

Janet Protasiewicz

Judge, Milwaukee County Circuit Court

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(Member since 2007)



Janet and husband Greg Sell (center) on the 4th of July

Milwaukee County Circuit Court Judge Janet Protasiewicz hears criminal complaints and defenses of serious crimes; crimes as ugly and incomprehensible as child pornography and as fatal as homicides. (The Circuit Court is the state court seated in the county and handles legal matters as far reaching as probate to felonies. In Milwaukee County there are 47 Circuit Court judges managed by Milwaukee County Chief Judge Maxine White. Judge White determines the assignments each of judges assume.)

Elected in 2014, Janet is up for re-election in April 2020. She is well trained for her position. After earning a law degree from Marquette University, she worked in the District Attorney's office prosecuting armed robberies and cases in Children's Court.

She's seen her share of the underbelly of society populated by dangerous people, but understandably some of the most horrific and difficult cases she's adjudicated have been those involving child pornography. She has been astounded by the monsters preying on children and infants. Janet's role has also occasionally meant personal risk. For some months last winter, she was under 24-hour police protection and now she sleeps with a police phone at her bedside.

Still, Janet continues to do her job. *"I want to serve. I don't let that element of society scare me. I go to Court every day doing the best of my ability to protect the innocent and law-abiding citizens of Milwaukee County."*

Janet didn't grow up dreaming to be a lawyer. After graduating with a degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she simultaneously applied to earn a master's degree and law school. She decided she really didn't want to teach so law school won the toss.

Her mother was a driving force in Janet's ambition to choose a career that would sustain her intellectually and financially. The legal field seems to be a family proclivity as one of Janet's brothers' practices law in Cleveland, OH.

Despite the tremendous responsibility Janet's robe requires, she maintains a zest for life and fun is a significant element of her existence.

She and husband, Greg Sell, a tax lawyer with Davis & Kuelthau, make time to enjoy much of what Milwaukee and the country has to offer with travel high on the list. (Janet and Greg were introduced by mutual friends. Greg refers to their first meeting as a "blind screening.") Short trips are most convenient for the couple as their demanding work schedules preclude weeks away.

"There's no place I don't like to go, but one of the most spectacular trips was a recent visit to Glacier National Park [Located in northwestern Montana along the Canadian border]. I've been to Yellowstone and that was wonderful, but Glacier National Park was sensational. I'm deathly afraid of snakes so I don't hike all that much, but I suspended my fear to marvel at this natural wonder."



Janet and Greg at St. Mary's Lake in Glacier National Park

The couple also enjoys theater with frequent tickets to the Rep, the Skylight and recently Renaissance Theaterworks.

Janet loves to cook. *"I have about 400 cookbooks and each Sunday I check our calendar for the week ahead and menu plan for those nights we'll both be home."*

She also recently took up tennis and really enjoys it. In summer she plays twice a week and, in the winter, has a lesson each week and plays a match as well.

Janet gives back to the community in many ways. She just finished serving as the President of the Marquette Law School Alumni Association; volunteers for the Red Cross and is on the board of directors for the Basilica of St. Josaphat Foundation. In addition to legal associations and groups, Janet is also a member of Tempo and Professional Dimensions, but the Rotary Club of Milwaukee has her heart most of all.

"I Love Rotary. If I had to choose only one organization to commit to it would be Rotary. If my schedule wasn't so restricted, I'd be more active with committees. I love the speakers, Done in a Day and the good things Rotary does for the community. I believe in the four-way test. I have the highest regard for the membership and the Rotary purpose."

Janet's commitment and belief in Rotary has been put into action. She has introduced 15 new members since she joined in 2007.



Editor's Note: We feature the popular Rotary People of Action series bi-monthly. September 20th we will profile Dan Nelson, President, Nelson Schmidt Inc. Rotary People of Action is written by RCM Board Member (and its Sargent at Arms) Barbara Velez.