

## Juvenile division chief discusses local cases at MCRW

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By Meagan Ellsworth



Chief of the Juvenile Division of the Montgomery County Attorney's Office Marc Brumberger discussed the cases he's faced, trends in local crime, and the Juvenile Justice System at the Montgomery County Republican Women's general meeting on Thursday at the River Plantation Country Club.

Montgomery County Attorney J D Lambright introduced Brumberger and also spoke to the MCRW. He feels it is important for parents to have an understanding of the degree of crimes being committed by juveniles.

In 2015, Brumberger said there were 1,078 juvenile prosecutions in Montgomery County with a drop in misdemeanors from 877 in 2014 to 797 in 2015.

Felonies also declined from 313 in 2014 to 297 in 2015. There were two homicides in 2014; 22 burglaries in 2014 to 33 in 2015; and 70 drug offenses in 2014 to 53 in 2015.

He said there was a noticeable spike from three robbery cases in 2014 to 14 in 2015, which he believes is due to juveniles in the Houston area targeting Montgomery County.

Of the cases from last year, 60 were sexual assaults, which is an increase from 46 cases reported in 2014.

"It's a little soon to tell if it's a trend but certainly that robbery spike last year was quite noticeable the other thing is just a steady increase of sexual offenses," he said. "We've always had a fair number of them but it gets to be more and more every year. I believe it is because kids are exposed to so much sexual content now particularly on the internet and also on TV, so young kids who really wouldn't have too much of a sexual awareness now do before they understand what to do with it."

Among the worst he's seen included a 16-year-old who allegedly committed sexual acts on a 6-year-old and had more than 4,000 images of child pornography that he distributed.

Brumberger and Lambright recently worked with cold case officers to resurrect the Don Collins case.

In 1998, he said Collins, 13 at the time, ambushed Robert Middleton on his 8th birthday in Splendor, covering him with gasoline and lighting him on fire.

The burns covered 99 percent of Middleton's body, yet he survived until 2011 when he died from an aggressive skin cancer resulting from the burns, Brumberger said.

Prosecutors lacked the evidence to convict Collins of murder until the cold case detectives learned that Collins had allegedly sexually assaulted Middleton prior to the burning and other witnesses revealed repeated admissions to the crime. The new evidence allowed the prosecutor to slam Collins as an adult with capital murder charges. Collins was sentenced to 40 years in prison in February 2015.

"To me, it's so terrible what he went through, how could you not seek justice," said Brumberger, whose son was also 8 at the time of Middleton's murder.

However, the case is currently pending an appeal.

"If we had lost that certification trial he could have walked out and never been prosecuted," Lambright said. "That was an important step for us. ... We knew it was going to be appealed if we could ever get a conviction and that's what happened now. If there's one thing I can point to we've made a lot of wonderful accomplishments in my three years, to finally get justice for the Middleton family, Robert's not here but we got justice for the family at least."

Brumberger said at least 15 percent of the juvenile cases have clear mental health issues with five percent significant enough where they cannot legally be prosecuted.

A third of the juvenile cases he sees have parents who he said either are doing a "bad job" or are "unwilling to provide discipline."

"It's extremely important," he said. "Kids take their cues from how to behave from their parents, so parents who are uninvolved or who make excuses for their children wind up having kids who have no ability to follow rules or don't care to follow rules, and often have no impulse control so they have emotional outbursts and get potentially violent. They may have their heart in the right place but they are unwilling to really enforce consequences for their kids."