



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAYETTE COUNTY SOLICITOR WINS CCAP AWARD

Uniontown, PA – Fayette County Solicitor John “Jack” Purcell received the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania’s (CCAP) Outstanding Solicitor Award recently in Lancaster.

Presented during CCAP’s Annual Conference and Trade Show, the award was a surprise for Purcell, who has served as Fayette County’s chief solicitor since 2016. He was nominated by Fayette County commissioners Dave Lohr, chairman, Vince Vicites and Scott Dunn.

“I’m just shocked. I was very surprised and grateful for everybody nominating me. I’m more of a behind-the-scenes person, but it’s always good to be recognized,” Purcell said. “I have two great assistants who deserve credit, as well, because it’s certainly not just me that handles the county’s legal matters. We’ve been confronted with a lot of serious issues, and we’ve met them head on. I also have excellent staff. The commissioners and their chiefs of staff have provided the necessary assistance and cooperation for everything I do, and I can’t say enough about all of them. We have a great team. Without all of them, I would not be able to produce the results I have for Fayette County.

Purcell’s work for Fayette County includes providing legal counsel on all actions or suits brought against the county; reviewing and providing legal advice for county policies, property and tax assessment issues, Right-to-Know requests and contractual concerns; evaluating and resolving legal matters associated with state and federal grants, funding, reimbursements and other financial matters; drafting or reviewing ordinances, resolutions and contracts; and much more.

Vicites said Purcell has attended more municipal meetings over the last 25 years than any other Pennsylvania solicitor.

“This is a great honor, because no one knows municipal law better than Jack Purcell. He is well-deserving of this award,” Vicites said. “Jack’s expertise in his field has helped Fayette County residents be well-represented from a legal standpoint, which better serves all county taxpayers. We are very fortunate to have Jack as our solicitor, as well as a good team of solicitors assisting him. Congratulations to Jack and his family.”

Dunn echoed Vicites’ sentiments, adding how “very proud” he is of Purcell.

“Jack’s knowledge, professionalism and dedication to serving our county in its entirety is a true testament as to why he’s deserving of this recognition,” Dunn said.

Lohr said it’s “phenomenal that, once again, Fayette County is recognized for its excellence.”

“Today, the focus is on Jack Purcell, an unassuming man who brings a wealth of knowledge, experience, and expertise to this position - and does so with quiet dignity. Jack is always there when we need him, providing valuable insight and direction, serving with distinction, responsive to the county’s needs and

always looking out for our best interests,” Lohr said. “It is an honor to work with someone of his caliber. Fayette County is blessed to benefit from all he brings to the table. I hold Jack in the highest regard and consider him an integral part of our team.”

During his tenure as chief solicitor, Lohr added, Purcell has been involved in “everything from legal questions pertaining to day-to-day operations to providing counsel” and “would be the first to point out that he doesn’t work alone.”

“Above and beyond that, he has been an integral part of planning for the new Fayette County Jail, ensuring that design decisions are being made with the best interests of inmates and staff alike in mind,” Lohr said. “In addition to Jack, we have two other solicitors, Sheryl Heid and Tim Witt, who work closely with Jack. Together, they work like a finely tuned machine. We’re fortunate to have such a skilled team of solicitors working for the common good. It’s wonderful that Jack has been recognized for all he does for us, and the recognition is well-deserved. As always, I am not surprised when Fayette County is recognized for excellence, and I say ‘hats off’ to Jack Purcell.”

During his tenure, Purcell has been instrumental in the Fayette County Prison Project; Fayette County Business Park Expansion Project; Sheepskin Trail development; multiple rural broadband initiatives; and countless other county endeavors. Before becoming chief solicitor, Purcell established himself as one of Pennsylvania’s top attorneys through a storied career of achievements.

In 1980, Purcell received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Pennsylvania State University, where he was on the Dean’s List, an Intercollegiate Athlete, and recognized in Who’s Who in American Junior Colleges. He graduated from West Virginia University College of Law in 1984, where he was named to the Order of the Coif - a group of students selected by faculty from the top ten percent of their graduating class who rank highest in scholarship.

Purcell has argued multiple cases before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and the United States Courts of Appeals for the Third and Fourth Circuits; taken on over 100 cases before the Pennsylvania Superior and Commonwealth Courts and the Pennsylvania Workers’ Compensation Appeal Board; prepared and granted a Petition for Certiorari to the United States Supreme Court in a death penalty case; served as trial counsel in complex civil cases in the United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, involving civil rights and employee benefits; prepared and prosecuted to conclusion over 300 workers’ compensation cases; and tried to verdict cases in the courts of Allegheny, Fayette and Greene counties.

In addition to Fayette County, Purcell represents the Fayette County Association of Township Supervisors, Fayette County Drug and Alcohol Commission, Albert Gallatin Municipal Authority, Center-West Joint Sewer Authority, Luzerne Township Sewage Authority, National Pike Water Authority, Connellsville Police Officers Association, Southwest Regional Tax Bureau, Wharton Township Zoning Hearing Board, Centerville Borough, and Luzerne, Connellsville, Perry and Springhill townships.

In his Outstanding Solicitor Award nomination letter, Purcell is described as having “more experience with municipal law than anyone in county history.”

“Jack personifies an outstanding example of ethical and moral conduct while performing his duties of office. His integrity is unquestionable. He is always courteous, polite and respectful. He is an equitable conversation partner and true gentleman,” the nomination letter states. “Jack’s commitment to his county and community goes above and beyond. He is a perfect selection for this award.”

Several of Purcell's friends and colleagues sent letters of support to bolster his CCAP award nomination, including Fayette County assistant solicitors Sheryl Heid and Tim Witt.

"Jack's strengths are in his knowledge of the law, combined with his high standards of moral integrity. Jack is able to bring multiple parties to resolution of difficult issues through his guidance and patience," Heid wrote. "Jack believes that the legal guidance of small municipalities is just as important as large municipalities. The contributions Jack makes improves fair governance of each township, each borough and our county. This, in turn, strengthens our citizens and our state."

Witt wrote that Purcell "instills confidence in those around him" and has the "uncanny ability to quickly synthesize information and make poignant observations that are crucial to forming effective plans and strategies."

"He has an encyclopedic knowledge of the County Code and county government, which has enabled him to amply lead county officials for the betterment of the county," he wrote. "With the leadership of Jack and our county commissioners, Fayette County has made incredible strides in improving the condition of our county."

Along with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Purcell's wife, Annamarie Purcell of Uniontown, and daughter, Johnna, were part of the surprise recognition, with the latter driving from her home in Washington, D.C. to Lancaster to attend the ceremony.

"I didn't think a whole lot about my daughter being there at first, because we were able to take a short family trip to Philadelphia while we were out there, and she went shopping with my wife Tuesday, so I really just thought she was there to visit us," Purcell said. "I even told my wife we shouldn't go to the (awards) dinner because our daughter was in town and didn't have a ticket. Later that day, they said they were able to get another ticket somehow. Now that I look back on it, I should have seen the signs."

Purcell said he still didn't realize he was getting the award until he heard the master of ceremonies name the colleges he attended.

"It's amazing that I did not pick up on this. The commissioners said a few times that I really should go to the conference because there would be a lot of great workshops, but the last few months have been so hectic that I've just been too busy to notice anything unusual about it," Purcell said. "Only right when they said both of my schools did I realize they were talking about me. I did not put it together until then."

Purcell said his initial shock kept him from saying everything he wanted to say in his acceptance speech, including his overwhelming gratitude for his family.

"I have to thank my wife and daughter. They've been incredibly supportive of me, and I'd never be able to do the things I've done without them," he said. "I think this award shows that the statewide organization recognizes that Fayette County is on the move and meeting any challenges we face in an effective manner. This is an award for everybody."

To learn more about the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), visit www.pacounties.org.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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