



Pictured left to right: Rick Pierce, Senior Judge John Cleland, President Judge Thomas King Kistler, Jim Koval, Steve Schell, Sheriff Denny Nau and Maxine Ishler

Helping courts facing high-profile trials

There were many lessons learned when hundreds of reporters from around the world came to cover the Jerry Sandusky trial in a small town with confined courthouse space.

Which is why Pennsylvania jurists and administrators are sharing their thoughts on a new video to guide other courts through high-profile cases. The 90-minute video — produced by the AOPC — has been provided to the National Center for State Courts and is available on its electronic video library.

More than 250 reporters and 33 television satellite trucks descended on Bellefonte, a town of 6,000 residents, for the beginning of the trial in December 2011.

The logistical and security concerns as well as analysis of what it would take to satisfy the information needs of the news media, were thoroughly vetted before the trial. The result was a smooth, textbook-like operation where justice was served.

The video features an extended conversation with Senior

Judge **John M. Cleland**, who presided over the trial, and interviews with Centre County President Judge **Thomas King Kistler** and District Court Administrator **Maxine Ishler**. **Jim Koval**, AOPC communications manager, and **Steve Schell**, a former AOPC communications coordinator, and Centre County Sheriff Denny Nau also were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted by **Rick Pierce**, an AOPC judicial programs administrator. Video recording and editing was done by **Leo Perrong**, a technician with the AOPC audio-video department. Each interview features analysis and recommended best practices from the trial. **AOPC**

more INFORMATION

To watch “Solving the Sandusky Storm: How a High-Profile Trial Can Turn a Small Town Upside Down,” go to the NCSC library (<http://www.ncsc.org/Publications-and-Library.aspx>). A limited number of DVDs are available by contacting Rick Pierce of AOPC’s Judicial Programs at (717) 231-3300 x 4011.

Updated guide issued for child dependency matters

An updated resource used by judges and others to help strengthen families and protect children has been issued by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

The *Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook* first distributed in 2010 guides family court judges, hearing masters, attorneys and child welfare professionals through the maze of legal issues and needs of abused and neglected children.

“New and experienced judges across the Commonwealth have embraced the benchbook as a valuable resource, as have lawyers, in their courtrooms,” said Supreme Court Justice **Max Baer**, a former administrative judge of family court in Allegheny County. “Unlike other treatises on child welfare which once completed are rarely updated, the *Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook* is a living document.”

The updated benchbook incorporates a number of new laws, changes in court procedural rules, and appellate court decisions that impact dependency proceedings. It also includes new sections on subjects such as the termination of court supervision, family finding, father identification and engagement, and incarcerated parents. There also are expanded sections on visitation and support for older youth aging out of the court-supervised system.

Organized for quick and efficient use by means of checklists, suggested questions and best-practice recommendations, the benchbook enhances informed decision-making and child advocacy in a manner not previously done. Other court systems — most notably in Vermont and as far away as the African nation of Tanzania — have used Pennsylvania’s benchbook as a model to enhance their own local practices.

The dependency benchbook is a product of the Supreme Court’s ongoing efforts to implement best practices in reducing delays in placing at-risk children in safe and permanent homes. Annual State Children’s Roundtables, begun in 2007, provide a forum to share ideas and develop strategies for judges, lawyers and child welfare professionals.

The court’s efforts are led by the AOPC’s Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) in close partnership with the state Department of Public Welfare’s Office of Children, Youth and Families. The OCFC, created in October 2006 by the Supreme Court, is funded with federal grants from the Court Improvement Project run by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The updated benchbook was distributed to judges at this year’s Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Court Judges in Hershey, and is available on the OCFC website (www.ocfcpcourts.us). **AOPC**

