

Court of Appeals to convene at Jones County Junior College Sept. 11; Other campus visits slated for October and November

September 6, 2012

The Mississippi Court of Appeals will hear oral arguments on the campus of Jones County Junior College in Ellisville for the first time on Sept. 11.

The doors will open at 9 a.m. A three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals will convene at 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. to hear oral arguments. Proceedings will be at the Ronald E. Whitehead Advanced Technology Center in the Howard Technology Park at 72 Technology Boulevard in Ellisville.

The Court of Appeals periodically schedules oral arguments on college campuses and occasionally at other locations as a teaching tool for students. It is known as the Court on the Road program.

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Joe Lee said the program gives students interested in careers in law an opportunity to watch an appellate court proceeding. It also helps acquaint the public with the workings of the appellate court.

“It provides an opportunity for people to see what we do,” Judge Lee said.

Five of the court’s law clerks will talk to students about the operations of the Court of Appeals before the oral arguments begin. Judges will answer students’ questions after the oral arguments, although they will not talk about the cases.

As many as 400 students are expected to attend the program. Circuit Judge Billy Joe Landrum has invited students from five area high schools, as well as JCJC paralegal studies students and other college classes. Students from Laurel Christian School, Laurel High School, Northeast Jones High School, South Jones High School and West Jones High School are expected to attend. Area judges and attorneys also are invited.

Judge Landrum said, “It looks like it is going to be a fantastic program.”

The Court of Appeals convened on two college campuses in 1996, and began the Court on the Road program as a part of its regular calendar for oral arguments in 2005.

Chief Judge Lee this year increased the number of college campus and county courthouse visits. The court will convene on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi on Oct. 4, and on the Mississippi Valley State University campus on Oct. 9. A three-judge panel will hear oral arguments at Mississippi State University on Nov. 13. The court made its annual visits to the Mississippi College School of Law and the University of Mississippi School of Law this past April.

The court also heard arguments at the Adams County Courthouse in Natchez on Aug. 8. It was the first time in recent history for a state appellate court to convene in Natchez, although that city holds a significant place in the history of Mississippi’s appellate court system. The state’s first appellate court, created by the 1817 Constitution, met at the Adams County Courthouse in 1818 and continued to hold its semi-annual meetings in Natchez, even after the seat of state government moved to Jackson in 1822.

The Court of Appeals' entire calendar of arguments may be viewed on the State of Mississippi Judiciary website at http://courts.ms.gov/appellate_courts/coa/coadocketcalendar.html.

Oral arguments scheduled for Sept. 11 in Ellisville include a criminal appeal and a civil wrongful death appeal.

Oral arguments are scheduled at 10:30 a.m. in the case of Toney Jennings v. State of Mississippi, Case No. 20011-KA-1313.

Jennings appeals a conviction of statutory rape. Jennings was 16 years old at the time of his arrest on June 9, 2010. The victim was 13. Jennings, formerly of Caledonia, was convicted in Lowndes County Circuit Court on Sept. 1, 2011. Circuit Judge Lee S. Coleman sentenced Jennings to 15 years with five years suspended and 10 years to serve.

George T. Holmes of the Indigent Appeals Division of the Office of the State Public Defender represents Jennings. Special Assistant Attorney General Lisa L. Blount represents the Attorney General's office.

Oral arguments are scheduled at 1 p.m. in the case of Barbara Lewis, Individually, as Administratrix for the Estate of R.J. Lewis, and on behalf of the wrongful death beneficiaries for the Estate of R.J. Lewis v. Forest Family Practice Clinic, P.A. and John Paul Lee, M.D., Case No. 2011-CA-0828 COA.

Lewis appeals the dismissal of a wrongful death lawsuit. R.J. Lewis died May 23, 2008. The lawsuit was filed June 1, 2010. Attorneys representing Lee sought dismissal of the lawsuit, arguing that Lee was not personally served with a copy of the lawsuit. Scott County Circuit Judge Vernon Cotten dismissed the lawsuit, citing insufficient service of process.

Attorney J. Howard Thigpen of Jackson represents Lewis. Attorney Mildred M. Morris of Jackson represents Lee.

Each oral argument is expected to last approximately an hour. The appellant and appellee are each allowed 30 minutes.

People wishing to watch the oral arguments are asked to be in their seats half an hour before the oral arguments are scheduled to begin.

The oral argument will not be broadcast via the court's Internet web site, since the Court of Appeals is convening a special session away from its camera-equipped courtroom.

Any media organization which may wish to photograph or videotape the presentation must follow the Rules for Electronic and Photographic Coverage of Judicial Proceedings. Media must file a Camera Coverage Notice at least 48 hours prior to the commencement of the proceeding. The camera coverage notice is available at <http://courts.ms.gov/forms/camnotice.pdf>. The camera coverage rules are available on the Mississippi Judiciary web site at http://courts.ms.gov/rules/msrulesofcourt/rules_electronicphotographic_coverage.pdf.

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