

Judge Brewer teaches at National Judicial College

May 13, 2014

Chancery Judge Cynthia Brewer of Madison County recently served as an instructor at the National Judicial College, teaching new judges about handling cases involving self-represented litigants.

Fifty-nine judges from across the country participated in the class as part of the general jurisdiction course for recently elected or appointed judges.

Judge Brewer also acted as a facilitator for other classes at the Reno, Nevada campus from April 28 through May 9. It was her fifth time to serve as a facilitator.

Courts across the country are dealing with increasing numbers of people who attempt to represent themselves in civil legal matters. Many self-represented, or *pro se* litigants, do so because they can't afford to hire a lawyer. Others simply choose the do-it-yourself route. For instance, irreconcilable differences divorce cases frequently involve one of the litigants coming into court without the assistance of a lawyer. Paternity disputes usually proceed with only one side represented by counsel.

The complexities of laws and court rules often spell problems for self-represented litigants. The National Judicial College includes in its curriculum training for judges on how to handle litigants who aren't knowledgeable of the law and who attempt to muddle their way through a court proceeding.

"We cannot ignore the fact that more and more people choose to represent themselves," Judge Brewer said.

Judges maintain a delicate balance in walking an unrepresented litigant through a court proceedings without assisting that person or giving unfair advantage. The objective is to give both sides a fair hearing.

"It's not so much holding their hand and telling them how to do it, but rather pulling the information out of them in an effort to get justice," Judge Brewer said.

Judge Brewer has served as a chancellor of the 11th Chancery District since 2007. She hears cases in Leake and Madison counties. She is former chair of the Conference of Chancery Judges. She previously served for four years as Madison County Court and Youth Court Judge. She also served as a municipal, county and Youth Court prosecutor in Hinds County.

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