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Court justice lauds local staff

By ROBERT BRYAN

Thursday, March 8, 2007 10:10 PM EST

In his State of the Judiciary address to Gov. Mitch Daniels and the Indiana General Assembly, the state's supreme court justice, Randall T. Shepard, lauded Wabash County court personnel for learning a smattering of Spanish.

In that speech, in fact, Shepard alluded to an incident in the Wabash Circuit Court, as reported in the Oct. 13, 2006, issue of The Plain Dealer.

Shepard had occasion in his report to note that, across the state, almost 500 court personnel in 34 counties had so far taken advantage of a partnership between the Supreme Court and Ivy Tech Community College.

It's called WorkPlace Spanish and involves classroom instruction in the basic Spanish words and phrases used in court procedures, such as "What court do I go to?" and "Where is the clerk's office?"

Remarkd Shepard in his address, "Initiatives like this language program and the enthusiasm with which local court personnel have greeted it, reflect a strong determination to serve people of all backgrounds, litigants, witnesses, relatives and anyone else who enters the courthouse hoping for justice."

Earlier in his remarks, Shepard referred to a Plain Dealer story on the efforts of 10 Wabash County court personnel - circuit and superior courts, clerk's office, probation office - to take the class.

Shepard alluded to an anecdote from Circuit Judge Robert McCallen III, relayed in the story, as an example of the kind of confusion and misunderstanding language barriers impose.

McCallen recalled an incident where he was explaining procedures to a youngster in the Day Reporting Program. McCallen would explain an item and the youngster turned to his parents in the courtroom. Another bit of explanation, another turn to the parents, and so on.

Slightly irritated, McCallen rebuked the boy, "You need to pay attention to what I'm saying."

It was revealed that the boy's parents spoke almost no English and he was providing them point-by-point translation.

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