

# **COURT WATCH - ROCHESTER**

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

As court watch volunteers, we are acting as advocates for a fair and equitable justice system. While not actively preparing, supporting, and accompanying victims to court, court watchers play an important role: in effect to empower senior citizens and neighborhoods. We wish to create a more informed and involved public by documenting judicial actions in the courts, court watchers help to ensure that judicial personnel are held accountable for their responses to senior and neighborhood issues.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To increase public awareness and public trust in the justice system by using trained volunteers as monitors.
2. To acknowledge exemplary actions by judges.
3. To protect the rights and ensure the safety of victims and their neighborhoods.
4. To make those involved in the judicial process aware of the public's interest in how courts handle senior and neighborhood affairs.
5. To promote consistent application of statutes regarding senior and neighborhood issues.
- 6 To promote judicial accountability.

## **COURT WATCH PRIORITIES**

1. To maintain a constructive, rather than adversarial, relationship with the justice system.
2. To help the justice system reach its potential by identifying shortcomings, recommending practical solutions, and advocating for change.
3. To communicate and share information with organizations, agencies, and neighborhoods that provide direct services and advocacy for senior citizens and neighborhood issues.
4. To recognize and attempt to understand the dilemmas and complexity of the decisions that justice system personnel face.
5. To help assure that the scales of justice are balanced between the defendant's rights and the safety of the community; between efficient proceedings and effective outcomes; between swift discipline and compassionate rehabilitation; between the hard edge of the law and the blurred reality of human failure.

## **COURT WATCH IS NOT:**

1. A vigilante or extremist organization.
2. "Out to get" judges or defendants or to restrict judicial independence.
3. Affiliated with any political party or religious faith.
4. A provider of victim advocacy or direct service.

## PROCESS OF BECOMING A COURT WATCHER

1. Attend a basic 3 hour **orientation** program about Court Watch
2. Fill out a complete **application** form and have a **criminal background check**
3. Have an **interview** and go through a formal screening process.
  - a. Applicants must be objective
  - b. Applicants or applicant's family must not have been recent victims of a crime.
  - c. Applicants must not have been arrested or convicted of a crime or have a pending case in the court system.
  - d. Applicants are questioned about previous court room experiences.
    - i. Served on jury, had divorce proceedings in court, involved in a civil or criminal trial or litigation.
  - e. Applicants will be questioned extensively as to their opinions of the justice system.
  - f. Applicants must be 21+ years of age (minimum)
  - g. Applicants must have good hearing ability, as conversations in court rooms can be hard to understand and sometimes soft spoken.
4. After the applicant passes the **screening** and application process, they will be given a trial observation session in court with a trainer or "seasoned" Court Watcher.
5. Attend the **formal training** class(es) to become a Court Watcher.
  - a. Objectivity and impartiality are emphasized in the training.
  - b. The defendant is innocent unless the jury decides otherwise.
  - c. The role of the Court Watcher is not to pass judgment on the defendant, or side with the victim.
  - d. The Court Watchers do not display any emotions and will be as unobtrusive as possible in the courtroom.
  - e. The Court Watchers are trained in proper courtroom etiquette, emphasizing courtesy and open-mindedness.
  - f. The Court Watchers will learn how to carefully document the session using the forms provided.
  - g. The Court Watcher learns about the judicial process from arraignment to sentencing.
  - h. The philosophy of the justice system, emphasizing the principles of the law, not just the procedures are taught.
  - i. The role of the judge, jury, prosecutor, and defense attorneys are explained.
  - j. Important legal terms and concepts are taught. (Legal Dictionaries will be made available)
  - k. The different phases of a trial are taught from jury selection to final summation.
  - l. Court Watchers are instructed not to follow a case, rather they are to observe a half day session per week in different courtroom setting.
    - i. Watchers are there to evaluate the system and participants at the session only.

- m. Continuing education classes will be offered
  - i. To reinforce the goals
  - ii. To iron out the flaws in the program
  - iii. To share information that will further improve the program
  - iv. Special speakers will be invited for further education.

# VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION

**Job Title:** Court Watch Monitor

**Purpose:** To monitor Olmsted County court cases involving senior citizen and neighborhood issues and to report significant data so that the information can be used to track individual cases as well as important trends. Court watch volunteer coordinators may use this information to communicate and/or disseminate it in a newsletter, the media, and/or to those with authority to change policies and procedures within the justice system.

**Location:** Olmsted County District Court primarily in the Rochester/Olmsted County Government Center, 151 SE 4 Street, Rochester, MN.

## **Responsibilities:**

1. Sign up for a convenient time. Be there on time.
2. Follow the Court Watch Monitor guidelines while in the courthouse.
3. Complete all monitoring forms, return them immediately, and debrief with the Court Watch supervisor.
4. Monitor at least twelve (12) half days a year, preferably at least one half day per month.
5. Periodically review the Court Watch materials to remain knowledgeable on relevant issues.
6. Attend at least three of the quarterly Court Watch updates a year to continue education and to gain mutual support.
7. Continue self-education concerning Court Watch core issues, e.g. court systems and institutional responses, cycles of senior and neighborhood issues,

## **Qualifications:**

1. Complete an orientation session
2. Complete application form, including a background check
3. Complete two (2) observation sessions with a Court Watch trainer, one prior to training and another following training.
4. Complete the formal Court Watch Monitor training.

**Evaluation:** On-going; indicators are the quality of paperwork, adherence to courtroom guidelines, consistent attendance and participation attendance at Court Watch sponsored activities and events.

**Benefits:** Helping to ensure the proper treatment of victims involved with the justice system, learning more about the dynamics of senior and neighborhood issues; helping to improve the justice systems response to cases concerning senior citizens and neighborhoods; meeting people who share your ideas and values. The privilege of calling yourself a Court Watch Monitor.



**Brief Educational History:**

**Brief Volunteer History:**

**Organizational Affiliations:**

**Brief Employment History:**

What **skills** are you bringing to this position? (computer, software programs.....)

If we publish a newsletter or do a media release may we use your name in the article?

\_\_\_\_Yes                      \_\_\_\_No

**Professional References:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Name                      Company                      Title                      Telephone Number

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
Name                      Company                      Title                      Telephone Number

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Name                      Company                      Title                      Telephone Number



**Authorization and Verification** (*Please initial each statement and sign below*):

- I hereby verify that all information contained herein is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.\_\_\_\_\_
- I hereby authorize the Court Watch Program to contact my references listed above.\_\_\_\_\_
- I hereby authorize the court Watch Program to check my criminal History\_\_\_\_\_

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**Please Return this form by Postal Mail to:**

**TRIAD  
% Crime Prevention Unit  
Rochester Police Department  
101 SE 4 Street  
Rochester, MN 55904-3761**

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**For office use only:**

Date Application Received:\_\_\_\_\_

Date Of Orientation:\_\_\_\_\_

Date Of Interview:\_\_\_\_\_

Date Of First Observation:\_\_\_\_\_

Date Training Completed:\_\_\_\_\_

Date Of Second Observation:\_\_\_\_\_

