



Emmet County News Release

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Friend of the Court Celebrating 100 Years of Service Emmet County FOC to Recognize Milestone Aug. 14

Michigan Friend of the Court system is celebrating 100 years of service to families in 2019.

Emmet County's Friend of the Court office invites the public to stop by the Emmet County building for cake and punch to celebrate this milestone Wednesday, Aug. 14, from 2-4 p.m.

The Friend of the Court (FOC) system is unique to Michigan. In 1917, a Wayne County judge appointed a person to ensure the court's decrees were being obeyed and children were being properly cared for and supported. This special appointee was soon dubbed a "friend of the court" and his work was so successful that in 1919, the Michigan legislature established a friend of the court in every county to ensure the welfare of children and guide families through the court system.

The work performed by FOC evolved over the years and by 1982, it had become part of the circuit court system with each county's FOC director appointed by the chief judge.

One thing that has not changed over the past century is the dedication of FOC offices to help families through some of the toughest times to make sure children receive the financial and emotional support they need. The FOC provides guidance and accountability through divorces, legal separations, custody and child support arrangements and other similar domestic cases brought before the court.

With about 2,000 employees in FOC offices across the state, these dedicated professionals assisted in collecting an average of \$607,222 per worker last year.

The Emmet County FOC currently has three case investigators for 1509 open cases. In 2018, Emmet County's FOC staff collected and distributed \$4.6 million in child support for Emmet County families. This was accomplished through a number of enforcement methods such as income withholding orders, tax refund intercept, reports to the credit bureau and license suspensions to name a few.

The local FOC also has two certified mediators and in 2018, they resolved 90 percent of the cases mediated. This allowed the parties involved to stay out of the courtroom and stay invested in resolving differences through the FOC mediation services.

Emmet County Friend of the Court Director Maurine Watts remains dedicated to the mission of the office she has helped to build up over the past three decades.

"I am proud to say that at a recent training, my senior case investigator impressed the presenters when she described our intake process and the value of setting the tone of the relationship with the clients right at the onset of the case," Watts said. "We want to continue our commitment to providing excellent customer service."

The public is encouraged to stop by the county's law library on the ground floor of the Emmet County building in downtown Petoskey from 2-4 p.m. on Aug. 14. Please use the entrance located on Lake Street and be aware the public must go through a metal detector and security check upon entering the building.

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