

Bristol County District Attorney's Office
C. Samuel Sutter
District Attorney

Press Release
June 10, 2010

District Attorney Sam Sutter announced that Attleboro District Court Victim Witness Advocate Janice Johnson was awarded the prestigious Gerard D. Downing Advocate of the Year Award during the Massachusetts District Attorney's Association's 16th Annual Prosecutors Conference in Worcester today.

Johnson is the first Bristol County victim witness advocate to win this award since its inception in 2005 and is only the seventh person to ever receive the award. She has spent the past 22 years working as a victim witness advocate in Attleboro District Court, and has served under three different district attorneys.

Johnson has handled thousands of cases during her distinguished career. She was influential in persuading one of Fr. James Porter's victims to go public, helped handle the controversial Attleboro Sect murder case and has touched the lives of thousands. Johnson has been particularly helpful to victims of domestic violence during her more than two decades of public service to victims of crime and witnesses to crime. She has helped numerous victims of domestic violence either get the support they need or get out of their abusive relationships.

In 2008, Johnson was awarded the Victim Advocate Award and the Length of Service Award by the Massachusetts Office of Victims Assistance.

The Gerard D. Downing Advocate of the Year Award, originally given in 2005 as the Downing Community Service Award, has since 2007 been presented annually at the Massachusetts Prosecutors Conference as the Advocate of the Year Award. The award is given in memory of Gerard D. Downing, who served as a Berkshire County Assistant District Attorney from 1983 to 1990, and as District Attorney from 1990 until his sudden death in 2003 at the age of 52.

The award presented to Johnson today is a lifetime achievement award which recognizes the special combination of talents embodied in a truly outstanding advocate: a deep compassion for and empathetic understanding of the needs of crime victims and their families; outstanding skill in anticipating and providing advice, counseling and services; and ability to instill in victims a sense of dignity and confidence; and the ability to reach and touch victims that makes them feel, regardless of the prosecution outcome, that their voice has been heard.

District Attorney Sutter nominated Johnson to become a recipient of this award last month, and the state's 11 district attorneys voted on nominations shortly thereafter. District Attorney Sutter, who worked closely with Johnson during his years as an Attleboro District Court prosecutor in the early 1990s, nominated Johnson for the award because of his belief that she has distinguished herself from her peers during her more than two decades of service.

"Jan has a thorough knowledge of the criminal justice system, shows genuine compassion for victims, possesses a great ability to connect with people, tremendous common sense and a relentless work ethic. What also stands out about Jan is the consistency of her performance as an advocate," District Attorney Sutter said. "During all my years of observing her, first as an assistant district attorney, then as a defense attorney and now as the district attorney, I have never seen her dragging, jaded or detached. Instead, she is always determined and driving forward."