

Hon. Duncan M. Beagle

Duncan Beagle has his own version of an old riddle:

*Sons my parents had but two,
but more than seven I
have now.
How can it be true?*

Simple for Judge Beagle. He has six official little brothers through Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Genesee County and several unofficial little brothers. Some are not so little, such as 17-year-old Willie McQueen, a defensive tackle at Southwestern Academy in Flint, who happens to have no legs. When he read about Willie, who lost his legs in a train accident, Judge Beagle contacted Willie to offer support, in part because Beagle himself is paralyzed from the waist down. Along with other mentors, Duncan has helped Willie through some rough times. He remembered when one of his "little" brothers chauffeured him for awhile after his disability struck, literally overnight.

Duncan's involvement with Big Brothers led to his election as Board President of the organization for four years, with service for over 20 years on the Board. He was named Big Brother of the Year in 1982. Gary Haggart of Big Brothers/Big Sisters was Duncan's college classmate at Albion. Gary reports, "All the kids love him. He is even more compassionate now that he is disabled and spends more time with kids of all backgrounds."

Duncan was extremely active with young people and sports before his own loss, resulting from sudden transverse myelitis in his spinal cord, landed him in the hospital for five months in 1991. From the onset of numbness in both legs, he was permanently paralyzed within two to three hours. He is the first to admit he felt sorry for himself as he lay in a University of Michigan Hospital bed. But the impetus to get on with his life came from two sources: the support of his family



Hon. Duncan M. Beagle, Presiding Judge, Genesee County Family Court

and many friends, including little brothers, and his hospital roommate. His roommate was paralyzed from the neck down and read Duncan the "riot act." Duncan recalls, "he told me that I would be able to perform 90 percent of my normal functions, while he could not change a television channel, feed himself, use the restroom, and on and on." That was a wake-up call for Duncan and he is now a role model for others. It is amazing to see just how much he does for himself, rarely accepting help, albeit always refusing in the most gracious manner.

During his hospital stay, Beagle was appointed to the Genesee County Circuit bench by Governor Engler, where he began in July, 1991. Engler appointed Beagle for "his broad legal background and service to his profession and community." In no time, Duncan took another major step in his life, marrying Dana in September, 1991. They now have a ten-year-old son, Devan.

Prior to his appointment, Judge Beagle served as Court Administrator for the 67th

District Court, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney for over five years, Friend of the Court Referee for four years, and had a private practice, specializing in domestic relations and criminal defense work for nine years.

Beagle is a product of the Flint Public Schools, a graduate of Albion College, and received his law degree from the University of Detroit Law School. He is a third-generation attorney, whose grandfather was elected prosecutor in 1928. His grandfather and father each practiced in Flint for over 50 years.

In 1992, 1998, and 2004, Beagle was re-elected without opposition. He was the only judge to volunteer for the Family Division, where he has served since January 1998. As Presiding Judge of the Family Division and Circuit Chief Judge Pro Tem, he continues his concern for youth with judicial activities. He was the lynchpin for working with area school superintendents to develop a comprehensive truancy policy, which will include a specialized Truancy Court. Like drug and sobriety courts, the Truancy Court will focus on children who repeatedly miss school and on their parents, assuring close contact with caseworkers and Beagle if a student does not cooperate. Beagle is hoping that "therapeutic jurisprudence" will save students from a life of incomplete education and crime. As an adjunct, Beagle is working with the Flint City Council on a possible truancy curfew ordinance. He also presides over a specialized drug court for neglectful parents.

Judge Beagle is a member of numerous bar associations and civic and fraternal organizations. He is a past-president of numerous organizations, including the Genesee County Bar Association, Police Athletic League, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Flint, IMA Foundation, and Greater Flint Area Sports Hall of Fame. Judge Beagle has served for five years as chairperson of the Atwood Stadium Authority in an effort to preserve and restore



Duncan and Devan Beagle at the Crim Race for Special Olympics

consistently demonstrated an innate ability to temper his judicial responsibilities with sensitivity and the right of citizens to be treated with respect. Through his dignity, leadership, and dedication to his profession and community, Judge Beagle will continue to touch the lives of countless individuals in a very profound and positive way.”

Duncan attributes his community involvement to his father, John Beagle, and to retired Judge Thomas Yeotis, who was a second father and mentor to him. His father stressed the good fortune the Beagles had and expected Duncan to contribute as he himself did, to thank the community for his success and to help others generally. Duncan met Judge Yeotis at an early age through his father, and played on Judge Yeotis’s youth sports teams, both basketball and baseball. “Tom loved playing and coaching more than just about anything,” recalls Beagle. Beagle always thought of Yeotis’s years on the bench

as Tom’s hobby. Mild-mannered and fair on the bench, Yeotis became impassioned at games, channeling tremendous positive energy into his young players. Yeotis continues to play over-60 softball in various locales around the U.S.

It is clear nothing can stop Duncan Beagle in his enthusiasm for life, for his family, for children, for the law, for sports, and for others. No wonder he recently received the Jack Hamady Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Rotary Club for his work in the community. It is abundantly clear that Duncan Beagle far exceeds any definition of Citizen Lawyer. ♦

Francine Cullari practices real estate, estate planning, and business law in Grand Blanc. She is Vice-Chairperson of the State Bar of Michigan Publications and Website Advisory Committee, where she is responsible for the Michigan Bar Journal. She is the editor of Bar Beat, a local magazine for the legal profession.

the historic facility. He presently serves on the State Commission for Disability Concerns as a Governor appointee and the Genesee County Disability Network. He is a member of the board of the Flint Rotary Club.

Prior to his being confined to a wheelchair, Judge Beagle was a high school basketball referee for over 20 years. For the past two years, he has coached his son’s baseball and basketball teams. He has “wheeled” with his son in the Crim Race, an annual event in Flint to raise funds for Special Olympics.

Kevin L. Francart, Assistant Attorney General nominated Judge Beagle for this article, and clerked for Beagle a few years ago. Francart commented that, “what Judge Beagle taught me more than anything about service to the community is that it is not just ‘talking the talk.’ It is about doing. He taught me that while it’s great to support your favorite cause with monetary donations, what is more important is your time.”

Retired District Judge Charles Mosier has nothing but fine words about Duncan. “I have had the good fortune and privilege of knowing Judge Duncan Beagle for many years. His strength of character is unquestionable, as is his passion for his work. He has