

## TRIAL LAWYER FACES FACTS

***"If we spent more money on grade and high school students instead of catching criminals, we would be a lot better off."***

By the time people enter the criminal justice system as defendants, it is usually too late to help many of them. Substantial amounts of money are spent trying and incarcerating criminals, and drug dependency programs are extremely expensive. Most judges, prosecutors and defense lawyers agree that, if more money were spent to support education in the first place, a lot less would have to be spent on criminals.

So says Washington attorney, Steven P. Kuenzel, a partner in Eckelkamp, Eckelkamp, Wood and Kuenzel. Kuenzel is one of the most prominent and active trial lawyers in Franklin County. He has acquired substantial experience with defendants brought before the courts since he earned his Juris Doctor degree at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law in 1976.

Kuenzel does not fit the stereotype of lawyers who use legal jargon and multi-syllabic terminology. He speaks plainly: "The biggest factor in crime is chemical dependency. And the most effective way of preventing use of illegal drugs is education.

"Let's face it: by the time people become criminals it is usually too late to help many of them. Education is the only effective long-term solution. People who engage in crime are not from the well-educated sectors of society. If we had spent enough money on them during their earlier years, we would be spending less on them today.

"We don't have enough jail cells for everybody who has a chemical problem. The criminal justice system cannot solve these problems."

Kuenzel points out that the cost to taxpayers for a 4-week chemical dependency program for a criminal is between ten and 12 thousand dollars. "Think of what could be done if the educational system could have used that money when it would have done some good."

Nationally, attitudes by young people toward chemical dependency are improving, and consumption is actually declining, Kuenzel said. This, in his opinion, is a direct result of efforts in the public and private school systems throughout the country. "If we spent more money on grade and high school students instead of catching criminals, we would be a lot better off."



**Steven P. Kuenzel**

He rapidly lists the specific savings: fewer jails, lower costs of incarceration, fewer police, lower premiums for auto, medical and property insurance, less unemployment. On the positive side: a more productive economy because there would be more skilled workers who can help the country compete. Last year Franklin County spent \$3.4 for law, order and the justice system.

Kuenzel emphasizes that parents, too, play a significant role in whether or not a person succumbs to illicit drugs.

Kuenzel and his wife, Susan, are parents of Steven, Jr., who attends Our Lady of Lourdes Elementary School. Steve, Sr., went there, too, after which he attended and graduated from Washington High School.

"I support both public and private school systems," he said. "Because I was a student in both, I have a unique perspective, and I know that both systems are vital to any community and make significant contributions to our well being. We should all be committed to the idea that both must be first- quality school systems."

Kuenzel's law practice includes criminal and civil trial work, in addition to business and estate planning. He is active in the Lions Club, the Elks, the Chamber of Commerce, and is currently president of the Washington Park Commission. He is also a member of several legal professional associations.

"The quality of both public and private schools are a reflection of the quality of life in any community," he said.