

# Mississippi Courts

April 2016

Published by the Administrative Office of Courts

## Governor signs juvenile detention licensing, TPR bills

Gov. Phil Bryant on April 18 signed into law the Termination of Parental Rights Act and the Juvenile Detention Licensing Act.

“With your help we have taken that next step in making sure juvenile detention centers are licensed for safety,” the Governor told judges, child protection agency heads and children’s justice advocates who had gathered at the Mississippi Supreme Court to hear a presentation about protecting infants and toddlers who are abused and neglected.

The Governor and First Lady Deborah Bryant sat in on part of a presentation

*Continued, page 2*



**Gov. Phil Bryant signs the Juvenile Detention Licensing Act as Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. and Division of Family and Children’s Services Executive Director David Chandler watch.**

## Church, courts, child protection office train foster parents

A Gulfport church, courts and the Division of Family and Children’s Services are working together to train foster parents to provide safe homes for hundreds of abused and neglected children in Harrison County.

Eighty-nine prospective foster parents participated in an intensive three-day training April 15-17 in a program put together by Michael Memorial Baptist Church, the

Division of Family and Children’s Services, Harrison County Court Judge Margaret Alfonso and Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam.

The training was part of Michael Memorial Baptist Church’s Rescue 100 Project, an effort to train and license foster parents to meet the needs of abused and neglected children in Harrison County.

“What we are trying to do is partner with the faith-based

community,” said Justice Beam, who was recently appointed by the Supreme Court as co-chair of the Commission on Children’s Justice. “The whole community is stepping up to take care of our kids.”

About 50 new foster homes may be licensed as a result of the training. Division of Family and Children’s Services Executive Director David Chandler said that li-

censing 50 more foster homes will make a huge difference. “That will go a long way toward curing the problem there on the Coast.”

The Rescue 100 Project started last year after Michael Memorial Pastor Rev. Tony Karnes met with Judge Alfonso to find out what the local needs were. Karnes said he came away astonished at the scope of the problem and

*Continued, page 3*



**Gov. Phil Bryant poses for a photo with people who worked on the TPR legislation. Left to right are Mississippi Judicial College Director Randy Pierce, Special Assistant Attorney General Patti Marshall, MJC Staff Attorney Bill Charlton, Gov. Phil Bryant, MJC Staff Attorney Carole Murphey, University of Mississippi School of Law Child Advocacy Center Director David Calder, Jurist in Residence John Hudson and Rankin County Court Judge Thomas Broome.**

about the Zero to Three Safe Babies Court Team Approach and the Excel by Five program for infants and toddlers. The Governor brought with him and signed the Juvenile Detention Licensing Act. He signed the Termination of Parental Rights Act earlier that day.

Jurist in Residence John Hudson of Natchez, who has worked for many years to bring about improvements in juvenile detention facilities, said, "I think it's a huge step forward in juvenile justice in Mississippi. It will mean that when children are placed in detention facilities, we can be confident that they are placed in a facility where their safety and well being is uppermost."

Rankin County Court Judge Thomas Broome, chair of the Council of Youth Court Judges and co-chair of the Commission on Children's Justice, said, "The administration of justice for children has

been greatly improved today by the signing of the Termination of Parental Rights Act and Juvenile Detention Licensing Act. The Governor and the First Lady understand the importance of the collaborative efforts of all the stakeholders working together to improve the lives of children and families."

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr., who had asked the Legislature to revise the termination of parental rights law, said the revisions will benefit children who come under the protection of the courts.

The Termination of Parental Rights Act, House Bill 1240, introduced by Rep. Trey Lamar and Rep. Kimberly Campbell, removed provisions that blocked adoption of children by relatives in some cases and removed provisions that prevented termination of parental rights of an estranged parent in some cases.

The Termination of Paren-

tal Rights Act brings help to "lots of children who are presently hung up in the foster care system, so that they can be placed in safe homes," said Judge Hudson.

HB 1240 went into effect immediately.

On April 19 and 20, House and Senate conferees approved HB 772, which says, "If the court determines that a parent or guardian who is a party in an abuse, neglect or termination of parental rights proceeding is indigent, the youth court judge may appoint counsel to represent the indigent parent or guardian in the proceeding."

Judge Hudson said, "It creates a vehicle for expansion of parent representation in the future. Unfortunately, we did not get the companion appropriation in the State Public Defender's budget to keep the pilots projects going."

HB 772 was introduced by Representatives Andy Gip-

son, Kathy Sykes, Campbell and John W. Hines Sr.

The Juvenile Detention Licensing Act, Senate Bill 2364, introduced by Sen. Brice Wiggins, requires licensing of juvenile detention facilities by October 2017 to assure minimum standards. Facility reviews will start in October 2016. The new law increases the authority of the existing Juvenile Facilities Monitoring Unit, giving it the role of a licensing agency. Previously, the Juvenile Facilities Monitoring Unit, a part of the Department of Public Safety, could inspect and point out shortcomings, but lacked authority to force improvements. Under the new statute, facilities that don't make improvements won't be licensed.

Judge Hudson said, "It creates minimum standards for all of our detention facilities to make certain that chil-

*Continued, page 3*

dren who are detained are safely detained.... It also protects the facilities. It gives them a standard to qualify under, which protects them from lawsuits.”

About 15 juvenile detention facilities operate in the state. The Act seeks to improve training of juvenile detention facility staff and improve education provided to juveniles while confined.

The new statute directs input from the Council of

Youth Court Judges.

The Juvenile Facilities Monitoring Unit will adopt standards proposed by the Juvenile Detention and Alternatives Task Force in 2014. Senate Bill 2364 goes into effect July 1.

The Governor signed the Juvenile Detention Licensing Act at a presentation about devoting more resources to improving the lives of at risk infants and toddlers. One of the benefits of the Safe Babies Court Team approach is

that abused and neglected children who receive intensive attention from the courts and child protective services are less likely to become juvenile delinquents who would land in detention.

Forrest County Court Judge Michael McPhail, who implemented the Zero to Three and Excel by Five programs a decade ago, estimates that they have saved Forrest County \$1 million that would have been spent

dealing with juvenile delinquents. Excel by Five is in 40 Mississippi communities.

Janie Huddleston, director of the Washington, D.C.-based Quality Improvement Center for Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams, said, “We talked with agency directors, the Governor and other staff about how we can all work together to improve the lives of infants and toddlers....We have the opportunity to move forward.”

## Rescue 100 sets goal of filling foster parent gap on Gulf Coast

*Continued from page 1*

committed to help fix it.

“She began telling me story after story about the situation and the desperate need for (foster) homes. I had absolutely no idea that conditions were so dire,” Karnes said. “How can we not know this is going on right under our noses? I was completely astonished....I knew from that point on that I had to do everything in my power to get involved.”

On April 1, there were 727 Harrison County children in DHS custody. Between Jan. 1, 2015, and Feb. 8, 2016, referrals to Harrison County Youth Court for abuse and neglect totaled 5,044, Judge Alfonso said.

Abuse and neglect cases have increased since she became Youth Court judge in 2011, Judge Alfonso said. Part of it is due to better awareness and reporting and having more DHS workers in Harrison County. Drugs and

domestic violence also drive up the numbers. “We are having so much of an increase of cases because of parents’ drug use. We have more reports of domestic violence with children present.”

“We just do not have enough foster homes,” Judge Alfonso said.

At a meeting last year with Gulf Coast Department of Human Services staff, Karnes asked how many foster homes were needed to fix the problem. About 100, he was told. So he set out to recruit 100 foster families.

About 200 people came to an orientation for prospective foster parents late last year. About 50 families signed up for training, said Gulfport attorney Michael Dickinson, a member of Michael Memorial Baptist Church.

Chandler said he was excited when he learned that 50 families had volunteered. “All they needed were the certification credentials to

help children. I got so excited. I thought it was something that we could do in a couple of weeks. I was the new man on the block. I didn’t know how involved it was,” Chandler said.

Things moved slowly. Foster parent training was going to take months. Dickinson turned to his father, Justice Jess Dickinson, and they met with Chandler. Justice Dawn Beam asked to help. Chandler asked her to take charge of moving the effort forward.

“I just don’t take ‘no’ for an answer very well,” Justice Beam said.

Families must still meet the approval of the Department of Human Services in a home study. It may still take months for them to become licensed, Michael Dickinson said.

Chandler said that earlier estimates from a private vendor put the cost of the training at about \$250,000. “These folks are getting it

done for peanuts compared to what it was going to cost.”

Local nurses helped with training. Volunteers fingerprinted prospective foster parents. Justice Beam cooked. Youth Court staff and Harrison County CASA workers served meals to participants.

Karnes said, “We realized that they have an incredible struggle that they face every day. They face extraordinary challenges. We just want to come alongside and help in the only way we can.”

Chandler said that he is interested in replicating in other communities what Rescue 100 is doing. “There is no way to do it without community involvement and without the churches’ involvement.”

Statewide, about 5,000 children are in DHS custody. The state needs about 3,000 certified foster families, Chandler said. They have about 1,500.

# State Law Library displays 1817 Mississippi Constitution



Mississippi Judicial College Staff Attorney Carole Murphey and daughter Addison Murphey, at left, and State Librarian Stephen Parks, at right, look at the 1817 Constitution during its display at the State Law Library on April 12.

The 1817 Mississippi Constitution spent a few hours on display at the State Law Library on April 12.

The Department of Archives and History displayed the hand-written document

that established Mississippi's government. It was a prelude to the state's Bicentennial in 2017. The Constitution and the 20-star flag that marked Mississippi's entry into the Union will go on display in

the Old Capitol Museum in June, then will be part of a traveling exhibit starting in October.

"We are excited to be able to give the public a glimpse, if only briefly, of this historic treasure," said Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. "The constitutional rights that we as a court are called upon to interpret today trace their beginnings to this document."

"Just imagine the people who touched it!" said Senior Accounting Specialist Anita Walters Moseley.

Viewers marveled at the penmanship. The most frequently asked question was who wrote it. Historians don't know, said MDAH Historic Resources Specialist

Krista Sorenson.

The 1817 Constitution was signed on Aug. 15, 1817, by 45 delegates to the constitutional convention.

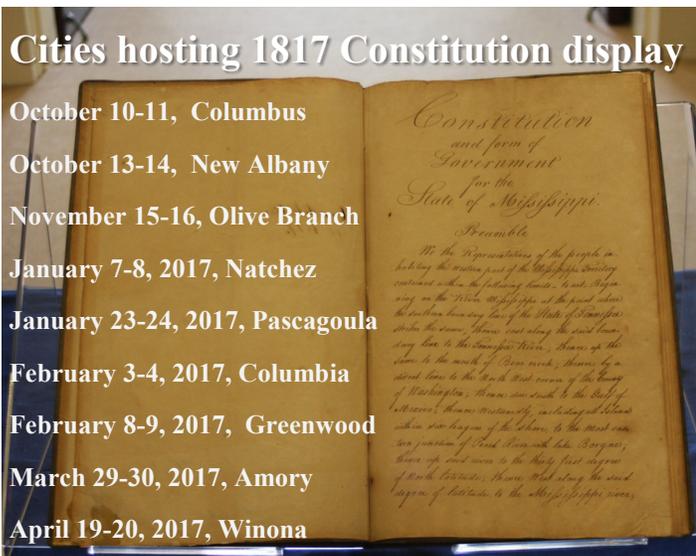
Opportunities to see the document are rare. It is seldom removed from secure, climate controlled storage.

State Law Librarian Stephen Parks arranged the viewing.

"When I read about the upcoming tour of the Constitution, I felt it would be nice that the State Law Library display it due to our role as the state's library. The Department of Archives and History has been gracious in allowing us to display it, especially during National Library Week,"

## Cities hosting 1817 Constitution display

- October 10-11, Columbus
- October 13-14, New Albany
- November 15-16, Olive Branch
- January 7-8, 2017, Natchez
- January 23-24, 2017, Pascagoula
- February 3-4, 2017, Columbia
- February 8-9, 2017, Greenwood
- March 29-30, 2017, Amory
- April 19-20, 2017, Winona



## Governor calls Justice Beam a calm, experienced judge

Gov. Phil Bryant said that a calm demeanor and extensive work with children, families and the Department of Human Services made Justice Dawn Beam his choice as the newest member of the Mississippi Supreme Court.

She quickly became the obvious choice, he said.

"I believe that the people of the state of Mississippi need Judge Beam," the Governor said before she took the oath of office as a justice of the Supreme Court on Feb. 16.

"Some of the toughest decisions that are made are those dealing with children and families and this lady has navigated difficult waters," the Governor said.

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. said that Justice Beam's background as a former chancellor will be an asset to the Supreme Court. "She comes to us as a seasoned chancellor. She is hard working."

Chief Justice Waller also praised her leadership in efforts to implement electronic filing in the five counties of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chancery District. The chancery district that includes Forrest, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River and Perry counties is the first court district in the state to implement district-wide e-filing in one operation.

Justice Beam said, "I truly believe this is what God would have me to do today."

"I've spent the last 28 years practicing rapid-fire law," Justice Beam said. In



**Justice Dawn Beam, at left, takes the oath of office as her husband, Dr. Stephen Beam, holds the Bible. Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr., at right, swore her in on Feb. 16.**

the chancery court, decisions had to be made immediately. On appeal, the Supreme Court has 270 days to issue a decision after the filing of the final brief. With that much time to think about cases, "I'll never sleep," she said.

Justice Beam's husband, Dr. Stephen Beam, held the Bible as she took the oath. Her parents, Dr. Gene Henderson and Dorothy Henderson, son Sam Newman and step-son Jason Beam, were with her at the ceremony. Another son, Will Newman, who is in China, watched part of the proceedings via cell phone video. Her father, Dr. Henderson, a minister, opened the ceremony with prayer. "I cannot express the joy Dorothy and I feel today for Dawn," he said.

At her formal investiture ceremony in Hattiesburg on March 7, her brother echoed pride in her accomplishments. "We are here today celebrating hard work. I don't know anyone who has worked harder than my sister," said Pinelake Church Senior Pastor Dr. Chip Henderson of Brandon. "She was laboring for children who were overlooked and pushed aside."

Gov. Bryant appointed Justice Beam to fill the unexpired term of Justice Randy Pierce, who became director of the Mississippi Judicial College on Feb. 1. The Supreme Court term for District 2, Position 2, is set to expire Dec. 31. An election will be held in November.

Justice Beam, 52, is the

fourth woman to serve on the Mississippi Supreme Court. She became the second woman on the current court.

Justice Beam served for five years as a chancellor of the Tenth Chancery District. She served for three years as county prosecutor for Lamar County. She previously engaged in private law practice. She was admitted to the Mississippi Bar in 1989.

Justice Beam was born in Marks in the Mississippi Delta and as a child lived in numerous communities across the state. She graduated from Caldwell High School in Columbus. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in business from the University of Mississippi, and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

## Justice Maxwell sworn in to Supreme Court Jan. 4



**Justice James D. Maxwell II takes the oath as his wife Mindy holds the Bible and his children, Mae Covington and Trip, watch. Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. administered the oath.**

Justices of the Mississippi Supreme Court welcomed Justice James D. Maxwell II of Oxford to the court on Jan. 4 when he took the oath of office in Jackson.

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr., who administered the oath, said, "He has had an exemplary career on the Court of Appeals. He is going to add a great deal to the Supreme Court."

Justice Maxwell thanked his former Court of Appeals colleagues and staff, and his family. His wife Mindy, children Mae Covington and Trip, parents James and BeBe Maxwell of Derma, and his aunt and uncle, Mildred and Eugene Dauphin of Natchez, accompanied him at the ceremony.

Gov. Phil Bryant appointed

Justice Maxwell to the Supreme Court position formerly held by David Chandler.

Justice Maxwell served on the Mississippi Court of Ap-

peals for almost seven years. He is a former Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi. He prosecuted federal cases of

## Judge Sanders presents portrait

Circuit Judge Betty Sanders looks out over the Greenwood courtroom where she presided for 20 years, or rather, her portrait does.

Friends and family gathered at the Leflore County Courthouse March 24 for the unveiling of the portrait. Judge Sanders retired from the Fourth Circuit Court more than a year ago after 25 years on the bench – five as a special magistrate and 20 as circuit judge.

She hasn't hung up her

robe. She spends about five days a month in courtrooms around the state as a senior status judge.

"I've gotten some great assignments," she said. And she has the option to decline taking a case. "I'm getting to see how the different districts perform the court's business. Seeing all different manners of handling the same thing has been good. Court staff has just been wonderful."

She remains active in work to benefit the judiciary,

public corruption and white collar fraud, money laundering, drug trafficking, immigration, and gang-related crimes.

He is a past president of the Young Lawyers Division of the Mississippi Bar, the Lafayette County Bar Association, and Tri-County Young Lawyers. He has also served on the Board of Bar Commissioners, the Mississippi Bar Foundation, the Diversity in the Law Committee, and the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association. He earned undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Mississippi.

Justice Maxwell frequently lectures on appellate and trial advocacy, legal writing, and Mississippi's judicial system.



*Continued, page 7*

## Judge Jim Greenlee appointed to state Court of Appeals

Judge Jim Greenlee of Oxford took the oath of office on Jan. 20 before his colleagues of the Mississippi Court of Appeals.

Court of Appeals Chief Judge L. Joseph Lee, who administered the oath, said, "We are grateful and appreciative for him joining us on this court."

Judge Greenlee thanked Gov. Phil Bryant for the appointment.

Judge Greenlee said, "It's a very humbling experience, and it's a great honor for somebody who has grown up in a small town and been around the state for so long. This is fantastic."

Judge Greenlee was appointed to the Court of Appeals vacancy created when Judge James D. Maxwell II was appointed to the Supreme Court. The two previously served together as federal prosecutors: Greenlee as U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi



**Chief Judge L. Joseph Lee, at left, administers the oath of office to Court of Appeals Judge Jim Greenlee as Judge Greenlee's wife Ann Greenlee holds the Bible.**

2001 to 2010, and Maxwell as an assistant U.S. attorney from October 2002 through February 2009.

As U.S. Attorney, Greenlee headed the office which prosecuted public corruption and judicial influence cases and major drug distribution networks, and assisted in the cold case investigation of the murder of Emmett Till. He

served on the initial U.S. Attorney General's Advisory Council after 9/11. He also served on the Office of Management and Budget Subcommittee, White Collar Crime Subcommittee, Controlled Substances/Asset Forfeiture Subcommittee and the Terrorism and National Security Subcommittee.

Greenlee was a federal

prosecutor for 22 years. He was an assistant U.S. attorney in the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's office from 1987 until 2001. He became the lead civil fraud attorney trying bankruptcy, tort, employment rights, eminent domain and white collar criminal cases.

He was in private practice in Oxford from 2010 until his appointment to the court.

Judge Greenlee earned a bachelor of engineering degree from the University of Mississippi in 1974 and a law degree in 1981. He served active duty in the U.S. Navy 1974 to 1978, and in the U.S. Navy Reserve until 1997. During his reserve service, he was commanding officer of a Reserve Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) Unit. He retired at the rank of captain.

## Judge Betty Sanders, *continued from Page 6*

serving on the Board of Governors of the Mississippi Judicial College and on the board of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project.

She enjoys having time to go to her grandchildren's school activities. Two grandsons live in Greenwood. A granddaughter lives in Dallas.

She's had time to travel,

including visiting Tanzania. "That was my dream vacation." She and her daughters, physician Neeka Sanders Johnson and attorney Neysha Sanders, spent 14 days abroad. They toured the Serengeti, Mount Kilimanjaro, Ngorongoro Crater and Zanzibar. They visited a hospital and the country's Su-

preme Court. She received an ornate pleated collar in the style of the country's judiciary.

If she has any regrets, it's that she didn't take more time to do fun things with her husband Alix Sanders and children before she retired. "If I had another lifetime there are so many things I would have done differently."

## Chandler works to increase funding, social work staff at FCS



**Dr. David Chandler is surrounded by judicial assistants and law clerks who worked for him on the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals.**

Former Justice David Chandler in his new job as director of the Division of Family and Children's Services is working to increase funding and staffing.

"My goal is to get the \$34.5 million we have determined is essential for us to comply with the federal mandates that have been placed

on us, to convince the Legislature to provide us with those funds, and then use those funds to employ a sufficient number of social workers and other people so we can have a proper number of employees for the children we are serving," Dr. Chandler said recently.

He is working to raise

salaries to be competitive with other state agencies, and to offer tuition assistance to social work students – two years of schooling for a two-year commitment to work for Family and Children's Services. He has less than 2,000 employees. Dr. Chandler expects to hire about 1,000 more. "Now if we get the

money, we will be able to cut that number of cases way down so that everyone has a manageable number of cases to handle. The children get the services they need, the care and attention they need."

He is working to get out of crisis and into routine. "What everyone will tell you now is rather than coming to work knowing it's going to be one crisis after the next, they can come to work now expecting it to be a routine day where they work hard, address their tasks, plan and begin to implement programs for the future."

Colleagues of the former Justice surprised him with a reception at the Supreme Court on Feb. 11. Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. presented him with an engraved plaque signed by the En Banc Court. Rep. Joey Hood of Ackerman presented him with a resolution adopted by the House of Representatives commending his career of public service.



**Seven trial judges took office in January in newly created judgeships. They are, left to right, front row, 20th District Chancellor Haydn Roberts; 15th District Circuit Judge Claiborne "Buddy" McDonald; 10th District Circuit Judge Justin Cobb (not a new position; appointed July 1, 2015), and 4th District Chancellor Wayne Smith; back row: 11th District Chancellor James Walker; 13th District Circuit Judge Stanley Sorey; 20th District Circuit Judge Steve Ratcliff; and 12th District Circuit Judge Jon Mark Weathers.**

# Pierce wants to add online training at Judicial College

Mississippi Judicial College Director Randy Pierce says that he wants to create an online videotape archive of training topics.

“The main thing is to think outside the box and with technology, use it and be smarter in the ways we train the judiciary and supporting personnel,” Pierce said.

The spring and fall conferences are the centerpiece for training. “There is tremendous benefit in bringing judges together and having the opportunity for judges to share ideas,” Pierce said.

He wants to add online training offerings. “I want to develop a database specific to points relevant in the courtroom on a daily basis,” he said.

Pierce stepped down as a Justice of the Supreme Court and became director of the Judicial College on Feb. 1. “I’ve got my feet under me



**Randy Pierce, at left, and his wife Cheryl Pierce accept a legislative resolution from Sen. Dennis DeBar and Rep. Roun McNeal.**

now,” he said recently.

Pierce was honored by his former legislative and judiciary colleagues as he moved to another chapter of his public service career.

Judges and court staff gathered Jan. 28 to wish him well. Chief Justice Bill Wal-

ler Jr. presented him with an engraved plaque commemorating his 16 years of public service.

Sen. Dennis DeBar and Rep. Roun McNeal of Leakesville presented Pierce with a concurrent resolution congratulating him on his

position as director of the Mississippi Judicial College and thanking him for his legislative and judicial service.

McNeal, who previously served as Justice Pierce’s law clerk, now has Pierce’s former legislative seat, representing House District 105.



**Former law clerks and Judicial Assistant Julia Soutullo join Randy Pierce for a photo during his farewell reception at the Supreme Court.**

## Judge Linda Coleman sworn in at Capitol before former colleagues

Circuit Judge Linda F. Coleman of Mound Bayou took the oath of office at the Capitol before her former colleagues in the Mississippi House of Representatives on March 22.

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. administered the ceremonial oath. Judge Coleman was sworn in earlier. Gov. Phil Bryant appointed her on March 9 to a vacancy on the 11<sup>th</sup> District Circuit Court after Judge Johnnie E. Walls Jr. retired.

The Governor said Judge Coleman will serve with grace, dignity and honor. Judge Coleman thanked the Governor for the appointment.

House Speaker Philip Gunn handed Judge Coleman a check to purchase a judicial robe. "We are proud of you and wish you well in your endeavors," Gunn said.

Judge Coleman compared the exuberance she felt with that she felt as a freshman legislator helping escort Rep. Robert G. Clark into the chamber when he became Speaker Pro Tempore in 1992. "This is one of the happiest days of my life."

The House unanimously adopted a resolution commending their former colleague's service and congratulating her on her appointment to the 11<sup>th</sup> District Circuit Court of Bolivar, Coahoma, Quitman and Tunica counties.

House Resolution 55, in-



**Circuit Judge Linda Coleman, at left, takes the oath of office at the Capitol on March 22. Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr., at right, administers the oath while House Speaker Philip Gunn holds the Bible.**

troduced by Speaker Gunn, said, "Widely considered to be one of the most influential state leaders and skillful tacticians of Mississippi's evolving political atmosphere, Representative Coleman maintained a strong leadership role in every meaningful initiative addressed by the Mississippi Legislature during her tenure, including economic development, fiscal affairs, education, gaming, public health, transportation, agriculture, and election reform initiatives and programs." The resolution noted her service as vice-chair of the former House Penitentiary Committee, vice-chair of the Tourism Committee, chair of the House Committee on Fees and Salaries of Public Officers, and most recently, vice-chair of

the House Corrections Committee. Other committees on which she served included Appropriations; County Affairs; Education; Investigate State Offices; Judiciary A; Judiciary En Banc; Management; Municipalities; Ports, Harbors and Airports; Public Property; Select Committee on Poverty; Transportation; and Ways and Means.

Reflecting on 25 years of service, Judge Coleman said, "I am really grateful to God that He allowed me to serve in this esteemed chamber....To have the privilege to shape policy for this state is a deep honor."

She asked her former legislative colleagues to think of her when they discuss education and other policies which affect the state's most vulner-

able. She came from the poorest school district in the state. "I am from the most vulnerable part of this state, the Mississippi Delta. Even though something is vulnerable, it is still viable."

Judge Coleman earned a bachelor's degree in public administration from the University of Mississippi and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. She went to work serving poor clients of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services in 1987. She was managing attorney for NMRLS from 1989 to 1994. In private practice, she represented towns of Mound Bayou, Clarksdale and Friars Point, and was attorney for the Bolivar County Board of Supervisors and the Mound Bayou School Board.

## Judge Johnnie Walls retires after 24 years of public service

Circuit Judge Johnnie E. Walls Jr. retired from the 11th District Circuit Court effective Jan. 31, 2016, after six years of service on the bench in the district that includes Bolivar, Coahoma, Quitman and Tunica counties.

Judge Walls, 70, previously served for 18 years in the Mississippi Senate. 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 Insti-

tutions and Rules committees. He served on Appropriations; Corrections; Fees, Salaries and Administration; Finance; and Universities and Colleges committees.

He served for two terms as the State Chair of the Mississippi Democratic Party.

Judge Walls grew up in Clarksdale, the oldest of 11 children. He graduated from Higgins High School in Clarksdale, received a B.A. 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 Bar 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 Victor McTeer and Rep. Willie Bailey, and later with college classmates Robert Buck and Court of Appeals Judge Tyree Irving. He later maintained a solo practice.

He was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored



People, 100 Black Men of the Delta, the Magnolia Bar Association, the Mississippi Bar and the former Mississippi Trial Lawyers Association.

## Longest serving trial judge Marcus Gordon retires March 4



Circuit Judge Marcus D. Gordon retired from the Eighth District Circuit Court of Leake, Neshoba, Newton and Scott counties on March 4, 2016.

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. said, "I thank him for his long tenure and his commitment to the orderly administration of justice."

At the time of his resignation, Judge Gordon, 84, of Union, was the longest serving trial judge in Mississippi. He served as Circuit Judge of the Eighth Judicial District for 37 years.

Judge Gordon submitted his resignation on the anniversary of his appointment to the bench. Gov. Cliff Finch appointed him as Circuit Judge of the Eighth Judicial District on March 4, 1977, after Judge O.H. Barnett resigned. He returned to private law practice in 1987, practicing

law with his nephew. He was reelected in 1991.

Judge Gordon said that medical problems prompted his retirement. Neuropathy has impaired his ability to walk.

"I thank the people who let me have this office and stay in this office as long as I have. They gave me their trust, and I am confident that in no fashion did I ever let that trust be violated," Judge Gordon said.

Judge Gordon previously served as district attorney for six and one-half years in the Eighth Circuit District. He was county prosecutor for Newton County for four years.

He was admitted to the bar in 1959. As a lawyer in private practice, he represented the Newton County Board of Supervisors as well as municipalities, school boards and hospitals.

He attended East Central Junior College in Decatur, now known as East Central Community College. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Mississippi and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

He served four years in the U.S. Air Force as an airplane mechanic assigned to the Strategic Air Command.

## Chancellor Rhea Sheldon appointed to 10th Chancery

Chancellor Rhea Sheldon of Purvis is following in the footsteps of Justice Dawn Beam and the late Chancellor Sebe Dale. Judge Sheldon was sworn in Feb. 22, filling the vacancy created by Judge Beam's appointment to the Supreme Court.

"Judge Dawn Beam and her predecessor Judge Sebe Dale were well respected by our bar and served the citizens of the 10th Chancery District with honor and character. I look forward to this opportunity and will strive every day to follow in their footsteps to fulfill the office of chancery judge with the respect, honor and integrity the seat holds, and am humbled to be able to serve the citizens of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chancery

District," Judge Sheldon said.

Gov. Phil Bryant in announcing her appointment Feb. 11 noted Judge Sheldon's diverse private practice experience.

Judge Sheldon, who is admitted to practice in Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, managed the Jackson office of a regional law firm, working on commercial litigation and toxic tort defense. She moved back to her hometown of Purvis in 2009, where she became a partner in a firm handling domestic, real estate and commercial litigation.

Judge Sheldon taught school for several years after earning a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in secondary education from



University of Southern Mississippi. She earned a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law. She served as Judicial Relations Director of the Moot

Court Board and sat on the Executive Committee. After law school, she served as a law clerk for former Supreme Court Justice Kay Cobb.

## Judge Christopher Collins appointed to 8th Circuit Court



Circuit Judge Christopher Collins of Union was appointed March 31 to the Eighth Circuit Court. Gov. Phil Bryant selected the trib-

al judge to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Marcus Gordon.

"In one word, I am humbled," Collins said. "I am honored and privileged to serve in this judgeship that belongs to the people. I am grateful to the Governor for placing his confidence in me and thankful to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee for recommending me. I pledge to seek the Lord's guidance as I serve on this bench."

Judge Collins served as a civil court judge for the Mis-

issippi Band of Choctaw Indians Tribal Court 1999 to the time of his appointment to the circuit bench. He also served as a domestic violence court judge for the Tribal Court.

He was a prosecutor for the cities of Union and Decatur and is a charter board member of the Eighth Circuit Court District's Drug Court. He served as felony indigent counsel in the Eighth District and as post-conviction counsel for inmates at the Walnut Grove Correctional Facility.

Gov. Bryant said, "Mr.

Collins' wide range of legal experience makes him eminently qualified for the circuit bench. I know that experience will serve him well, and I am pleased he has accepted this appointment."

Judge Collins received an associate of arts degree from East Central Community College, a bachelor of arts degree from Mississippi College and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. He was admitted to the Mississippi Bar in 1992.

## Judge Morgan retires to the lake and golf course



Nothing gets in the way of tee time, says retired Circuit Judge Clarence E. “Cem” Morgan III.

Judge Morgan retired Dec. 31 after serving for 21 years on the state’s Fifth Circuit Court. The lifelong resident of Kosciusko moved with his wife Sara to a house on a lake in Birmingham, leaving a legacy behind in the hills of Attala County.

Judge Morgan said he doesn’t plan to practice law. Living in Alabama means he can’t do senior status. “With 25 years practicing law and 21 (on the bench), I think that’s enough,” he said.

Fellow Fifth Circuit District Judge Joey Loper lamented the departure of his friend at a Dec. 17 retirement reception at the Attala County Courthouse. “Our sadness is tempered by the fact that Cem has met a special lady

and is starting a new life with her in Birmingham,” he said. “He has worked hard for that PERS check and we are all so

proud of him that he can now enjoy the fruits of his many years of labor.”

Three generations of Morgans served the justice system in the Fifth Circuit, Loper said. Morgan’s grandfather was district attorney in the 1930s. Morgan’s father preceded him on the Fifth Circuit bench. Judge Loper was appointed to the court after Circuit Judge Clarence E. Morgan Jr. died in office in December 1992. Judge Cem Morgan was elected to the district’s other judgeship in November 1994, and took office in January 1995.

“For 38 of the past 40 years, a Morgan has served as circuit court judge in this district,” Judge Loper said.

“No one knows better than me how hard it is to follow a Morgan onto the bench.”

The district includes Attala, Carroll, Choctaw, Grenada, Montgomery, Webster and Winston counties.

Judge Morgan served as county attorney for Attala County for six years, and as Kosciusko municipal judge for 14 years. He has been a leader of the bench and bar. He served as chair of Mississippi Conference of Circuit Judges 2007-2008. He was a member of the Commission on Judicial Performance 1998 to 2003, and was chair 2002-2003. He was a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Mississippi Bar 1987-1990.

## Mitchell appointed to 5th Circuit trial court



Gov. Phil Bryant appointed George Mitchell, Jr. of Eupora as Circuit Judge of the Fifth Circuit Court District. He filled the unexpired term of Judge Clarence

“Cem” Morgan, III.

“To be appointed Circuit Judge by Governor Bryant is one of the greatest honors I have received and to which I shall forever be grateful,” Judge Mitchell said.

Gov. Bryant said, “His wealth of diverse experience as a prosecutor and in private law practice will serve the citizens of the Fifth Circuit Court District well. Additionally, his leadership as a military veteran and Mississippi Court of Military Appeals judge demonstrates character of the highest level.”

Judge Mitchell practiced

law in Eupora for 32 years. He served as Maben city attorney and city prosecuting attorney for eight years, and was Webster County School Board attorney.

He is a decorated military veteran, earning the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, the Mississippi Magnolia Cross, and the Air Force Legion of Merit.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Mississippi State University and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

## T.K. Moffett appointed to First Chancery Court

Chancery Judge T.K. Moffett of Tupelo came to the bench in January after a military career spanning 37 years, and 35 years of practicing law. Gov. Phil Bryant appointed him to the First Chancery District after the death of Chancellor Talmadge Littlejohn.

Judge Moffett began his law practice in Tupelo in 1980, representing clients in bankruptcy, criminal law, personal injury, medical malpractice, Social Security disability and family law. He is admitted to practice in Mississippi and Alabama.

When the Governor announced his appointment in December, Judge Moffett said, "Judge Mask, Judge Malski, Judge Hatcher and the attorneys of the First Judicial District all do a great

job, and I consider it an honor to work with them. Judge Littlejohn was a hard-working, capable judge, and I hope to serve the attorneys and people of the First Judicial District by following that same tradition."

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. administered the ceremonial oath at his investiture in Tupelo on Jan. 15.

Judge Moffett said, "I never planned on being a lawyer. God just opened some doors and has blessed my life.... As I enter this office, my prayer is that God will grant me the wisdom to know how to enter the correct judgment and the courage to act accordingly."

The West Point graduate commanded at every level, from platoon leader to division commander. The deco-



rated military veteran mobilized with the 155th Armored Brigade for Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm and with the 91st Division for Operation Enduring Freedom.

He served with the 25th Infantry Division, the 155th Armored Brigade and the 66th Troop Command of the Mississippi National Guard, the 91st Division and the 104th Division. He retired as a Major General.

He earned a master's de-

gree from the University of Hawaii in 1974 and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 1979. He completed a National Security Fellowship at Harvard University in 1996.

During law school, he taught American government at Itawamba Community College and Northwest Community College and political science at the University of Mississippi. He taught Mississippi Rules of Civil Procedure as an adjunct professor at the University of Mississippi's Tupelo campus. Later, he conducted leadership and ethics training in the U.S., Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda.

He served as Tupelo city prosecutor for 10 years. Gov. Bryant appointed him last year to the Veterans Home Purchase Board.

## Chancellor Talmadge Littlejohn died Oct. 26, 2015



Chancellor Talmadge Littlejohn died Oct. 26, 2015, after suffering an apparent heart attack at his New Albany home. He was 80.

Mississippi Supreme Court

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. said, "Judge Littlejohn had a long, distinguished career as a public servant, including service as a district attorney and legislator."

Gov. Phil Bryant said, "He was a dedicated jurist and will be missed."

Judge Littlejohn was the oldest serving chancellor in the state at the time of his death at age 80. He was a member of the Mississippi Bar for 55 years. He had 44 years of public service, in-

cluding more than 12 years as a chancellor. He was elected chancellor in 2002 and took office in January 2003 in the First Chancery District of Alcorn, Itawamba, Lee, Monroe, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tishomingo and Union counties. Judge Littlejohn began his fourth term as a chancellor in January.

He began his public service career in 1960 as a member of the Mississippi House of Representatives. He was admitted to the Mississippi

Bar that same year. He served four years in the House and four in the Mississippi Senate, from 1964-1968. He served eight years as district attorney in the Third Circuit District, 1968-1976. He was New Albany Municipal Judge for 16 years.

He was born in Blue Springs. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with special distinction from Mississippi College and an LL.B degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

## Retired Circuit Judge Joe Pigott died Nov. 3, 2015



Retired Circuit Judge Joe N. Pigott of McComb died Nov. 3, 2015, at Ochsner-Baptist Medical Center in New Orleans. He was 90.

Pigott had been visiting New Orleans with family after going on a cruise, said his son, former U.S. Attorney Brad Pigott of Jackson. “He had just had a wonderful time. It was very joyful and very wonderful.”

Brad Pigott described his father as a quiet and thoughtful man. “He loved being a lawyer and a judge.” Joe Pigott was a district attorney during his son’s adolescence. “I was privileged to grow up around it,” Brad Pigott said.

Supreme Court Justice Jim Kitchens of Crystal Springs knew Pigott for 48 years. “I think that I learned more from him than anybody else

that I was exposed to as a lawyer. I did not always agree with his rulings, but he was the best judge that I ever practiced before,” Justice Kitchens said.

Judge Pigott tempered his sentences.

“He was not harsh. He sentenced within the parameters prescribed by the law, but he

didn’t throw the key away. He was a strong believer in the second chance,” Justice Kitchens said.

In a March 2007 interview that aired on National Public Radio, Judge Pigott recounted the frequent appearances in his court by the late Willie Earl “Pip” Dow. “He always pled guilty, and he was a likable person.” Dow attended the portrait hanging ceremony for Pigott after the judge retired. Dow told the judge that he had retired too. He had no more convictions afterwards. “Sometimes, you make friends in strange ways,” Judge Pigott said in the interview, which can be heard on NPR’s StoryCorps archive at <https://storycorps.org/listen/joe-and-lorraine-pigott/#>.

NPR in 2009 also aired

Judge Pigott’s account of his family’s reaction to Orson Welles’ 1938 radio drama of “War of the Worlds.” The family, like much of the radio audience, thought there was a Martian invasion. The interview is archived at <https://beta.prx.org/stories/43217?play=true>.

Judge Pigott’s career of public service spanned nearly four decades. He served as Pike County prosecuting attorney 1955-1962. Gov. Ross Barnett appointed him as district attorney in 1963 in the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit District, which at the time included Copiah, Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties. He served as district attorney for nine years, returning to full-time private law practice in 1972. He was elected Circuit judge in 1974 and served until his retirement in June 1992. After he left the Circuit bench, Pigott served as a senior status judge, hearing cases assigned by the Supreme Court through 2001.

The World War II veteran saw combat as a teenager. He volunteered for the U.S. Army and served as an intelligence officer in Europe. He parachuted behind enemy lines, gathering intelligence. He was captured by the Nazis twice, and escaped twice. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge, and suffered severe frostbite to his feet during the Siege of Bastogne. He walked away from a medic tent after he learned that the

treatment would be amputation.

“He walked on those same feet and ankles for another 70 years,” Brad Pigott said.

His family knew little about his war experiences until about five years ago. He didn’t talk about it easily.

Judge Pigott recounted that as a 19-year-old Army sergeant, he and two other soldiers were among the first Americans to arrive in Milan, Italy, on April 29, 1945, after the bodies of executed former dictator Benito Mussolini, his mistress and followers were hung by their feet from a beam at a gas station. A mob had trampled and reviled the bodies. Judge Pigott said that he ordered the mob to disperse, and for the bodies to be taken down.

Justice Kitchens arranged for Judge Pigott to do an oral history interview at the National WW II Museum in New Orleans.

Joe Pigott was discharged from the Army in 1946 at the rank of Captain. He had attended Southwest Mississippi Junior College before entering the Army. He resumed his education on the GI Bill at the University of Mississippi, earning a Bachelor of Business Administration in 1947 and a law degree in 1949. He was admitted to the practice of law that same year.

## Retired Chancellor Sebe Dale Jr. died April 5, 2016

Retired Chancellor Sebe Dale Jr. died April 5 at his home in Columbia. He was 94.

Judge Dale retired Dec. 31, 2010, after 42 years on the bench, 32 of that as chancellor of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chancery District. He was a Youth Court referee for 10 years before he was elected to the Chancery bench. The 10th Chancery District includes Forrest, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River and Perry counties.

Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam remembered Chancellor Dale as a mentor. She followed him as 10<sup>th</sup> District Chancellor when he retired. "Judge Dale lived a life of service to his state and country in the military, as a lawyer, and then as a Chancery Judge. As a lawyer, he taught me respect for the court and love of the law. He retired from the bench just short of 90 years old. When I followed him as Chancellor, I constantly reflected on things he taught me. We have lost a humble servant and dear friend today, and Judge Dale is no doubt hearing the words 'Well done.'"

Court of Appeals Judge Eugene Fair of Hattiesburg served alongside Judge Dale as a Chancellor for the 10<sup>th</sup> Chancery and practiced law before him. "He is my hero. He was one of those people who teaches you how the job is done. He was a judge's judge. If you want to be a good judge, you try to be like

Sebe Dale."

Judge Fair said Judge Dale was always available to the lawyers. "He was one of those people who went to his office every Saturday morning and probably on Sunday afternoons. If you needed to talk to him, you could find him." Judge Dale had that same work ethic as a lawyer in private practice. Judge Fair recalled handling a child visitation dispute in which Judge Dale represented the other parent. "We called Mike Sullivan, who was chancellor, on Christmas Day because the daddy and mama were fighting over visitation. We showed up in court the 26<sup>th</sup> day of December, whatever year that was, and tried that case. He was always available."

Tenth Chancery Court Administrator Lisa Martin Stringer worked for Judge Dale for 13 years, from the time she was a high school senior until he retired. Judge Dale gave prayerful consideration to the decisions he was called upon to make in family law disputes. "He worked very hard and the decisions didn't come easy," Stringer said. "He wanted to do what was right for those children...I always remember him making sure that he had the best interests of the children at heart. He prayed for guidance on how to best serve those children." Stringer said that Judge Dale called termination of parental rights

"the closest thing to a death sentence in Chancery Court. His happiest day in court was a day that he got to do an adoption. He got to create a family that day."

The building where Judge Dale held court in Columbia, formerly known as the

Chancery Court Annex, was renamed "The Sebe Dale, Jr. Chancery Court Building" in his honor in November 2010, shortly before he retired.

At the ceremony to rename the courthouse, Judge Dale said that he followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. His grandfather, John B. Dale, was president of the Marion County Board of Supervisors when the main courthouse was built in 1905. "He set a track for me and my father set a track for me. I've done my best to be true to it. Thank you so much," he said at the ceremony.

Judge Dale was a member of the Mississippi Judicial College Board of Governors for 22 years, 18 of that as chairman. He was a member of the State Penitentiary board for eight years. He served as chairman of the Conference of Chancery



Judges and of the Judicial Advisory Study Committee, and as president of the Marion County Bar Association.

Judge Dale was a graduate of Columbia public schools, Mississippi College and the University of Mississippi School of Law. He was admitted to the Mississippi Bar in 1948, and engaged in the private practice of law for 31 years. He was a recipient of numerous awards, including the Chief Justice Award, the Mississippi Bar Lifetime Achievement Award and the Mississippi State University Prelaw Society's Distinguished Jurist Award.

He was a veteran of World War II, having served four years of active duty in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was a reservist for 27 years, including service in the Judge Advocate General Corps. He retired at the rank of Colonel.