

Circuit Judge Vernon Cotten announces retirement

May 3, 2017

Circuit Judge Vernon R. Cotten of Carthage will retire from the Eighth Circuit District bench on May 31 after nearly 20 years of service.

Judge Cotten announced his impending retirement May 1 at the opening of the current term of Leake County Circuit Court. He made the announcement two weeks after his 80th birthday.

In his letter to Gov. Phil Bryant, Judge Cotten said, “Thank you for the privilege of serving you, the State of Mississippi and the citizens of the Eighth Judicial District.”

Gov. Bryant will appoint a judge to the Eighth Circuit, which includes Leake, Neshoba, Newton and Scott counties.

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. attended the opening of court in Carthage and accepted a copy of Judge Cotten’s letter of resignation. Chief Justice Waller said afterwards, “He is an exemplary judge in his demeanor, his compassion for both defendants and victims, and in his attention to the timely administration of court business. His aspiration was to do the correct thing morally and legally and ethically.”

Chief Justice Waller also attended the Eighth Circuit Drug Court graduation May 2 in Sebastopol, where he praised Judge Cotten’s innovation. “He is one of those who has taken the position and has taken it to the next level.” Judge Cotten founded the fourth drug court in the state in 2003. The Eighth Circuit Drug Court became the first to be certified by the Administrative Office of Courts.

Circuit Judge Christopher Collins said that the program developed special tracks for DUI offenders and for military veterans. Under Judge Cotten’s direction, the program accepts probation violators to address their drug addiction. The Eighth Circuit Drug Court currently has the largest enrollment of any program in the state, with 302 participants.

Judge Cotten, who presided at his last drug court graduation, said afterwards, “God has blessed me with a great level of health and I give Him all the honor and glory for ...whatever accomplishments have come about.” After serving for nearly 20 years as circuit judge, “It’s time to give a younger person an opportunity,” he said.

Gov. Kirk Fordice appointed Judge Cotten on Nov. 27, 1997. Before his appointment to the Circuit Court, Judge Cotten served as municipal judge for the city of Carthage for 10 years and as a special judge of the tribal court of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians for 23 years.

He previously worked as an attorney in private practice in Carthage. He was admitted to the practice of law in 1965. He is a graduate of Mississippi State University and the former Jackson School of Law, now the Mississippi College School of Law.

