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Proclamation signed for "Jury Appreciation Week"

By: Lindsey Tederman

A proclamation was signed Wednesday making this week "Jury Appreciation Week" in Lexington. Lawyers, county employees, judges and other community members witnessed the signing by city council member Linda Miller on behalf of Mayor Ted Cook at the Lexington Public Library.

The importance of jury duty was presented by County Judge Carlton Clark and District Judge Jim Doyle. Liz Neely, PhD., the project director for the Minority and Justice Implementation Committee part of the Nebraska Bar Association, made introductions and spoke about her goal, to promote and educate the public about jury service, one of the highest duties of any citizen.

Judge Clark began by explaining the important process of picking a jury and the absolute right to a trial by jury. "It's the cornerstone of the justice system," Clark said.

He added the jury selection process is usually a smooth one, with the one complaint that juries may not be representative of the entire community. He emphasized the importance of giving everyone the opportunity to serve. To serve on a jury you must have a valid driver's license or be a registered voter. To qualify, you must also be a United States citizen, be 19 years of age or older and be physically and mentally capable.

During Judge Doyle's presentation, he spoke of the history of the jury, which went back 800 years ago. He referred to the story of how Robin Hood, which showed some of the first trials by juries. And 600 years later this system was put into place in the United States Constitution, Amendments 6 and 7, and directly into the first articles of the Nebraska Constitution.

Judge Doyle then thanked the lawyers, the honored officers of the court, who practice at trials. "We must give lawyers their due," Doyle said.

He warned of individual's rights diminishing by way of big corporations. These businesses are only looking to speed commerce by forcing customers to sign a citizen's right to a trial away, Judge Doyle said.

In closing, Judge Doyle said serving on a jury is the only other way to be directly involved with government besides voting. "You are performing a function of government that deserves fellow man." After this event, Neely, Judge Clark and Judge Doyle headed to the Lexington High School to speak to the students and on Thursday evening, met with the Grass Roots Leadership Development Program in Lexington.