

## **Arthur Johnston, Lee Westbrook receive Chief Justice Award**

July 18, 2013

Madison County Chancery Clerk Arthur S. Johnston and Circuit Clerk Lee Westbrook are recipients of the 2013 Chief Justice Award.

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. presented the awards on July 12 at the Mississippi Bar Convention in Sandestin, Fla. The annual awards recognize individuals whose work improves the judicial system.

Johnston and Westbrook were honored for their extensive work in development of the Mississippi Electronic Courts e-filing system.

Chief Justice Waller said, "Because of the selfless efforts of Arthur Johnston and Lee Westbrook, we have an e-filing system that conforms to Mississippi rules of practice and procedure and is accountable to the public, attorneys and professional staff."

Chief Justice Waller presented both with plaques commending their work. Plaques read: "In appreciation of dynamic leadership crucial to the development of the Mississippi Electronic Courts system. Your extensive hands-on efforts and commitment of time, staff and resources moved MEC from an idea to implementation. Your public service far exceeding the duties of your elected office improved the administration of justice and benefitted the bench, bar and public."

Johnston said, "It's been a privilege to be able to work on the system and to make it fit state court practice. It's an honor to have received the award and to be recognized for the work we have done. It was a privilege to be a part of it."

Westbrook said, "It's an honor and a privilege to receive the award. It has been an honor to be the first county to work on the MEC system."

Madison County was the original pilot test site for the development of the Mississippi Electronic Courts program. Madison County Chancery Court was the first to use e-filing. Voluntary electronic filing of documents began in Madison County Chancery Court on July 22, 2009, and became mandatory in that court on Sept. 15, 2009. Madison County Chancery Court has operated as a paperless court since January 2010.

Madison County Circuit Court became the first Circuit Court in the state to implement e-filing in circuit civil cases. The court began accepting voluntary electronic filing of court documents on March 1, 2010. E-filing became mandatory in civil cases on April 15, 2010.

Madison County Circuit Court also will be the first court in the state to use e-filing in criminal cases. Madison Circuit began staff training and in-house use of the criminal e-filing system on March 19. Testing and refinements continue. No date has been set to activate the system for external use.

Westbrook has worked on MEC development since 2006. The initial work included brainstorming to develop the features that each court would need.

Johnston has been involved in development of the e-filing system since 2004, when he was appointed to the Supreme Court E-Filing/Court Docket Management Committee. The Committee developed goals and policy standards which guide development of the e-filing

system. Johnston and his staff worked with MEC staff to adapt the federal court's e-filing and document management system for use by the state courts.

Johnston said e-filing and the tools it provides to the courts and lawyers are the key to improving efficiency and effectiveness of the state court system. He liked the technology when he first used it in private law practice in federal court. MEC adapted the federal system to state court use.

"I am convinced that MEC is how we are going to improve the administration of the courts and access to justice over the long term," Johnston said.

Seventeen trial courts in eleven counties around the state currently use e-filing through MEC. E-filing court jurisdictions include Clay County Circuit Court and the Chancery Courts in Desoto, Grenada, Hinds, Holmes, Rankin, Webster and Yazoo counties. In Madison, Harrison and Warren counties, all trial courts – Chancery, Circuit and County Courts – use e-filing.

The Mississippi Supreme Court and Court of Appeals began accepting e-filed briefs and motions July 1.

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