



# Office of the Criminal District Attorney 2015 Annual Report



Sharen Wilson, CDA

# A MESSAGE FROM YOUR CDA



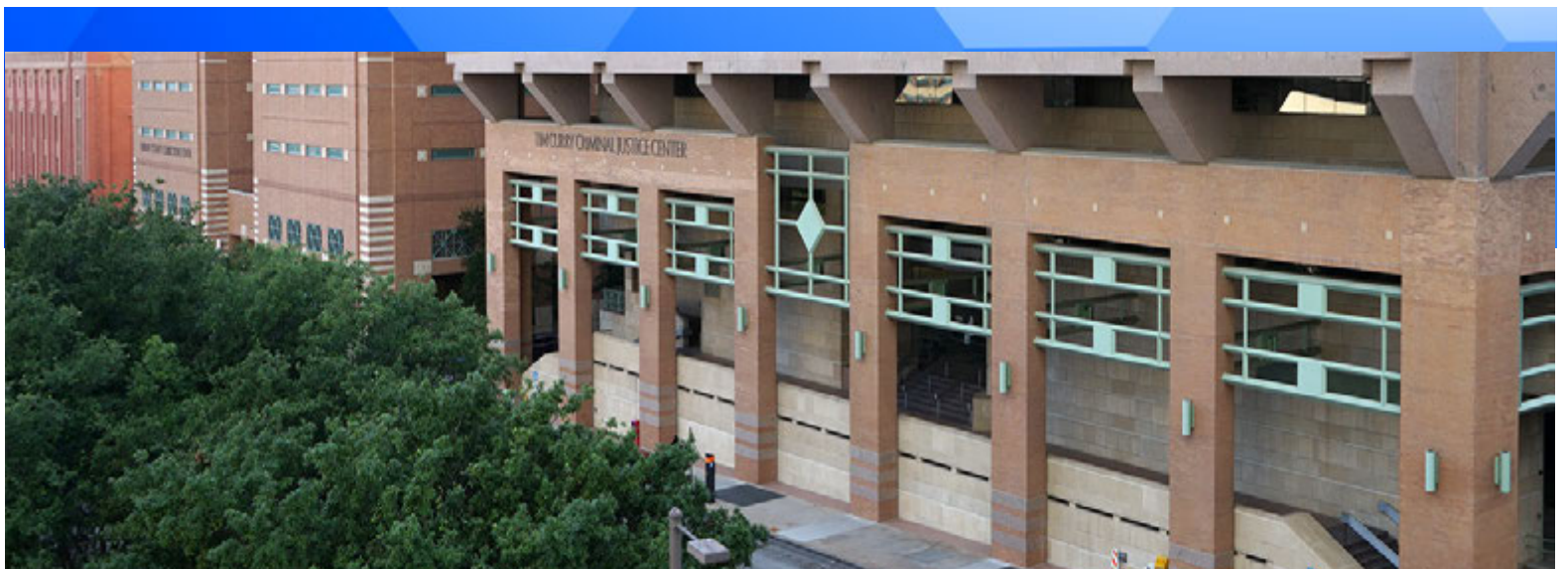
Among my priorities when I was sworn in to this position in January of 2015 was to increase both the level of communication and transparency between this office and the Tarrant County community. We continue to implement new initiatives intended to encourage an ongoing dialogue around the services we provide, and this, the first comprehensive Annual Report by the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's office, has been prepared for you as a detailed account of the past year's activities.

And what a year it's been! In addition to the almost 43,000 criminal cases filed with this office in 2015, we handled numerous new and unanticipated challenges in our ongoing mission to provide justice for the citizens of Tarrant County. New legislative initiatives, legal precedents and forensic discoveries continue to change the landscape, and we meet each new task at hand with the firm knowledge that in this job no day is unimportant, no decision is irrelevant, and no relationship is immaterial.

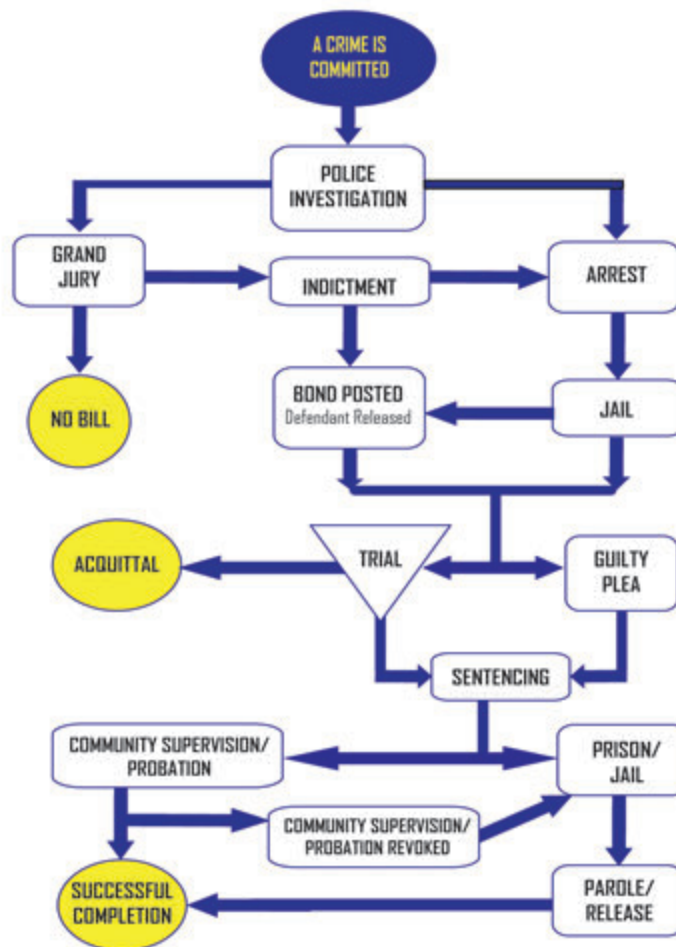
I hope you find this Annual Report to be both interesting and informative. It is an honor to work with the talented and dedicated employees of this office each day, and to serve you as your Criminal District Attorney.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.



# A CRIMINAL CASE



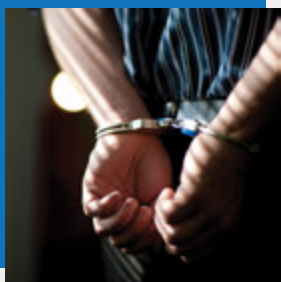
## 2015's "Firsts"

As you'll read in this Annual Report, 2015 was a year of many firsts for the Office of the Tarrant County CDA. These include:

- Annual Report
- Chief of Staff division
- Citizen Advisory Committee
- Conviction Integrity Unit
- Discovery Compliance Policy
- Diversion Coordinator
- Quarterly newsletter updates
- Special Victims Unit
- TDI attorney & investigator



# OUR DIVISIONS

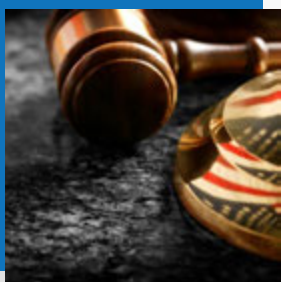


## The Criminal Division

The Criminal Division is the largest division, and is charged with the responsibility to investigate and prosecute the thousands of criminal allegations which are brought in Tarrant County each year. The division consists of a number of specialty units, each dealing with a specific facet of the Office's prosecutorial responsibilities. These include:

- 10 Felony Courts
- Conviction Integrity
- Gang
- Grand Jury
- Intake
- 10 Misdemeanor Courts
- Juvenile
- Post Conviction
- Special Victims
- White Collar/Public Integrity

The Criminal Division is led by Chief Larry Moore, and two Deputy Chiefs, Tiffany Burks and Kevin Rousseau.



## The Civil Division

The Civil Division, led by Chief Vince Cruz, Jr., acts as General Counsel for Tarrant County, providing legal advice to its elected and appointed officials.

This division also assists victims of family violence in obtaining protective orders, and represents the State of Texas in obtaining involuntary commitments of persons who have not committed a crime, but have been diagnosed by two physicians as having a mental condition that will pose a threat to themselves or someone else.

Finally, civil attorneys represent the Department of Family and Protective Services (formerly CPS) in cases where abuse or neglect are alleged and court intervention is sought.

## The Investigation Division

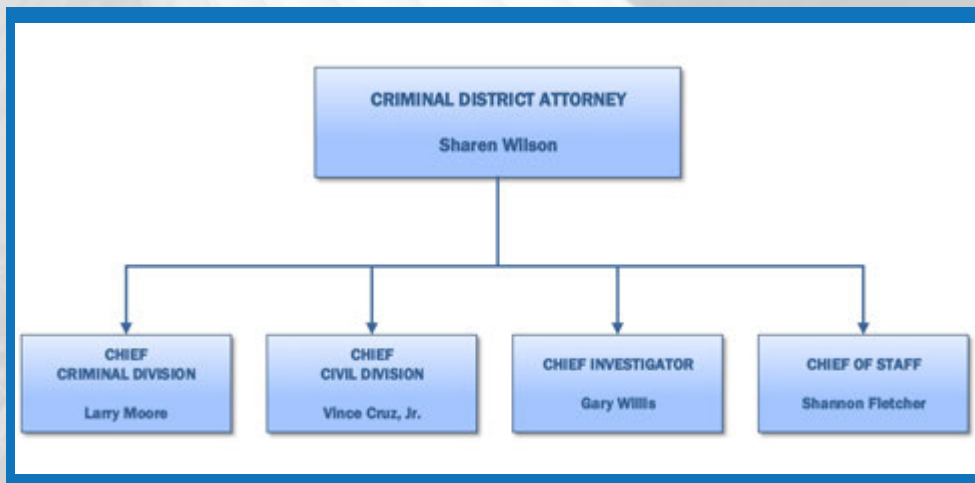
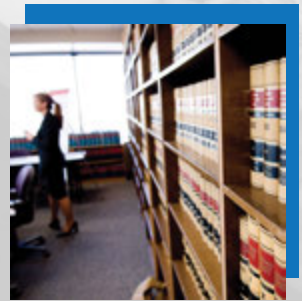
The primary responsibilities of the Investigation Division include assisting the prosecutors in evaluating and preparing cases for trial. CDA investigators are certified Texas Peace Officers with a wealth of law enforcement knowledge and experience. Their duties often include traditional activities such as arresting suspects, interviewing witnesses, and advising and assisting other Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies in a variety of situations. This division also includes our Digital Forensic and Technology Services (DFATS) unit, a “one-stop shop” for our digital media evidence.



The Investigation Division is led by Chief Investigator Gary Willis, and Assistant Chiefs, Danny McCormick and Kyle Gibson.

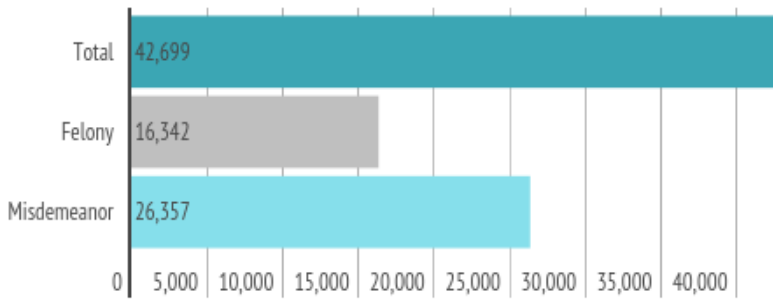
## The Chief of Staff Division

The Chief of Staff Division is responsible for all non-lawyer, non-investigator operations of the office. These include hiring and personnel matters, internal information technology needs, facility requirements, and the administration of the CDA Office’s annual budget and annual report. Led by Chief of Staff Shannon Fletcher, this division also includes the Victim Advocates, Community Outreach, and Communications units.

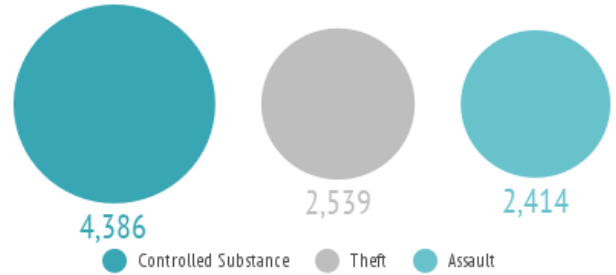


# 2015 AT A GLANCE

## Total Cases Filed



## Top 3 Felony Offenses (by # of cases disposed)

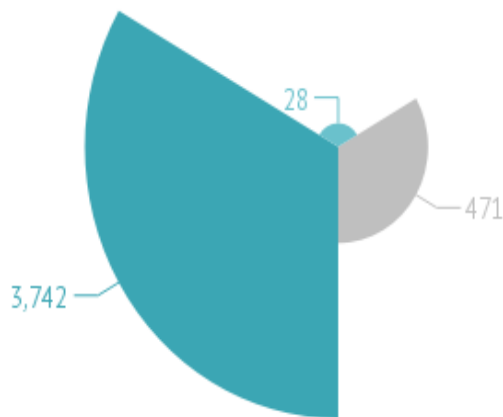


## Deferred Prosecution Program (DPP) (CDA diversion program for young adults)

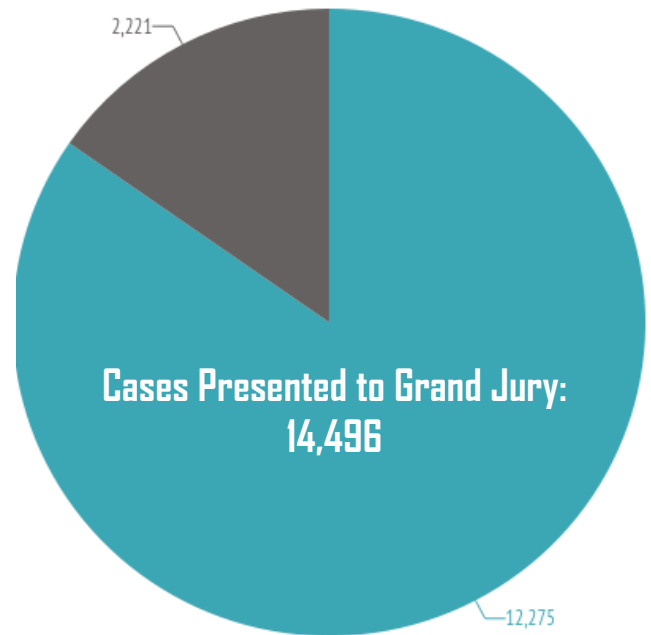
**90% Completion Rate**

198 enrollments since enhanced program began in August

## DWIs & Related Cases (by # of cases filed)



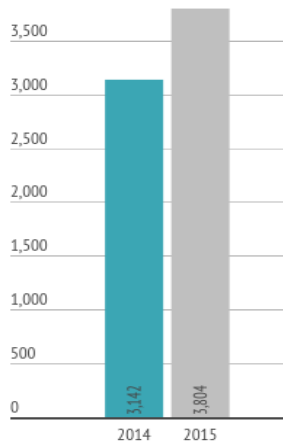
Misdemeanor DWI Felony DWI Intox Manslaughter/Assault



Indictment No Bill

## Speakers on the Road Engagements: 166

**10,548**  
Cases Handled by CDA  
Victim Advocates



**Requests for Mental Health Commitments**  
Increase since 2014: 21%

### Financial Felonies (by # of cases disposed)



492

Credit Card Abuse



384

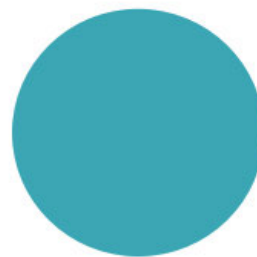
Forgery



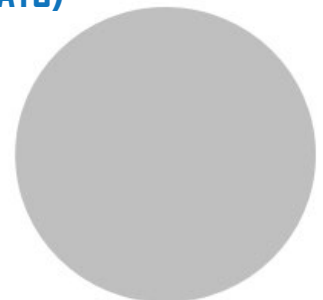
228

Financial Fraud

### Digital Forensics & Technology Services (DFATS)



1,320



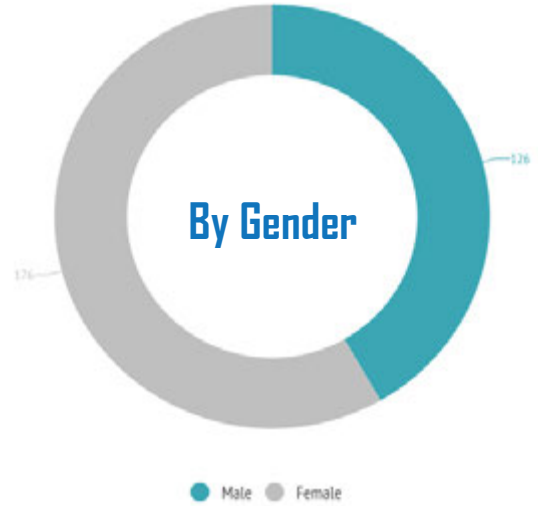
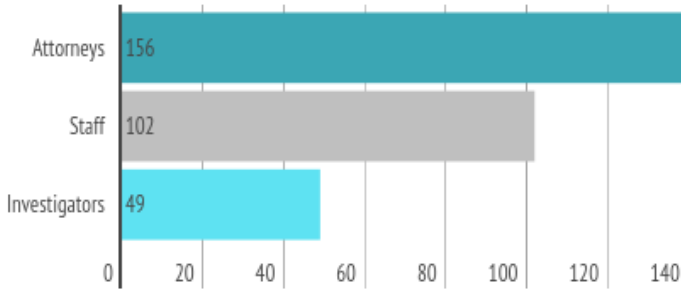
1,877

● Digital Media Items Received ● Trial Art Requests



# CDA EMPLOYEES

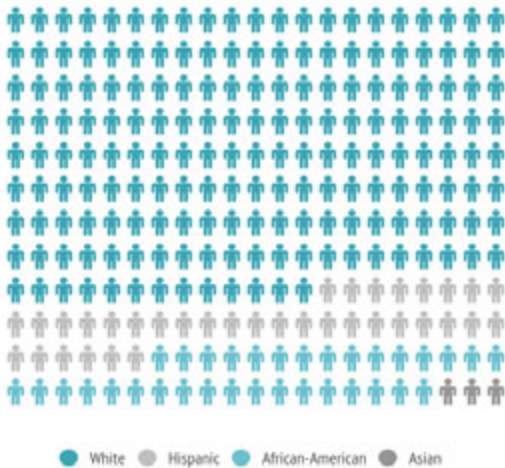
## By Division



**97%** are involved in a community group/activity

## Years of Tenure

25 years & up	29
20 - 25 years	33
15 - 20 years	36
10 - 15 years	50
5 - 10 years	39



## By Ethnicity

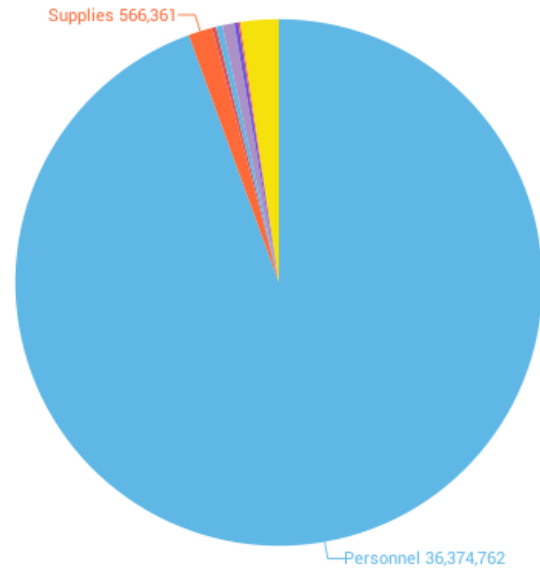
According to Texas Lawyer's survey of the Top 20 large law firms in the state, 14.4% of TX lawyers at those firms are minorities; our rate is higher at 17.24%. It is also directly correlative to the percentage of the active members of the State Bar of Texas who identify themselves as minorities (approx.17.8%).



# FINANCIAL REPORT

**FY2015 Approved Budget**     **\$41,594,489**

Personnel	\$36,374,762
Transfers/Reserves/Debt	\$ 900,000
Supplies	\$ 566,361
Court Costs	\$ 286,250
Other	\$ 146,200
Contracts	\$ 99,000
Education	\$ 98,450
Ed/Travel	\$ 46,000



**FY2015 Spend**     **\$38,517,023**

**FY2015 Budget Savings**     **\$ 3,077,466**



# LEADING BY EXAMPLE

## Criminal Justice & Law Enforcement Agencies

Every day our office works in partnership with other law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute criminal offenders. It only further strengthens our investment in our community to build relationships of trust with our law enforcement officers, through which we can create an environment of zero tolerance for the criminal element.



### COMPLIANT DISCOVERY

In 2015, we implemented the Discovery Compliance Policy, the first official policy for compliant Brady disclosure in the State of Texas. Developed in close partnership with the police chiefs of every department in Tarrant County, it creates a clear process for disclosure between the police, CDA's office, and defense attorneys on all applicable future cases. Local law enforcement is currently 100% in compliance, and the policy has quickly become a model for numerous other Texas counties.

In addition to the DCP, last year CDA Wilson met regularly with the police chiefs around the county to create a forum for ongoing dialogue among our various law enforcement agencies. In the interest of continuing to foster trust at all levels, we further expanded our outreach by assigning an Assistant CDA and CDA Investigator as liaisons to each police department. Through a grant from the R4 Foundation, we created a secure Police Lounge in our building for officers who must spend long hours on site waiting to testify in our trials.

### DIGITAL FORENSICS AND TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Early last year, the multi-year effort to centralize our digital capabilities came together in the new CDA Digital Forensics and Technology Services unit (DFATS). Our state-of-the-art DFATS unit is the only "one-stop shop" for digital media evidence in Texas, and one of the only facilities of its kind nationwide. The DFATS team has the ability to image, analyze and interpret the data from audio, video, cellular, and computer sources. As well as providing services for the 40+ law enforcement agencies in Tarrant County, DFATS has assisted investigations by more than 60 outside agencies across Texas and the U.S. Of only 55 Certified Forensic Video Analysts in the world, two are members of the DFATS staff.



DFATS employees also provide much-needed technical trial support, converting complicated evidence into exhibits and demonstrative aids which allow the jurors, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and the judge to clearly review and understand the information presented. In 2015, more than 1,800 of these exhibits were created for trial. A full-scale mobile mat was created which accurately depicted for the jury in one of our capital murder trials the dimensions of the bathroom crime scene, allowing jurors to observe first hand inaccuracies in the defendant's description of the incident.

## CREATING DIVERSION

When our ACDAs are assigned a case, they are encouraged to consider three possible resolutions: trial, plea, or diversion. We are most often asked about the diversion opportunities available to youth, with the hope that the earlier in life an offender is reached, the greater chance there is to create a law-abiding member of society.



Last year, we updated the decades-old Deferred Prosecution Program (DPP), a limited supervision program designed to give the young person in trouble for the first time a chance to rehabilitate without the stigma of a criminal conviction. Initially created in the 1970s by longtime CDA Tim Curry, today's vastly different landscape inspired several updates, ensuring more accessibility for minorities and low income youth, while also allowing it to run more efficiently for staff. DPP is now available to offenders aged 17 to 24 at the time of the offense, who have not previously been convicted of a crime; it has tracks for non-drug and for drug-related offenses. Much is expected from DPP applicants, but if they have the drive to change the path they're on, it can provide a real second chance. Since the enhanced program began in August, there have been 198 enrollments, with 90% of the first class' enrollees completing the challenging process.

Another program we championed this year is Project SAFeR. Created in partnership with Lena Pope and Alliance for Children, Project SAFeR is designed to assist families dealing with childhood problematic sexual behavior. Utilizing intensive group and individual therapy, Project SAFeR seeks to rehabilitate low risk juvenile offenders between the ages of 10-12, preventing future acts. The first class of juveniles graduated the comprehensive 18 week program in the Fall.



## COMBATING DWI

In 2015, more than 4,200 cases of Driving While Intoxicated were filed with our office, including 28 cases of Intoxication Manslaughter/Assault. While more high profile crimes grab the headlines, DWIs continue to be one of the offenses most plaguing our community, with an alarming number of drivers testing at two or three times the legal limit or higher.

One way we may reduce the problem of drunk driving is by educating drivers about the realities of the offense, and holding the offenders responsible for the damage they cause. We have increased the frequency of our No Refusal weekends, which represent a partnership between Tarrant County law enforcement agencies through which anyone stopped for suspected impaired driving who refuses to take a breath test instead is subject to a court-ordered blood test. These tests provide scientific evidence necessary to ensure drunk drivers are held accountable, and the high visibility of the weekends are an active deterrent for potential drivers. In November, CDA Wilson was proud to serve as the Honorary Chair of the 2015 Walk Like MADD event in Fort Worth, and we will continue our aggressive pursuit of those who needlessly endanger lives by committing this senseless, selfish offense.



# LEADING BY EXAMPLE

## Organizational Structure & Efficiency

### CHIEF OF STAFF DIVISION

This new division is the first formal organizational structure for the administrative responsibilities of the office. It encompasses 34% of CDA employees, and has oversight of the budget, human resources, facilities, Victim Advocates, community outreach, and communications capabilities. Coordinating these previously siloed departments into an organized team allowed for an orderly distribution of responsibilities, creating a more efficient and effective result.

### CONVICTION INTEGRITY UNIT

Our new Conviction Integrity program is another first for this County, and one of only a handful like it in the nation. Designed to reexamine past cases as warranted, the unit is at work currently on its first in-depth case review with the National Innocence Project. As forensic science continues to evolve, our Conviction Integrity and Post Conviction units are working closely with the Texas Forensic Sciences Commission and regional labs to stay at the forefront of how new discoveries may impact criminal justice procedures in our county.

### SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

A top priority for this office is to increase awareness for, and the protection of, the most vulnerable among us — the children, elderly and disabled. The creation of our new Special Victims Unit has allowed a critical focus on prosecuting violent crimes against members of these three groups. Our specialized SVU prosecutors and investigators are sought out for training requests and special prosecutions around the state.

### EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

We continue to stress the importance of professional development opportunities to ensure that our ACDAs, investigators, and staff remain the best in the state. Our Misdemeanor Chief and Deputy Chief actively train attorneys statewide, and prepare continuing legal education projects for our office. We've developed an internal practicum series through which our junior attorneys receive regular individualized evaluation and advice from our more senior ACDAs, raising the bar on the skills they are able to bring to bear prosecuting on behalf of the State.

### WHITE COLLAR/PUBLIC INTEGRITY UNIT

In addition to strengthening our focus on the financial exploitation of the elderly, this unit has welcomed a Texas Department of Insurance-funded ACDA and Investigator, which for the first time allows us to investigate and prosecute insurance fraud at a highly specialized level in our county.

## Community Relations & Communications



CDA Wilson and CDA employees meet regularly with dozens of community organizations and agencies to hear concerns and share goals for the future. Early in the year, we implemented the Speakers on the Road program, which makes CDA employee experts available as potential speakers on more than 60 topics, ranging from cyber-bullying to identity theft to domestic abuse. By the end of the year, speakers from this program had participated in 166 events around the county.



In October, CDA Wilson and CDA employees participated in more than 50 neighborhood events around Tarrant County to celebrate National Night Out, an annual community-building campaign that promotes enhanced relationships between neighborhoods and law enforcement. In each neighborhood, our attorneys, investigators, and staff were impressed by the willingness of citizens to work with their neighbors to create a renewed sense of community security.



Inspired by this outreach, 97% of CDA employees now participate in a community group or activity, and CDA Wilson has created the first Citizen Advisory Committee for the CDA's office. This group, which meets quarterly, is comprised of community representatives from all areas of the county, and all ethnic and income groups, and will bring to the table the issues closest to the hearts of their individual communities. As they say in football, the best offense is often a strong defense, and it is by law-abiding citizens working together to educate our youth, build trusted relationships, and demand accountability that we can make our neighborhoods the safest they have ever been.



We have also sought to improve our methods of communication with residents of the county by developing new tools to encourage an ongoing dialogue. In addition to this Annual Report, we publish a quarterly CDA newsletter, "The Docket." Both publications are new for this office. A renewed CDA website ([cda.tarrantcounty.com](http://cda.tarrantcounty.com)) was launched last year, along with new Facebook ([facebook.com/TarrantCountyDA](https://facebook.com/TarrantCountyDA)) and Twitter ([twitter.com/TarrantCountyDA](https://twitter.com/TarrantCountyDA)) accounts, each updated regularly with information on our trials, services, and activities, and all with the intent to inspire conversations about the services your CDA's office provides. We are also reviewing and revising all external communications, such as department brochures, to ensure they provide the most up-to-date and relevant information to assist citizens.



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

## Some of 2015's High Profile Prosecutions

### **The State of Texas v. Geronimo Aguilar**

“Mega-church” pastor Aguilar was found guilty for sexually assaulting a then-teen whose family were members of his congregation in the 1990s. Aguilar was sentenced to 40 years for multiple counts of Sexual Assault of a Child Under 17, and 20 years for Indecency with a Child. He has also been indicted for the abuse of the family’s other daughter.

Prosecutors: Eric Nickols, Sheila Wynn, Elizabeth Kamber Investigator: Mike Weber, Danny Nutt Staff: Rhona Wedderien

### **The State of Texas v. Robert Charles Atlas**

Atlas was found guilty of the 2014 capital murders of both his live-in fiance and their unborn child. After committing the murders, which followed a night out with friends in Downtown Fort Worth, Atlas fled to Louisiana, where he was ultimately captured. He received a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

Prosecutors: Lisa Callaghan, Art Clayton Investigator: Maria Hinojosa Staff: Melissa Barbolla, Rhona Wedderien

### **The State of Texas v. James Byrd**

James LeMarc Byrd, a high-ranking member of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (ABT), was the first defendant prosecuted by our office under the new “Kingpin” statute, designed to levy higher penalties on those proven to have directed gang activities, rather than just participating. He was sentenced to 50 years in prison for organizing the tortuous group assault of another ABT member.

Prosecutors: Josh Ross, Allenna Bangs Investigator: An Truong Staff: Tabatha Stevenson, Rhona Wedderien

### **The State of Texas v. Staten Corbett**

Staten “Monster” Corbett, another ABT member, was found guilty of Murder and Tampering with Evidence (Corpse) for taking part in the vicious attack of a man he and his co-defendants claimed was pretending to be an ABT member. Corbett was sentenced to 60 years in prison for the murder, and an additional 20 years for tampering with and dumping the body in a remote location.

Prosecutors: Lisa Callaghan, Art Clayton Investigator: Danny Sustaire Staff: Laura Flores, Rhona Wedderien

### **The State of Texas v. Terry Lynn Douglas**

Terry Lynn Douglas received two life sentences, plus 80 years after being found guilty of a series of sexual assaults and robberies that terrorized East Fort Worth in August of 2014.

Prosecutors: Kimberly D’Avignon, Sarah Bruner Investigator: Mike Weber Staff: Cecilia Jones, Rhona Wedderien





### **The State of Texas v. Marian Fraser**

Tarrant County ACDAs served as special prosecutors in Waco's 19th State District Court case against former home daycare owner Fraser. She was found guilty and sentenced to 50 years in prison for the death of an infant in her care, who was determined to have been given an overdose of cold medicine to induce sleep.

Prosecutors: Dale Smith, Melinda Westmoreland Investigator: Brent Ezelle

### **The State of Texas v. Michael Henderson**

In this bizarre case, Michael Henderson was found guilty of the capital murder of a homeless man who he intended to pass off as himself in an attempt to avoid prosecution for the sexual assault of his own teenage daughter. Henderson was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Prosecutors: Kevin Rousseau, Allenna Bangs Investigator: David Whisenhunt Staff: Blanca Burciaga, Rhona Wedderien

### **The State of Texas v. Dondre Johnson**

Mortuary owner Dondre Johnson was found guilty on two counts of Theft, \$1,500 - \$20,000 for failure to provide proper funeral services through the Johnson Family Mortuary. In the summer of 2014, a number of bodies in varying states of decay were discovered in the garage and embalming room of the business. Each of the bodies, including the remains of two infants, had been entrusted with Johnson over a period of many months to prepare and arrange for cremation. The jury requested the maximum sentence: two years in State Jail and a \$10,000 fine on each count of Theft. Johnson has no possibility for parole.

Prosecutors: Harry White, Sid Mody Investigator: Brad Harmon Staff: Andrea Knutzen

### **The State of Texas v. Hector Orozco**

A former employee of Terminix, Orozco used the company's customer list to prey on dozens of elderly victims around the county, who allowed him into their homes as a trusted vendor. Orozco was found guilty of stealing more than \$200,000 in jewelry, silver, and other irreplaceable items, and received the maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Prosecutor: Lori Burks Investigator: Gary Willis Staff: Glenda Barnett





*The mission of the Office of the Tarrant County  
Criminal District Attorney is to enhance public safety  
through vigorous enforcement of criminal and civil laws  
in an ethical, honest, and just manner.*



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