

## Yolo County Jurors, Take a Bow

California's Jury Appreciation week begins on May 8<sup>th</sup>, and Yolo County's hardworking jurors deserve special recognition. Throughout California, jurors spend countless hours in court, deciding difficult and important questions with only minimal compensation. Jurors are the unsung heroes of our justice system.

Here in Yolo, our jurors work especially hard.

According to the latest statistics from the California Judicial Council, available at [www.courts.ca.gov](http://www.courts.ca.gov), Yolo County has significantly more jury trials per capita than most California counties. For the fiscal year 2013-2014, Yolo County had 144 criminal jury trials and six civil trials, while Sacramento County had 268 criminal trials and 25 civil trials during the same period. Yolo's population is less than one-sixth that of Sacramento's, but our trial load is more than one-half of our much larger neighbor. We could not handle this volume of trials without our dedicated pool of jurors.

Jury service represents an enormous contribution of citizen resources. If each of Yolo's 150 trials takes about 24 hours of jury time (four days, with six hours per day), for 12 jurors and two alternates, then in one year Yolo citizens devote more than **50,000 hours** to jury service.

And this does not count the many hours spent by prospective jurors who are summoned for duty, but do not end up serving. According to a 2007 countrywide survey by the National Center for State Courts, for every 100 persons who receive a jury summons, fewer than five are actually impaneled on a jury. The others do not serve for a variety of reasons, including peremptory (or "no cause") challenges by the lawyers, or resolution of the case at the last minute. For every juror who serves, there are a number of others who suffer the inconvenience of clearing their schedules in readiness for service, but who do not make it into the jury box.

So the jury system takes a huge amount of our citizens' time – is it worth it?

It would be more efficient to have professionals decide cases, as is done in some European countries. But the American system of citizen-jurors provides superior justice, and not just because 12 minds are better than one.

Because of their diversity, citizen-jurors are better equipped to see cases from all angles, and to take a broad and not myopic view of the facts. A diverse group of individuals, deliberating with each other, can get closer to the truth than any one person, no matter how wise.

But our system can be improved. Currently, the Governor and the Legislature are considering a proposal to reduce the number of peremptory challenges for misdemeanor criminal offenses from ten to six, which would allow the court to summon fewer jurors. Other reforms have already been adopted, such as expedited jury trials for simple civil cases. The Yolo Superior Court is continuously looking for ways to minimize the burdens of service on our jurors.

When you stop to think about it, you realize how extraordinary our jury system is. We take citizens from all walks of life, and entrust them with some of the most sensitive and difficult questions. Jurors hold tremendous moral authority, because unlike other government actors, no one can argue that they are beholden to campaign contributors or special interests, or that they are seeking power or money. They are ordinary people doing their best to provide justice.

To recognize our hard-working jurors, Yolo County Superior Court will host a reception on May 13, 2016 at 12:15 p.m. in the jury room of the courthouse, which is at 1000 Main Street in Woodland. We will celebrate with cake and a small token of our appreciation. Any Yolo County resident who has served on a jury in the last year is encouraged to attend (no RSVP required), and receive some well-deserved praise.

*Dan Maguire is a judge on the Yolo Superior Court.*