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COMMUNITY

Chief Justice Heavican visits Beatrice for Resolution Center, courthouse tours

[Christina Lyons](#) - Aug 13, 2024

Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice Michael Heavican visited Beatrice on Tuesday afternoon, along with four Supreme Court associate justices, Nebraska Judicial Branch staff and probation administrators, for presentations at the Gage County Courthouse.

Several members of the group toured The Resolution Center in downtown Beatrice before a presentation in the Gage County Courtroom by Kelly Riley, Office of Dispute Resolution, and Lacey Jurgens, president of the board of The Resolution Center.

The center provides child welfare conferencing, family mediation, juvenile and restorative justice conferencing in 16 counties in Southeast Nebraska. Six mediation centers provide similar services throughout Nebraska.

Gage County Court Judge Jeff Gaertig said the center helps parents and families.

“They help find compromise and solutions outside of the courtroom,” he said.

Riley talked about the different services available at the mediation centers. She told the guests that the programs were important to juveniles and their families, using stories to illustrate her point.

“In a small community there were three juveniles that vandalized several properties and entered the juvenile justice system,” she said. “One of the youths chose to participate in a restorative justice conference. Victims from the community had a chance to ask the youth questions like, ‘Why did you target me?’ They eventually developed a restorative plan. The juvenile was from a single-parent home and now he had five community members that he was connected to. That’s huge.”

Jurgens said the center facilitated conversations to find the best possible outcome.

“Getting a neutral party involved during a conflict will help with the best possible outcome,” she said. “The key is finding what is best for the people involved. It gives families a voice and lets them be heard.”

Gage County District Judge Rick Schreiner said The Resolution Center provides a valuable service.

Visiting justices and staff toured the courthouse before a reception and presentation in the Gage County District Courtroom.

Gaertig welcomed guests and introduced Heavican.

“I wanted to thank everyone for being here today,” Heavican said. “Thank you for supporting the courts and Gage County for remodeling this courthouse in a beautiful way.”

Judge Linda Bauer provided history on the Thrive program.

“The Thrive Mentoring program was developed and piloted by my colleague, Judge Anne Paine of Red Willow County Court,” she said. “She collaborated with Nebraska Probation and service providers in her county to establish this mentorship program that aims to provide youth with a positive relationship with a supportive adult.”

Bauer said Barry Walsh, a Harvard educator, had researched the question of why some youths that are confronted with childhood trauma adapt and overcome.

“The answer is that the child who ends up doing that has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult. That is the roots of Thrive,” she said.

Thrive is a grassroots program where a youth collaborates with a Thrive worker to identify a mentor.

In the 1st Judicial District, Gage County CASA will be the Thrive provider in Jefferson, Saline and Gage counties.

“It is my heartfelt wish that this will increase those kids’ odds of becoming successful adults. Not only that, but it will enhance the lives of the mentors themselves and will shine a ray of hope to those that work in the juvenile justice system,” she said.

Bauer thanked probation staff that helped develop the program.

Gaertig this program would not happen without probation and Gage County CASA.

“We can’t have any impact on children without positive human mentors and relationships,” he said.

Melanie Stormer, chief probation officer in District 1 Probation, said the collaborative effort in developing the program has been impressive.

“Most importantly, we counted on our community,” she said.

She recognized probation and CASA staff that made it possible.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony took place with the Beatrice Area Chamber of Commerce.

Heavican presented Amber Lovitt of Gage County CASA with a “Friend of the Court” plaque.



Chief Justice Michael Heavican listens as Judge Linda Bauer provides history on the Thrive Mentoring Program. The program will work through District 1 Probation and Gage County CASA in Gage, Saline and Jefferson counties.



Gage County District Court Judge Rick Schreiner, Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice Michael Heavican and Gage County Court Judge Jeff Gaertig (from left) stand in the Gage County Court on Tuesday afternoon. The Resolution Center and the Thrive Mentoring Program were presented to multiple judicial branch guests.



A ribbon cutting took place in the Gage County District Courtroom for the Thrive Mentoring Program with the Beatrice Area Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday afternoon.



Chief Justice Michael Heavican presents Amber Lovitt of Gage County CASA with a "Friend of the Court" plaque.