

Judge Billy G. Bridges announces retirement

October 31, 2005

Judge Billy G. Bridges of Brandon, one of the longest-serving members of the Court of Appeals, has announced that he will retire Dec. 31.

He has spent more than 38 years in public service. For the past 10 years and 10 months, he has served on the Court of Appeals.

"I really was kind of shooting for 40, but something tells me inside my being that this is the time," Judge Bridges said. "I'm 72 years old and if I went to the end of my term, I'd be 75."

Gov. Haley Barbour will appoint someone to serve out the remainder of Judge Bridges' term, which expires in January 2009. The judgeship is for Court of Appeals District 3, Position 1.

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr., with whom Judge Bridges previously practiced law in Rankin County, said, "Judge Bridges gave me my start in the practice of law in 1972. Being under the tutelage of a seasoned, experienced lawyer was invaluable to a novice lawyer beginning my career. I am forever grateful for the experience and his friendship. Judge Bridges has served the bench and bar with distinction and the judiciary is much better off as a result of his tenure."

Judge Bridges said he won't hang up his robe. He will join the pool of retired judges who hear cases by special appointment when trial judges recuse themselves. During the past year, he has already sat as a trial judge in several cases in which local judges stepped aside.

"I want to work. I don't want to quit. If I quit, I'd probably die," Judge Bridges said.

"I'm in good health. I think for the next three or four years I'll be able to answer to this call," said Judge Bridges.

He also wants to do mediation and arbitration work. He does not plan to open a full-time law practice.

The Legislature created the Court of Appeals to relieve a backlog of appeals before the Supreme Court. The 10-member court went to work in January 1995. The Supreme Court assigns cases to the Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court has discretion to review or decline to hear Court of Appeals decisions.

Judge Bridges, Chief Judge Leslie D. King and Judge Leslie H. Southwick are the three remaining original judges who were elected to the court when it was created. Judge Bridges previously served as Chief Judge from Jan. 31, 1997, until Feb. 17, 1999. The Chief Judge serves in that administrative capacity by appointment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Chief Judge King said, "There is a very unique bond that develops with people who start off in a new institution together."

Chief Judge King said, "I was fortunate in my transition (to Chief Judge) to have Billy there."

Chief Judge King said Judge Bridges has a unique sense of humor that can break the tension during some discussions.

Judge Bridges said his appellate court work has been the most enjoyable of his long career. "I enjoy the camaraderie with the judges here. We never fall out over cases. We disagree agreeably."

Judge King said, "Billy is a hard worker. He also knows the difference between personal interests and institutional interests. He has always worked to see that the interests of the institution took

precedence over his personal interests.”

Judge Bridges said he has postponed his retirement plans. Within a span of four months last year, former Chief Judge Roger McMillin returned to the private sector, Judge James Thomas died and Judge Southwick took a leave of absence to serve on active duty with the Mississippi Army National Guard in Iraq.

Judge Bridges previously served as a chancery judge of the 20th Chancery District of Rankin County, as district attorney for the 20th Circuit Court District of Rankin and Madison counties, and as Rankin County prosecuting attorney. He was board attorney for the town of Florence. He represented the Rankin County School Board and the Rankin Medical Center.

Judge Bridges grew up in Pearl. His family moved from Simpson to Rankin County when he was two. His father worked as a farmer, a baker, a rural letter carrier, postmaster and grocery store operator. His mother took her husband’s place as postmistress when Bridges’ father was in the military in World War II.

Judge Bridges served in the U.S. Marines during the Korean War, attaining the rank of sergeant. The GI Bill paid for his college, including law school at the University of Mississippi. He is the only member of his family to pursue the legal profession.

Judge Bridges said he plans to travel, and to hunt and fish more. A seven-point buck and two trophy bass are among the decorations on his office wall. But the law has taken most of his time.

“I have a boat that the engine hasn’t been cranked in four years,” he said.

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