

Office of the Kane County State's Attorney



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KANE STATE'S ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES TOP EMPLOYEES FOR 2015

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Four employees of the Kane County State Attorney's office have been honored for their contributions to the office, public safety and public service in 2015.

Assistant State's Attorney Bill Engerman is the Prosecutor of the Year, and Deferred Prosecution Program director Michelle Halbesma is the Employee of the Year. In addition, Assistant State's Attorneys Andrew Whitfield and Kaitlin Kerstetter were honored for their outstanding trial work.

Engerman is in his second stint with the office. He initially joined the office in 2001 after more than a decade in private practice. He left the office in August 2008 to become the first assistant state's attorney in DeKalb County. He returned to the Kane County State's Attorney's Office in March 2011, and in 2013 he was named chief of the newly established Felony Trials Bureau.

In 2015 Engerman prosecuted Paul Johnson, an Elgin parolee who brutally murdered his 33-year-old neighbor in what was considered a random crime. Johnson, 36, was given a 50-year prison sentence.

As a trial attorney, Engerman is respected for his meticulous preparation and attention to detail. He is regarded as a leader in the office, spending much time mentoring less experienced prosecutors to help them hone their trial preparation and litigation skills.

"It was a pleasure five years ago to bring Bill back to this office, just as it was a pleasure to name him our Prosecutor of the Year. He is respected by all in this office, and he is respected by his peers in the legal community. That respect recently was highlighted when Bill was the first Kane County ASA to serve as president of the Kane County Bar Association," Kane County State's Attorney Joe McMahon said.

Engerman grew up in Morton Grove, Ill., and is a graduate of Maine East High School, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and American University's Washington College of Law.

Halbesma has been with the office for 22 years and been the director of the Deferred Prosecution program for nearly as long. She was hired in 1993, and was

named director of the Second Chance pretrial diversion program when it was launched in 1995.

The program continues to evolve under her leadership. The program now is known as Deferred Prosecution, and its value is illustrated in many ways – it is a staple of the office, it has thrived through four administrations, and it has grown to include five components – felony/misdemeanor, misdemeanor drug and alcohol, domestic violence, prostitution and solicitation, and felony drug.

Perhaps the most important element she has provided the diversion program is tangible certainty of its effectiveness. In 2014-15, as part of her work toward her masters' degree in criminal justice from Aurora University, she completed a study with Aurora University and the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority. The study showed a recidivism rate among diversion program participants of only about eight percent, meaning that more than 92 percent of participants who complete the program do not return to the criminal justice system within three years.

In addition to her masters' work and the diversion study, Michelle works with state's attorney's offices in other counties to help them establish similar pretrial diversion programs.

"Michelle is everything I could ask for in an employee. She's conscientious, caring, hard-working, efficient, and willing to be a trend setter," McMahon said. "Her efforts here have really helped me understand how to best use our limited resources. I'm grateful for all of her hard work and the example she sets."

Halbesma is an Aurora native with an undergraduate degree from Western Illinois University.

The office gave two "Ace of Spades Awards" for courtroom excellence – one award for felony trials and one for traffic and misdemeanor trials. The award is based on a number of factors, including the number of trials completed.

Whitfield is a three-time Ace of Spaces Award winner, having also won it for 2008 and 2014. He is assigned to the Child Advocacy Center. He grew up in Naperville, earned his undergraduate degree from Lewis University in Romeoville and his law degree from the Southern Illinois University School of Law in Carbondale. He joined the Kane SAO in 2007.

Kerstetter was recognized for her excellence with the Ace of Spades Award for traffic and misdemeanor trials. A native of Geneva, she earned her undergraduate degree from Illinois State University, and her law degree from the Northern Illinois University College of Law. She joined the Kane SAO in 2014 after she interned with the office while studying for her juris doctor.