

'Evening at the Courthouse' a success, organizers say

By: Heath Hamacher May 9, 2016

The Mecklenburg County Courthouse on April 28 was the site of the 10th annual Justice Initiatives' Evening at the Courthouse, a fundraising event geared toward helping the organization fulfill its mission of educating the community about the court system and advocating and advancing its needs and interests.

The fundraiser opened up with a rooftop VIP event and featured food from some of Charlotte's finest restaurants — and a lot of fellowship. There was live music and imbibement, but also a serious message that was passed along by emcee Paul Cameron of WBTV that even after 50 years as a unified court system, there is work to be done.

According to Cameron, North Carolina ranks 48th in the country for the number of judges per capita and 40th in salaries paid to trial court judges. Only one penny of every tax dollar goes to funding the court system and about a third of Mecklenburg County court employees, and nearly 70 percent of magistrates, work second jobs.

Nicole Sodoma of Sodoma Law in Charlotte chaired the event. She believes the agency's philosophy that the rule of law is the foundation of a civilized society and that a healthy court system is "critical to safeguarding this foundation."

"If we seek a strong and prosperous society, we must be concerned with the efficient and effective administration of justice," Sodoma said.

According to the final tally, about 175 guests—including lawyers, judges, county commissioners and other civic leaders—attended the fundraiser. Sodoma said that the silent auction raised 40 percent more than last year and overall this year's fundraising efforts were 23 percent more successful than those of 2015.

Justice Initiatives is a nonprofit organization formed in 2004 by civic leaders, attorneys, business owners and concerned citizens seeking to ensure the proper funding of the judicial branch so that it may "provide timely access to justice for all" and "initiate smarter and innovative judicial programs and services."

Sodoma said that while the organization does not contribute to the funding of the courts ("because that is for the legislators to handle"), it does advocate for funding on the courts' behalf.

"Our committees spend countless hours identifying opportunities where we can make an impact and we work hard to inform people about why the level of funding to our court system truly makes a difference to our community," she said.



Nicole Sodoma of Sodoma Law in Charlotte, who chaired the 10th-annual Justice Initiatives Evening at the Courthouse April 28, holds up a pledge card. Sodoma said the fundraiser raised 23 percent more money than last year's event.

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