims of crime “who did their jobs and duty to bring justice, sunshine and good outcomes to many in our community.”

“The CAP team exists for children and families through your compassion and expertise,” Pape told the luncheon audience. “Thank you for showing up, speaking up and never giving up.”

Special guest at the event was past Children Services Executive Director Craig H. Neuman and his wife who came in from their Virginia home for the celebration luncheon. It was Neuman, who along with Prosecutor Watkins in 1986 had applied



Honored at the luncheon included past and present Children Services directors Marsha Tiger, left, Marilyn Pape and Craig Neuman, right, shown with Prosecutor Watkins.

for and received one of only six national grants that enabled the creation of the unit.

In fact, it was Neuman who called Watkins and made him aware of the grant.

Remembering how the CAP unit got started, Neuman talked about the

“chilly” reception nationally in the legal world of the idea of combining compassion and considering the rights of the child victims.

“What a contrast did we have in our county! We had good outcomes and we have a right to be proud of our work,” Neuman said.

Watkins singled out the work of Robert Kubiak who helped secure the \$105,000 Department of Justice grant by writing a concept paper envisioning the Child Assault Unit.

Assistant Prosecutor Gabriel Wildman, present chief of the Child Assault Division of the Prosecutor's Office, said he figures there are about 70 serious cases of sexual



abuses of children he prosecutes per year.

“Over the 40 years, those figures show that we have helped thousands and thousands of children

in crisis,” Wildman said.

Assistant Prosecutor Gabe Wildman, photo at left, is the current chief of the Child Assault Division of the Prosecutor's Office in Trumbull County. In photo at right, CSP rep Darlene Shope chats with Prosecutor investigator Roy Anne Malak and Michael Burnett, Chief of the Criminal Division of the Prosecutor's Office

Special-made plaques commemorating the 40th anniversary were presented to Neuman, Watkins plus former and present CAP members, investigator Roy Anne Malak, former Child Assault Division chief Diane Barber, and Children Services representatives Darlene Shope and David Watts. Also recognized was the first director of the Child Assault Unit, attorney Carol Sopkovich, current Trumbull County Common Pleas Court Magistrate, who was in attendance.

In presenting Neuman's award plaque, Prosecutor Watkins praised the past director for having a son (same name Craig H. Neuman) who is a highly decorated pilot of fixed-wing aircraft who was recently promoted to Colonel in the U.S. Air Force.

The keynote speaker at the luncheon was Jennifer Gorsuch, a victim of a vicious sexual abuse at age 7 who remained vigilant in keeping her abuser David Lockney serving a life sentence behind bars by testifying for Prosecutor Watkins at a full board parole hearing in Columbus in 2002. Lockney was one of the first abusers convicted by the Child Assault Prosecutor Unit in July 1987.

This was the first time that Jennifer Gorsuch recounted in public her experience as a child abuse victim. Her often-tearful address was met with a standing ovation from the luncheon attendees.

“My story began with something terrible, but that’s not where it has ended,” Jennifer

Gorsuch recounted how the CAP unit helped her find faith in the legal process, which led to a new family, friendships and a purpose in life.

She had special words of thanks for Prosecutor Watkins, “who stood up for me when I couldn’t.”

“Thank you for saving me, standing up for me and believing in me. You fought for justice for me when I couldn’t. I want to thank Children Services for standing up for me too. They helped find me love and protection through my adoptive parents.”



Child assault victim Jennifer Gorsuch courageously and emotionally details her story of child sexual abuse and recovery helped by the efforts of the CAP team.

Gorsuch also had words of encouragement to present CAP members.

“The child you help truly may not remember every name. At the age of 7, I didn’t know the names of those protecting me when I couldn’t protect myself. What you do does matter. It mattered for me.”

Pape, in making a special presentation to Watkins, offered a special salute to Watkins for his long-term, vigorous pursuit of justice. She noted his persistence in the longtime pursuit of justice for homicide victim Karl Hoerig, who was murdered by his wife who had escaped to Brazil to avoid prosecution. She was finally brought to justice 11 years later and is now in prison.



After the luncheon, former Summit County assistant prosecutor Philip Bogdanoff presented a talk about child assault predators.

“He wrote to three presidents, pleaded with the Justice and State Departments and would talk to anyone in an effort to get justice for those victims,” Pape said.

The Trumbull County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday, Oct. 7, issued a special proclamation congratulating the Children Services Board and the Prosecutor’s Office on 40 successful years of their joint Child Assault Unit.



During the luncheon, Prosecutor Watkins shares a moment with former CSB representatives Darlene Shope and Dave Watts. At right, former Common Pleas Judge W. Wyatt McKay greets First Assistant Christopher Becker prior to the luncheon.

After the luncheon, a special presentation was given by former prosecutor, Attorney Philip Bogdanoff, who gave an

instructive lecture titled “Reporting Sexual Predators, Fumbling a Duty to Protect Victims of Sexual Abuse.” Bogdanoff, a former Summit County assistant prosecutor, talked about the nationally noted cases of sex abuses who used power and celebrity to escape prosecution, including the abuse cases against singer Michael Jackson and Dr. Larry Nassar, an osteopathic sports medicine physician for USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University who sexually assaulted at least 265 young athletes under the guise of medical treatment.

During the program, Watkins recited the story of the beginning of the Child Assault Prosecution unit:

In 1986, members of the legal profession faced a dilemma when dealing with child assault victims. Some mental health professionals had suggested a victim’s court



Current CAP director Melanie Deluca, left, shares a moment with a former CAP head Marilyn Shope.

appearance could be more hurtful than the abuse itself. In recognizing this problem, the Prosecutor's Office and Children Services presented a concept that focused on effective prosecution of the growing number of child sexual

abuse cases while at the same time not further traumatizing the children involved.

The plan included training for prosecutors and other professionals who deal with sexual abuse, an investigation protocol which set forth an appropriate role for each agency involved and policies and criteria to assist prosecutors in determining whether or not to pursue an abuse case.

The first Child Assault Prosecution Unit included attorneys Sopkovich, division chief, and Pat Spencer, assisted by investigator Sue Steindurf.



Former CAP unit chief Diane Barber addresses the luncheon group after she was presented with a plaque recognizing her more than 20 years of service.

Also recognized were past chiefs of the Child Assault Unit that included the late Thomas Wrenn and former Assistant Prosecutor Diane Barber, now a prosecutor in Warren Municipal Court.

Commemorative anniversary pens were given to the first CAP division chief Carol Sopkovich, retired investigator/police officer Mark Massucci and retired senior Common Pleas Judge W. Wyatt McKay for his service and fairness toward sexual assault victims including one child rapist who is still in prison serving the longest sentence in county history. Also receiving pens were Jennifer Gorsuch and two other sexual abuse victims in attendance, Charlotte and Tina, who testified in February 2026 before a full parole board in State vs. Paul Czoka, leading it to reverse itself in keeping a child predator in prison. Others were honored who contributed to the success of the unit which has prosecuted cases of child sexual abuse, child pornography and cyber sexual abuse in the county.

More photographs of the event appear on the following pages.

For more information, contact Guy M. Vogrin, investigator/public information officer for the Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office at 330-675-2485.

More photos from the 40th anniversary commemoration luncheon



