

Chief Justice Award recipients announced

July 16, 2007

State Drug Court Coordinator Joseph Craft of Clinton and Supreme Court Information Technology Department Director Michael Jones of Brandon are the recipients of the 2007 Chief Justice Awards.

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. announced the awards on Saturday, July 14, at the annual Mississippi Bar Convention in Sandestin, Fla. The annual awards recognize people whose work improves the judicial system.

Craft was recognized for his work in the development and implementation of drug courts in Mississippi. As State Drug Court Coordinator, he oversees all drug courts in Mississippi. Mississippi has 19 drug courts – 14 adult drug courts and five juvenile drug courts. Craft is responsible for monitoring each program's compliance with drug court laws and rules established by the State Drug Court Advisory Committee. Craft works with judges and court staff statewide in the planning and creation of new drug courts and the training of drug court staff. Eleven other programs are in planning stages.

Jones was recognized for his work in the design, development and implementation of the Mississippi Case Information Delivery System. MYCIDS, which is pronounced "my kids," is a computerized case management system for Youth Courts. Eighteen courts now use the MYCIDS system. Twelve more courts have requested the system.

Chief Justice Smith said, "Mike Jones and Joey Craft are much deserving of this award. Mike's progressive work with MYCIDS development has greatly impacted our Youth Court system. Joey is nationally recognized for his expertise in establishing and maintaining drug courts. The contributions both of these individuals have made towards improving our state's judiciary are very much appreciated by the Court."

Craft had extensive involvement with drug courts before his promotion to State Drug Court Coordinator on July 1, 2006. He joined the Administrative Office of Courts as a project manager in September 2002. Craft worked with legislators and judges in 2003 to establish a framework for drug courts statewide, and in 2004 worked through the State Drug Court Advisory Committee for passage of legislation that established a statewide funding mechanism for drug courts.

Craft is a faculty member of the National Drug Court Institute, based in Alexandria, Va. NDCI provides comprehensive drug court training, works to develop more effective drug court policies and procedures, and disseminates drug court research and evaluations. Craft helped facilitate training and implementation of a drug court program in Kentucky. He will continue to work as a facilitator for drug court training and implementation in other states.

Craft is president of the Mississippi Association of Drug Court Professionals. He is a charter member of MADCP and previously served as the organization's treasurer and vice-president. He is a member of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals and is a delegate to the Congress of State Drug Court Associations. He has twice addressed the nationwide conference of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, speaking about sustaining drug courts through establishment of stable sources of state funding.

Craft previously worked for 10 years at MCI-WorldCom in telecommunications fraud

detection. He was a research analyst in the high technology crime unit of LDDS WorldCom Communication Inc. from August 1992 until May 1994. He served as a supervisor of network security for LDDS WorldCom Communication Inc. from May 1994 to June 1998. He served as a manager of network fraud detection for MCI-WorldCom Inc. from June 1998 until September 2002.

Craft's education background is in criminal justice, computer science, statistics and business administration. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1991.

Jones has worked for more than eight years tailoring and refining the Mississippi Case Information Delivery System to help Youth Courts organize their work and records efficiently and save staff time and other resources. Design work began on the MYCIDS program in March 1999. Jones and former Administrative Office of Courts Program Specialist Jamie McBride initially worked with a contract vendor, then took the project completely in-house.

Jackson County Youth Court became the pilot project for the MYCIDS system design in September 2001, followed by Adams County in May 2002. Leflore County became the most recent addition to the system in June. Other counties which utilize the MYCIDS system are Amite, Claiborne, Franklin, Hancock, Harrison, Holmes, Humphreys, Jones, Pike, Rankin, Sunflower, Walthall, Warren, Washington and Yazoo.

Computer hardware, staff training and a help desk are provided by the Supreme Court at no charge to local Youth Courts. The MYCIDS system includes electronic docketing and record keeping. Case tracking features designed specifically for Mississippi Youth Court laws assist court staff in scheduling all hearings and other events required by law to occur within a specific time frame. The system provides modifiable templates for court orders and other paperwork. Judges and court staff are able to track juveniles' encounters with multiple jurisdictions.

The MYCIDS system collects and retrieves data over the Internet on a secure, encrypted system. The MYCIDS information database is housed at the Mississippi Supreme Court.

The benefit of centralized records storage was demonstrated in Hancock County after Hurricane Katrina. The Hancock County Youth Court building flooded. The court was able to resume operations more quickly because records weren't lost.

Jones, a native of Scott County, has worked for the Supreme Court for 13 years. He has served as director of the Court's Information Technology Department since 1996. He previously worked for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks for three years, earning Employee of the Year in 1993. He supervises a staff of nine who are responsible for all computer technology for the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals and the Administrative Office of Courts.

Jones earned a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science and statistics from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1988. He graduated from the U.S. Air Force Air Education and Training Command in electronics and avionics in 1989. He served for seven years as a navigation/communication specialist in the 172nd Mississippi Air National Guard.

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