

DA's office honors late 'Skip' Ebert

NAOMI CREASON
The Sentinel

The Cumberland County District Attorney's Office this week issued a statement regarding the recent death of former DA and county judge Merle "Skip" Ebert.

Ebert, a graduate of Dickinson School of Law, began his career first as a public defender in Cumberland County before going into private practice and then into prosecution, first in Dauphin County and later in Cumberland County.

He was the Cumberland County district attorney from 1995 to 2005, when he resigned to spend 12 years as a county judge.

He would later return to the DA's office in 2018, appointed to fill the seat's vacancy upon the departure of Dave Freed. He retired a few years later in 2021 after winning re-election to the county row office.

The DA's office this week said there were a number of improvements under Ebert, including the use of investigative grand juries at the

county level, the creation of the county's Central Booking Center and the creation of the DA's forensic laboratory.

Ebert also started the county's Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition program, and then as judge he began the county's first drug treatment court, with a focus on reducing recidivism through supervision and treatment over punishment.

"As both district attorney and judge, Skip Ebert left an indelible mark on

the criminal justice system in Cumberland County," the district attorney's office said. "Not one to simply accept the status quo, Skip was always at the forefront of innovative changes.

"At the Cumberland County District Attorney's Office, we strive every day to fill Skip's larger-than-life shoes and to follow his lead to find ways to improve the criminal justice system and keep the citizens of Cumberland County safe and secure," the statement reads.



Cumberland County District Attorney Skip Ebert speaks during the Victims' Rights Rally in Carlisle in April 2021.

SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Woman turns dream into reality with hair salon

RACHEL ANDREOLI
For The Sentinel

Cumberland County has no shortage of residents with unique talents and independent spirits.

From artists to mechanics, office workers to outdoor professionals, these entrepreneurs showcase the best of what businesses in the county have to offer.

Every week, The Sentinel's Small Business Spotlight will feature these people and share their stories.

Discover your local connection through this series that focuses on small business owners in your own backyard and highlights the services they provide for their community.

Edina Mesic

Business Name: Sunshine Salon

Years in business: 7 years

Location: 900 Cavalry Road, Carlisle

Contact: 717-462-4789

Q: Why did you want



Sunshine Salon owner Edina Mesic, left, colors the hair of Lizzy Dum, 17, of Mechanicsburg, at the North Middleton Township business.

to start this kind of business?

A: It was always my dream to have a hair salon. And to make people look and feel beautiful.

Q: How did you get your start?

A: Truthfully my mom was the one that gave me that little push. I've always talked about it since I was a kid. And I worked hard — saved all my money and tips. It was all I've ever dreamed of. With my fam-

ily and my husband and his family, I definitely had the best support system.

Q: What does your business sell or provide?

A: Hair services (cut, coloring, styling, eyebrow



Sunshine Salon Owner Edina Mesic, left, and hairstylist Esteban Santiago show off Mesic's product line at the North Middleton Township business.

waxing and hair products). I also have my own Dina hair line. Shampoo, conditioner, leave-in conditioner, face oil. For the men, too, with beard oil.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you are facing right now?

A: Finding full-time stylists, and dealing with the loss of stylists and customers.

Q: What is your favorite thing to do or place

in Cumberland County?

A: Other than spending time at the shop and the boys I like to check out other businesses in the downtown. I don't really get a chance to do it as much right now, but I enjoy the time I get with my boys (3-year-old and a 2-year-old).

Rachel Andreoli is the owner of Love Where You Live LLC.

Grant

From A1

Now ninth graders, the trio has closed the middle school chapter of their lives, but the work they began there is still going strong.

Food drive

Their project began with a food drive to stock the Dawg Shawp, a middle school classroom stocked with free clothes, hygiene products and, now, food for students to take as needed.

"We thought we would take it to the next step and add in the food aspect of it, because we know that ... they offer meals for the high school students, but there was nothing really happening for the middle school students," Ava said.

The seventh graders posted flyers around the school to advertise the drive and began gathering donations. While organizing the food drive, the girls also be-

gan writing for an Explore Act Tell grant.

"It was definitely something new that we had no idea anything about it before we started this project," Sophia said.

Over the summer, they learned they'd won the \$1,000 grant, and, despite already clinching the A on their seventh grade project, they regrouped in eighth grade to map out how to spend the funds.

Grant funding

It was the middle school student council that shaped the direction of the project from there; the organization was conducting its own food drive for Big Spring families over Thanksgiving break.

"That's how we sprouted the idea of doing a winter giveaway, because obviously they have something for Thanksgiving, but winter break is also a much bigger break," Sophia said.

Whigham contributed

additional funding she won through a contest toward the initiative, and the girls opened a form for families to sign up for meals.

At first, they were hoping for 10 families. Instead, they got 35, totaling 175 people.

With a \$3,000 budget, the students set their sights on planning six healthy, affordable meals per family for the winter break, accounting for food allergies, number of family members and preferences.

"That part was really hard because it took a lot of math and critical thinking to figure out for each family, since we did personalize it to each family," Eve said.

Last December, the girls joined Whigham (on her birthday) for an after-school shopping excursion.

Packing the meals meant missing almost a full day of classes. Then came the after-school distribution.

"I do remember most of the families that came in

to pick up their meals were like, almost surprised, in a way, because I don't think that they were expecting to see [us]," Eve said. "I think they were expecting to see a room full of like, 30-year-old adults."

Round two

With the distribution behind them and positive feedback rolling in, the three regrouped and set their sights on securing a second round of funding.

"Since we actually had something to show them, it was also a lot easier this time," Eve said.

With one grant-writing process behind them, the students applied for Explore Act Tell grant number two, securing another \$1,000, though the verdict is out on how to spend it.

"I think what I'm trying to encourage them to think about is now, especially there at the high school ... not that it can't be a middle school-focused project,

but we're trying to find a way to address the need in a bigger picture," Whigham said.

As planning continues, the freshmen have no intention of stopping the work any time soon.

"We came so far already," Ava said. "Why stop?"

Some highlighted the possibility of transforming the effort into a middle school club, adding that the three of them could be mentors, teaching the next group of students how to apply for grants and organize similar distributions.

They're also discussing fundraising initiatives to increase the impact.

Despite the workload both in and out of class, the three agree that the effort is worthwhile.

"It was hard getting out of classes and making up work and all that stuff," Sophia said. "But I think it truly was really worth it, and it was really rewarding."

Aside from interdis-

ciplinary skills learned through the project, like English in grant writing and math in price calculations, Eve said she has gained empathy and gratitude through the experience.

"I feel things on a deeper level now, because I have seen things and we've been able to help people that are in need," she said.

The way Ava puts it, seventh graders are usually more worried about friends and video games than trying to make a difference.

"I think we should be proud of ourselves," she said.

As an educator, Whigham certainly is.

"They're pretty awesome kids," she said.

Maddie Seiler is a news reporter for The Sentinel and cumberlandlink.com covering Carlisle and Newville. You can contact her at mseiler@cumberlandlink.com and follow her on Twitter at: @byMaddieSei

Housing

From A1

of 246 households, including 411 people, waiting for housing services. Of these, 123 households or 50% are unsheltered, Shewell said, adding that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development does not define couch surfing or staying in a hotel as homeless.

Mellen pointed to ALICE families, an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.

"It's really ... households that are employed," she said. "They're earning more than the federal poverty level, but they're not earning enough to cover [a] basic household budget to afford the basic cost of liv-

ing where they are."

According to 2022 data, 37% of Cumberland County households fell below the ALICE threshold, and 57% of Carlisle households qualified as ALICE families, Mellen said.

Challenges

One factor that could contribute to housing needs is population growth.

Mellen said Carlisle saw an 11.1% population increase between 2020 and July of 2023, accounting for an additional 2,226 people. Cumberland County also ranks among the fastest growing counties in the state, recently losing a first place position to northeastern Pike County.

Another challenge: funding.

"With homelessness,

there is not enough money," Kuna said. "There's not enough federal money out there, there really isn't, and the truth is, it's very difficult to use."

Aside from homelessness, she said renters and homeowners also face difficulties, from limited land and inventory to regulatory hurdles.

"It's very difficult for those people who are HUD section eight or low income to move to that next step, because those landlords are requiring more and more," Shewell said.

Many require income three or four times the monthly rent, specific credit scores and no prior evictions.

Stoner pointed to extreme competition, rising construction costs and lagging

wage growth as other hurdles.

"The cost is outpacing our ability to afford new housing," he said. "So the challenge is not for the weak at heart. Clearly, we have an uphill battle for housing today."

Solutions

However, panelists also brought solutions to the table.

Kuna said the Housing and Redevelopment Authorities of Cumberland County is engaging with developers, contractors and landlords to help ease regulatory fears.

Another option could be zoning changes. Mellen, who is also a member of the Carlisle Borough Council, said the borough's Land Use Reform Subcommittee

is working on recommendations that could allow accessory dwelling units to function as apartments.

Shewell highlighted several Safe Harbour projects that could add dozens of housing units.

Harbour Village is wrapping up construction in neighboring South Middleton Township, with move-in to begin later this year. The development will feature 40 housing units designed for those who make varying percentages of Carlisle's area median income, including units designed for people with physical or mental disabilities.

Shewell said applications for the units opened in August and the organization received more than 400 applications by the

end of October.

In downtown Carlisle, work is ongoing on Harbour House, an East High Street building that will be converted into three affordable housing units. Also on the horizon is the renovation of Carlisle Opportunity Homes, which has 27 single-family homes transitioning to Safe Harbour ownership.

"It's a great start, but it's not the end of it," Shewell said. "It's just the beginning, and we intend to add a lot more."

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