

## Court of Appeals Judge Larry Roberts announces plans to retire

April 2, 2015 — Mississippi Court of Appeals Judge Larry Roberts of Meridian will retire June 30.

“I think as of right now I am the longest continuously serving judge in the Mississippi judiciary,” said Judge Roberts. “It’s just time.”



“I’m about to be 66. I just want to spend time with my family,” he said. “My wife and I have decided it’s time to go home.”

Sheila Roberts is a retired teacher. During the week, they live in Jackson, where the Court of Appeals meets. They go home to Meridian on weekends.

“I’ve been really blessed. I’m a strong Christian and I believe the Lord has blessed my life beyond measure. I’m just honored for the opportunity to have served.”

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Joe Lee said, “During his entire term on the Court of Appeals, Judge Roberts has consistently been punctual, productive and professional. His legal expertise, especially in criminal matters, will be sorely missed. He never declined to participate or to serve the court in any manner when the need arose. We are proud to claim Judge Larry Roberts as a member of the Court of Appeals.”

Judge Roberts’ career of nearly 37 years includes nine and a half years on the Court of Appeals, 19 years as a Circuit Judge of the 10th Circuit District that includes Clarke, Kemper, Lauderdale and Wayne counties, and eight years as a Lauderdale County Court judge.

He was the youngest judge of a court of record in state history when he was elected Lauderdale County Court Judge in 1978. He took office in January 1979. He joked that he barely met the office requirement of having been a lawyer for five years when he ran for the judgeship. That would be his only contested election.

Then-Gov. Haley Barbour appointed Judge Roberts to a vacancy on the Court of Appeals on Jan. 4, 2006.

“I just feel very honored to have had the career I’ve had. I’ve steadfastly tried to be a good judge, to make decisions based on what the facts are and on the law as I understand it, and to do it fairly and properly.”

Judge Roberts on March 31 notified Gov. Phil Bryant of his intent to retire effective June 30. The Governor will make an appointment to fill the vacancy for Court of Appeals District Three. Since less than half of the eight-year term remains, the Governor’s appointee will serve out the remainder of the term. The term ends in January 2017.

Asked what his contribution to the court has been, Judge Roberts said, “To try to add the

aspect of a seasoned trial judge to the appellate deliberative process. There have been times and cases where my knowledge and experience of how things operate at the trial court level have been helpful to the court's understanding of why it occurred the way it occurred."

Judge Roberts is the only former Circuit Court judge on the Court of Appeals. Two former Chancellors serve on the 10-member court.

In addition to hearing and deciding hundreds of cases, Judge Roberts has served on two committees which laid extensive groundwork for changes in criminal law and rules of criminal court practice. In 2011, the Uniform Criminal Rules Study Committee, with Judge Roberts as co-chair, submitted its report and recommendations to the Supreme Court after more than six years of work. The proposal, pending before the Supreme Court, would create a uniform set of rules which would address every aspect of criminal proceedings from initiation of charges through post-trial motions. Judge Roberts also served on the legislatively created Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force in 2013. The Task Force was charged with developing policies that improve public safety, ensure clarity in sentencing, and control corrections costs. The Task Force reviewed sentencing, corrections, and community supervision data to formulate recommendations to the Legislature. The recommendations led to passage of criminal justice reform in House Bill 585, signed by Gov. Bryant on March 31, 2014.

"It's an honor to be asked" to serve on those committees, Justice Roberts said. "I think my work and effort was rewarding and, hopefully, helpful."

Asked about his future plans, Judge Roberts said he does not have specific plans. He is considering serving as a senior status judge. Senior status judges are retired judges who may be appointed by the Supreme Court to preside over Circuit and Chancery Court cases in which local judges have recused themselves.

The avid duck hunter will have time to enjoy the season. He enjoys a hunting camp in the Delta. And he and his wife will have time to travel.

Judge Roberts was born in Cleveland. His family moved to Pachuta and later to Meridian. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of Mississippi in 1970, and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 1973. He was admitted to the Mississippi Bar May 1, 1973. He engaged in the general practice of law in Meridian from May 1973 until December 1978.

Judge Roberts served as a U.S. Army reservist for 20 years. He served on active duty for almost a year during Operation Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991. He was assigned to the 1181st USA Transportation Terminal Unit in Meridian. He retired in 1994 with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

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