

# Mississippi Courts

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## Justices Maxwell, Chamberlin nominated to federal bench



Justice James D. Maxwell II

President Donald Trump nominated Mississippi Supreme Court Justices James D.



Justice Robert P. Chamberlin

Maxwell II and Robert P. Chamberlin to trial judge positions on the U.S. District Court

for the Northern District of Mississippi.

President Trump announced his selections on his Truth Social platform on Aug. 12. The nominees are awaiting Senate confirmation.

U.S. Senators Roger Wicker and Cindy Hyde-Smith introduced the Justices at their Sept. 3 hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Senators Wicker and Hyde-Smith in a joint statement said: "We wholeheartedly support Justices Maxwell's and Chamberlin's nominations to the U.S. District Court. President Trump chose these men for their qualifications and

experience, which will serve them well on the federal bench. Jimmy and Bobby have dedicated their lives to upholding the Constitution, defending the rule of law, and serving their Mississippi communities with distinction. They are ready to assume these federal roles, and we look forward to their speedy confirmation both in committee and by the Senate."

Vacancies exist on the federal District Court due to Judges Michael P. Mills and Sharon Aycock taking senior status.

Justice Maxwell, of Oxford, was appointed by Gov. Phil

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## MEC implementation completed; Director Nathan Evans honored



Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at right, presents Chief Justice Award to Nathan Evans of MEC.

Mississippi courts marked a milestone on June 30 with the completion of the statewide

electronic filing and case management system. Mississippi Electronic

Courts, MEC, operates in all 82 Circuit Courts and all 24 County Courts. All Chancery

Courts were implemented into the MEC system as of June 19, 2023.

MEC Director Nathan Evans of Gluckstadt was honored with the 2025 Chief Justice Award days after MEC completed statewide implementation.

The annual Chief Justice Award recognizes individuals whose actions significantly impact the law, the administration of justice, and the people of the State of Mississippi. Chief Justice Mike Randolph selected Evans in recognition of his leadership in implementing the MEC system statewide. Chief Justice Randolph presented the award to Evans on July 11 at the Mississippi Bar Convention in Destin, Fla.

Chief Justice Randolph said that Evans "has demonstrated

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## MEC staff honored for completing statewide implementation, *continued from page 1*



MEC staff are, left to right, Reddy Gudimetta, Mitch Davis, Vernadette Barnes, Swathi Kota, Latasha Banks, Kehlye Gaddis, Alecia King, Katie Dalton, Joseph Reddy, Jim Burris, Madhu Janga and Rich Gordon. At back are Chief Justice Mike Randolph, Director Nathan Evans.

exceptional technical ability, planning skills, management and leadership in 10 years of work with MEC.”

Evans said, “The successful statewide implementation of the MEC system marks a historic milestone for the Mississippi Judiciary. With both appellate courts and all 188 Chancery, Circuit and County Courts now operating on a single, centralized case management and e-filing system, we have taken a significant leap in efficiency, transparency, and access to justice for the

public we serve.”

Administrative Office of Courts Director Katharine Surkin said, “Having all courts on MEC will finally allow AOC to focus on data integrity. I commend Nathan and his team on completing this Herculean task.”

Evans said, “This achievement would not have been possible without the extraordinary dedication and cooperation of so many. I am also deeply grateful to the clerks, judges, court administrators, and all staff across every court

who embraced the change, provided critical feedback, and worked alongside us through each phase of the process....This has truly been a collective effort, and the success belongs to all of us.”

Evans thanked his staff of analysts, programmers, trainers and customer service representatives. “They do the lion’s share of the work. I just make sure we keep moving. I couldn’t have done it without them. I have a very talented and hard-working staff at MEC.”

MEC staff were recognized at a reception at the Supreme Court on July 24.

Evans also recognized predecessors at MEC. “A lot of work was done before I arrived.”

Evans joined MEC in March 2015 as a law student intern while pursuing a law degree at Mississippi College School of Law. In December 2015, when he earned his Juris Doctorate, he became lead business and legal analyst for MEC. He became director of MEC in April 2018.

## Justices Maxwell, Chamberlin nominated to U.S. District Court, *continued from page 1*

Bryant to the Mississippi Supreme Court on Jan. 1, 2016. He was elected in November 2016, and re-elected in 2024. Justice Maxwell previously served as a judge on the Mississippi Court of Appeals, initially appointed by Governor Haley Barbour on Feb. 2, 2009, then elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014.

Justice Maxwell served as Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi, prosecuting public corrup-

tion, white collar fraud, money laundering, drug trafficking, and gang and immigration crimes. He was Corporate Fraud Coordinator and helped lead the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force.

He earned his undergraduate degree and Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi.

Justice Chamberlin, of Hernando, was elected to the Supreme Court in 2016 and was sworn in on Jan. 3, 2017.

Gov. Haley Barbour ap-

pointed him to the 17th Circuit bench on Nov. 24, 2004. He served as Circuit Judge for 12 years.

He was elected to the Mississippi Senate in 1999, and served Senate District 1 for five years. He was vice chair of the Universities and Colleges Committee 2000-2003 as well as chairman of the Elections Committee in 2004.

He was Municipal Court Judge for the City of Hernando 1991-1999. He was Munic-

ipal Prosecutor for the City of Horn Lake in 1992. He also served as a Special Master in Chancery Court. He was in private law practice for 14 years, and served as attorney for the DeSoto County Board of Supervisors for four years.

He attended Northwest Mississippi Junior College and graduated from the University of Mississippi with a Bachelor of Arts in history. He earned a Juris Doctor from University of Mississippi School of Law.

# Justice David Sullivan investiture held June 6 in Gulfport



Justice David Sullivan, second from left, takes the oath of office while surrounded by family at his June 6 investiture in Gulfport. Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at right, administers the ceremonial oath.



Hank Ros



Mayor Billy Hewes

Colleagues, friends and family described Supreme Court Justice David P. Sullivan of Biloxi as a jurist of fairness, integrity, honor, compassion, patience and understanding.

“What he brings to the bench in my mind as a practicing lawyer is that compassion, that understanding, that patience, that tolerance, that fairness in law that we all expect our judiciary to have and

to administer when they give justice,” said Biloxi attorney Joseph Henry “Hank” Ros, Sullivan’s former law partner, at an investiture ceremony on June 6 in Gulfport.

Speaking to other justices gathered for the investiture, Ros continued, “I’m sure what you gentlemen will find out...he can be very – how should I say this – stubborn and hard-headed, so when he gets

his feet under him, you will find that he will be spirited in his discussions at your meetings.”

Chief Justice Mike Randolph, who administered the ceremonial oath, said that after five months of service on the court, “Let me tell you all, he has his feet under him.” He continued, “He never forgets the greatest trait of all judges and that is to follow the rule of law.”

Justice Sullivan was sworn in at the start of his term on Jan. 6, 2025, at the Supreme Court in Jackson. It is traditional to hold an investiture ceremony at a later time.

Justice David Ishee recalled serving together with Sullivan on the Gulfport Municipal Court many years ago, he as Municipal Judge and Sullivan as City Prosecutor. “Now we get to serve together on the Supreme Court. It’s an honor.”

Gulfport Mayor Billy Hewes said, “He probably, more than any other person to sit on the bench, has had more hats and experience, and I think that is going to serve him well.” In his private law practice, “whoever he was representing, whatever cause he had taken up, he was extremely passionate about it....You are carrying on a great history of your family.”

Ros recalled meeting Sullivan for the first time when Ros was a law clerk at the Mississippi Supreme Court. Sullivan, a college student, visited his father, Justice Michael Sullivan, to ask for money to attend a Rolling Stones concert. They became instant friends, and their friendship led to working as law partners defending insurance companies. Sullivan moved on to other practice areas. Ros watched Sullivan “essentially reinvent himself as a lawyer. He went from a defense insurance lawyer to being a city prosecutor, to being a public defender then being a municipal judge.”

Former Mississippi Bar President Leonard Blackwell of Biloxi recalled the late Justice Michael Sullivan, measuring his judicial character through the writings of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu and President Abraham Lincoln. He quoted Lincoln, who said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” Blackwell added, “And that is what I believe we are entrusting today with great confidence.”

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## Chancellor Jerry Sharp appointed in Jones and Wayne counties



Gov. Tate Reeves speaks at June 27 investiture.

Chancellor Jerry D. Sharp took the oath of office before a packed courtroom of colleagues, friends and family on June 27 in Laurel. He began hearing cases on July 1.

Gov. Tate Reeves said, "I am incredibly proud to celebrate today the investiture of

Judge Jerry Sharp, who I have appointed as a Chancery Court Judge for the 19<sup>th</sup> Chancery District. You all know him well, but Judge Sharp has had a long and distinguished legal career, making him not only an excellent choice but an ideal choice to fill this important role. Throughout every phase of his career, he has established himself as an accomplished and respected attorney. His success and breadth of legal experience will make

him an outstanding jurist on the Chancery Court."

The Governor also thanked Chancellor Billie Graham, who retired on June 30. "You have done an outstanding job as Chancery Judge in this district and you have made our state very proud. We will miss you but we wish you a very healthy and a very happy retirement."

The Governor appointed Judge Sharp to the position

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## Justice Sullivan is second generation to serve on Supreme Court



Leonard Blackwell



Amelia Sullivan

Sullivan is committed, I believe, to be a great judge."

Justice David Sullivan is a fourth generation lawyer. Growing up as the son of a Supreme Court Justice, he wasn't always sure that he wanted to serve on the Supreme Court. "I had thought about it and joked about it, but never thought that I would have the guts to do it." Supporters asked him to run.

He thanked his supporters for a grass roots campaign that started with a gathering at The Chimneys restaurant. Speaking from the front steps and looking out over a crowd seated and standing among the live oaks on the lawn, he said, "This is not a celebration of me. This is a celebration of you."

"I owe this all to God, without whose grace and compassion I would not be here." He said, "About 16 years ago, I turned my life around and reinvented who I was as a lawyer and as a person."

His daughter, Amelia G. Sullivan, a teacher at West Harrison High School, reflected upon the public service of her grandfather

and her father. "A name returns to the bench. A legacy deepens and the arc of service that began a generation ago finds a new bearer. Mike Sullivan took his seat guided by integrity, humility, a lot of wit and an unwavering devotion to the law." Her father doesn't stand in Justice Michael Sullivan's shadow, she said. "He walks a well-worn path but his footprints, which are the imprint he will leave on our state and community, are his own, shaped by a life of service and experience that is distinctly his."

She recalled when her father became a criminal defense lawyer. "Sometimes I wondered how he could defend people who were accused of violent or immoral acts....Over time he helped me understand that every American has constitutional rights. That is something that I have



Justice David Sullivan speaks at investiture.

taught my students...I think that that lesson that he was able to teach me offers a glimpse into his deep respect for our system and his unwavering commitment to uphold his promises, even when it is difficult....I am certain that my father will bring honor, clarity and compassion to this role. I am certain that he will never take for granted the weight of the robe he now wears. Dad, I'm so proud of you."

"Mike Sullivan was so humble, and you have to have humility to have wisdom. This day and age we need wisdom and we look to the judiciary to provide it," Blackwell said. "David

## Sharp says he seeks wisdom to take on family court difficulties



**Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at left, gives the oath of office to Chancellor Jerry Sharp, at right, as Judge Sharp's son Seth Sharp holds the Bible.**

the state of Mississippi.”

Judge Sharp is expected to serve the remainder of the term in the District that includes Jones and Wayne counties. The regularly scheduled election will be held in November 2026. The new term will begin in January 2027.

Judge Sharp, of Ellisville, has represented clients in Chancery Courts, served as a guardian ad litem in Jones County Chancery Court and Jones County Youth Court, and was a Youth Court public defender. He served as a member of the Board of Certified Court Reporters for four years.

He earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law, and a Bachelor of Science from the University of Southern Mississippi.

formerly held by Judge Graham.

Judge Sharp said, “I can’t tell you how humbled I am to be here today and how blessed I feel to be here today....This is something that I have desired for a long, long time. I have truly wanted this.”

“I’ve been so blessed by God. Without Him none of this is possible,” he said.

He thanked his wife April Sharp, his son Seth Sharp and his father Dwight Sharp. “The only person who is not here is my mom,” he said, his voice breaking. He was sworn in with his hand on the late Louise Sharp’s Bible.

He quoted John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.”

He said that his own son is a miracle, and he would do anything for him. “I cannot begin to understand the love that God the Father had for us to allow His son to be punished

on our behalf.”

“With Chancery Court one of the most important things I believe is that you are dealing with families, families facing very difficult situations, the hardest times of their lives, and I pray that the Lord gives me the wisdom in how to handle those situations and deal with those particular situations.”

Chief Justice Mike Randolph told Judge Sharp that there is no conflict between being a Christian and being a judge. Moses was a judge.

Chief Justice Randolph said, “Part of your oath is you are going to treat them all the same. It doesn’t make any difference if they are Black or White. It doesn’t make any differences if they are rich or poor.”

After he administered the oath set out in the Mississippi Constitution, Chief Justice Randolph added, “You need to decide that you are not going to minimize, compromise, rationalize or apologize as a judge for following the laws of

## Chancellor Billie Graham retires



Retired Chancellor Billie Graham said that she has no specific plans for the future after retiring on June 30. “I have intentionally planned not to plan,” she said in between greeting a courtroom full of colleagues, friends and well-wishers on June 27.

“I am passionate about my Bible Study and Sunday School. I just don’t know beyond that,” she said.

Her portrait was added to the courtroom.

## Judge Christopher Posey appointed to 8th Circuit bench



**Supreme Court Justice Jenifer Branning, at left, gives the oath of office to Circuit Judge Christopher Posey, second from left, on July 22 at the Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia as Judge Posey's family looks on.**

Circuit Judge Christopher M. Posey of Philadelphia took the ceremonial oath of office before friends, family and colleagues at an investiture ceremony at the Neshoba County Courthouse on July 22.

Supreme Court Justice Jenifer Branning of Philadelphia administered the ceremonial oath. Fellow Circuit Judge Caleb May swore in Judge Posey on July 15 at the start of his appointive term. It is traditional to have a formal investiture at a later date.

Justice Branning recalled nearly two decades of practicing law in the same courthouse and seeing Posey in the courtroom. "I am confident that you will serve the people of this district very well," she said before administering the oath.

The 8th Circuit Court District includes Neshoba, Leake, Newton and Scott

counties.

Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, offered prayer in Choctaw and English. He and Judge Posey, his longtime friend, have known each other since grade school.

Chief Ben said, "This is a fine man who I know will do a fine job in this courtroom for the people," he said. "He is a man of integrity which will also carry him along. He is a man of spirit and great honor. He appreciates his community and I thank him for that."

Judge Posey, 43, said, "I've been in the Circuit Court on all sides over the course of 19 years." He started practicing law with Ed Williamson, representing clients in products liability and medical malpractice cases. Posey then did criminal defense and some civil defense work. He served as an assistant

district attorney for the past nine years.

Judge Posey said, "This is going to be an adjustment going from advocating for one side to being a fair and impartial referee....I'm looking forward to this new challenge, and I appreciate everybody coming out today."

Gov. Tate Reeves appointed Judge Posey to the position formerly held by Circuit Judge Mark Duncan, who retired on June 30.

Duncan shared Judge Posey's excitement at the judicial appointment. They have known each other since the new judge was a youngster. "I know what kind of person he is, what kind of lawyer he is and what kind of judge he is going to make," Duncan told the crowd at the investiture. "I knew him as a young lawyer who came back to his hometown to

practice law, which is beginning to be a real rarity....I watched him grow up and become a great prosecutor and a great trial attorney." Duncan hired Posey as an assistant district attorney in 2016, while Duncan was District Attorney for the 8th Circuit District.

But, Duncan said, to be a judge, "you need somebody who is more than just a good lawyer. The role of a judge carries great power and carries great responsibility. And when you are picking a judge, you want somebody with the unquestioned qualities of honesty, integrity, compassion, fairness, patience and impartiality, somebody who understands the real world consequences and effects of the decisions that he or she makes upon the people involved, and we are getting those things with Chris Posey."

Judge Duncan told the new judge that every action that he takes affects public trust in the judicial system. "It is a solemn oath to be impartial and fair. The courtroom is a place where the most powerful in our society and the weakest are equals. It is a place where truth is sought, order is preserved and justice found, and judges safeguard all of those things for us. Judges are guardians of our rights, the protectors of our Constitution and a steward of the public trust, and at a time when our courts and our Constitution are being attacked on many fronts, judges must stand firm as pillars of our democracy," Duncan said.

## Judge Mark Duncan honored with retirement celebration



Judge Mark Duncan, at left, is pictured with his wife Joni and son Ben at a retirement ceremony held on June 27 at the Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia.

### By Debbie Burt Myers

More than 150 people, including family, friends and colleagues, gathered on June 27 to celebrate the retirement of Circuit Court Judge Mark Duncan.

Duncan addressed the crowd at the Neshoba County Courthouse with humility and gratitude, his voice occasionally breaking. "This is too much," he said. "I don't feel like I deserve all of this, but I deeply appreciate it."

Duncan served for 16 years as Assistant District Attorney of the 8th Judicial District, then was elected District Attorney in 2003. During more than 30 years in the District Attorney's office, Duncan prosecuted more than 800 jury

trials. The most notable was the successful prosecution in 2005 of former Ku Klux Klan leader Edgar Ray Killen in the murder of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner in Neshoba County in 1964.

In 2017, then-Gov. Phil Bryant appointed Duncan as Circuit Judge for the 8th Judicial District, which includes Neshoba, Leake, Newton and Scott counties. He retired June 30.

Court Administrator Nicole Bryan, who organized the event, told Duncan, "I will miss your calming influence, your brave decisions, your example of Christian faith, and most of all, our big brother talks."

Retired District Attorney Ken Turner, who worked alongside Duncan for 16 years, said, "The best decision I ever made as DA was bringing Mark on board...As Dunc would say, we worked together like peas and carrots."

Turner recalled one particular felony DUI trial in which Duncan secured a guilty verdict. Turner said that later, standing outside the courthouse, he joked with Duncan: "You just beat the stew out of those two attorneys — one's leaving in a brand new Mercedes, the other in a BMW, and you're heading home in a used Toyota pickup!" Turner told the crowd at the ceremony, "Mark chose this career path not for how much

money he could make, but for the good he could do."

Turner also spoke about Duncan's friendship. Recalling his own daughter's injury in a car accident, he said that Duncan shouldered the load during one of their busiest court terms. And when she needed a wheelchair ramp, Duncan said, "Don't worry about it." The Turners returned home from the hospital to find the ramp had been built.

Turner said, "He served these counties with honor, integrity and fairness. If anyone's earned a great retirement, it's Mark, (wife) Joni, and (son) Ben."

Duncan thanked Turner for his kind words, calling their years together some of the most rewarding of his career.

He said, "People had been asking me for years when I was going to retire. Last year I started thinking about it seriously. This year, I finally made the decision to do it." Now the question he hears is what's next. "Truth is, I don't know. Maybe my yard will get mowed more often. I hope my golf game will get better. I really don't know."

Quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Duncan said: "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

His wife will retire later this year and together they'll see where their path leads.

"I believe with all my heart that God puts us where we're meant to be and uses us to minister to others. I'm looking forward to that happening."

## Investiture for Circuit Judge Michael Reed held Aug. 11 in Hattiesburg



Circuit Judge T. Michael Reed, at left, is pictured with Gov. Tate Reeves after investiture.

Circuit Judge T. Michael Reed took the ceremonial oath of office before a packed courtroom in Hattiesburg on Aug. 11.

Gov. Tate Reeves, who appointed Judge Reed, told the standing-room-only crowd, “I’m convinced and I know that some of you are as well, that he is an excellent choice for this position.”

The Governor said that he was impressed with Judge Reed’s legal experience, which included service as a municipal prosecutor and municipal judge. He also praised the new judge’s commitment to his family and his community.

Gov. Reeves said, “Whether in state court or in federal court, Judge Reed has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to upholding the rule of law and to delivering justice to victims. I know that he is going to bring that same te-

nacity to this position and I know that the 12<sup>th</sup> Circuit and our state are lucky to have him in this new role.”

Judge Reed, 56, began his law practice in Hattiesburg in 1998. He served as Petal City Prosecutor 2000–2017 and as Municipal Court Judge for Petal 2017–2025. He also was a public defender for the City of Petal in his early career. He served as Board Attorney for the Richton School District 1998–2021. He served as municipal prosecutor for the town of Richton 2008 – 2021, attorney for the town of Richton 2010 – 2021, and later as Richton Municipal Judge.

Hattiesburg City Councilman Dave Ware, a close personal friend for more than three decades, said he has observed Judge Reed as a husband, father, trusted friend and respected attorney. “It is his compassion and empathy coupled

with commitment to hold people accountable for their actions that make him an excellent judicial choice.”

Hattiesburg Mayor Toby Barker said, “If you live in Hattiesburg, you can count Judge Reed as a friend, and long before today, you have seen his family” at school functions, on soccer fields and as supporters of numerous causes. “You are a better community and a better people” because of the Reed family.

Judge Reed thanked Gov. Reeves for the appointment. He said, “I pledge to you to do my best every single day to see that justice is done fairly, but firmly.”

He reflected on Mississippi’s gains in education, accomplished with community support. He spoke about gun violence among youth, and challenged everyone to mentor young

people. “Everyone in this room can be a mentor to a young boy or girl. It costs basically nothing. My prayer and my hope today is that each of you will invest your time and energy in our youth....Now is the time for each of you to pay society back. Volunteer at church. Volunteer at a boys or girls club. Volunteer at your local school.”

Judge Reed said that he had many to thank. “First and most important is the good Lord above, our savior Jesus Christ.” He thanked his wife Heather, whom he called “the rock of our family. She is the glue that holds our family together” while he practiced law for 27 years. He thanked their three daughters for how they handled “with grace and dignity” the soccer matches and dance programs that he missed. He said, “This new position is a new job for me, but it will never compare to the job of being a girl dad, and I love you.”

He recognized three people who have passed away. The late attorney T. Jack Riley gave him office space and clients in 1998, and taught him about practicing law. He spoke lovingly of his stepfather, the late Horace “Jim” Malone, “the only Dad I’ve ever known,” and his late mother, Jorita Reed Malone, who took great joy in learning about his judicial appointment. She died five days after the appointment was announced. “Gov. Reeves, you brightened my mom’s day there at the very end.”

He thanked his prede-

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**Gov. Tate Reeves, center, is pictured with Pine Belt area gubernatorial appointees to the Circuit bench, left to right, Judges Matthew Sullivan, 13th Circuit; Richelle Lumpkin and Brad Touchstone, 15th Circuit; and Michael Reed and Wes Curry, 12th Circuit.**

cessor and mentor, retired Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich, for 41 years of public service. He noted that Judge Helfrich started an intervention court in 2003. “I can tell you that as a criminal defense lawyer, I had numerous clients go through drug court, many of them that I didn’t think there was a hope and a prayer for them, and now they are wonderful, productive people of this community.”

Gov. Reeves appointed Judge Reed to the Circuit Court after Judge Helfrich retired on June 30. Judge Reed will serve out the term in the district which includes Forrest and Perry counties.

Judge Helfrich swore in

Judge Reed earlier so that he could begin work at the start of his term on July 1, and administered the ceremonial oath at the Aug. 11 investiture. It is traditional to hold an investiture ceremony at a later time.

The Governor thanked Judge Helfrich for his service, saying that he has “gone above and beyond” as Circuit Judge. “He has not only made his community proud, but he has made our state proud.... We wish you a very healthy and happy retirement.”

Gov. Reeves said, “There are quite a few judges in this room but I think that we can all agree it is a fact that our judicial system is made better when people of the quality

of Judge Reed are willing to take on these responsibilities.”

Gov. Reeves acknowledged in the audience Pine Belt area judges whom he appointed during the past five and one-half years. He said, “I must tell you that it’s one of those things that I take extremely, extremely serious because of the role that the judicial branch plays in our society and particularly in our communities. And so to find the right people to fill these positions, some of whom, many of whom actually, are in this room today that I’ve had an opportunity to appoint to the bench – I want you to know that I take this extremely seriously and

that’s why I’m incredibly proud to be here with you at the investiture of Michael Reed, who I’ve appointed to serve the 12<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court District as Circuit Judge.”

The Governor also praised the courage of law enforcement and thanked them for their service. “It is these individuals who courageously and tirelessly deter crime and put criminals where they belong, and that is behind bars. That is why I appointed Judge Reed, and that is why I will take every opportunity to continue appointing judges who recognize the importance of public safety and who will uphold the rule of law.”

## Judge Damon Stevenson sworn in as Hinds County's fifth Circuit judge



**Circuit Judge Damon Stevenson takes the oath of office on Sept. 5 as his wife Jessica Stevenson holds the Bible. U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves, at right, administers the oath.**

Newly appointed Hinds County Circuit Judge Damon Stevenson at his Sept. 5 investiture ceremony spoke of accountability, fairness, mercy, redemption and justice. He said that he wants to do his part to make Hinds County safe.

"I want young people to walk in my courtroom and I want to give them an opportunity to turn their life around and be productive, and if they cannot turn their life around, I want them to understand that nobody has a license to terrorize this community. And so I want to do my part to make Hinds County safe for the citizens and the residents," Judge Stevenson said after taking the oath to serve in a newly created circuit judgeship.

Gov. Tate Reeves appointed Judge Stevenson, of Clinton, to the newly created judicial position. The Mississippi Legisla-

ture during the 2025 Regular Session created a fifth circuit judgeship for Hinds County. The appointed term for the new judgeship began Sept. 1 and extends through Jan. 4, 2027. An election will be held in November 2026.

Senior Hinds County Circuit Judge Winston Kidd said before the ceremony, "A fifth elected judge added to the Seventh Circuit will help case flow and will allow judges to handle more cases."

Judge Kidd has known Judge Stevenson since the latter was a student in Judge Kidd's pretrial practice class at Mississippi College School of Law. Judge Kidd has watched him develop into a capable courtroom attorney. He has the temperament needed to be a trial judge.

City and county government leaders welcomed Judge Stevenson during the investiture.

Willie Bozeman, speak-

ing on behalf of Jackson Mayor John Horhn, congratulated the Mississippi Legislature for creating the new judgeship, and Gov. Tate Reeves for appointing Judge Stevenson. Speaking for the Mayor, Bozeman said, "He asks that I extend to Judge Stevenson that he is willing to work hand in hand with him as needed, and as the Mayor has said...he wants to have this to be one of the safest, livable cities in the country, and Judge Stevenson can help us reach that plateau."

Robert Graham, President of the Hinds County Board of Supervisors, said that Judge Stevenson has a deep understanding of the criminal justice system, unwavering professionalism and commitment to fairness. He possesses a calm demeanor, steadfast confidence and will provide courageous leadership. "May your journey be guided by wisdom, pur-

pose and grace."

Attorney Diandra Hosey Sanders, Byram Ward 2 Alderwoman and Mayor Pro Tem, was a law school classmate and has worked with Stevenson as he served as Byram Municipal Court Judge. She said, "I know that Damon is going to treat everyone with respect, and he always has. He loves the Lord. He is a compassionate servant leader."

Attorney Tomekia Goli-day said that Judge Stevenson has what it takes to become a "Zechariah Judge." Quoting Zechariah from the Bible, she said, "He has the emotional maturity, temperament and wisdom to dispense judgment fairly. He will apply the rule of law while showing kindness and compassion to those who stand before him." She also expects that he will be even-handed and consistent – traits that allow lawyers to better advise their clients because they will know what to expect.

U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves, who administered the oath of office to Judge Stevenson at the investiture, recalled his capable representation of clients in federal court. "He will be missed in our court with his patience, his skill, his understanding and mastery of the law, particularly the sentencing guidelines. His first job was as a federal probation officer."

Attorney John Hall, past President of the Magnolia Bar Association, commended Gov. Tate Reeves for his selection of Judge Stevenson.

Law Professor and

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## Governor appoints W. Douglas Hollowell to 21st Circuit bench



**Circuit Judge Wayne Douglas “Doug” Hollowell III, at left, is sworn in by Circuit Judge Gerald Chatham Sr. on Sept. 2 before the DeSoto County Board of Supervisors.**

Gov. Tate Reeves appointed Wayne Douglas “Doug” Hollowell III of Olive Branch to a newly created Circuit Judge position in DeSoto County.

Judge Hollowell was sworn in on Sept. 2 during a meeting of the DeSoto County Board of Supervisors.

The Mississippi Legisla-

ture created a third circuit judgeship for DeSoto County earlier this year and renumbered the district as the 21<sup>st</sup> Judicial District. Judge Hollowell’s

term extends through Jan. 4, 2027.

The Governor in making the appointment said, “Doug’s deep legal expertise, proven leadership, and unwavering commitment to justice makes him an outstanding choice for Circuit Judge. His appointment reflects my ongoing mission to ensure that Mississippi’s judiciary is led by honorable and trusted stewards of the law.”

Judge Hollowell served as a DeSoto County Justice Court Judge from 2021 until his appointment to the Circuit Court bench. He served as Judge Pro Tem for the municipalities of Horn Lake and Walls, and as public defender for Byhalia Municipal Court. In his early legal career, he interned for two years with the Third Circuit District Attorney’s Office. His civil practice included business litigation and personal injury defense. He has litigated cases in more than 30 counties across Mississippi and successfully argued before the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. He was named a Top 10 Under 40 Criminal Attorney by the National Academy of Criminal Defense Attorneys, and was a founding member of the American Association of Premier DUI Attorneys.

Judge Hollowell was born and raised in Olive Branch, graduating from Olive Branch High School. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Mississippi and a law degree from the University of Miami School of Law in Coral Gables, Florida. He was admitted to the Mississippi Bar in 2013.

### Judge Damon Stevenson takes oath, *continued from page 10*

Dean Emeritus Jim Rosenblatt of Mississippi College School of Law recalled watching Stevenson’s skills mature in class and in court. “I’m confident that Damon Stevenson is going to make a great circuit judge. He’s got the intellect, he’s got the experience and he’s got the temperament to be a judge, and he will be a great judge.”

Judge Stevenson earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Tougaloo College, where he majored in economics with an emphasis in accounting. He earned an opportunity for post-graduate studies in the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program, and pursued studies at the University of Mississippi, Pennsylvania State University and the University of California at Los Ange-

les. He earned a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law, and was admitted to the practice of law in 2008. He is a graduate of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Charleston, S.C.

Judge Stevenson thanked his family. His mother, aunt, siblings, wife, two daughters, cousins and other family members shared in his excitement for the start of a new chapter.

He also told the crowd that he wrestled with himself over sharing some of his life story. Recalling his late father, he said, “My father was sentenced one time in this courthouse, and so to have the ability to let people know that you can be a productive member of society, you can be law abiding – I want young people to know that

you can, regardless of where you started in life, you can be a meaningful member of society. So often you look at the news and see young people – they are messing up their lives and they are doing things, they are becoming a real thorn. I want my courtroom to be a place of redemption, a place of justice and a place of mercy.

“I just want to do right by people. I just want to be fair. I just want a court that moves cases, that is responsible to the community. I believe that Hinds County is a wonderful place. So often you hear negative stuff.... I’m raising a family here. You know, this is my home. I want to do my part to make this place great. I’m so excited to have this opportunity to serve the citizens of Hinds County.”

## Lee County Youth Court implements Family Intervention Court



Judge Staci Bevell

Lee County has the newest of eight family intervention courts operating across the state.

The Lee County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on Oct. 6 to approve the Family Intervention Court's \$150,000 budget, which includes \$100,000 from the Administrative Office of Courts and \$50,000 from Lee County's portion of Mississippi's 2021 settlement with opioid distributors.

Youth Court Judge Staci

Bevell said, "Our court is overrun with abuse and neglect issues which directly involve drug use. It has caused parents to exhibit behaviors that directly affect the safety of their children within their homes. There is a lot of critical in-depth assessment that needs to happen in these cases. No one gets up and decides that they want to be an addict. Courts that see these people know that they are trying many times to escape a trauma they experienced and there is not a quick fix there. My team and I made this a priority when I took the bench and opening this Court is a big step for us. Youth Courts are problem solving courts and this court model is exactly where the future of Youth Court needs to be headed. We hope to add a juvenile intervention court in the future because the need is there too."

Family intervention courts provide screening to identify alcohol and drug dependent people for eligibility and ap-

propriate services. Court intervention services can include clinical assessment, counseling and rehabilitative care, education, referral, service coordination and case management. "It is a way to centralize and organize their battle for sobriety and gain a support system. The case management tool is key," Judge Bevell said.

Lee County Family Intervention Court will work in partnership with North Mississippi Health Services Neuroscience Institute to provide assessment and treatment for their FIC participants along with other existing community partners.

Claire Chitwood, Administrator of Neuroscience Institute, told the Board, "We believe, and it is scientifically proven, that the approach to addiction medicine is familial. It can be generational. We are overrun in our department as well." NMHS has included Lee County Youth Court's FIC as part of their application

for state opioid funds.

"I have seen the successes of FIC in other jurisdictions and my team is so excited to hit the ground running. Other Intervention Courts around the state, both adult and family, have been so helpful and extended lots of opportunities for us to come and observe, shared lots of tools and forms. AOC has gotten us up and running administratively and we hope to have our first court date during the first week of November."

Youth Court Program Director Vicki Lowery of the state Administrative Office of Courts said, "Juvenile and family drug courts stand at the crossroads of justice and compassion, helping addicted parents and at-risk youth rebuild their lives. Judge Bevell's intervention court ensures that families in Lee County have the tools and support necessary for them to recover, reunify, and thrive."

## 5 Mississippi youth courts receive grants from New Allies

Youth courts in Bolivar, Marion, Harrison, Hancock and Jackson were approved for grant funding from New Allies, the consulting and technical assistance initiative of Youth Villages.

Grants totaling \$325,000 were announced in August. They aim to improve outcomes for children and families related to safety, permanency and family engagement in judicial child welfare proceedings.

New Allies also launched the Mississippi Youth Court Institute, a collaboration with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to support implementation of best practice standards in child welfare through educational and training opportunities for all courts and judges.

"We recognize that judges, as leaders in our child welfare system, play an integral role in supporting system-level changes that will benefit children and families," said Britanny Binkowski, director of New Allies. The grants will support a range of family initiatives incorporating court innovations and evidence-based models, including:

- Bolivar County Youth Court's family reunification and stability initiative, focusing on high-quality visitation and care coordination to reduce time in foster care and expedite reunification;
- Marion County Youth Court, hiring a staff member to strengthen home safety plans, increase access and utilization of services and integrate family feedback into court decision

making;

- A collaborative project with Harrison, Hancock and Jackson County Youth Courts to increase support to mothers and expecting mothers experiencing substance abuse.

A 2024 study by the Mississippi Commission on a Uniform Youth Court System and Procedures found the state's youth courts are chronically underfunded and understaffed. Lee County Court Judge Staci Bevell, who led the commission, said, "The Mississippi Youth Court Institute will help recipient courts bridge some funding gaps with targeted resources to improve outcomes for children and families, and in addition provide ongoing educational opportunities for all youth court judges. Our judges strive every day

for our courts to be better than the day before. Having (New Allies) come alongside us to offer these financial resources and educational opportunities will bring new innovation, and we look forward to a long and productive relationship."

Outcomes for the initiatives will be evaluated by the Youth Villages' data science department and the NCJFCJ. "The NCJFCJ is proud to partner with New Allies on the first Mississippi Youth Court Institute," said Allison List, Ph.D., program director in behavioral health for the NCJFCJ. "We bring over 88 years of experience in training and technical assistance. We're honored to support selected court teams in implementing best practices to improve outcomes for families."

## Jackson County Family Intervention Court celebrates first anniversary



The Jackson County Family Intervention Court staff gathered for a picture after the court's first graduation ceremony on Oct. 17, 2025.

The Jackson County Family Intervention Court celebrated the program's first anniversary on Oct. 17 with a graduation ceremony at the Jackson County Youth Court in Pas-cagoula.

Three parents graduated after successfully completing the program created to help them overcome drug abuse and addiction and regain custody of their children. Fifteen other parents remain enrolled in the program.

The court-supervised voluntary program provides parents with drug and mental health treatment and other resources for recovery after their children have come under the care of the Department of Child Protection Services and have been or are about to be removed from parental custody. The aim of the program is to safely keep children with parents or reunify children with their parents in drug-free homes.

"The Family Intervention Court gives families the opportunity to rebuild from the chaos of alcohol and drugs," said John Harry, Program Co-

ordinator and Assistant Administrator of the Jackson County Youth Court. "We work to help our families thrive. Sometimes that means we are helping them address their struggles with alcohol and drugs, but other times it's connecting them to resources in our communities."

Jackson County Court and Youth Court Judge Stacie Zorn supervises the Family Intervention Court. She said, "Family Intervention Court provides a more holistic way to support families who are enrolled in our program. They receive intense wrap-around services in the form of substance abuse treatment, counseling and other mental health support to help them get their children home faster."

Judge Zorn said, "Substance abuse is a big problem in our county, and even when a parent knows they need help, obtaining proper treatment can be overwhelming. In Family Intervention Court, we are able to help participants find access to substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and other resources they need to

recover and heal their families."

Many of the program participants have a combination of drug and mental health issues.

Harry said, "We recognize that the cost of mental health treatment in Mississippi is very steep. We work with participants to alleviate the cost of treatment." During the past year, the program has pulled together funds from various grants to pay for treatment. Individual out-of-pocket costs have been "not a dime," he said.

It's not an easy program to successfully complete, though. With all of its requirements, "it's a burdensome program," Judge Zorn said. Participants have to submit to drug screenings twice a week, and check in daily via a phone app which lets them know whether that's the day they will be drug screened. They report to the Family Intervention Court twice a month, as well as attend Youth Court proceedings regarding the underlying case regarding custody of children. There are numerous required meetings with a case manager,

therapists and social workers. Sometimes there are difficulties with arranging to get off work to attend all of the required meetings.

Participation is voluntary, but the court reminds parents that with or without Family Intervention Court services, they must meet the requirements of the family service plan, a series of goals and objectives set by the court, to regain custody of children.

Harry said, "Judge Zorn has built a team uniquely qualified to address some of life's toughest situations. The team is staffed with lawyers, social workers, counselors, and court professionals. Along with the court team, we are partnering with mental health therapists, rehabs, and peer support groups all offering our participants the tools they need to be successful."

Judge Zorn said that she started the program a year ago after seeing the successful operation of similar programs around the state. "If something is working well in other counties, there's no reason it can't work well in Jackson County."

## Legislature appropriates \$500,000 to expand CASA



Sen. Brice Wiggins



Frances Allsup



Shelley Eubanks, Greene County Chancery and Youth Court Clerk, flips through a scrapbook of photos from her foster daughter's journey to adoption.

*By Samuel Hughes, Kristen Kaylor and Nischit Sharma, RHCJC*

Mississippi has set aside \$500,000 for Court Appointed Special Advocates, CASA, marking the state's first appropriation to help the organization grow into more counties.

CASA fills a gap in youth courts, where judges often lack time and staff to investigate every aspect of a child's situation. Volunteers act as the court's eyes and ears, focusing on what's best for the child.

CASA Mississippi, part of the national network, reports children in foster care who have an advocate spend less time in care, do better in school and gain access to more resources. The group currently serves 11 counties, including the six along the coast. Advocates say the new appropriation, which took effect July 1, will allow CASA to expand its reach and stabilize funding after years of relying on volatile federal grants and private donations.

Sen. Brice Wiggins, Senate Judiciary A Chair from Jackson County, pushed for the appropri-

ation and said he hopes it becomes a recurring state commitment. He's seen CASA's impact both as an attorney and as a former volunteer.

"Resources are limited ... People think the court has all this — it doesn't," Wiggins said. "You have the judge, a clerk and a court reporter. Each side is advocating for where they should be, and CASA — their advocacy is for what's in the best interest of the child."

Frances Allsup, who directs CASA Southeast Mississippi, said volunteers provide on-the-ground context about cases for judges — insight that helps move cases through youth court more efficiently.

"We bring a different perspective and objectivity, and it really helps with the flow of judgment, and it just brings so much more information," she said. "Not only are we looking out for the best interest of the child, but we take into account those parents who are really trying to right their wrong."

Shelley Eubanks, who serves as Chancery Clerk

and Clerk of Youth Court in Greene County, was a foster parent and spent nearly five years attending youth court proceedings for a foster child whom she adopted.

"Without CASA, I'm not certain that her entire story would have been told, and without a doubt, I feel like it would not have ended the same," Eubanks said. Her daughter's adoption was finalized in 2019.

Eubanks said having a CASA volunteer was instrumental in the process.

"Obviously, the courts can't gather up all the information needed," Allsup said.

Greene County has about 40 children in state custody, and roughly half have a CASA advocate — a shift Eubanks said has set a new standard.

That level of support depends on volunteers, Allsup said. She said she's hopeful the state money will help with recruitment, which has been difficult since COVID-19. New advocates must pass a background check, complete 30 hours of training and observe court proceed-

ings, often shadowing an experienced volunteer first.

One of those veterans is Florence Motes, who has served as an advocate for seven years. She said home visits, school check-ins and other steady contact builds the backbone of the report for the judge.

"I tell people I'm the judge's eyes and ears," Motes said. "We have to write a report every time we go to court .... Everything that we put in that court report, and everything that we say in court, we have to be able to substantiate."

Eubanks said she believes the appropriation can do something simple and powerful: put more CASAs in more courtrooms.

"No matter what the circumstances of the case are, that child could always use an advocate, and things just get seen more clearly," she said. "Hopefully, with this money, CASA is going to expand into some more counties; it's going to touch some more children's lives."

## 60 people graduate from 15<sup>th</sup> Circuit Intervention Court



**Judge Prentiss Harrell accepts a hug from an Intervention Court graduate as Probation Officer Casey McInnis looks on.**

Sixty people who turned around their lives in the 15<sup>th</sup> Circuit Intervention Court celebrated success and second chances at a graduation ceremony on June 6 at Pearl River Community College in Poplarville.

Graduates included 21 from Lamar County, 19 from Marion County, 14 from Pearl River County, three from Lawrence County and three who transferred from other counties.

Circuit Judge Prentiss Harrell, who supervises the program, said it is the largest class of graduates since the intervention court program started in the 15<sup>th</sup> Circuit District in 2007. About 550 people have graduated from the 15<sup>th</sup> Circuit program since it began.

Pearl River Community College President Adam Breerwood said, "Hope is real and no one is ever too far gone to find their way back."

Graduate Aubrey Holcomb, one of six who spoke, said, "I wake up every single day with hope. I had lost that for so long. That's an extraordinarily hard existence. I was a full-

blown addict for 11 years of my life."

While abuse, trauma and tragedy started many down the road to addiction, graduate Natasha Hebert said she had a wonderful childhood, loving parents, great siblings, extended family and good friends. She dabbled in drugs at 19 because she was curious. "I never considered myself an addict – just a heavy social user," she said, but drug use eventually became her priority. "I had no ambition, no accountability, no healthy friends, no license, no job, no car." She was arrested in 2019, and sat in jail for 30 days. It was the longest she had ever been away from her children. In drug court, she got a job, paid her traffic fines, regained a driver's license after nine years without, bought a car, started a 401K account and has good credit. "I am forever grateful for those who took a chance on me," she said.

Graduates ranged in age from 20s to 60s. As each graduate's name was called, a list of their accomplishments was displayed on two large

screens. Their new lives included regaining custody or visitation with children, repairing family relationships, ownership of houses and autos, getting jobs and starting businesses, among others.

Hundreds of family and friends packed the Brownstone Center on campus to watch graduates accept a certificate that attested to successful completion of the drug court program through years of drug tests, treatment, counseling and court appearances. Breerwood said, "To them, your resilience is a miracle."

The babble and cries of infants and murmurs of small children punctuated the graduation ceremony. Six drug-free babies were born to graduates.

These babies' potential for healthy lives also represents a taxpayer savings of about \$4.5 million, Judge Harrell said. That's based on an estimated average savings of \$750,000 over the first 18 years of each child's life.

Diverting people from prison to being wage-earning citizens also has a benefit for taxpayers. Judge Harrell estimated that the 15<sup>th</sup> Circuit's savings of incarceration costs is about \$4,350,000, based on an average of \$65.35 per day to house an inmate in prison.

The path to reclaiming their lives requires courage, honesty, strength, determination, discipline and commitment to change, Breerwood said. "We are all proud of you. We honor the bravery that it took to get here....This is what healing looks like and this is what real change feels like....We celebrate your future. Your future is wide open."

Senior U.S. District Judge Keith Starrett started Mississippi's first state felony drug court in 1999 when he was a Circuit Judge of the 14<sup>th</sup> Judi-

cial District. He recalled sentencing people to prison, only to see the same people commit more offenses upon release. "I saw all these people come back and back and back. I said, 'What we are doing is not working.'" He heard about drug courts and set out to create an alternative to incarceration.

Judge Starrett's aim was to stop the revolving door and change the lives and futures of people who participated in drug intervention court. Presiding over the program also changed his life, he said. "I've seen so many lives changed in drug court....But the person that has been affected by drug courts more in Mississippi is me, because it changed my life. It changed the way I saw people. It changed the way I saw the potential that each of the people that came in my court had. My job was to help them realize it. Judge Harrell's job and desire is for you to realize what you are capable of doing. Do the best you can with your life."

Judge Harrell said after the ceremony, "Many of them have never had structure in their lives....It's wonderful to see people change their lives for the better."

The 15<sup>th</sup> Circuit program is a structured, four-phase, three-to-five-year program. The goal is to improve participants' quality of life and to provide them with tools which they need to be productive citizens. In addition to remaining drug-free, all participants must perform community service and have a high school diploma or GED before graduating. Sixteen members of the graduating class earned their GED or high school equivalent; 11 completed a degree or earned a trade certificate at Pearl River Community College.

### 3rd Circuit Intervention Court celebrates 20th graduation



Circuit Judge Kelly Luther is one of two judges who supervise the 3rd Circuit Intervention Court.

By Alyssa Schnugg  
*Oxford Eagle*

*Reprinted by permission*

The Third Circuit Judicial District Drug Intervention Court marked a milestone on Sept. 30 with its 20th graduation.

During a ceremony held at the Lafayette County Courthouse, 36 people were recognized for completing the three-year program. Graduates were from Oxford and New Albany.

The court, overseen by Circuit Court Judges Kelly Luther and Gray Tollison, is designed to help participants with substance use disorders rebuild their lives through treatment, close supervision, frequent court appearances and random drug testing.

Established in 2008, the program currently has 320 participants. It provides an alternative to incarceration, allowing individuals to maintain employment and work toward expungement of their criminal records if they succeed. Those who do not complete the

requirements face the possibility of prison.

Judge Luther noted the financial impact of the program; the state allocates about \$325,000 annually, roughly \$1,000 per participant, compared to \$25,000 per inmate for incarceration. "It's the most cost-effective program in the state," Judge Luther said.

Graduates were awarded medals and certificates during the ceremony.

Guest speaker Robin Minyard of Communicare used the metaphor of bowling, describing the role of drug court as "bumpers" that help participants stay on track until they are able to make good choices on their own. "We learn to bowl within the boundaries," she said. "A lot of days you bowl spares and strikes. That's what drug court is about. But now the bumpers are off. When you walk out you won't need any bumpers....Make good choices .... Choose life."

### Bar Foundation inducts Fellows

Circuit Judge Debra Gibbs of Jackson, Chancellor Willie J. Perkins Sr. of Greenwood and Administrative Office of Courts Director Katharine Surkin of Madison are among 20 recent inductees of the Mississippi Bar Foundation.

Lawyers representing the highest level of professionalism and competence are inducted as Fellows of the Bar Foundation each year. Other Fellows inducted at the Bar Foundation dinner on July 9 are U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert P. Myers Jr., Commissioner of Public Safety Sean J. Tindell and Lauren R. Hillery of Gulfport; Michael J. Bentley, Matthew Eichelberger, Adam B. Kilgore, Assistant Attorney General Harold E. Pizzetta III, Mississippi College School of Law Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Mary L. Purvis, and Aafram Y. Sellers, all of Jackson; Jay P. Carmean and Assistant District Attorney Mary Ann Connell of Oxford; Charles M. Merkel III of Clarksdale; Everett T. Sanders of Natchez; Scott J. Schwartz and Assistant District Attorney Matthew D. Shoemaker of Hattiesburg; Bonnie B. Smith of Ridgeland; and Charles J. Swayze III of Greenwood.

Fellow is the Foundation's highest honor. Selection is peer recognition of the highest level of professionalism, competence and leadership. Fellows are selected for membership based on excellence as a lawyer as well as dedication and service to the public and the legal profession.

Judge Gibbs began her service on the Hinds Circuit Court in January 2023. She previously served for six years in the Mississippi House of Representatives from District 72. She taught accounting at Jackson State University and was founding director of



Circuit Judge Debra Gibbs



Chancellor Willie Perkins



AOC Director Katharine Surkin

JSU's School of Business Center for Professional Development. She was Director of Accounting and Finance at the Mississippi Department of Human Services, then was a

*continued on page 17*

## ICWA Conference strengthens training, highlights culture



**Tribal drummers perform in the opening ceremony of the ICWA Conference on Aug. 20.**

Judicial officials and child welfare workers from state and tribal courts gathered on Aug. 20 for an annual review of federal requirements related to temporary custody, foster

care and adoption of Indian children.

About 150 people attended the thirteenth annual Indian Child Welfare Act Conference at Pearl River Resort at Choc-

taw.

The Indian Child Welfare Act, ICWA, was established by Congress in 1978, setting federal requirements for removal and placement of Indian children in foster or adoptive homes. Requirements apply to state child custody proceedings involving any Indian child who is a member of or eligible for membership in any of the 574 federally recognized American Indian tribes.

Speakers repeatedly emphasized the necessity to identify Indian children early in any matter which brings them into contact with social services, law enforcement and the jurisdiction of a court.

Shanna Burr, Senior Youth Court Judge for the Choctaw Tribal Court, said, “Be sure to ask that question in the very beginning – if they have any kind of Native American enrollment or eligibility for enrollment.”

Identification requires more than looking at physical appearance and family name, said Choctaw Tribal Attorney

General Diane Maxwell. Verification of tribal membership can only come from the Tribal Enrollment Department. “The main thing is reaching out to the Tribe when you have a child in custody” who may have Native American ancestry.

Destini Hernandez’s job as an ICWA caseworker for the Choctaw Tribe includes making the determination of whether a child is a member of the Choctaw Tribe or eligible for membership. She helps ensure that tribal involvement is respected and helps facilitate culturally appropriate placement for adoption and foster care.

ICWA aims to preserve tribal culture and safeguard the rights of Indian children to their heritage. Conference participants were immersed in Choctaw cultural heritage from the opening ceremony and throughout the day. Fifth and sixth graders from Standing Pine Elementary School, dressed in brightly colored shirts or dresses topped with ruffled aprons, sang the National Anthem in the Choctaw language. Children are taught the language from the time they start daycare. Choctaw Indian Princess Lexi Camille Rodriguez gave the invocation in Choctaw.

Drumming punctuated the program opening and afternoon dances by senior tribal members in brightly colored regalia decorated with intricate beadwork. Drummers sang in their ancestral tradition to the rhythmic sound of a drum.

Choctaw Chief Cyrus Ben said, “We refer to it as the heartbeat of the people. It’s our people speaking to us.”

The U.S. government’s adoption of ICWA to enforce children’s right to their culture 47 years ago was a course

*continued on page 18*

## Bar Fellow induction, *continued from page 16*

Workers Compensation Commissioner.

She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from University of Southern Mississippi, a Masters of Business Administration from Mississippi College and a Juris Doctor from Mississippi College School of Law.

Judge Perkins began his service on the Seventh Chancery Court in January 2019. He served for 25 years in the Mississippi House of Representatives from District 32. He was board attorney for the Leflore County School District, city attorney for Itta Bena and attorney for the Greenwood Housing Authority and Central Mississippi Inc., CMI. He is a graduate of Tougaloo College and the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Surkin has served as Director of the Administrative Office of Courts since Nov. 1, 2023. She has worked for the Supreme Court for 15 years. Before becoming AOC Director, she served as senior judicial law clerk and later Chief of Staff for Chief Justice Mike Randolph. Surkin began her legal career as a judicial law clerk for former Justice George C. Carlson Jr. in December 2001. She practiced law for nine years with the firm of Page, Mannino, Peregich and McDermot. She returned to the Supreme Court staff in August 2014. Surkin earned a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Millsaps College and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

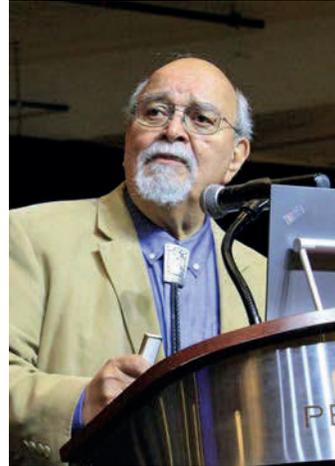
## ICWA Conference reviews requirements, *continued from page 17*



**Judge Shanna Burr**



**AG Diane Maxwell**



**Judge William Thorne**

reversal after more than a century of policies and practices that were meant to extinguish Indian culture. Indian boarding schools that began in the 1800s sought to “civilize” Native American children by replacing all that they knew with English language, Christian religion and non-native dress. “The goal was cultural eradication,” said retired Judge William Thorne Jr. of San Diego.

Boarding schools included church affiliated programs approved by the federal government and schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Families were forced to send their children to boarding schools, Thorne said. In 1894, 19 Hopi men were arrested for resisting U.S. government policies, including forced removal of children to boarding schools. They spent nine months in Alcatraz. A more broadly applied tactic was to withhold resources – food, clothing and blankets – from families who resisted sending children to boarding schools.

Many children died in boarding schools. “Often times the families never knew what happened to these kids. The schools never bothered to notify the family,” Thorne said. Some tribes have been fighting for years to have the

remains of children repatriated to their homes. Many are lost in unmarked graves.

Tiny handcuffs intended to keep children from running away are among grim relics of the boarding schools.

Those who survived the boarding schools lost their cultural identity as well as basic notions of what family life should look like. Children reared in dormitories didn’t learn parenting skills, leading to dysfunctional families and intergenerational trauma, Thorne said.

In the waning years of the boarding schools, another government program aimed at assimilation took their place. Indian children were removed from their families and adopted out to mostly white families. The Indian Adoption Project ran from 1958 through 1967. Thorne said between 25 and 35 percent of Indian children were sent to non-Indian homes during that time.

Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978 in response to the high numbers of adoptions into non-Indian families.

A 1989 landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that interpreted the enforcement of ICWA originated in Mississippi. In the court’s decision in *Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indi-*

*ans v. Holyfield*, Justice William Brennan Jr., writing for the majority, recounted history that preceded Congress’ adoption of ICWA, noting that the legislation “was the product of rising concern in the mid-1970s over the consequences to Indian children, Indian families, and Indian tribes of abusive child welfare practices that resulted in the separation of large numbers of Indian children from their families and tribes through adoption or foster care placement, usually in non-Indian homes.”

Thorne, a Pomo/Coast Miwok Indian, became a judge in 1979. He worked for more than 34 years as a tribal court judge in Utah, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Nevada, California, Nebraska, Oregon and Michigan. He was the first Native American to serve on the Utah Court of Appeals. He now spends part of his time teaching about ICWA.

He told conference participants that some of what he teaches comes from 40 years of his own mistakes. He walked them through a long list of lessons learned from his own errors. Recalling some of his own adjudications, he said, “I removed kids when it wasn’t necessary.” He said, “We

are actually adding trauma in the name of helping those kids. Foster care should be a last resort.”

He emphasized helping families be better parents, and if they can’t do that, looking for placement with other family members. “Our concern is not to make them perfect parents. Our concern is that the kids be safe at home.” He said, “Our success should only count when we help them to succeed. Our job is to help them keep their kids at home...Family matters. Children need to belong.”

Judge Kathleen Quigley of Tucson, Arizona, is President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. She established the Indian Child Welfare Act Court in Pima County in 2020. Coming from a state with 22 federally recognized Indian tribes, she is strong on ICWA training. However, she thinks back to 2009, when she became a Pima County Juvenile Court Commissioner. “I didn’t know the law. I didn’t know how to apply it,” she said of ICWA. Training was a 15 minute introduction to ICWA.

“It’s really about the training and the letter of the law,” Quigley said. “A hallmark of our court is education and training.”

She reiterated the necessity for case workers, attorneys and judges to be mindful of the possibility that a child has Indian heritage, and to ask early.

“Children have a right to their families. Those children need that connection to their families, their tribe,” she said.

Quigley told attendees to ask themselves, “What can we do to do a better job?”

“They need a champion. That’s why you are here,” she said. “Every child that we see matters.”

## Legal aid providers fear funding cuts coming soon



At left, Sam Buchanan, Executive Director of the Mississippi Center for Legal Services, outlines potential funding cuts. Minnie Howard, Deputy Director of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, is at right. Gayla Carpenter Sanders, Executive Director of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project, is at center back.

Legal aid providers face possible funding cuts in programs that assist the poor across Mississippi.

At the quarterly meeting of the Access to Justice Commission in Jackson on Aug. 19, service providers described loss of federal funds and more potential cuts as they search for ways to continue meeting the civil legal needs of poor people.

Gayla Carpenter Sanders, Executive Director of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project, leads an ongoing effort to recruit lawyers in private practice to give pro bono service. “The private bar has to step in. The money may go away, but the cases will not go away,” she said.

The state’s two full-time legal services agencies are the Mississippi Center for Legal Services, covering about 60 percent of the state, and North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, covering about 40 percent. About 70 percent of the programs’ funding comes from the U.S. Congress by

way of the Legal Services Corporation, said Sam Buchanan of Hattiesburg, Executive Director of the Mississippi Center for Legal Services. Funding is reallocated every three years, and funding will be adjusted for Mississippi’s population loss.

Buchanan said that the U.S. House of Representatives’ proposal is a 46 percent cut nationwide. The best hope is the U.S. Senate proposal that would provide a slight increase, although inflation will mean no real gain. The President has suggested no funding for LSC.

“Zero funding would be devastating to us and the clients that we serve,” Buchanan said. “Our non-LSC sources are quite limited in Mississippi.” Even in the best case scenario of level funding, vacant attorney positions can’t be filled.

Legal Services offices also fear the possibility that the federal government might take back money previously budgeted, said Minnie Howard,

Deputy Director of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services.

“From our access to justice perspective, we already do not have enough. It would be an extreme loss for Mississippi,” said Access to Justice Commission Executive Director Nicole McLaughlin of Tupelo.

Federally funded Protection and Advocacy programs around the country also fear funding cuts. While the U.S. Senate proposed level funding, the President called for deep cuts. Funding cuts could affect the work of programs like Disability Rights Mississippi, the Protection and Advocacy agency for individuals with disabilities.

Other programs planned and approved for grants this year saw funding cancelled. Among those, the Office of State Public Defender was poised to move forward with a study of outcomes regarding parent representation in Youth Court. A grant had been approved for more parent attorneys and interdisciplinary team members, training and

data collection, said Jennifer Morgan, Parent Defense Program Manager at OSPD. The Judicial, Court and Attorney Measures of Performance grant was cancelled.

Sanders said that MVLP is repeating the Legal Ambassadors program introduced in 2023. MVLP is recruiting up to 25 pro bono attorneys to provide services in counties with five or fewer practicing lawyers. The aim is to provide representation from start to finish in family law cases. Each lawyer will take on four cases and participate in a family law clinic. The Legal Ambassadors program will run through May 2026.

Leaders of the Mississippi Bar are working to encourage lawyers to considering practicing law in underserved areas including small towns. There aren’t enough lawyers to serve all the paying clients or the pro bono needs in some counties.

After he was sworn in as Mississippi Bar President on July 11 at the Mississippi Bar Convention, Rhea Tannehill of Oxford said that recruiting lawyers to practice in underserved areas will be a priority. He noted the difficulty of recruiting lawyers to practice in the Mississippi Delta. Issaquena County has no lawyers practicing from an office in that county. In east Mississippi, Kemper County is among several counties that have only one local lawyer. “I think everyone realizes it has become an issue in small communities,” he said.

New Access to Justice Commission Co-chairman Blake Teller of Vicksburg said a shortage of lawyers in small towns is a problem in other areas of the country as well. “That’s an access to justice issue.”

## 14th Chancery family law clinics provide legal help to 60 people



**Volunteers who participated in the free Family Law Clinic on Aug. 1 in Starkville are, left to right, attorneys Steven Adams of Starkville, Angela Turner Ford of West Point, Joseph Van Every of Columbus, Robin Brown of West Point, Lydia Quarles of Starkville, Chancellor Paula Drungole-Ellis, attorneys Amanda Beard of Starkville, Clarissa Harris of West Point, Hays Burchfield of Eupora, and Heather Blansett of Houston.**

More than a dozen attorneys provided civil legal assistance to 60 people across the 14<sup>th</sup> Chancery District in free family law clinics held in Starkville and Macon in August.

Nine attorneys assisted 38 people with civil legal matters on Aug. 1 at the Oktibbeha County Courthouse, and five attorneys helped 22 people at a clinic on Aug. 8 at the Noxubee County Courthouse in Ma-

con. The attorneys assisted low-income people with family law matters including no fault divorce, adult name change, simple wills, advanced healthcare directives and power of attorney. The clinics were open to residents of Chickasaw, Clay, Lowndes, Noxubee, Oktibbeha and Webster counties.

Attorney Rod Hickman of Macon said that he was grateful for the opportunity

to participate in the Aug. 8 clinic. "For me, giving my time is about making the legal system more accessible to people who might otherwise feel overlooked. One case that was especially meaningful involved helping an elderly woman complete her will. She had been anxious about getting it done, and when we finalized it, she was so relieved and appreciative. Moments like that remind

me why these clinics matter. They provide peace of mind and practical solutions for our neighbors."

Attorney Steven Adams of Starkville began working with free family law clinics while he was in law school. He helped with wills and irreconcilable difference divorces at the Aug. 1 clinic in Starkville. "I love to assist with local pro bono events for our courts because it gives indigent individuals access to the system," Adams said. "It was a great event and I encourage every attorney to give back to their local community when they can."

Adams was appointed to the Access to Justice Commission July 1.

Senior Chancellor Paula Drungole-Ellis has organized 11 free clinics since 2019. She would like to expand services next year.

She said, "I am so happy to be able to offer these clinics to people in the community who may not have the funds to hire an attorney but need assistance. Volunteer attorneys make the process easier for the filer and for the court system." She added, "For others who just need a simple will or power of attorney, it gives them peace of mind."

She said, "I certainly appreciate the attorneys who volunteer their time and knowledge every year. It is because of them that each clinic has been as huge success!" The number of people seeking assistance continues to increase, and more volunteer attorneys will be needed. "Giving back to the community is what it's all about," she said.



**Volunteers at the Aug. 8 Family Law Clinic in Macon are, left to right, attorneys Joseph Van Every of Columbus, Stephanie Gobert of Oxford, Chancellor Paula Drungole-Ellis, attorneys Rhonda Evans of Columbus, Rhonda Hayes-Ellis of Columbus, and Rod Hickman of Macon.**

## Access to Justice Commission honors Rodger Wilder for leadership



**Access to Justice Commission leaders are, left to right, Executive Director Nicole McLaughlin, former Co-chair Rodger Wilder, and current Co-Chairs Blake Teller and Chancellor Jacqueline Mask.**

The Mississippi Access to Justice Commission honored attorney H. Rodger Wilder of Gulfport for his 15 years of service as co-chair of the organization dedicated to improving civil legal access to the courts for poor people.

Wilder's leadership was the longest in the history of the Commission. He stepped down as co-chair of the Commission on June 30. He has been a member of the Commission for 16 years, and will continue his membership. He joined the Access to Justice Commission in 2009, shortly after serving a term as President of the Mississippi Bar.

Presiding Justice Leslie King of Greenville praised Wilder for leadership that was calm, thoughtful, organized, consistent and committed.

Chancellor Jacqueline Mask of Pontotoc County, Commission co-chair, said, "He has a gift for solving problems. He has a tremendous heart for helping the peo-

ple of Mississippi, especially the poor."

Access to Justice Commission Executive Director Nicole McLaughlin of Tupelo said, "His heart is about as big as he

is," and he has the tenacity of a bulldog when that is needed to move matters forward.

Court of Appeals Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton of Jackson said, "He has truly

been selfless in his service."

Wilder was honored at the Access to Justice meeting in Jackson August 19.

Wilder said, "I can't tell you how touched that I am by those kind and very generous words. I take great pride in the work of this Commission." He praised the work of the Commission's dedicated members and the ex-officio members who are service providers. Their efforts have helped the people of Mississippi.

He encouraged continuing efforts, saying, "We are just beginning. It's going to get better."

Presiding Judge Carlton noted numerous accomplishments by the Commission under the leadership of Wilder and Judge Mask. Free civil legal clinics were held to assist poor people in every chancery district in the state in 2018. The effort earned recognition twice from the American Bar Association, which named the Mississippi Bar as 2019 recipient of the Harrison Tweed

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## Teller appointed co-chair of Access to Justice

Attorney Blake Teller of Vicksburg was recently appointed co-chair of the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission.

Chancellor Jacqueline Mask of Pontotoc County was reappointed as co-chair.

New members appointed to the Commission are Lee County Chancery Clerk Bill Benson of Tupelo, attorney Steven Adams of Starkville, and Jackson County Court and Youth Court Judge Stacie Zorn of Ocean Springs.

The Supreme Court reappointed Commission members Justice Jenifer B. Branning of Philadelphia, Court of Appeals Presiding Judge Virginia C. Carlton of Jackson, and Assis-

tant U.S. Attorney Kimberly Hampton of Oxford.

The Supreme Court created the Access to Justice Commission in 2006. The Commission's mission is to develop a unified strategy to improve access to justice in civil legal proceedings for the poor in Mississippi.

The Supreme Court recently moved the Commission and its funding under the supervision of the state Administrative Office of Courts. The Commission and its Executive Director, Nicole McLaughlin, had been overseen by the Mississippi Bar since 2018. McLaughlin, of Tupelo, has served as executive director of the Commission since 2018.

Teller practices law in Vicksburg in the firm of Teller, Hopson & Schrader, LLP. His practice includes personal injury, wrongful death, real estate, banking law, corporate law and governmental law.

He concluded his term as president of the Mississippi Bar in July 2023. He has served as a member of the Board of Bar Commissioners, as chair of the Real Property Section of the Mississippi Bar, and as president of the Fellows of the Young Lawyers of the Mississippi Bar. He is a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation. He also served as president of the Board of Di-

*continued on page 22*

### 3 new members appointed, 3 reappointed to Access to Justice Commission

*Continued from page 21*

rectors of the United Way of West Central Mississippi, the Rotary Club, the YMCA Board of Directors and the Vicksburg-Warren Chamber of Commerce. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from Vanderbilt University.

Judge Mask was appointed to the Access to Justice Commission in February 2014 and became co-chair in August 2016. She is senior chancellor of the First Chancery District, having served since January 1999 in the district which includes Alcorn, Itawamba, Lee, Monroe, Prentiss, Pontotoc, Tishomingo and Union counties. Since 2015, she has scheduled annual free legal clinics in every courthouse in the eight counties of the First Chancery District, and she has helped promote free legal clinics in other districts across the state to make the judicial system more accessible to self-represented litigants who can't



**Bill Benson**

afford to hire attorneys to represent them. She was in private law practice for 16 years before she was elected to the bench. She served for 15 years as a Youth Court public defender. She is a graduate of Mississippi University for Women and earned her Juris Doctor from University of Mississippi School of Law.

Benson has served as Lee County Chancery Clerk since 1992. He also serves as Chair of the Board of Trustees of the state Public Employees Retirement



**Steven Adams**

System, PERS. He has served as the county employee representative on the PERS Board of Trustees since 2008. Benson, an accountant, previously served as Monroe County Administrator from 1988 to 1992. He was County Auditor for the State Auditor's Office from 1981 to 1987. He earned an accounting degree from the University of Mississippi.

Adams has practiced law in Starkville since 2019, and opened his own practice there in 2023. His practice includes



**Judge Stacie Zorn**

criminal defense, family law, estate planning, probate litigation and business formation. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in criminology from Mississippi State University and his Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. He served as a law clerk for Supreme Court Justice Josiah D. Coleman. He also served for eight years in the Mississippi Army National Guard.

Judge Zorn was elected as Jackson County Court Judge in November 2022 and took office in January 2023. Before her election, she practiced law for almost 20 years with the Pascagoula firm of Heidelberg Steinberger, P.A., and its predecessors. Her practice included employment law, federal and state workers compensation defense, and family law and estate law. She previously served as a family master in Chancery Court and as judge pro tem in Ocean Springs Municipal Court. She is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi and earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Justice Branning was elected to the Mississippi Supreme Court in November 2024 and took office in January. She

### Rodger Wilder honored, *continued from page 21*

Award for extraordinary efforts to improve civil legal service, and honored the Mississippi Bar and the Access to Justice Commission with the 2020 E. Smythe Gambrell Professionalism Award. Those concerted volunteer efforts to improve poor people's access to the courts helped the state move from last place in 2016 to number 34 on the 2020 national Justice Index Survey.

Many people who can't afford to hire lawyers attempt to represent themselves. The Commission began preparing self-help videos for self-represented litigants in family law cases in 2020.

In January 2011, the Supreme Court accepted a Commission recommenda-

tion to allow limited scope representation, which enabled lawyers to assist people at legal clinics without taking on representation for the life of a case. In December 2015, the Supreme Court granted the Commission's request to establish a Law Student Limited Practice Rule, which allows law students to do volunteer work under the supervision of a licensed attorney.

Wilder, who has practiced law on the Gulf Coast since 1978, is a longtime community and bar leader. Before serving as state bar president, he was president of the Mississippi Bar Foundation and the Harrison County Bar. He is a founding member of

the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, and serves as president and CEO.

Among his many awards, he was the 2024 recipient of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce's Spirit of the Coast Award, the 2017 Curtis E. Coker Access to Justice Award and the 1998 Pro Bono Publico Access to Justice Award from the Russell-Blass-Walker Chapter, American Inns of Court.

Wilder earned a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering from Mississippi State University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

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**Access to Justice Commission new appointments, reappointments,** *continued from page 22*



**Justice Jenifer Branning**

served for nine years as a Mississippi State Senator, representing Neshoba and parts of Leake and Winston counties. She served on the Mississippi Prepaid College Tuition Board, the Mississippi Women’s Task Force, and the Southern Legislative Conference Committee on Economic Development, Transportation and Cultural Affairs. She practiced law in Philadelphia for 20 years. Her private practice included general practice in Chancery and Circuit Courts, real estate and business transactional work, utility work and estate planning. She served as a special Youth Court prosecutor and as guardian ad litem in Chancery Court.



**Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton**

She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration from Mississippi State University and attended the MSU Master of Business Administration program before earning a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. During law school, she was a clerk for the Secretary of State Division of Business Regulation and Enforcement.

Presiding Judge Carlton has served as a judge on the Mississippi Court of Appeals for 18 years. She is a former legislator, having served House District 100 for three years. She was an assistant district attorney and county public defender. She began her legal



**Kimberly Hampton**

career as a Mississippi Supreme Court law clerk.

Judge Carlton served for 24 ½ years in the military, including active duty, reserve duty, and National Guard duty. She was a U.S. Army JAG officer in legal positions including prosecutor, defense counsel, deputy staff judge advocate, staff judge advocate, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Army in Hawaii. She served as Command and General Staff College instructor, and as a U. S. Army Reserve military trial and military appellate judge. She retired from the military in February 2015 at the rank of Colonel.

She earned a Bachelor of

Business Administration degree from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. She is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and Staff College and the U.S. Army War College.

Hampton has served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi for almost seven years. She previously worked for four and a half years as a state assistant district attorney in the Delta, and for a year as a staff attorney for the Mississippi Department of Human Services. She received her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law, where she served as president of the Black Law Students Association, a member of the Dean’s Leadership Council and a member of the Trial Advocacy Board. As a law student, she served as a law clerk for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Memphis. Before law school, she served as an assistant teacher through the AmeriCorps program, assisting with the education of incarcerated youth at the Wash-

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**2026 law camps planned to introduce students to legal careers**

Plans are underway to hold summer law camps in June 2026 in Gulfport, Natchez, Oxford and Tupelo to introduce high school students to potential careers in law.

Planned programs are expected to include discussions with judges, prosecutors and private practice attorneys; opportunities to watch court proceedings; and practice activities including negotiations and oral arguments.

Program dates are:

- Natchez, Miss-Lou Pre Law Academy, June 1-5;
- Oxford Law Camp, June 8-11;
- Gulfport, Gargiulo Law Camp, June 15-18;
- Tupelo, Themis Law Camp, June 22-25.

Lafayette County Court Judge Tiffany Kilpatrick is organizing the Oxford program for 2026.

Judge Kilpatrick said, “The goal is to provide an exciting avenue for these young people to test drive the practice of law and,

hopefully, decide that they not only want to enter the legal profession but remain ‘tapped in’ to our local bar and remain in our community.”

Harrison County Court Judge Alison Baker said, “I am starting this law camp because I’ve met several high school students over the past few years who are interested in being an attorney, have a lot of questions, and want more information on what the practice of law is like. This Law Camp will not

only give students a better understanding of the structure of the Mississippi court system, but will also give them some hands-on experience to see if they might want to become an attorney.”

The Gargiulo Law Camp is named in honor of the late U.S. Magistrate Judge and former Circuit Judge John Gargiulo.

The programs to be held in Gulfport and Oxford are new. Access to Justice Co-

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## Law camps introduce high school students to possible legal careers, *continued from page 23*



Chancellor Jacqueline Mask, at center back, is pictured with participants from the June 2025 Themis Law Camp in Tupelo.



Chancellor Vincent Davis, at left, Aimee Guido of Natchez Inc., second from right, and Circuit Judge Carmen Drake, at right, are pictured with 2025 law camp scholarship winners.

Chair Chancellor Jacqueline Mask started the Themis Law Camp in Tupelo in 2022, and it became a model for others. A law camp was held in Natchez in June 2025. The Mississippi Court of Appeals also held an appellate law camp in June 2025.

Judge Baker said, “The years of success with Judge Mask’s law camps paved the way for this camp. I’m thankful for Judge Mask’s and Nicole McLaughlin’s hard work and planning.”

Judge Mask said, “We have tremendous untapped potential in our young peo-

ple. One of the goals of this program has been to help them see that, and to show them the first steps on the path to a legal career. If we can help them discover this early enough, and that it’s attainable for them, we believe it will spur them to apply themselves to make this a reality. We want to inspire them and show them how they can lift themselves and their communities by choosing this type of career.”

Judge Mask said, “It’s my hope that our combined efforts to bolster this program will have a lasting, positive impact on

these students, and on the future of our region. Those of us who have been blessed to be an attorney or judge can use this as a way to give back to the communities that have helped us have these careers.”

Encouraging young people to consider careers in law is important to providing access to the courts for all people, particularly those who have limited financial means, said Nicole H. McLaughlin of Tupelo, executive director of the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission. In recent years the number of people who struggle to afford legal assistance has grown as the number of attorneys has declined.

McLaughlin said, “The decreasing number of attorneys in the state is a serious access to justice issue we are very concerned about. Targeting our Mississippi youth and introducing them to the law as a possible profession might assist in the shortage of attorneys in the state. We need our brightest to stay in Mississippi and, hopefully, practice law or become affiliated with the legal profession in some other way.”

As of July 2025, 22 counties have fewer than 10 practicing local attorneys, according to Mississippi Bar data. Nine counties have five or fewer lawyers. Claiborne County has five lawyers with offices in the county; Noxubee County has four resident lawyers; Jefferson Davis, Perry and Quitman counties each have three lawyers; Kemper and Sharkey counties have two each; Humphreys County has one; and Issaquena County has none.

Chancellor Vincent Davis of Fayette, who spearheaded the 2025 program in Natchez, said, “It exceeded my greatest expectations. It was an amazing camp.” Local attorneys joined the audience, spending time at the program beyond their scheduled times to speak. “The whole legal community enjoyed it,” he said. “It was good for the kids, good for the legal community. It was an opportunity for the legal community to give back to the young people.”

He looks forward to attracting students from a

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# Mississippi Court of Appeals hosts students on Constitution Day



**Court of Appeals Judge Deborah McDonald talks to students.**

The Mississippi Court of Appeals celebrated Constitution Day on Sept. 17 by hosting fifth graders from Jackson's Galloway and Walton Elementary Schools. The students attend Operation Shoestring's after school program.



**Students ask questions and enjoy a view from the bench.**

Court of Appeals Judges Deborah McDonald and David McCarty, Special Assistant Attorney General La'Bria Barnes and attorney Demarcus McGee talked to students about the work of judges and the attorneys who appear before them, and answered students' questions.

Students were delighted to take turns sitting in panels on the Court of Appeals bench, as well as at attorneys' tables.

"This is one of the most important days of the making of this country that you will ever, ever know about," Judge McDonald told about 25 students.

On Sept. 17, 1787, delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed the U.S. Constitution in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Judge McDonald told students that they can be doctors, lawyers, engineers or any other professional due in part to the individual rights guaranteed by the Constitution. "The good thing about the Constitution is in this country, you can dream and you can be what you want to be."

Judge McDonald told the students that she grew up poor in Jefferson County, one of the poorest counties in the country. No one expected her to grow up to be a lawyer or a judge. The Sept. 15, 1963, killing of four little girls in a Ku Klux Klan bombing of a Birmingham church inspired

her to earn a law degree to make a difference.

"I said no, I've got to change this. This cannot be. And what I want to say to you all, is that you all can change too. You are the agents of change now."

She urged students to pursue civics education and learn their rights. "Seek out to know what your rights are, and what other people's rights are."

Barnes explained the three branches of government and her work in the executive branch defending state agencies and officials. Barnes said that every citizen is entitled to constitutional protections. "The most interesting thing about my job is that regardless of whether they are incarcerated, they have constitution rights. The same Constitution that protects you and me...is the same Constitution that protects those who are incarcerated."

McGee talked about his work defending companies in the private sector. McGee said that he is one of two Black attorneys at the large Jackson firm where he practices. "Having people that look like you and have your interests in mind is very important to have in various positions," he told the students.

Judge McCarty told the students that the court is here to serve the citizens. "This is your court. You belong here."

## Law Day Camps, *continued from page 24*



**Court of Appeals Judge Amy Lassitter St. Pé, at left, speaks to high school and college students during a law day camp.**

wider area in 2026.

Circuit Judge Carmen Drake of Natchez said, "The Pre-Law Academy was a valuable experience for our community, offering students early exposure to the workings of our legal system and the honorable responsibilities that come with the practice of law." She said, "Initiatives like the Pre-Law Academy underscore the importance of civic education and the power of early mentorship in shaping the next generation of leaders. The camp's success reflects the collaborative spirit of local pro-

professionals from all walks of life who are committed to investing in youth and building a more informed, engaged community."

The Court of Appeals conducted an Appellate Law Day Camp in June as part of its 30th year anniversary. Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton of Jackson said, "The Mississippi Court of Appeals hosted the Appellate Law Day Camp to provide students with a better understanding of the judicial process and to further inspire their interest in the legal field."

## Supreme Court makes appointments to Bar Complaint Tribunal



**Chancellor Haydn Roberts**

The Mississippi Supreme Court recently appointed six new members to the Bar Complaint Tribunal, and reappointed four members.

New appointees include Chancellor Haydn J. Roberts of Brandon, Circuit Judge Kelly L. Mims of Tupelo, Sen. Jeremy England of Ocean Springs, attorney John G. Holaday of Flowood, attorney Da-



**Circuit Judge Kelly Mims**

vid A. Pumford of Gulfport, and attorney Robert R. Morris of Southaven.

Tribunal members who were reappointed include Chancellor Jennifer Schloegel of Gulfport, Municipal Judge Amy K. Taylor of Philadelphia and attorneys Jason D. Herring of Tupelo and Rachel Pierce Waide of Tupelo. Each has served three years on the Tribunal.



**Sen. Jeremy England**

Chief Justice Mike Randolph signed appointment orders on Aug. 25 and Sept. 10. Morris will serve a one-year term, until Aug. 31, 2026. He replaced Rhea Tannehill of Oxford, who stepped down. All other terms are for three years, concluding on Aug. 31, 2028.

The 27-member Complaint Tribunal is made up of nine judges and 18 law-



**John G. Holaday**

yers.

Judge Roberts has served since January 2016 as Chancery Court Judge for the 20th Chancery Court District of Rankin County. He previously served as chair and vice-chair of the Conference of Chancery Court Judges. He served for almost eight years as a Rankin County

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## Council of Youth Court Judges reelects executive board



**Judge Staci Bevill**

The Council of Youth Court Judges reelected its executive board at its September conference. Lee County Court Judge Staci Bevill is chair of the Council, Marion County Youth Court Referee Renee Porter is vice-chair, and Lafayette County Court Judge Tif-



**Judge Renee Porter**

fany Kilpatrick is secretary-treasurer.

The newest member of the Board of Directors, elected in September, is Amite County Youth Court Referee Amy Foster.

Other members of the Board of Directors are 1st Dis-



**Judge Tiffany Kilpatrick**

trict Chancellor Brad Tension, Lowndes County Judge Allison Kizer, Itawamba County Youth Court Referee Lori Basham, 9th District Chancellor Deborah Giles, Warren County Judge Marcie Southerland, Newton County Youth Court Referee Jason

Mangum, 10th District Chancellor Rhea Sheldon, and Harrison County Court Judge Michael Dickinson.

Judge Bevill joined the bench in January 2019. She is a graduate of Mississippi State University and earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Porter has served as Youth Court Referee since June 2021. She is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi and earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Kilpatrick joined the bench in January 2023. She previously served as an assistant district attorney and a public defender. She taught legal research at the University of Mississippi School of Law, her alma mater.



**David Pumford**



**Robert Morris**

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Chancery Court staff attorney, and for six months as court-appointed family master in Chancery Court. Judge Roberts is a Hall of Fame inductee and graduate of the University of Mississippi. He earned his Juris Doctorate degree from Mississippi College

School of Law.

Judge Mims has served since January 2019 on the First Circuit Court, which includes Alcorn, Itawamba, Lee, Monroe, Pontotoc, Prentiss and Tishomingo counties. He was a public defender for 15 years before he was elected to the bench. He has 34 years of military service. He is a

veteran of the U.S. Army, Mississippi Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve. He served on active duty three times, including deployments in Operation Desert Storm/Shield and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was promoted to brigadier general upon his retirement from the Mississippi National Guard in 2022. He earned a degree in marketing from Mississippi State University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Sen. England has served in the Legislature since 2020. He chairs the Elections Committee and is vice-chair of the Ports and Marine Resources Committee. He practices law with the firm of Speed, Seta, Martin, Trivett, Stublely & Fickling, LLC. His primary practice area is workers compensation defense. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Mississippi State University, where he served as Vice President of the Student Association and graduated magna cum laude. He earned his Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law, where he served on the Moot Court Board and the Law School Student Government Association. He was named Mississippi Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year 2014-2015.

Holaday's practice includes civil litigation, criminal defense and family law. He was admitted to the practice of law in 1994 and served for a year as a law clerk for U.S. District Judge Charles Pickering. He practiced with the firm of Langston, Frazer, Sweet & Freese, handling premises liability, products liability, medical malprac-

tice, commercial fraud and insurance bad faith claims. He opened his own law practice in 1998.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, cum laude, from Mississippi State University, and a Juris Doctor, cum laude, from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Pumford represents clients in family law matters before Chancery Courts, Supreme Court and Court of Appeals. He began his legal career as a law clerk for the late Presiding Justice Michael D. Sullivan. He was admitted to the practice of law in 1999. He practiced law with the firm of Lowrey & Fortner, P.A., in Hattiesburg before opening his own practice on the Gulf Coast in 2012. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in economics from Swansea University in the United Kingdom, a Master's degree in political science and international relations from the University of Southern Mississippi, and a law degree from the Cumberland School of Law at Samford University.

Morris has served for 18 years in private civil practice and 10 years as a prosecutor. His private practice experience includes personal injury, products liability, workers compensation, insurance, premises liability and commercial and business litigation. He began his legal career in private practice in 1997. He became an assistant district attorney in 2014. Gov. Tate Reeves appointed him as interim District Attorney for the then-17<sup>th</sup> Circuit District in September 2022. He served through December 2023. He returned to private law practice in 2024.

## Judge Trent Favre joins NCJFCJ Board

Hancock County Youth Court Judge Trent Favre of Bay St. Louis recently was named to the Board of the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

He was sworn in during the Council's annual meeting in Chicago on July 22.

Judge Favre in a Facebook post said that he felt overwhelmed, honored, humbled and nervous. "I look forward to serving in this role.

Judge Favre has served as County Court and Youth Court Judge since 2018, when the position was created. The Commission on Children's Justice honored him as one of its Champions for Children in 2019. The Mississippi Bar honored him with the 2020 Judicial Excellence Award.

Judge Favre previously served as City Attorney for Bay St. Louis and was an as-



**Judge Trent Favre**

sistant prosecutor for Bay St. Louis and the Hancock County Justice Court.

He graduated cum laude from Millsaps College, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy with a minor in French. He received his Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

## Chancellor Cynthia Brewer receives Susie Blue Buchanan Award



Chancellor Cynthia Brewer, center, is pictured with earlier Susie Blue Buchanan honorees on July 10 at the Mississippi Bar Convention. Left to right are Lydia Quarles, Margaret Oertling Cupples, Patricia Bennett, Judge Brewer, former Justice Dawn Beam, Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes and Joy Lambert Phillips.

Chancellor Cynthia L. Brewer of Madison was honored on July 10 for her exemplary work and service as a role model for women in the legal profession.

The Women in the Profession Section of the Mississippi Bar selected Judge Brewer as the 2025 recipient of the Susie Blue Buchanan Award. The award was presented on July 10 at the Price-Prather Luncheon during the Mississippi Bar Convention in Destin, Fla. The annual award honors an outstanding woman lawyer who has achieved professional excellence and has actively paved the way to success for other women lawyers.

Judge Brewer told the room full of lawyers and judges, "Thank you very much for this recognition and this honor. Each and every one of you have had an effect upon me....You have inspired me to be better than I thought that I could ever be."

She recalled watching every episode of Perry Mason as a child. She wanted to be a criminal defense lawyer defending the innocent, as the character portrayed, but became a prosecutor in her early career. She was drawn to further public service as a judicial special master, County Court Judge and Chancellor. She encouraged lawyers in the audience to seek out opportunities to serve as special masters, and as judges.

"I didn't plan on being who stands before you today. I planned on being Perry Mason – with a skirt – and nice handbags," she said, prompting laughter.

Referring to the 26 former Susie Blue Buchanan Award honorees on the awards luncheon program, Judge Brewer said, "I would like to say thank you to the people that you see on the back of your programs, especially the ones that I've had an opportunity to serve with."

She said of Lt. Gov. Evelyn Gandy, former Mississippi College School of Law Professor Carol West and former Mississippi Court of Appeals Judge Mary Libby Payne, "When they walked out with their law degree, they were not welcomed. We have (been) welcomed, for the most part. I got called 'little girl' recently, but that's another story. We are welcomed in the courtroom....These ladies fought hard to improve the legal system as well to improve females in the profession and I say thank you to each and every one of them."

She recalled an old picture of herself, Lt. Gov. Gandy and former Mississippi College School of Law Dean Patricia Bennett from a time when there were few women lawyers working in Hinds County. They made a difference. "I say to each of you, stay. Make a difference. Think about what is our goal and

that is to improve or open the door for improvement, whatever way you can."

She has served for many years as a visiting instructor at the National Judicial College in Reno. "It has been my privilege and honor to serve as a judge, to inspire one another, to take newly elected and or appointed judges from all over our nation and be a part of their professional lives." A few of the Mississippi judges who she mentored were in the audience.

Former Mississippi Bar President Jennifer Ingram Johnson, the luncheon speaker, recalled appearing before Judge Brewer in Chancery Court as a young litigator, "and I was scared to death....And Judge Brewer welcomed me into her court, not only with her words, but just by her presence, her openness and her bright light."

Johnson, of Hattiesburg, wore former Lt. Gov. Gandy's pearls at the luncheon. The first woman statewide officeholder was her mentor and cherished friend. Gandy was the fifth recipient of the Susie Blue Buchanan Award. Johnson held up a copy of the pale pink luncheon awards program. "These are the trailblazers. These are the women who have paved this path for each and every one of us to be here and to be able to be leaders in our profession. Judge Brewer, you are very well suited to be added to the list of Susie Blue Buchanan Award winners today."

Susie Blue Buchanan of Brandon became the first woman lawyer qualified to practice before the Missis-

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## Circuit Judge Jim Kitchens receives Justice Achievement Award from Court Administrators



Circuit Judge Jim T. Kitchens and Court Administrator Lynn Conner

Circuit Judge Jim T. Kitchens Jr. of Caledonia was honored with the Justice Achievement Award at the spring Trial and Appellate Judges Conference in Biloxi.

Sixteenth Circuit Court Administrator Lynn Conner of Columbus, immediate past president of the Mississippi Court Administrators Association, presented the award to Judge Kitchens on April 24 at a luncheon of the Court Administrators Conference.

Conner said the annual award honors a person “who by their resolve, persistence, or endeavor, has selflessly contributed to the administration of justice within the State of Mississippi.”

Judge Kitchens is Senior Circuit Judge of the Sixteenth Circuit District of

Clay, Lowndes, Noxubee and Oktibbeha counties. He is in his sixth term on the court, having first taken office in 2003. He is former chair of the Conference of Circuit Judges, and served on the curriculum committee for the Conference. He was vice-chair of the Justice Court Task Force and served on the Mississippi Model Jury Instructions Commission.

Judge Kitchens was an assistant district attorney in the Sixteenth District for six and one-half years. He was a law clerk for Supreme Court Chief Justice Dan Lee for more than two years. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Mississippi State University and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law.

## Judge Brewer receives Susie Blue Buchanan Award, *continued from page 28*

Mississippi Supreme Court in 1916. The Price-Prather Luncheon, now in its 27th year, is named for the state’s first woman judge, Washington County Court Judge Zelma Wells Price of Greenville, and the first Mississippi woman chancellor, Supreme Court Justice and Chief Justice, Lenore Loving Prather of Columbus. Chief Justice Prather received the Susie Blue Buchanan Award in 2005.

Judge Brewer is senior chancellor of the 11th Chancery Court, hearing cases in Madison and Leake counties. She became a chancellor in January 2007. She served twice as chair of the Conference of Chancery Court Judges. She is a member of the Board of Governors of the

Mississippi Judicial College. She served on the Commission on Judicial Performance as alternate Chancery Court member. She previously served for four years as Madison County Court Judge, where her duties also included part of the Youth Court docket. She also previously served as a special master in Chancery Court, and as a Municipal, County and Youth Court prosecutor in Hinds County.

Judge Brewer earned her undergraduate degree from the University of South Alabama, and her Juris Doctor from Mississippi College School of Law. She previously served as an adjunct professor at Mississippi College School of Law.

The number of women

in the legal profession has increased dramatically since Judge Brewer graduated from Mississippi College School of Law in 1985. Men outnumbered women graduates at MCLaw by more than two to one in 1985; there were 67 male law school graduates and 30 female graduates that year.

During the past five years, ratios of women to men entering Mississippi’s two law schools have fluctuated.

At the University of Mississippi School of Law, women outnumbered men among first-year law students in three of the past five years. The 2024 fall class of first-year law students included 91 women and 72 men. The 2021 entering class was 95 women and 86 men. The

largest male class in the past five years was in 2022, with 98 men and 79 women first-year law students at the University of Mississippi School of Law.

At Mississippi College School of Law, first-year law students included 76 men and 64 women in fall 2024. Men outnumbered women first-year law students three of the past five years; 2021 enrollment was 82 women and 58 men starting law school, and 2023 first-year law students were evenly divided at 65 women and 65 men.

Of 8,824 active members of the Mississippi Bar, 2,865 are women, according to data from January 2025, the most recent available. Of those, 2,191 practice in Mississippi and 674 out of state.

## Judges Carlton and McDonald honored for judicial service



Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton, center, is pictured with former Supreme Court Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens, at left, and MAJ Immediate Past President Tripp Segars.

Mississippi Court of Appeals Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton of Jackson and Judge Deborah McDonald of Fayette were recently honored for their judicial service.

The Mississippi Association for Justice named Presiding Judge Carlton as the recipient of the Justice James W. Kitchens Distinguished Jurist of the Year Award on June 13 during the Association's annual convention in New Orleans.

The MAJ Women's Caucus honored Judge McDonald with its Lifetime Service Award on June 12.

The Distinguished Jurist of the Year Award is presented to a member of the

judiciary who has demonstrated the principles of fair, honest, and open jurisprudence during service on the bench. Attorney Tripp Segars of Madison, MAJ Immediate Past President, said, "Judge Carlton's integrity, professionalism and commitment both to justice and the rule of law is inspiring and necessary, especially in today's climate, when the judiciary and rule of law have been questioned."

Presiding Judge Carlton said, "I am humbled to have received this honor. I am truly moved by this recognition of my judicial service. I feel blessed to serve as a Presiding Judge on the Mississippi Court of Appeals. It is truly a col-

laborative court with a heart for the pursuit of justice. It is an honor and privilege to work hard each day for fair and impartial justice. Thomas Jefferson said, 'The most sacred of the duties of a government is to do equal and impartial justice to all its citizens.'"

Segars said, "MAJ has awarded the Distinguished Jurist of the Year to many deserving honorees over the years. This year was really special, as we renamed it the Justice James W. Kitchens Distinguished Jurist of the Year Award."

Former Justice Kitchens said, "I was absolutely stunned when this was named for me. It was an honor."

Judge McDonald was recognized for her 37 years of law practice and seven years as a Court of Appeals judge.

Judge McDonald said, "I was totally surprised, and it was a great honor. That was something special."

She is among five women serving on the 10-member Court of Appeals. She said, "I just want other women lawyers to appreciate the work all of us do and the perspective that women lawyers bring."

Judge McDonald's former law practice included civil rights, voting rights, consumer protection, products liability "and just about everything else you can think of." She began her legal career as an attorney representing the poor at the former Southwest Mississippi Legal Services in McComb. She argued her first case before the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in her first year

out of law school. She worked for Legal Services for nine years, serving as staff attorney, managing attorney and executive director. She entered private law practice in 1991. She served as Municipal Judge in her hometown of Fayette for 23 years. She is admitted to practice before all state and federal courts of Mississippi and the U.S. Supreme Court.

She is a graduate of Alcorn State University, where she studied social science education. She earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Presiding Judge Carlton has served as a Judge on the Mississippi Court of Appeals for 18 years. She is the second longest currently serving member of the Court of Appeals. She is a former legislator, having served House District 100 for three years. She served as an assistant district attorney and county public defender. She began her legal career as a Mississippi Supreme Court law clerk.

Judge Carlton is admitted to practice before all Mississippi courts, the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces.

She had a long and distinguished military career, serving first as a U.S. Army JAG officer in legal positions including prosecutor, defense counsel, deputy staff judge advocate, staff judge advocate, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Army in Hawaii. She later served as Command and General

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## Judge McDonald receives Lifetime Service Award, *continued from page 30*



**Court of Appeals Judge Deborah McDonald, at left, accepts the Lifetime Service Award from Madeline Iles, President of the Mississippi Association for Justice Women’s Caucus.**

Staff College Instructor, and as a U. S. Army Reserve military trial and military appellate judge. Her 24 ½ years of total

military service included active duty, reserve duty, and National Guard duty. She retired from the military in February 2015 at

the rank of Colonel.

Judge Carlton is from Columbia, Mississippi, and currently lives in Jackson. She earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. She is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and Staff College and a graduate of the U.S. Army War College.

She served on the Mississippi Children’s Justice Commission, the Mississippi Supreme Court Rules Advisory Committee, and as Chairman of the 2020 Special Committee on Judicial Election Campaign

Intervention. She currently serves on the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission and on the Board of Governors of the Mississippi Judicial College. She also previously served as an adjunct professor at Mississippi College School of Law and at Belhaven College. Judge Carlton is a member of the North Jackson Rotary Club and was named 2020 Champion of Change by the Women in Rotary Committee of Rotary District 6820, which includes 45 Rotary Clubs. She was a member of the Junior Auxiliary of Columbia, Mississippi, and is a past chair of the Jackson Symphony League Ball.

## Mississippi Court Administrators Association elects officers

Chancery Court Administrator Brooke Pollard of Gulfport was elected president of the Mississippi Court Administrators Association at the Spring Conference on April 24 in Biloxi.

Chancery Court Administrator D. LaShae Gilmore of Jackson was elected First Vice President. Circuit Court Administrator Kinshasa West of Fayette is Second Vice President. Youth Court Administrator Candace Payne-Johnson of Bay St. Louis is Secretary. Circuit Court Administrator Mary Brauer of West Point is Treasurer. Circuit Court Administrator Lynn Conner of Columbus assumed the Executive Board position of Immediate Past President.

Pollard is court administrator to Chancellors Carter Bice and Jennifer Schloegel of the Eighth Chancery Court.



**Officers are, left to right, Immediate Past President Lynn Conner, President Brooke Pollard, First Vice President D. LaShae Gilmore, Second Vice President Kinshasa West, Secretary Candace Payne-Johnson, and Treasurer Mary Brauer.**

Gilmore is court administrator to Chancellor Tiffany Grove of the Hinds County Chancery Court.

West is court administrator to Circuit Judge Tomika Irving of the 22<sup>nd</sup>

Judicial District.

Payne-Johnson is court administrator to Hancock County Youth Court Judge Trent Favre.

Brauer is court administrator to 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Dis-

trict Circuit Judge Michelle Easterling.

Conner is court administrator to 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Circuit Judge Jim T. Kitchens Jr.

## Bar Memorial Service honors 121 attorneys who died



Mississippi Bar President-Elect Kelly Sessoms III, center, reads the names of 121 attorneys who died during the past year.

The Mississippi Supreme Court convened on Oct. 14 with officers of the Mississippi Bar to honor the memories of 121 members of the Bar who died during the past year.

Mississippi Bar President J. Rhea Tannehill of Oxford said that the honored dead included men and women who practiced from Seminary, Miss., to San Francisco, in small towns and big cities, and in practice areas across the spectrum.

Tannehill recalled looking at the list for the first time and being shocked at the number of people whom he knew, and equally surprised at how many he didn't know. So he started reading obituaries. In those he found military heroes and Sunday School teachers, Little League ball coaches and Boy

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## Mississippi Law Journal publishes tribute to former Justice Robertson

The *Mississippi Law Journal*, published by University of Mississippi School of Law students, devoted an entire issue in honor of the career and service of the late former Justice James L. Robertson.

Articles gave tribute to Justice Robertson's distinguished career as a law professor, jurist, and counselor to a range of clients from the penniless to the powerful. Former students, former law clerks, judges, and lawyers who practiced with Robertson – 27 in all – shared recollections of his remarkable intellect, devotion to the law, and passion for literature that he often wove into his judicial decisions. They also recalled his interests in professional baseball, running, theater and opera, and his enthusiastic sharing of those pursuits.

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes of Tupelo introduced the recently published volume at the University of Mississippi School of

Law alumni luncheon at the Mississippi Bar Convention in July. "I was honored to be asked to submit an article," she said.

In addition to sharing her memories as a first year law student in Professor Robertson's fall 1982 civil procedures class at the University of Mississippi School of Law, Chief Judge Barnes gathered recollections of other civil procedures class students. "He spent the class alternating between lecture and cross examination," she said. She and others recalled how he walked in with nothing but a coffee cup in hand and lectured for hours.

Chancellor George Ward of Natchez recalled, "He had a photographic memory. He lectured with no notes and could quote lines from legal decisions verbatim."

Mary Kay Hansen wrote, "Professor Robertson loved the law, and he exuberantly shared his love for the law

with his students. He had a joyous quality about him as he taught. His enthusiasm was infectious. We were prodded and pushed to respect the law while challenging and testing it." Hansen practiced in West Virginia then Nebraska.

University of Mississippi School of Law Dean Frederick G. Slabach began his law school studies the year that Robertson joined the faculty. "Perhaps his advice with the most enduring impact on a generation of lawyers was his 'last day of class' advice that he expanded in 1983 for publication in the *Mississippi Law Journal*, *The Lawyer as Hero*....Robertson challenged us to reconsider perceptions of the legal profession while recognizing the indispensable role lawyers play in upholding the foundations of democracy and the rule of law."

Senior U.S. District Judge Michael P. Mills, another of Robertson's students, wrote,

"Jimmy's intellect was matched by his fearlessness, and therein lies the measure of the man. Other great minds may sometimes lack courage or simply have no conviction. Or perhaps their intellects are neutralized by selfish ambition. Not so Jimmy. He simply did not know how to act other than true to his beliefs and convictions. He was authentic."

Former Assistant Attorney General and Assistant Secretary of State Leslie Scott recalled a law school class trip to the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, where Robertson met with one of his pro bono death row clients. She recalled his glum demeanor some years later on the day another death row inmate was to be executed. Robertson had voted to affirm the man's death sentence. "Jimmy wondered aloud whether he would be welcomed if he joined

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Scout leaders, a member of the Gleaners and delivery person for Meals on Wheels. Their common thread was service.

Tannehill read excerpts from some of the obituaries, starting with the oldest, John H. Price Jr. of Jackson, who was admitted to the Bar in 1948 and died at age 101: "In 1943, he volunteered for active military service in World War II and completed his training at Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, MS. Although he was offered the opportunity to attend Officer Candidate School in 1944, he chose instead to ship out overseas with his original group, the 609th Tank Destroyer battalion. The 609th initially landed in Great Britain, but from there, they traversed the English Channel in September, 1944, and landed on Utah Beach in Norman-

dy, France. Thereafter, he served in that battalion under General Patton's 3rd Army. In Europe, during 1944-1945, the 609th was involved in a number of battles, including the Battle of the Bulge."

After asking, "How can we honor them?" he quoted from the Book of Matthew: "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Tannehill said. "There is no question that they gave to the least of these brothers and sisters. I believe it is our duty as loved ones and friends to carry their torch. I believe it is our duty to continue to give to the least of these brothers and sisters because that is what they would have wanted. That's what they cared about and that will be their legacy."

Justice David Ishee said, "Think about the people that we honor here today who

spent their lives searching for justice and equality for their fellow citizens."

He continued, "The prophet Isaiah told the feuding children of Israel, 'Come, let us reason together.' That brought them from violence and chaos to the table of reason, where lawyers and judges seek to bring everyone. That's what stands between us and the downfall of our republic and the downfall of our civilization, those wise individuals who can bring us to the table of reason."

Mississippi Bar President-Elect A. Kelly Sessoms III of Pascagoula read each of the 121 names, and a resolution commending their lives and service.

The resolution included this: "Whereas, we recognize and give thanks for the legacy of each in shaping this honored profession both in Mississippi and beyond. While some gave

decades of service, the careers of others were cut short, but we acknowledge each had an impact on the pursuit of justice and upholding the rule of law; and accordingly, we celebrate the legacy and memory of their dedication and contributions to our profession and;

"Whereas, we give thanks for the devoted public service of those we honor today, and we acknowledge that, without their devotion and other sacrifice, which they exemplified, the liberty and freedoms we enjoy today would be endangered and our individual lives diminished;

"Whereas, in mourning the loss of these members of the bar, we also recognize that their passing will never diminish the profound impact each has made in the lives of their families, their colleagues, their communities, and on this profession."

## **Mississippi Law Journal tribute to Justice Robertson, *continued from page 32***

those attending a candlelight vigil against the execution being held at the Governor's Mansion." They went.

Jackson attorney Danny Cupit recalled gaining Robertson's pro bono representation when as a Mississippi State University student, Cupit and his roommate challenged the College Board's refusal to allow them to invite NAACP President Aaron Henry to speak on campus. Robertson secured the speaking engagement by threat of litigation. The legal fight moved to the University of Mississippi, which stuck with the College Board's requirement that it pre-approve speakers. The legal fight went on for five years before the federal court issued an injunction against the College Board.

Cupit continued, "It was as a member of the Supreme Court that Jimmy was able to draw his training in journalism, history and the law into focus. He

approached every legal issue he confronted on the court with the thoroughness of a treatise from its historical origin to its contemporary application, and ultimately its effect on society, often infused with hints of subtle humor."

Attorney Paul Barnes worked with Robertson for 15 years at the Wise Carter firm in Jackson. He said of Robertson, "He considered it part of the obligation of every lawyer to make the system better and had great disdain for those who didn't."

Michael B. Wallace, who practiced with Robertson at Wise Carter, credited him with introducing the practice of questioning lawyers during oral arguments. Before Robertson joined the court, questions from the bench were rare.

"Jimmy's writing likewise brought new life to the law. The Supreme Court had no shortage of sound scholarship

before Jimmy arrived, but he took delight in making the law memorable," Wallace wrote.

The tribute is filled with references to court decisions that Justice Robertson wrote. In *Dycus v. Sillers*, a 1990 opinion in a dispute over competing interests of fishermen, landowners and hunting club leaseholders, Robertson began, "This is a case about a fishin' hole." The decision continued, "This is also a case about a people, the waters they fish, and a unique culture and lore. These form an ambiguous but real part of our life whose pulse is preserved in the product of our poets from the famous to the obscure."

"Before getting to the legal arguments of the appeal, Robertson spent some 3,000 words quoting William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Walker Percy, Mark Twain, Willie Morris, Ellen Douglas, James Dickey, Barry Hannah, John Grisham and other literary luminaries.

Professor Christopher R. Green, Jamie L. Whitten Chair of Law and Government at the University of Mississippi School of law, wrote that he enjoyed Robertson's opinions as he used them in his classes. He compiled "A Few of Jimmy Robertson's Greatest Hits," with excerpts from 13 of Robertson's opinions.

Former Robertson law clerk Meredith Gowan Le Goff, who teaches American Constitutional Law in Paris, wrote, "Godspeed, Justice Jimmy. Your memory is a blessing to us, we lucky ones who shared different parts of your incredibly well lived life. Your legacy will surely brighten the paths of future generations of lawyers."

Robertson died on Dec. 10, 2023, at his Jackson home.

The tribute was published in *Mississippi Law Journal* Volume 94, Issue 4, 2025.

## Retired Circuit Judge Roger Clark died on May 2, 2025



**Retired Circuit Judge  
Roger T. Clark**

Retired Circuit Judge Roger T. Clark of Gulfport died on May 2. He was 85.

Judge Clark served for almost 16 years as a circuit judge of the Second Circuit Court of Harrison, Hancock and Stone counties. He was appointed by Gov. Haley Barbour to a vacancy on the court and took office in January 2005. He was senior judge of the district when he retired on Nov. 30, 2020.

He had a civil law practice for 35 years before he was appointed to the bench. He practiced for 32 years with the firm of Bry-

ant, Clark, Dukes and Blakeslee.

Colleagues recalled the gentleman lawyer and judge as fair, courteous, patient, kind and humble.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph praised his service. "I have known Judge Clark for over 50 years. He is an exemplary attorney, member of the bar, and an outstanding judge. His collective talents will be missed by the entire judiciary. We have all lost a dear friend," he said.

Circuit Judge Randi P. Mueller was appointed to the judgeship which Judge Clark previously held. She said, "Judge Clark was a humble, gentleman lawyer and judge. As a lawyer appearing before him, you needed to be prepared for questions during hearings. But no matter if you won or lost, he treated everyone with respect. He is missed in the courthouse by all the court staff and the attorneys who had the pleasure of appearing before him."

Former Mississippi Bar President H. Rodger Wil-

der of Gulfport handled cases with and against Clark when he was in private practice. "He was always prepared, professional, and knowledgeable. He conducted court in the same manner. He was a lawyer and a judge who was a great credit to the profession," Wilder said.

Circuit Judge Christopher Schmidt, who served alongside Judge Clark, said he was a mentor and friend. "He wasn't any different as a judge than he was a lawyer or a friend you knew: he was a consummate gentleman, courteous and kind, patient and always humble. As judge he exemplified all the qualities of a great judge. I never saw him show when something got under his skin....He showed respect to every person who entered his courtroom regardless of their involvement in a matter. He spoke with clarity. He treated court staff with respect and was always respectful of others' time," Judge Schmidt said.

Judge Schmidt said, "He

was my judicial mentor in all respects, but especially when it came to medical malpractice cases. He likely forgot more about that area of law than most will learn. His portrait hangs over my shoulder in the courtroom we shared, and I always feel like he's there watching to make sure I live up to the standards of excellence he always reached."

He said, "We both enjoyed salt water fishing and telling fishing stories to each other." Both also enjoyed cooking. "Often on a Monday we would tell each other how bad our smoked ribs or brisket turned out, and then we'd laugh and vow to cook them again, but better the next time."

Judge Clark grew up in Iuka and moved to Biloxi to work for the telephone company after he earned an undergraduate degree at the University of Mississippi. After he earned a law degree at the University of Mississippi School of Law, he moved back to the Gulf Coast.

## Retired Chancellor Robert Oswald died on Aug. 28, 2025



**Retired Chancellor  
Robert Oswald**

Retired Chancellor Robert H. Oswald died on Aug. 28,

2025, at USA Medical Hospital Trauma Center He was 97.

A funeral service was held on September 1 in Pascagoula. Interment with military honors was at Machpelah Cemetery. Judge Oswald's grandsons served as pallbearers. Honorary pallbearers were his former law partner Bill Reed; retired Judges Robert Krebs, Jaye Bradley and Glen Barlow; Judges Kathy King Jackson, Mark Maples and Neil Harris; and Lynn Presley, Tommy Brodnax, and John Strickler.

Judge Oswald served as

Chancellor of the 16th Chancery Court District of Jackson, George and Greene Counties 1979-1991. During his time on the bench and after he retired, he was involved in efforts to modernize the Mississippi court system and improve the administration of justice. He served as vice-chair of the Commission on the Courts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a project begun by the Mississippi Bar in 1990. The Commission laid the groundwork for landmark improvements in the judicial branch, including the 1993 creation of the Mississippi

Court of Appeals, which enabled appeals to be decided timely, and the Administrative Office of Courts, which provides a centralized administrative infrastructure for the trial courts. Other major legislation which began with Commission recommendations included providing support staff for trial judges and salary increases to attract and retain highly qualified trial judges. After those major accomplishments, the Commission worked on trial court funding, implementation of some of the earliest information technology, and

## Retired Circuit Judge Johnnie Walls Jr. died May 10, 2025

Former Senator and Circuit Judge Johnnie Walls Jr. died on May 10. He was 80.

A celebration of life was held on May 24 at Union Grove Baptist Church in Clarksdale.

Judge Walls served for six years on the 11th District Circuit Court, retiring on Jan. 31, 2016. He was elected to the court after serving for 18 years in the Mississippi Senate, representing Senate District 12, Bolivar and Washington counties. At various times during his Legislative service he was Chairman of the Constitution Committee and Executive Contingent Fund Committee and was vice-chair of Judiciary B, Business and Financial Institutions and Rules committees. He served on Appropriations; Corrections, Fees, Salaries and Administration; Finance; and Universities and Colleges committees. He was Chair of the Mississippi Democratic Party for two terms.

Circuit Judge Linda Coleman of Cleveland served in the House of Representatives while Walls was in the Senate, and was appointed Circuit Judge when Judge Walls retired. Judge Coleman said, "I saw him as a strong advocate for the people and a tremendous example to follow in the legal profession. His record as a state Senator speaks for itself. He was still championing the rights of his constituents and the people of the state of Mississippi as a whole.

"I am really honored to have succeeded such a statesman who leaves a tremendous legacy for our state, particularly the Mississippi Delta," Judge Coleman said.

Greenville Mayor Errick D. Simmons said in a Facebook post, "Judge Walls was a dedicated public servant and a distinguished legal mind. Representing Greenville and the Delta, he served with honor in the Mississippi State Senate

from 1993 to 2010, representing District 12. In 2010, he was elected to the bench and began his judicial service on January 3, 2011, where he continued to uphold the principles of justice until his retirement....Judge Walls leaves behind a powerful legacy of integrity, wisdom, and dedication to public service."

Simmons said, "Prior to his time on the bench, he built a widely respected private law practice in Greenville, where he was known as a skilled and passionate criminal defense attorney."

The Mississippi Democratic Party posted on its Facebook page, "Judge Walls was a pillar of leadership, service, and legal excellence. He served the people of Mississippi's 12th Senate District from 1993 until 2010, championing justice and equality throughout his tenure. Following his legislative service, he was elected to the bench of the Eleventh Judicial



**Retired Circuit Judge  
Johnnie Walls Jr.**

Circuit Court, where he served with fairness and distinction until his retirement in 2016."

Johnnie Earl Walls Jr. was born on April 25, 1945, in Clarksdale. He was the eldest of 11 children of Elizabeth Barron-Walls and Johnnie E. Walls, Sr. He graduated from Higgins High School in Clarksdale, received a Bachelor of Arts degree in biology with a minor in chemistry from Jackson State University, and received a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

He was admitted to the practice of law in 1971. He began practicing law at North Mississippi Rural Legal Services in Greenwood. He was appointed executive director and director of litigation of NMRLS in 1979.

He at one time practiced law with Charles Victor McTeer and Rep. Willie Bailey, and later with college classmates Robert Buck and former Court of Appeals Presiding Judge Tyree Irving.

He was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 100 Black Men of the Delta, the Magnolia Bar Association and the Mississippi Bar.

## Retired Chancellor Robert Oswald, *continued from page 34*

improvements for the criminal justice and juvenile justice system. In his retirement, Judge Oswald served as vice-chair of the Judicial Advisory Study Committee from its legislatively created inception in 1993. The Study Committee made recommendations to the Supreme Court and the Legislature to improve the administration of justice.

At the Oct. 14 Bar Memorial Service, Supreme Court Justice David Ishee remembered Judge Oswald as the chancellor who swore him in to the practice of law in 1989. He tried many cases before Judge Oswald. "He was very much a man of integrity," Justice Ishee said.

Mississippi Bar President Rhea Tannehill in his Bar Me-

morial address mentioned Judge Oswald among many lawyers who were deeply involved in their home communities. Judge Oswald in his private law practice helped found the city of Gautier.

Robert Holmes Oswald was born on Jan. 26, 1928, in Birmingham. He was the youngest of three children of Charles Alfred Oswald Jr. and Jeanette Bibby Oswald. His family moved to Pascagoula in 1941. He attended Pascagoula High School and left before graduating with the Class of 1945 to enlist in the United States Navy in World War II. He served in the Pacific on the aircraft carriers USS Sargent Bay and USS Tripoli. In 1946, he returned home in time to receive his high school diploma. He

attended Millsaps College, Tulane University and Jackson School of Law. He was admitted to practice law in 1951. He served in the Army National Guard during the Korean War, after which he began his practice of law in the office of attorney Karl Wiesenburg in Pascagoula. He served as attorney for the Pascagoula School District and as County Administrator for Jackson County.

He retired as a judge in 1991 and joined the law firm of William T. Reed in Pascagoula. He retired from practicing law in 1999.

He met Betty Jean Robinson Oswald, the love of his life, in 1941. They were married in 1966. Betty preceded him in death by seven months.

## Retired Circuit Judge Jerry Terry died on June 6, 2025



**Retired Circuit Judge  
Jerry O. Terry Sr.**

Retired Circuit Judge Jerry O. Terry Sr. of Biloxi died on June 6, 2025. He was 91.

A funeral service was conducted on June 11 at Riemann Family Funeral Home in Biloxi, with entombment at Southern Memorial Park in Biloxi.

Judge Terry served for 22 years as Circuit Judge of the Second Circuit District of Harrison, Hancock and Stone counties. He was appointed to the court in 1987 by Gov. Bill Allain. He was Senior Circuit Judge when he retired on June 30, 2009.

Supreme Court Justice David Sullivan of Biloxi recalled trying cases before Judge Terry. "He was a true gentleman, an exceptional judge of character, and had the respect of everyone who came before him in his courtroom. He could be stern and ran a tight ship in the courtroom but had a great sense of humor. We missed him greatly when he retired."

Court of Appeals Judge Anthony N. Lawrence III of Pascagoula described Judge Terry as "a lawyer's judge. He let the lawyers do their job and he would do his. I always felt he had a calming presence in the courtroom."

Judge Terry at the time of his retirement told an interviewer, "The greatest challenge to me is to sit up there and keep your mouth shut and let the lawyers try the case." He loved the courtroom.

Judge Lawrence recalled Judge Terry's words of encouragement. "When I would see him, he always wanted to know about my family and my practice. He would offer words of encouragement to me that helped me as a young lawyer."

Gulfport Mayor Hugh Keating recalled, "He was a great mentor for young lawyers and went out of his way to be polite to them, which made me feel like you were part of the system and respected. It helped instill confidence and it was kind of a rarity."

Keating said Judge Terry "set a wonderful example for young lawyers to emulate. I learned a lot just from being around him and watching how he interacted in the courtroom, and learned to have a great deal of respect for him. On the bench, I didn't always have a favorable outcome, but I always respected his ability to articulate all sides of an issue and balance the law before he applied it."

The first case over which Terry presided as Circuit Judge would lead to a landmark Mississippi Supreme Court decision regarding tidelands. Keating defended the Mississippi State Highway Commission when Andrew Gilich Sr. and Jacobina Gilich filed an inverse condemnation action over the building of the I-110 loop over the beach in Biloxi. The Supreme Court on appeal reversed the jury's award to the Giliches in a precedent setting case regarding state ownership of tidelands. "It wound up being one of the foremost land title deci-

sions in the history of the state with regard to tidelands law," Keating said.

Judge Terry came to the bench after 25 years of private law practice on the Gulf Coast. "He was a lawyer's lawyer. He was the most civil and well prepared practitioner you could ever possibly imagine," Keating said.

His civil practice was primarily insurance defense. "He was one of the most highly respected insurance lawyers. He had a very, very successful and significant insurance defense practice," Keating said.

Judge Terry began his career as a claims adjuster for

State Farm Insurance. He moved to the Gulf Coast to work as an adjuster after graduating from the University of Mississippi School of Law. He was born in Clear Branch, in Rankin County, on April 16, 1934, to Joe Walter Terry and Edith Neal Terry. He grew up in Brandon.

His musical talents earned band scholarships to Hinds Junior College and Mississippi College. He played clarinet. He joined the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 328<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Band. He was part of the Army Band that played for President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Queen Elizabeth II.

## Retired Judge John Shirley died July 17



**Retired Judge  
John N. Shirley**

Former Rankin County Justice Court Judge and County Prosecutor John N. Shirley died on July 17, 2025, surrounded by his loved ones.

Judge Shirley spent the majority of his more than 30-year legal career serving in Rankin County. He was a Rankin County Justice Court Judge for more than 19 years, having first been elected to the bench in 1999 and taken office in 2000. He also served as Pearl Municipal Court and Pearl Youth Court Judge 2004 - 2017, presiding over the state's only municipal youth court.

He resigned from both positions in 2017 when the Pearl Youth Court was closed.

He stepped down as Justice Court Judge in March 2019, resigning to seek election as County Prosecuting Attorney. He was elected to the prosecutor position and took office in 2020.

He had been a county prosecutor in his early career, then served as a public defender in Pearl Municipal Court and Youth Court.

He served as the Justice Court representative on the Commission on Judicial Performance 2004 - 2012. He was a member of the Council of Youth Court Judges and the Mississippi Justice Court Judges Association. He was a frequent speaker about Youth Court law at continuing legal education programs.

He graduated from the University of Alabama with a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science in 1982. He earned his law degree from Mississippi College School of Law in 1987, and was admitted to the practice of law in 1988.