



# Sunshine seminar turnout encouraging

Cass County's public office holders and their staff members did themselves proud - for the most part - overflowing the Sheriff's Office Community Room Nov. 19 for the Attorney General's Sunshine Law presentation.

Attorney General Chris Koster's Sunshine Law expert, Tom Durkin, who is spending the year giving these seminars in every county in the state, told attendees that it was the best turnout he had seen before giving a rousing and entertaining talk on the importance of public access to information and discussions.

The Sunshine Law, Durkin freely admitted, is "the most violated" section of the Missouri Revised Statutes, and there is a reason for it.

"It's more art than science, and art is interpretable," he said.

That makes adherence to the standards of openness set forth by the General Assembly a challenge, but one that is critical to our system of government and our way of life.

"If you believe in freedom, you'll believe in this level of transparency and openness - it's as simple as that," he said.

He said Koster strongly supports the outreach provided by these county-by-county seminars.

"We believe it is far better to educate than to litigate."

But even with Thursday's surprisingly strong turnout, there were those organizations conspicuously missing. Though the Harrisonville and Cass-Midway school districts sent representation, the two largest districts in the county, Belton and Raymore-Peculiar, sent no one. This is particularly disturbing in light of the relative-

ly large administrative staffs of both districts.

Also missing was the Pleasant Hill School District, as well as the majority of the smaller districts in the county.

Additionally, there was only one water district represented and one fire district represented. Again, these organizations are run by taxpayer-elected boards. Those boards spend your tax money and are subject to Sunshine Law provisions. Therefore, representatives should have been in attendance.

The city of Peculiar was well represented at the seminar, despite hosting an elected officials training session last month that featured a Sunshine Law talk by a Missouri Municipal League attorney. Certainly, as a municipal government organization, we wouldn't give that presentation anywhere near the weight of one conducted by the Attorney General's office on behalf of the citizens, but attendance at any such educational session is certainly an indication of interest.

Below is a list of those government representatives attending the Attorney General's seminar:

**State**

- Debbi Lehr, representing State Rep. Luke Scavuzzo (D-Harrisonville)

**Cass County**

- Office holders and staff: Janet Burlingame, County Clerk; Michele Phelps, human resources; Bob Huston, Assessor; Pam Shipley, Collector; Steve Chesklik, Treasurer; Sandy Gregory, Recorder of Deeds; Kelly Elliott, Circuit Clerk; Teresa Hensley, Prosecutor.
- Law enforcement: Steve Whitmore, Teresa Carmichael, Amy Forst, Chuck Stocking and Susan Lett, sheriff's office.
- Library Board: Roger Toomey and Seth Hershberger.

**Cities**

- Belton: Dot Watkins, staff; Justin Neff, city council; Patti Ledford, City Clerk; Bobby Davidson, city council; Everett Loughridge, city council; Jay Leipzig, community development director; Ed Willette, park board; and Pat Stiles, park board.
- Freeman: Elaine Jackson and Don Jackson.

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- Harrisonville: Sharon Allen, police department; Sheryl Stanley, public information officer; and Debbie Grant, City Clerk.
- Raymore: Jeff Cox, city council; and Jeanie Woerner, City Clerk.
- Peculiar: Holly Stark, alderman; Jim Antonides, alderman; and Brad Ratliff, City Administrator.
- Garden City: Randy Jones, City Administrator.

## Schools

- Harrisonville: Marie Vallec.
- Cass-Midway: Susan Tinich, elementary prin-

cipal; and Shelbie Dalton, special education director.

## Fire departments

- Central Cass: Jarrett E. Hawley, Jr.

## Water districts

- PWSD No. 2: David Shroud.

## Private citizens

- A total of seven additional attendees were private citizens.

## Note:

A law enforcement seminar was also conducted, which drew a number of area officers and administrators.