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Local news and sports for Wyandot County

Justice French visits Upper Sandusky



Ohio Supreme Court Justice Judith French (from left) tours the Wyandot County Courthouse on Wednesday afternoon, along with Wyandot County Prosecutor Jonathan Miller and Sheriff Mike Hetzel. French stopped in Upper Sandusky as part of her tour of all 88 Ohio counties. She said she hopes to return to the area in the future to visit schools.

Ohio Supreme Court Justice Judith French visited Upper Sandusky on Wednesday afternoon, when she ate lunch at a downtown restaurant and met with local attorneys before touring the Wyandot County Courthouse with Sheriff Mike Hetzel and Prosecuting Attorney Jonathan Miller.

“It’s great to visit local businesses and meet local business people, the local lawyers and public officials to really find out who lives here, what they do and what kind of education they have so you get a good cross section of the community,” French said.

“... I always learn something about every community, so that’s what I’m doing for as much time as I can offer myself to do that.”

French said she plans to visit all 88 Ohio counties and learn as much as she can about the Buckeye State. Wyandot is the 64th county she has visited since her appointment in January.

“I think the more I know about Ohio and the people who live in Ohio, the better justice I will be, the better able to understand the cases that come in front of me,” she said.

“I also think it’s my obligation as a public official to be a resource to the people and you have to get out of Columbus in order to really do that. I’ll definitely visit all 88 (Ohio counties) and when I finish the first round of 88, then I’ll start again,” French added.

French was in awe of the historic 100-year-old Wyandot County Courthouse. She toured the third-floor courtroom and got a look inside the attic, an area that is closed to the public.

“I love the history of it. I love sitting in the original chairs. I love the feeling of the wood,” she said. “... I feel the history of it of over 100 years. When you think of the history of it and how much our society has changed, wouldn’t they be surprised that there are four women on the (Ohio) Supreme Court, including a chief justice? That shows how much we have changed and grown.”

French rounds out a slate of seven justices, including Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor and Justices Paul Pfeifer, Terrence O’Donnell, Judith Lanzinger, Sharon Kennedy and William O’Neill.

French said she started the day with visits to several Crawford County businesses before stopping in Upper Sandusky and moving on to Marion. Today, the justice said she will be in eastern Ohio's Coshocton and Guernsey counties.

"There are lawyers and public officials all over Ohio and I just want to meet as many of those as I can," she said.

French said she hopes to return to Wyandot County in the future to visit local schools.

"I feel very passionately about civic education and really hope to be back in the area not too long from now and be able to talk to high school and middle school students about the Supreme Court and be the civic education lesson in person," she said. "I think it's really important for them to understand who we are and this is what a Supreme Court justice looks like."

French said she grew up in Sebring, a small town in Mahoning County, where she worked her first job at McDonald's. She received her undergraduate, master's and law degrees at The Ohio State University.

According to the Supreme Court of Ohio's website, Gov. John Kasich appointed French to the state's highest court on Jan. 1. Prior to that, French served in the 10th District Court of Appeals. She also served as chief legal counsel to former Ohio Gov. Bob Taft and assistant attorney general and chief counsel in the office of former Ohio Attorney General Betty Montgomery.

"These are not positions of privilege and if I can send that message to students who aren't even sure they are going to go to college and talk to them about what opportunities might be available, then that's a great part of my job," French said.

"... If they are studying social studies or government, then I can be a resource to them. ... I think it's important to add Supreme Court justice to that list of people that kids can relate to and that they think they can be one day."

By CHANDA NEELY City editor