



MICHIGAN ADOPTION DAY

Giving thanks for families

Tuesday, November 20, 2012

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wright Lifetime Achievement Award winners announced; former Office of Child Support Director Marilyn Stephen of Jackson, Crawford County Juvenile Officer Thomas Haskel honored for service to Michigan families

LANSING, MI, November 20, 2012 – Thomas M. Haskel of Grayling, a longtime juvenile officer and court administrator, and Marilyn F. Stephen of Jackson, the former director of the Office of Child Support for the Department of Human Services, are the 2012 winners of the Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award.

DHS and the Michigan Supreme Court present the Wright Award to recognize exemplary, long-time service to Michigan children and families. Haskel and Stephens were honored today at the Michigan Adoption Day ceremony at the Michigan Hall of Justice in Lansing.

DHS Director Maura D. Corrigan said that Haskel and Stephen “are fitting recipients of this award for their lives of service to Michigan families. Like Dan Wright, they are people of intelligence, tenacity, and compassion – and they are extraordinarily effective.”

Haskel is the administrator of the courts in Crawford County and also serves as a juvenile court officer and referee. A graduate of Central Michigan University, where he received a bachelor’s degree in social work, Haskel began working with juvenile offenders and other at-risk youths in 1981, and created community service and work project programs as an alternative to detention. Among his achievements: the Viking Vision Career Academy, which serves students who are in danger of dropping out of high school. Haskel also founded the Time Out Project,

now known as the Phoenix Program, an anti-truancy program for middle school students. At the courthouse, Haskel created the “Read to Kids” area, stocked with children’s books, where parents and caregivers can read to children during visits to the courthouse; each child is permitted to take a book home.

Haskel was nominated by Patricia Bonamie, the court’s family division manager who also serves as a caseworker and juvenile referee. “Tom is truly a shining example of someone who has made a difference in the lives of others,” Bonamie wrote. “I have worked with Tom for 19 years now and have had the pleasure of seeing many community members return to tell him that the personal efforts that he made while they were young enabled them to become successful adults.” She also noted Haskel’s “many hours of volunteer work with organizations whose primary focus is on children,” including the Grayling Little League, Grayling Youth Booster Club, and Grayling Redskins Football League.

Stephen served as director of the DHS Office of Child Support for 10 years before her retirement earlier this year. A former Jackson County assistant prosecutor, Stephen helped lead the effort to upgrade Michigan’s automated child support payment processing system by federally-mandated guidelines. The successful upgrade helped the state avoid \$140 in federal penalties. Stephen co-founded the Program Leadership Group, a collaborative effort of DHS, the State Court Administrative Office, the Friends of the Court Association, and the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, which continues to meet twice a month on child support efforts and policy. According to Pamela McKee, planning and evaluation manager for the Office of Child Support, “the PLG operates in the spirit of consensus . . . together they developed many significant child support policy and system enhancements, striving to be the best in the nation.”

McKee, who nominated Stephen, praised Stephen for her “inclusive, global leadership style” and as “a strong advocate for responsible parenting.” While OCS director, Stephen oversaw over 2,300 child support workers serving over one million Michigan families annually. Over \$14 billion in child support was distributed to Michigan families during her tenure. Stephen has served on the board of the National Child Support Enforcement Association and on the National Council of Child Support Directors. A past president of the Michigan Family Support Council, she has testified at Congressional committee hearings on child support issues.

The Wright Award was established in honor of the late Daniel J. Wright of Grand Ledge, an attorney and longtime leader in child support and child welfare reform. Wright was a former director of SCAO’s Child Welfare Services Division and the Friend of the Court Bureau.

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