



## December, 2009 - New CASAs complete training

Court Appointed Special Advocates for children (CASA) director James Ward introduced the four volunteers who completed 35 hours of initial training in November and were sworn in last Thursday by Judge Susan Dobrich. Debbey

Proven of South Bend is the Human Resources and Volunteer Manager at the Cass County Council on Aging, a past member of the Literary Council of Cass Co., and an elementary school teacher for 10 years. Christine Kucklick of Cassopolis has a finance background, having been a corporate controller in the private sector for many years. In addition, she has been a volunteer for United Way and



most recently mentors Cass students in reading and math. Edna Holmes of Berrien Springs spent a lifetime in education, both as a volunteer and teacher. She has taught at the high school and college level, in the south, west coast, and most recently Lake Michigan College. In addition, Edna has served as a radiology technician in several major hospitals. And Eileen Staley of Cassopolis markets software and IT services to public libraries. She has also been a member of the Cass Literary Council, and a volunteer at Sam Adams School. Long after college Eileen went back to school to obtain an associates degree in Computer Technology at Southwestern Michigan College, and at one point she and her husband were serious about becoming foster parents.

“There are several common threads these new volunteers share, all are professionals in their respective fields, all have done volunteer work in their community, and all have worked with kids and are obviously dedicated to the children,” Ward said. He went on to say that 2009 has been a very good year for CASA, doubling the number of volunteers and almost doubling the number of children they advocate for. 2009 brought many success stories of children

reunited with their parents, adoptions into loving families, and older children who successfully aged out of the system and are now living on their own. Ward also mentioned that the community has been very generous in support of CASA in 2009.

Barb Strlekar, president of the CASA board, welcomed the new volunteers into the CASA family and offered her support. Kristen Chism, a case worker from the Department of Human Services, told of her respect for CASA dating back to when her mother was a CASA volunteer, and the good relationships she has with her current CASAs on the many cases they work together. John Bossler of Edwardsburg, a volunteer for the past year, talked about his rewarding relationship with an 18 year old boy and commented that he may have learned even more from his CASA than the boy has learned from him. Victor Fitz, Cass County Prosecutor, talked about the importance of working with youth in the community and giving them a good start in life so they don't end up in the court system later in life. Fitz told the group that because of their dedication they will make a difference in a child's life.

After the swearing-in ceremony, the new volunteers, their guests, local dignitaries, and friends of CASA enjoyed cake and conversation in the Law and Courts building.