

Judge Weiss honored by Prevent Child Abuse Arizona

KINGMAN – Presiding Juvenile Superior Court Judge Richard Weiss was honored on January 17 by Prevent Child Abuse Arizona for his work to help children in Mohave County.

According to the group’s website, “Prevent Child Abuse Arizona is a chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America.” The non-profit organization’s mission is “to prevent the abuse and neglect of Arizona’s children.”

“They have the Hope Awards for Excellence,” Weiss said. “The four categories are Prevention, Protection, Permanency and Policy. I got the award for Permanency, which is to work toward getting all the effected children into loving, nourishing homes sooner rather than later.

“A year or so ago, the Supreme Court was focusing on case flow,” he said. “They pulled us – the different entities that come to dependency court – together to work as a team. We sat down and figured out each other’s jobs. We then tried to come up with practical solutions that would work better for all of us.”

Weiss said that the national group, Best for Babies, has done studies that deal with infant physical and mental growth.

“What they have found is, despite what we thought we knew 15 to 20 years ago, the important part of a child’s life is right there at birth to three or five years. That’s where they have to get the proper connections for their brains to develop.”

The local version of Best for Babies is the Mohave County Children’s



Judge Richard Weiss

Action Team, he said. “The main groups are the Court, Child Protection Services (CPS) and Mohave Mental Health, which is a Regional Behavioral Health Association (RBHA). Ours is based out of Flagstaff, so it is a NARBHA, Northern Arizona Regional Behavioral Health Association.

“Other service groups involved are Catholic Social Services, Foster Parents, Arizona Early Intervention, departments of health, DDD (Division of Developmental Disabilities) and our own CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates),” Weiss said.

Prevent Child Abuse Arizona Coordinator Sally Campbell nominated Weiss for the award. Her nomination remarks included, Weiss “spends his days traveling a court circuit between Kingman, Bullhead City and Lake Havasu City. In the 11 months, he has found time in an unbelievably busy schedule to develop a ‘Court Team’ of cross discipline service providers to

address what seems like insurmountable barriers facing infants and toddlers in his court.”

In reference to this team concept, Campbell wrote, “The group meets every month. It is the most well-attended court team meeting in the state. Judge Weiss sets the agenda. He facilitates the meetings.... What he does in these meetings that is so effective is provide leadership.”

As with all services, facilities and budgets are limited.

“We are always looking for volunteers,” Weiss said. “There is a lot more work to do than we can ever think of.”

The Court welcomes assistance from retired doctors and teachers, medical personnel of any level and just about anyone “who has an interest in helping babies and children,” he said.

Prior to becoming a judge, Weiss was a private attorney for approximately 15 years.

“I mostly handled defense work,” he said. “I did a bunch of juvenile work in dependencies.”

He became a commissioner in 1996 and a judge-pro-tempore in 1998.

“I was appointed to the Superior Court in 2005 and elected in 2006,” he said.

Weiss, who has been presiding juvenile judge since 2005, said he is also doing a portion of domestic relations cases in Bullhead City.

“We are looking to get our dependency cases in the towns where the situations exist,” he said. “One of our projects is to get what is known as a ‘medical home’ for the children who are brought into the system. That way, medical records will follow each child” who may have to go to a foster home or elsewhere.

“Getting the right services to the kids who need them” is an example of the team approach, he said. “We look at the process and see how we can improve it.”

Weiss said he was very happy to receive the Prevent Child Abuse Arizona Permanency Award.

“It is pretty humbling to receive that when I know I am just the front man,” he said. “I have close to two dozen really dedicated people who come to these meetings. Sally Campbell, who nominated me, is a wonderful lady who has the answers and keeps us all moving. We have a good bunch of attorneys.”

Prevent Child Abuse Arizona has been around for about 20 years, Weiss said. “It’s a well-run outfit that deals with the issues, not only for infants and toddlers, but throughout” the system. “They had close to 1,000 people who attended their convention at the Mesa Convention Center. They are right on top of cutting-edge stuff. That’s something they give us rural counties: networking, training and insight.”

Community support is crucial to the success of the team approach.

“We are trying to get ‘Baby CASAs’ trained,” he said. “If we can get a CASA at the first court hearing where a child is involved, we are a lot more effective.”

Anyone interested in information on becoming a CASA should call Linda Wimberly at (928) 753-0713.

“Funding is a big problem,” Weiss said. “We have applied for certain grants to train CASAs. We don’t have sustaining funds and, therefore, some grantors are hesitant to give to communities that can’t show a program will continue. We are also trying to access into faith-based groups as well.”

Weiss said he has worked to keep the momentum going with the team approach and to keep the people enthused about their service to children and the community.

“I have been fairly successful and that is part of why I was nominated for this award,” he said. “This award is for all of our dedicated team.”

Anyone interested in more information on the team approach meetings should call Judicial Assistant Kara Letcher at (928) 753-0790.