

# Wronko

From Page L-1

Now they are handled by a handful of lawyers who specialize in domestic violence and who see the cases through from beginning to end.

"Kevin, through his hard work, was instrumental in building one of the finest domestic-violence units in the state," said Passaic County Prosecutor James Avigliano. "His respect was statewide, not just countywide."

Avigliano has appointed Senior Assistant Prosecutor Gina Pfund, already a lawyer in the section, to take over Wronko's responsibilities. Avigliano says he is committed to keeping the section alive, but this year's fiscal situation will make it challenging.

"The unit has gone from five lawyers to four lawyers, and it will probably be down to three lawyers. I can't fund everything."

Avigliano said that when the department lost a \$200,000 federal grant two years ago, he made up the difference from other parts of his budget rather than cut staff.

Wronko, appreciative of Avigliano's support through the years, sounds as enthusiastic about the job upon his departure as he was when he launched the section seven years ago.

"I had a lady just yesterday. She said, 'Yes, he beat me. But if I don't get him out of jail, who's going to baby-sit my kids? I'm paying hundreds of dollars for child care. You're now punishing me.' In that case, I was able to work out a plea agreement where he got out of jail and he was able to baby-sit the kids, separate from her being in the house," he says.

Therein lies a strange kind of dichotomy seen in many domestic violence cases, he notes. "Not all these guys are bad fathers. Sometimes they're just bad husbands or boyfriends," he says. "We can arrange visitation that's safe, sometimes with a third-party we can trust."

Other times, the behavior is more dangerous. "They'll kill pets. They'll scratch up her favorite car. Throw a favorite vase out the window. Take her favorite piece of jewelry or favorite picture of her mother. ... It's about a bully and his control."

Compared with other crimes –



CHRIS PEDOTA/STAFF

Chief Assistant Prosecutor Kevin Wronko with Dorria Fahmy, center, and Nawal Kahf. Fahmy is a member of Wafa House (Women Against Family Abuse), and Kahf is executive director.

## Support groups for women

Here are some support services in and around Passaic County for victims of domestic violence:

■ **Wafa House (Women Against Family Abuse):** Serves mostly women of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent, but all are welcome. Phone: 800-930-Wafa (9232); e-mail: info@wafahouse.org; address: Wafa House Inc., PO Box 2102, Clifton, NJ 07015-2102.

■ **SOS (Strengthen Our Sisters), West Caldwell.** Phone: 800-767-9470; e-mail: info@sosdv.org

■ **Project SARAH (Stop Abusive Relationships at Home):** Serves mostly Jewish and Russian-speaking women, but all are welcome. Phone: 973-777-7638; address: 199 Scoles Ave., Clifton, NJ 07012

■ **Manavi:** Serves mostly South Asian women, but all are welcome. Help line: 732-435-1414; e-mail: manavi@manavi.org; address: Manavi, PO Box 3103, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

domestic abuser often can be cured. "If we really hold them accountable, and make them go for counseling, most of them will not come back," he says. "But they have to have the system in their face. Up until then, they've been getting away with it."

The Domestic Violence Section handles the issuance of restraining orders in family court; and in criminal court, the prosecution of people who violate those restraining orders and those charged with the assault of a spouse or partner. If a victim is killed, the Prosecutor's Office Homicide Unit joins in. Less violent cases – those not in-

dled in Municipal Court.

Wronko, 59, says the biggest challenge has been earning the trust of victims, the vast majority of whom are women. One of the few men in his field, victims tend to look at him almost like a father figure.

"If you treat them with the decency they're entitled to, and maybe even have some tears with them – which I've done – most of the time you walk out of the room and you're getting hugs and thank-you's. ... You're obligated to be a good lawyer but you have to be a good human being. ... You can't get frustrated."

calls. In one case, and brought her house to play Sar over at her house her phone and s told me she had v dant in the' cou wasn't happy to s stood what was g let that effect my him. And I didn ther," he says.

More harrowi county case (he where) involving call that to this da mestic-violence s

"A highly educ highly educated with two knife slaughtering his years ago. Their the phone and s life by calling 911 year-old boy is on roes I've ever se olence. He truly s life."

Wronko says l years as a Passaic cutor more softer hardened. That, h part due to his w violence.

"I came out of feminist. I've met women, some ama