

Howard retiring as Stark County Family Court judge

Monday

Posted Dec 19, 2016 at 10:45 PM

Stark County Family Court Judge Michael Howard is ending a long career in juvenile justice and domestic relations.

By Ed BalintRepository staff writer

CANTON Stark County Family Court Judge Michael L. Howard is bidding farewell to a career that began in the juvenile justice and domestic relations system in the 1970s.

Elected as a judge in 2004, the 65-year-old Howard is completing his final term in the position. A retirement reception was held in his honor Monday night.

The ability to intervene early in a juvenile case is what attracted him to the profession, Howard said Monday. "I recognized that I really had a passion for trying to help kids," he reflected.

"Everybody who works (in juvenile court) takes this very seriously," Howard added. "All the judges and magistrates agonize over the decisions they have to make a lot of times. There's no really good alternative; it's deciding which is the least bad alternative for kids and there's always trade-offs, and it's very seldom clear-cut."

Howard said he has learned that prenatal care, a stable home life and an early emphasis on education are critical for children.

In 2004, Howard was elected as judge in Family Court, which includes divorce, child custody, abuse, neglect and juvenile delinquency cases.

He first worked for the court from 1974 to 1979 as an intake officer and law clerk for Judge W. Don Reader. Of Reader, Howard said he learned, "There's always two sides to things."

Howard moved to Seattle where he worked as a certified public accountant and tax manager. He volunteered as a guardian ad litem for abused and neglected children before returning to Stark County in 1991 to resume working in Family Court. Howard served as a magistrate and then was appointed chief magistrate.

Howard is a graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University; he received his law degree from the University of Akron.

The outgoing judge said he plans to stay involved in the community, including serving as an officer for the United Way of Greater Stark County and on the board of directors for the Stark Education Partnership. The North Canton resident also plans to travel and spend time outdoors, including hiking.

Other interests include playing clarinet in the Kent State Stark University Concert Band.

Reach Ed at 330-580-8315

and **ed.balint@cantonrep.com**

On Twitter: **@ebalintREP**

