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## Summit County Clerk of Courts Tavia Galonski discusses her agenda

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When she was 16, Tavia Galonski was introduced to her uncle, the late U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Randolph Baxter, and it set her on a path to public service.

At the time, he was an attorney, but he was seated as a bankruptcy judge in the Northern District of Ohio soon after they met.

"I did not realize we had lawyers in our family until then," she said. "I think I wanted to be a lawyer from that moment on.

"My uncle and I were very close," Galonski said. "He encouraged me to go to law school in Akron as he had done. He was very proud of me and urged me to go as far as I could."

And that's exactly what Galonski has done, serving as an attorney, magistrate and most recently as a legislator in the Ohio House of Representatives where she was assistant minority whip.

Now she has begun a new chapter in her career as Summit County clerk of courts after being appointed by the Summit County Democratic Party Central Committee to fill the remainder of former clerk Sandra Kurt's term, which ends Jan. 5, 2025.

Kurt was elected clerk of the Akron Municipal Court last November.

"I have always been interested in civil rules and the minutia of the law," said Galonski, whose first day on the job was Jan. 11. "As a legislator, I had the opportunity to hone these skills so when this position became available it seemed like a really good fit for me."

Born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Galonski obtained her bachelor's degree in psychology from Emory University in Atlanta where she became employed as a Delta Airlines flight attendant, a position she continued to hold while enrolled at The University of Akron School of Law.

After earning her juris doctorate from Akron Law in 1995, Galonski started as a staff attorney at Community Legal Aid in Akron, focusing on divorce, dissolution and custody cases.

Galonski then served as a judicial attorney and part-time magistrate at Summit County Domestic Relations Court.

When Summit County Juvenile Court Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio took the bench in 2003 she hired Galonski as a full-time magistrate.

"Tavia has been a dedicated public servant throughout her legal career," said Judge Teodosio. "She worked to better the lives of families and children in Summit County while a magistrate at the juvenile court. I know she will work hard to continue to serve the community in her new role."

Galonski was initially appointed to the Ohio House of Representatives in 2017 to fill the remainder of former State Rep. Greta Johnson's term in the 35th District.

She was elected the following year and won two additional terms after that.

When Galonski resigned to take her current position as clerk of courts, she was representing Ohio's 33rd District.

During her time in the legislature, she was the ranking member of the Civil Justice Committee and was elected by the Ohio House Democratic Caucus as assistant minority whip in 2021.

Galonski lives in Akron with her husband Chief Assistant Summit County Prosecutor John Galonski and has two adult children and a grandson. She is a member of the Ohio State Bar Association and Akron Canton Barristers and is the vice president of Black Elected Officials of Summit County. While she has left the legislature, Galonski continues to serve on the General Assembly's Women's Suffrage Commission.

Galonski is running for a full term as clerk of courts in the November election.

She has already made a few changes including one designed to bring more transparency to the clerk's office.

"First of all, I would like to say that Sandra Kurt was an excellent leader and left me an office that runs very smoothly," said Galonski.

"One thing I did notice was that there was sometimes a long lag time between when a civil action or indictment was electronically filed and when it appeared on the docket," said Galonski. "We have been able to change this so that now most items will be posted to the court's docket within 24 hours.

"The quicker turnaround time helps everyone, especially the public since the information is available sooner and any parties involved can take whatever steps are needed."

Galonski also partnered with U.S. Rep. Emilia Sykes to hold a passport fair on March 2 in Northfield Village as part of her effort to raise awareness about the document's importance.

"A passport is an excellent form of ID that is rarely challenged by anyone," said Galonski. "It can also mark the beginning of an individual's preparation to take the trip of a lifetime.

"Many people don't realize we have a passport bureau at the clerk's title offices," said Galonski. "We want to encourage people to take advantage of the opportunity to make an appointment to fill out the paperwork to get a passport or renew the one that they have."

During the fair, there were agents on hand to answer questions about passports and applications from both Sykes' office and the clerk's Northfield title office.

In addition, a Naloxbox containing two doses of Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, will be installed in the lobby of the clerk's office.

Naloxone rapidly reverses an opioid overdose caused by prescription drugs, heroin or fentanyl.

Galonski requested the box after learning about a recent initiative led by County Executive Ilene Shapiro that seeks to install Naloxboxes throughout county buildings.

The effort is the result of a partnership between county officials and Summit County Public Health's Project DAWN, which provides overdose prevention training and education to the community, including how to administer Naloxone.

"When I was a magistrate in juvenile court, I learned about the lifesaving benefits of

Naloxone," said Galonski. "I took the Project DAWN training and since then I have had a box of Naloxone on my desk and I carry it with me in my purse.

"Given the ongoing opioid epidemic, it's important to be prepared," she said. "Naloxone is safe and easy to use and it saves lives. Having it available in the clerk's office is just a part of good customer service."

With the clerk's Fairlawn title office slated for permanent closure at the end of the year, Galonski is currently assessing potential locations around the county to open a new office.

"Fairlawn had one of the most expensive leases and was not well used," said Galonski. "We want to find a more viable option in a location that is convenient for the public."

Summit County Chief Deputy Clerk Anthony Gomez said Galonski is passionate about making the office work well for everyone who utilizes it.

"Clerk Galonski brings a new perspective to the clerk's office as an attorney and former magistrate," said Gomez. "No other clerk in modern history has been a lawyer.

"She is wonderful to work for and leads with kindness and compassion," said Gomez. "Her collaborative leadership is already producing positive results."

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