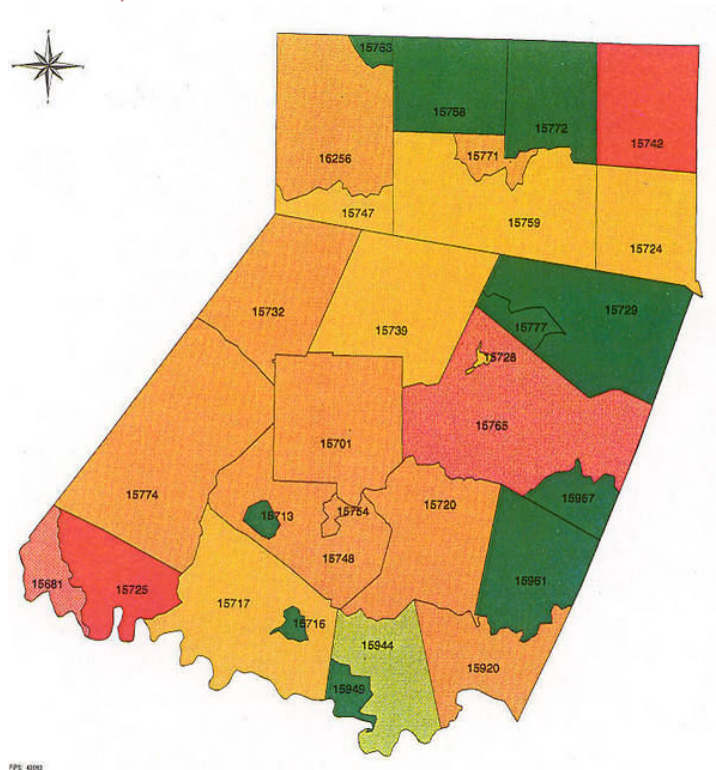


# District attorney plans to implement lifesaver program

By RANDY WELLS [rwells@indianagazette.net](mailto:rwells@indianagazette.net)

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Indiana County District Attorney Patrick Dougherty Wednesday asked the county commissioners to support a program his office is implementing to provide additional safety for dementia patients and others in Indiana County.

Dougherty said he became aware of Project Lifesaver after Patti Hewitt Choby told him about her recent experience with her husband, who has dementia. Hewitt told Dougherty her husband wandered away from her while they were shopping at Martin's in White Township, and police officers, store employees and others searched for him for four hours before he returned safely to the couple's Indiana Township home.

Hewitt told Dougherty she was aware of Project Lifesaver programs in Florida where she previously lived. It is a system for locating missing persons with dementia, epilepsy, Alzheimer's disease, autism, Down syndrome and other related illnesses who have a tendency to wander away from their caregivers.

Dougherty said people enrolled in the program wear a small transmitter, about the size of a wristwatch, on their wrist or ankle. The transmitter sends out a unique tracking signal. If a person goes missing, search teams use their signal-receiving equipment to track and locate the missing person.

He is proposing to use drug forfeiture money to buy the necessary equipment and have Indiana County detectives trained to operate the tracking equipment. He said that state police and local police departments have told him that many man-hours are spent searching for patients who wander away.

Dougherty said Project Lifesaver may be operational in Indiana County by the first of the new year.

"Meeting with Patti Hewitt really opened my eyes to the need for this," he said.

Patricia Hewitt Choby is a former Indiana school teacher who in the 1960s became an icon of local television popularity as Miss Patti, the host of the children's "Romper Room" show on WJAC-TV, Johnstown.

Also at their meeting Wednesday the commissioners approved a memorandum of understanding that will admit Butler County to

the Intercounty Regional Radio System, a one-of-a-kind network for public safety radio traffic connected to a server in Greensburg. Butler County will be the seventh county in the network, joining Indiana, Armstrong, Westmoreland, Fayette, Somerset and Lawrence counties.

ICORRS allows emergency responders to seamlessly talk across county and municipal boundaries.

Tom Stutzman, director of the Indiana County Emergency Management Agency, said that even before the addition of Butler County, ICORRS' radio coverage area is 5,147 square miles with 918,000 residents. The network includes more than 900 public safety agencies, he said.

On the recommendation of the Indiana County Office of Planning and Development, the commissioners agreed to add \$26,978 in county liquid fuels funds to the \$15,000 previously approved for Plumville Borough. The total allocation of nearly \$42,000 will offset the projected cost of \$48,000 for repaving and building new curbs along Indiana Street in Plumville.

The commissioners proclaimed October as Chamber of Commerce Month in the county and commended the Indiana County Chamber of Commerce — now in its 105th year — for all it does as the leading business organization in the county. The local chamber, with 660 members, advances collaborative regional partnerships, mentors young professionals and provides leadership through marketing, promotion and business advocacy to help make Indiana County a more attractive and productive setting for business.

The commissioners appointed Donald Lorelli to the Housing Authority of Indiana County, and Denise McQuown-Hatter, Ronald Bowersox and Dr. Timothy Mack to the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board.

And Robin Maryai, the county's chief clerk, reminded county

residents that Oct. 31 will be the last day to apply for a civilian absentee ballot for the Nov. 7 election. Voters can do that by contacting the Voter Registration Office in the courthouse.

## Randy Wells

Reporter/staff writer

Randy Wells has been an Indiana Gazette reporter/staff writer since 1988. He regularly covers Indiana County government, Indiana Borough council and the Marion Center Area School District.