

FROM YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISAGREEMENT OVER COURTHOUSE DESIGN IS NOTHING NEW

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An old saying goes, be careful what you wish for, you might just get it. The first recorded controversy over a courthouse design in Medina County was set in motion by the Ohio General Assembly and Governor Rhodes in July, 1965 when they created a second Common Pleas Judgeship. Advocating for it before the legislature were Medina County Common Pleas Judge Windsor Kellogg, Wadsworth Solicitor Charles Johnston Jr., Medina County Bar Association President and County Prosecutor James Foreman, and Bar Association Common Pleas Committee chairman William G. Batchelder Jr. Also included as supporters were Probate Judge Wayne Garver, State Representative H Dennis Dannley, County Commissioners Joseph Neath, Howard Dunn, and Kenneth Indoe. The explosive growth of court cases and population in Medina County mandated it, they argued. However, where to fit a courtroom, offices and jury room into an already cramped courthouse was a major problem, as well as expense.

The county commissioners are required by state law to provide a courtroom and supporting facilities for all judges. Being a bit short on cash, they contended that it was far better to have a short 1 mill levy than borrow and pay for 20 years of interest. The Commissioners asked for the assistance of the Medina Bar Association, as well as the affected county officials, on the concept design and layout of the new courthouse. By February of 1966, Architect William Boyd Huff and Associates from Akron, who had also designed the nearby 1955 County Jail, provided sketches of a proposed courthouse expansion. Connecting the Old Courthouse with the Jail was proposed to be a "slick, three-story glass brick and metal panel building." (Medina County Gazette, February 7, 1966)

The modern design may have been compatible with the jail. However, it was not deemed by many of the public to be compatible with the 1873 French Second Empire façade of the Old Courthouse. Nor was it in keeping with a

growing preference within Medina for a more historic, colonial Western Reserve look. Following an outcry by citizens, elected officials, Medina Community Design Committee, and local historical society, the architect re-designed the new building in both contemporary and colonial architectural styles. On June 21, 1966 the proposed Courthouse addition plans and project phases were revealed to the public and their opinions invited.

the contemporary design, instead, because of the considerable savings to the costs by eliminating the columns at the entrance. (Medina County Gazette, June 23, 1966) A one mill levy on the ballot in November 1966 to build a new courthouse overwhelmingly lost in every community but one township, with 68% voting no. The worst showing was in Brunswick City with 82% opposed. Although endorsed by the Medina County Gazette, and pretty much

then forced to finance the project by issuing \$1.5 million, 20-year general obligation bonds pledging future revenues.

State law clearly asserts that in its judgement, the board of county commissioners have the power to determine if a courthouse is needed, its' style and dimensions, the costs and how to pay for it. (Ohio Revised Code 307.01) Neither the design nor the issuance of bonds without a tax increase to pay for the courthouse can be subject to a vote. Despite failure of the tax levy at the ballot box, on December 15, 1966, County Commissioners and judges decided the Courthouse addition would be started immediately. In a prepared statement the County Commissioners stated: "The county does not contemplate any revision of the exterior of the existing courthouse, and the exterior of the new building will be constructed to harmonize with the courthouse, and will enhance the appearance of the public square and the surrounding real estate." It took all of 1967 and 1968, to purchase the adjoining properties, design the final structure, bid and build the "New" Courthouse. On January 12, 1969, a formal dedication was



1906 Postcard Picture of "Old" Courthouse.

Commissioner Chairman Joseph Neath reported that 95% of those attending the public viewing of the courthouse design favorably accepted the "colonial architecture," referred to in the press as Tuscan Roman. Reportedly, Probate Judge Wayne Garver and County Recorder Elsie Fetzer preferred

all of the civic leaders that had advocated for the new judgeship, it probably lost for a number of reasons. Many complained that the Commissioners paid too much for the property, while others suggested that too many other competing money issues were on the ballot at the same time. Commissioners were

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held, with Lt Governor John Brown, master of ceremonies and Ohio Supreme Court Justice Louis Schneider as the keynote speaker.

A state legislator who was also a former county commissioner once offered some advice to me that may be relevant. He said if you can avoid it, don't get involved in a new courthouse or addition project. Most people seem to have an opinion that usually bears little relationship with expertise in courthouse

design or frequency of use, nobody wants to really pay for it, and very many will say they like it just the way it is. The saving grace if you do your job right, he observed, was that eventually almost everybody will like the changes and in a few years most people will not even understand or remember the fight. That seems to be the case for the "New" Medina Courthouse finished in 1969. So far as its currently proposed replacement, that remains to be seen.



1946 Postcard of Wood County Courthouse. It was constructed in the midst of a slew of indictments of County Commissioners, Architects and Contractors involved in the project. Regardless of guilt or innocence of those charged, the County Prosecutor later explained: "The people of this county were very angry at that time because the court house was being built without a vote of the people, and they were ready to find an indictment against every person who had anything to do with the courthouse." (Marion Star, February 29, 1896) Despite these traumatic events the massive sandstone courthouse in the Richardsonian Romanesque style is considered to be one of the finest in Ohio and a historic landmark.

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Catholic Charities of Medina County is Pleased to Announce Their 60+ Program

Catholic Charities of Medina County is pleased to announce the expansion of their exciting new program meeting the needs of the growing population of seniors. The 60+ Program offers a variety of mental health and home-based services for residents who are 60+ years of age. Most of the costs of these services are covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and Insurance or funding from the Medina County ADAMH Board. Everyone is welcome. Please call **330-723-9615**.

Catholic Charities of Medina County has been providing supportive services to residents for generations. The 60+ Program offers a comprehensive clinical mental health and/or substance abuse assessment at the office or in the home. Counseling services are provided by licensed staff trained to assist in the recovery process associated with depression, anxiety, stress, and relationship issues. Home-Based services for seniors include assessment and counseling as well as symptom monitoring, identifying services, case

coordination and community resource connections. The goal is to help each person achieve their best level of individual functioning as well as increasing their ability to succeed in the community and remain living in their own home independently.

Mead Wilkins, LISW-S, recently joined the treatment team after serving Medina County for 20 years as the Director of Job and Family Services and the Clinical Director of the Ohio Center for Survivors of Torture for the past three years. He is very excited to join the 60+ Program team helping to improve the quality of life for Medina's seniors. "Being able to remain independent and stay in your home is very important. Very few people want to go to a nursing home", he said. The 60+ Program empowers and fosters healthy connections, helps access resources that are available in the community and assists in meeting basic daily needs.

Michelle Kipfstuhl, Director of Catholic Charities Community Services of Medina County,



MEAD WILKINS



MICHELLE KIPFSTUHL

expressed her enthusiasm at expanding services to the 60+ population. "Sometimes, because of our name, people incorrectly assume our services are only available to Catholics. We provide services to anyone in the community regardless of their faith tradition. Here in Medina we have a long tradition of helping - and trying to meet the needs of those who might not be able to find assistance elsewhere. This expansion of service is a natural growth of the services we already provide - and it makes sense because we know that the 60+ population is increasing steadily in this county."