

The Family Business: Mom and Daughter Court Officers Rebecca and Jolyn Dingman

Maggie McCann: New York State Court Officers often refer to their academy classmates as family, a particularly fitting description for Rebecca and Jolyn Dingman, who made history as the first mother-daughter duo to graduate together from the Upstate Court Officer's Academy in June 2025.

Since then, they've been deployed to the Oneida County courts, every day bringing their strong family values and shared commitment to the safe, fair, and efficient administration of justice into the courthouse.

Welcome to Amici, News and Insights from the New York Courts. I'm Maggie McCann. And today, we're talking with Court Officers Rebecca and Jolyn Dingman, a remarkable mother-daughter team who remind us of the important role that empathy and compassion play in the title of Court Officer, but more so in our shared titles of community members and fellow human beings. We'll explore why they chose their shared career path, the challenges they've faced, and what they've learned from their first year on the job.

Welcome to the podcast, Officers Rebecca Dingman and Jolyn Dingman. For the remainder of the episode, with respect to your titles, I will be using your first names just so we don't get a bunch of Officer Dingman confusion.

But thank you both for coming on and agreeing to do this. I honestly have been really looking forward to this a little bit selfishly, just because you're both really great to talk to!

We have a lot to talk about, a lot of ground to cover. But, before getting into what's going on now in the Courts and where you're at now, I want to talk a little bit about what happened beforehand, how you got here. What was it that you were doing before you began the court officer journey?

COT Rebecca Dingman: So, for myself, I started with the Oneida County Sheriff's Office back in 2017 as a Court Attendant working in the combined building there. And that's where I really found my niche, so to speak.

I really enjoyed putting on the uniform and representing the agency, working with people that were coming into the courthouse, interacting with folks. I had a coworker that had mentioned to me about the New York State Court officer position, and this was back in 2017, 2018, and I started to look into it.

And at the time, the last time that a test was given was in 2014. So, from that point, I just started to learn about it and kind of research it and was just waiting on when the next test would be announced so that I could take the exam.

January 2020 was the exam announcement where you could sign up, I was slated to take it in April or June of 2020. And then obviously we know what happened with COVID so I ended up taking it in 2021.

September of 2021 I took the test, got a decent grade on it, took the first PAT (Physical Agility Test) and failed it, waited the 90 days, took the next PAT and failed that one too. But I really was hoping that maybe there would be another test announced. And to my surprise, I was really shocked that they offered it so soon. The announcement came out in 2023 that they would give it again in 2024. So I was all in and dialed in big time to take the exam and do what I needed to do, not to make those mistakes on that PAT and really drive that one home and succeed.

COT Jolyn Dingman: I was working at a grocery store before, and then I decided that I wanted to become a Court Attendant along with my mom because I wanted to get into the law enforcement field anyway.

I had almost completed my bachelor's degree in criminal justice. So, I only had online classes left to take so I figured, "Well, why not become a Court Attendant, get my feet wet a little bit." I was originally looking in customs and border protection, when I became a Court Attendant, at first I'm like, "Oh, I'll just be working in a courthouse. Not really much happens there." At the time, I'm like, "Oh, that's a little bit," I hate to say it now, but "A little bit boring." But once I got into it, I thought to myself, "Oh, I really like this."

And of course, my mom encouraged me to take this test anyway, even though at the time I still wanted to go to customs and border protection. And I'm very happy that she made me take it because I wanted to go for being a court officer all the way.

Maggie McCann: And you are not alone in that assumption either. I think that's a big misconception that people have that the court's kind of just standing at the magnetometer, standing in the corner of the room while things happen. But I'm glad to hear that you found that differently.

COT Jolyn Dingman: Thank you. Me too.

Maggie McCann: When you started with both of you together the second time around for the screening and court officer processing, what did that look like for you both?

COT Rebecca Dingman: For me, it was nerve-racking, the fact that I wanted to succeed at that PAT. I had the bad experience for myself those prior two times so I was really focused, hyper-focused in on succeeding at that PAT.

Jolyn had hers the following week. I remember I took off from work and drove down with her. We stayed overnight in Castleton. I waited in the car while she was going through her process, her PAT, very, very nervously. I could not sit still.

Anyway, it was a joy to see her get through that portion of it. You have to have patience through this process. That's something that is easier said than done when you really want something so bad. For myself, I'd been waiting for it for so long, but each little step for myself, speaking for myself was, yeah, it was nerve-racking. But with each step, each phase, you're getting closer to the goal line, so to speak.

Yeah, you're worrying about things and anxious about it as well for me anyway. And once you reach those phases, you get past them, you're like, "Oh, okay, I can breathe now." And then it's all in their hands and then you're just waiting.

So, it was good to have Jolyn there with me knowing the experience. She was going through the same thing so we could kind of... Actually, she's better at keeping me calm. It should be the other way around. I'm the mother, but yeah, she does a very good job of, "All right, mom, take a breath. It's going to be all right. We got this. Be positive." She was manifesting for me all through it.

COT Jolyn Dingman: I got to say, it was definitely fun training for the PAT (Physical Agility Test) together. I remember because we couldn't really find an area, like a flat area to practice, say the PACER test, the beep test, or the agility run.

So, I remember we borrowed some cones. My dad works for the town that we live in, so we borrowed some cones from the-

COT Rebecca Dingman: DPW (Department of Public Works).

COT Jolyn Dingman: Yeah, DPW. And we spray-painted little pink dots in the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) parking lot because that's where we would go to train. So, we spray-painted little dots so that we knew where to put the cones.

So, we would go and do that almost like every night we would practice. And at the end of our road, because we live at the end of a dead-end road, we would spray-paint little lines for the beep test and we would just keep running back and forth.

Maggie McCann: It is a impressive amount of commitment you've both put into this. And I appreciate that there's two kind of sides of this coming in that it was very anxiety-inducing and scary, it sounds like for Rebecca. And, Jolyn, even in our previous conversations, you've said the word fun so many times, that this almost sounds like it was just a fun activity and I think maybe the combination of the both was exactly what you guys needed.

COT Jolyn Dingman: Yes, definitely.

COT Rebecca Dingman: We definitely are like yin and yang, for sure.

Maggie McCann: In our previous conversations, we've talked a little bit about that the academy experience was much the same. Once you finally made it through the screening process and you got that call to start the academy, did you keep that partnership - doing everything as a team - or try to branch out a little bit?

COT Jolyn Dingman: So before going to the academy, the other Court Officers who we worked with as Court Attendants, we worked side by side, they would always say, "Oh, they're going to smoke you for being mother daughter. They're going to make fun of you, the instructors." And I guess I walked into it knowing, "Okay, they can make fun of us all they want if they want, we're going to get it done."

But it was the exact opposite. The instructors were actually really... I feel like they didn't really make a big deal about it, but they encouraged us when they could and when they had an opportunity to, and they kind of had fun with it and we did it as well.

COT Rebecca Dingman: I don't know if I had fun. Again, there's a word, the difference. Again, I was so hyper-focused on everything and so inside of my head too. Yeah, fun is the word that came up in that but I was so hyper-focused on making it through. I put a lot of pressure on myself, so I couldn't really enjoy it.

Although reflecting upon the whole experience, I can't say enough good things about the instructors and the way they impart their knowledge upon everybody who comes through those doors and the guidance that they give and the support, even though in the moment it didn't feel like it, like they would say, everything is a building block. And that was exactly correct.

Every day there was something that they would build upon and it enabled me to sometimes calm down, I guess, even though I don't seem as though I did. I was very inside myself, but it was good to know that Jolyn was there and seeing her interact and, kind of, I would remain on the outside of it and just let her do her thing.

And yeah, we did kind of branch off because we even drove separately to and from every week, so we never really carpooled because I just wanted to give her her space.

COT Jolyn Dingman: I mean, I feel like I would kind of go out more in the evenings. I'd go out to dinner with our classmates and everything. And I don't know, I mean, you went out a few times.

COT Rebecca Dingman: Yeah, yeah.

COT Jolyn Dingman: But it actually kind of was though the college experience that I never really had. But no, I mean, we did things together too. We would study together and go out to dinners, go for walks. It was fun though.

Maggie McCann: There's two things that I think make your experience unique, and that's you're both on opposite sides of the age spectrum of our Court Officer ranks, and you're both female Court Officers. I'm curious if you think that those two things may have affected your experience.

COT Jolyn Dingman: I guess in regards to the gender part, being a female Court Officer versus a male Court Officer, I guess some people might have the assumption that female officers, they're softer or we could talk to people better or things like that. I don't really find it that way just simply because there's so many different people, so many different backgrounds, so many different personalities, characteristics, such like that.

And it's just more of what you as an individual bring to the table, to the job where one person might be a little bit better at talking to folks, whereas others might be ready to go into action more.

So in regard to age, I mean, I guess for me personally, being younger, there's so many other officers who have been on the job so much longer than me and I have so much to learn still. I never like to step on anybody's toes or anything like that. So I like to stand back a little bit sometimes more and just watch and learn so that I can determine what I personally would do in the future.

COT Rebecca Dingman: For me, much along the lines of what Jolyn had said, and those things are fluid too. You might be able to talk to people in one moment and then go into action in another. I mean, that's what the job really entails regardless of females or males on the job. I seem as though because I'm a little older, I kind of have more of maybe a maternal instinct sometimes or the experience that I've had in the course of my life and different situations that I've had to deal with both personally and professionally that lead into how you deal with certain situations that may arise and kind of looking at everything as a whole rather than just one little isolated instance.

Just pretty much with age comes wisdom, but for me, I mean, my wisdom comes from the people that are around me and I try to extract whatever I can. And if I can impart a little bit, that's great, but I feel like I'm just starting out a career as well. And I can learn a lot from my teammates, my coworkers, my brothers and my sisters. So I guess that's kind of how I look at it and how I approach things too.

Maggie McCann: Thank you both. I appreciate that because I feel like sometimes the answer to that question is, "Yes, there's a very big difference, but here's why those differences can work." But there's also an element that this job is accessible and available to anyone who's willing to do it.

With the work that you do in the courthouses, I know that you're also getting involved a little bit outside of the courthouse. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience with the Court Officer's Ceremonial Unit?

COT Rebecca Dingman: Oh, yeah, the Ceremonial Unit, that's special. That's something that I would see pictures of online when I was looking into this profession and career as a court officer. And I remember seeing all of the events that would be taking place down in New York City and just the way they looked was so impressive, the photos, and even the videos. And I remember thinking, "Wow, I'd love to be a part of that someday."

And luckily enough, they opened up a training this past December. It's the first one that they've had upstate, so Judicial District three through eight. So you have all the downstate Court Officers who are sergeants and lieutenants who conducted this training that have such a vast amount of experience and knowledge to share with us. So it was amazing to just soak all of that in.

And I wish... I'd love more of it too, or even like a refresher because they are so knowledgeable, because they've done so many details. For example, funeral details, how versed they are in that. And everything is almost, it isn't almost, it is, everything is precision-based and it's extremely impressive.

So to be a part of that and to get that training from them was just absolutely phenomenal. To be a part of that as well is something so remarkably prideful, taking pride to represent the agency outside of a courthouse, details such as parades or again, like funeral details, to be there for court staff, your fellow brothers and sisters who have maybe passed and to be there for their families, also court events that take place in the courthouse like the Bar Association, Memorial Service, all of those things to show people that we're not just on the inside of the courthouse maintaining security, we're also out in the community putting a different light on the agency. And I think it's monumental.

Any sort of community relations or community engagement, the Ceremonial Unit really goes in line with that and brings it, ties it together. It's extremely special. I'm so grateful that we have that now upstate. And I really hope that with this next class that graduates, I'm hoping that those individuals are afforded the same opportunity to join the ceremonial unit.

COT Jolyn Dingman: And I just think back to our first official detail that we did, the Girl Scouts one that we held at Rome Supreme Court, and they had us do some of the ceremonial things like the 15 count manual arms with the rifles and the flags. And then afterwards we got to speak with some of the kids and the parents and answer questions.

And it's just great to interact with a community like that. And yeah, it's a great honor to be a part of the Ceremonial Unit. It's a great opportunity to get out and show pride for our agency.

COT Rebecca Dingman: The folks that come into the courthouses, our respective courthouses that we work in, they know us and you're kind of forming those relationships. I know you have too, Jolyn, right? We've embraced this community out here-

COT Jolyn Dingman: Oh, of course.

COT Rebecca Dingman: ... because we've done events out here like Shop With A Cop in December. Even just last night we were at a Touch-a-Truck event. We had our MSP (Mobile Security Patrol) car there and just interacting with people who live here. Yeah, it's special to be able to do that.

That's one of the main things that I really take away from being a Court Officer too, is that those community relations and how impactful they can be, the positive relationships that you can have with people, with court users or anyone. It's very impactful.

Maggie McCann: That's really commendable. I know from our previous conversations and now as well, something that we talked about before and a word that I've heard you use often is empathy. That's something that you talked about bringing to the job and bringing to, now, like you're saying, the community you're working in. It just seems to kind of bleed into everything you do.

COT Jolyn Dingman: Yeah. I mean, empathy is just so important in this job, in any job, honestly, but definitely this one, because you just don't know what a person's going through when they walk through the courthouse doors. They could be having a good day, they could be having a horrible day. You don't know what they're coming into court for.

I mean, here in family court, it could be custody or child support. Those are very stressful things for folks. Yeah, you just always got to make sure that you're obviously doing your job, maintaining the security and wellbeing of the court and the court users and the court employees, treating everybody with respect and dignity. And when you can, approach a situation with grace.

COT Rebecca Dingman: When people are coming into the courthouse, it's not the best place. Not a lot of happy things happen in a courthouse. So there's a lot of stress. There's a lot of anxiety that comes into that. And just the other day, I was talking with a court user and she was feeling anxiety. She was getting anxious, got her a cup of water. I told her to just breathe. We're going to just take everything one step at a time.

What they're feeling is valid no matter what it is. And if you can get people, just by talking - I love to talk to people - so just by talking to them and kind of letting them know that, "Yeah, I feel those things too, and you can get through it." Like Jolyn said, treating everybody with respect, part of our job as well, or our mission statement, kindness. Just being easy, gentle with everyone.

Yes, when you do have to act, you have to act if it comes to that, that verbal judo that we learned in the academy, all the procedural justice, that's another thing too that we learned. Procedural justice one and two really gets you to

think about how you are going to approach different situations like the scenario-based training that we had.

Those are invaluable on the job. So those lessons are just, it's a part of what we wear. It's like your duty rig. That along with the training that we just had too, the vicarious trauma training, absolutely, the value of that is remarkable.

I found that that should be something that everybody gets everywhere no matter what kind of job you do, because it's very relatable.

Maggie McCann: You said it was vicarious trauma? If you would mind explaining just briefly a little bit of what exactly that is.

COT Jolyn Dingman: Basically, it was just kind of the series of training that we did. It was just talking about those of us who work in the Court System, listening to the cases that happen in court and how it affects you as a court employee, even though you're not experiencing these things in your life, hearing about them, it can bother people and it can affect their, kind of, daily lives because of how traumatizing it is.

And yeah, vicarious because it's through the court users talking about it and listening to that day in and day out, it can get heavy. So it was just kind of talking about that. Also, more elaborating on... you don't know what people are going through, different mental states that folks could be in, different ways of talking to people, different words or phrases that you can substitute.

COT Rebecca Dingman: Yeah. And coping mechanisms for your own use upon hearing all of those things, other people's traumas, you're taking that in as well. So you need to be able to recognize how that makes you feel. I always tell people, I say it to anybody who I come across, "You've got to feel things all the way through in order for yourself to heal."

COT Jolyn Dingman: And talking about it too with people if you need help, using the court resources.

COT Rebecca Dingman: We're very fortunate to work for an agency that recognizes these things. I know that it's very important. I think that Judge Richardson was the one who put that forth that vicarious trauma and I was blown away by her when she came to the academy to speak to us. We're fortunate to have people like her of her status in our court system that recognize we're all human, we're all human.

Maggie McCann: I imagine the both of you being able to go through it together and have that shared experience is beneficial.

COT Jolyn Dingman: If you need to vent about things, it's good to talk. Everybody does it. They talk to family members, spouses, whoever, but definitely it's nice to have a family member who's also a fellow officer.

And yeah, I have friends too, other Court Officer friends who I'll talk to about different situations and kind of bounce off like, "Hey, what would you have done in this scenario?" It's definitely beneficial.

COT Rebecca Dingman: We learn from each other in that whole process. That's what's important. It's like a family for sure. It is a family.

Maggie McCann: We have a court officer exam application currently open. The application closes May 14th. Do you have any words of wisdom for those who may be beginning the process now?

COT Rebecca Dingman: For me, if you have an interest in law enforcement, if you were a student of criminal justice or even psychology, social work, yeah, apply for the job if you have an interest in this. It's a rewarding career. It's 9:00 to 5:00. You get weekends off, holidays. I mean, the job is the best law enforcement job I think there is. It is, it truly is, we call it a hidden gem and it is. It's a hidden gem. If you like to affect change and make a positive difference, you can on this job. It's rewarding. It's personally rewarding. You can make a difference in somebody's life or their day.

COT Jolyn Dingman: And it's just such a great agency to work for and there's just so many opportunities within it. Movement, you can become sergeant, lieutenant, captain. There's, of course, now the Ceremonial Unit that you can join. There's SRT, the Special Response Team, the community events.

It's just there's so much pride and honor when you become a court officer. There's definitely nothing like it. The application process isn't the easiest one. It can get lengthy, challenging, as you know, mom. But if you really, truly want it, you just got to stay the course and the reward is just so worth it.

COT Rebecca Dingman: Just put the hard work in. Believe in yourself. When you think you can't do something, this applies to anything, you can do it. If you put in the work, just believe that you can do it and keep your focus, keep pushing forward, and you'll get there.

COT Jolyn Dingman: I put my uniform on every single day. It's just pride. Even the first day that I put it on during the academy, I was just like, "Wow."

COT Rebecca Dingman: Oh, yeah.

COT Jolyn Dingman: Yeah, you remember that.

COT Rebecca Dingman: Oh, yeah, I do. You said it though, there's that pride every day to put the shield on. It's just the whole... There's pride. You're representing an agency, you're representing what all the court officers before us have done, how they've paved the way. And we have that responsibility to continue and to make it grow, to make it exponentially better as the years go on.

Maggie McCann: And you both are shining examples of what court officers can be. It has been an absolute pleasure talking to both of you. And with that, Officers Jolyn Dingman and Rebecca Dingman, thank you so much for being on.

COT Rebecca Dingman: Thank you so much, Maggie. Really appreciate that.

COT Jolyn Dingman: Thank you, Maggie.