

Mississippi Courts

April 2021

Published by the Administrative Office of Courts

Judges Joel Smith, John Emfinger appointed to Court of Appeals



Court of Appeals Judge Joel Smith, center, takes the oath Jan. 19 at the Gartin Justice Building. His wife Courtney Smith, second from right, holds the Bible as their children look on.

Judge Joel Smith takes oath Jan. 19

Court of Appeals Judge Joel Smith on Jan. 19 said that he will devote all his energies to serving with honesty, fairness and integrity.

He said, “Now that I have taken this oath, I promise to give everything I have to serve all of the citizens of the state and to serve with three things: with honesty, with fairness and with integrity every day that I am given the chance on this

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Judge John H. Emfinger sworn in March 3 to Mississippi Court of Appeals



Judge John H. Emfinger, center, takes the oath of office on March 3 on the steps of the Governor's Mansion. Susan J. Emfinger, at left, holds the Bible as Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at right, administers the oath.

Gov. Tate Reeves appointed Judge John H. Emfinger of Brandon to the Mississippi Court of Appeals on March 3. Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph swore in Judge Emfinger on the steps of the Governor's Mansion in Jackson.

Gov. Reeves said Judge Emfinger is fair minded and hard working. “I am proud to make this appointment today, because I know that Judge Emfinger is a man of character. He is a man

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Judge Smith serves District 5

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Court.”

Gov. Tate Reeves, who appointed Judge Smith, said, “I must tell you that the most important trait one could possess is that of character, someone that is going to do right, whether doing what is right is the easy thing or not.” He said, “As I was reviewing the many qualified and capable applicants to fill this position, the thing that kept Joel Smith at the very top of every list was his dedication to the law, his commitment to doing right, his ability to discern right from wrong and his understanding of the importance of this role and the importance of the judicial branch of government.”

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna M. Barnes of Tupelo said the diversity of backgrounds among appellate judges is one of the Court’s strengths. Every member of the Court not only shares part of the caseload but also brings areas of expertise to deliberations in deciding cases.

Court of Appeals Judge Anthony N. Lawrence III of Pascagoula said, “I know you will do a great job because I have personally witnessed your public service in the work you’ve done for the citizens on the Coast, and I know that you will con-



Coast judges include Judge Anthony Lawrence, Judge Joel Smith and Justice David Ishee.

tinue that up here.”

Judge Lawrence and Judge Smith previously served as district attorneys in adjoining districts on the Gulf Coast.

Judge Smith said that he sought the appointment because “I knew that it would be one that would give me an even greater opportunity than I possessed as DA to help more people in this state for the reason that I got into public service.” He said, “Like many in this room, I joined the legal profession or public service because I simply wanted to help others. That was kind of the thing that drove me to be a lawyer and then to join public service. I hope to be able to leave this world a little bit better place for my three kids and for the generations that will follow.”

Gov. Reeves appointed Judge Smith to a vacan-

cy created when Sean Tindell left the Court to become Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety on June 1, 2020.

Judge Smith, 46, served for the past nine years as district attorney, and was an assistant district attorney for 11 years. Before joining the District Attorney’s office, he practiced corporate defense and premises liability litigation with the firm of Bryant, Clark, Dukes & Blakeslee.

He is past president of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association and served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Prosecutors Section of the Mississippi Bar. He serves as vice-chair of the Mississippi Children’s Justice Act Task Force and was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Mississippi School Safety Task Force. He served on the

Mississippi Corrections and Criminal Justice Oversight Committee and on the Governor’s 2020 search committee to find a new Corrections Commissioner. He was an instructor with the U.S. Navy Sexual Assault Intervention Training Program, Southern Regional Public Safety Institute and the Harrison County Law Enforcement Academy. He was President of the Leadership Gulf Coast Board of Trustees, was a member of the Board of Directors of the Coast Chamber of Commerce and was a member of the Gulf Coast Business Council.

He is a graduate of Gulfport High School. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Mississippi in 1996 and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 1999.

Judge Emfinger serves District 3

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of his word. And he is committed to protecting the rule of law in Mississippi.”

Judge Emfinger said, “It is an honor for me to serve in this position. I will work hard every day to make sure that the trust that has been placed in me has not been misplaced.”

Gov. Reeves appointed Judge Emfinger to the District 3, Position 2 vacancy on the Mississippi Court of Appeals. The appointment was effective March 3, and will end on Jan. 2, 2023. The judgeship was previously held by Judge Cory T. Wilson of Flora, who was appointed to the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on July 2, 2020.

Judge Emfinger served for more than 10 years as a Circuit Judge of the 20th Circuit Court District of Rankin and Madison counties. He served on the Commission on Judicial Performance, the Mississippi Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules and the Criminal Code Revision Consulting Group. He is a former chairman, vice-chair and secretary treasurer of the Conference of Circuit Judges.

He served for 12 years as an assistant district attorney for the 20th District, serving at three dif-



Gov. Tate Reeves, at right, announces his appointment of Judge John Emfinger.



Judge John Emfinger visits with Court of Appeals Presiding Judge Jack Wilson and Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton at a reception outside the Governor's Mansion.

ferent times between 1988 and 2010. He served nearly 10 years as a special assistant attorney general, serving at three different times between 1983 and 1997. He worked in the Criminal Division preparing appellate briefs; in the State and Local Government

Section handling criminal appeals, AG opinions, elections and Voting Rights Act submissions and litigation; and as director of the Public Integrity Division supervising investigation and prosecution of public corruption, white collar crime, voter fraud and large

scale drug operations. He worked for a year as Assistant Secretary of State and staff attorney in the Securities Division of the office of the Mississippi Secretary of State. He was in private law practice for about seven years. His practice areas

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Judge Matthew Sullivan, DA Christopher Hennis sworn in March 5

A large crowd gathered in the parking lot outside the Smith County Courthouse in Raleigh on March 5 to watch new Circuit Judge Matthew G. Sullivan and new District Attorney Christopher D. Hennis take their oaths of office.

Gov. Tate Reeves appointed Judge Sullivan on March 4 to the judicial vacancy created by the Feb. 7 death of Circuit Judge Eddie H. Bowen. Sullivan served for six years as District Attorney. His appointment to the bench created a vacancy for the district's top prosecutor. The Governor appointed Hennis to replace Sullivan as District Attorney.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph administered the oaths of office to both men on the porch of the Courthouse as the Governor looked on.

The 13th Circuit District includes Covington, Jasper, Simpson and Smith counties.

Gov. Reeves said Judge Sullivan is strong, fair-minded and hard working. "It is critical to the mission of law and order that we appoint quality judges to the courts, people who have a firm grasp of the rule of law," he said.

Hennis served as an Assistant District Attorney for the past seven

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Chief Justice Mike Randolph gives the oath of office to Judge Matthew Sullivan on steps of the Smith County Courthouse. Judge Sullivan's son and wife Kayla Sullivan hold the Bible.



Chief Justice Mike Randolph administers the oath of office to District Attorney Christopher D. Hennis as Hennis' wife, Lisa Hennis, holds the Bible on March 5 in Raleigh.

Judge Emfinger appointed, *continued from page 3*

included oil and gas law, domestic relations and criminal defense. He is a former member of Mississippi Prosecutors Association. He is admitted to the Bar in Mississippi

and Alabama.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in political science and a Masters of Business Administration from Mississippi College and a law degree

from Mississippi College School of Law.

Judge Emfinger, 65, is married Susan J. Emfinger. They have three daughters and four grandchildren.



Robert Sullivan Sr. of Laurel, at right, assists Judge Matthew Sullivan in putting on his robe during the ceremony.

years. The Governor said, “We are so blessed and so fortunate to have a very capable Assistant District Attorney ready to step up” to serve as District Attorney.

Hennis said after he took the oath, “I am truly humbled by the confidence you placed in me. I promise to you that I will strive and do my utmost every day to protect that confidence.”

Hennis, a prosecutor for almost 16 years, said he views the job as protecting the rights of victims as well as those accused of wrongdoing. “The role of a prosecutor is not to get convictions,” he said, although prosecutors like convictions. “A prosecutor is a minister of justice.” That duty may be to seek the death penalty, or to dismiss a case of one wrongfully

accused.

Judge Sullivan said, “You have a very capable man in Chris Hennis.”

The new judge told the Governor, “I thank you for placing your faith in me to do this job.” He told the crowd, “I promise to protect the weak and have mercy on those deserving of it.” He said, “I promise to make each one of you proud, to do the best that I can.”

Gov. Reeves said he’s made a lot of tough decisions during the past 12 months of the pandemic. But picking the new judge and district attorney wasn’t hard. “I’m proud of them and I know they will do a fantastic job for the people of this district,” he said.

Gov. Reeves thanked Judge Bowen’s family for his service. “Job well done,” he said.

Assistant District Attorney Jonas Bowen, son of the late Judge Bowen, said the pandemic hit hard. His father died of COVID-19. Circuit Judge Stanley Sorey’s wife, Lynn Sorey, died Oct. 8, 2020, from the coronavirus.

Jonas Bowen said he has known Sullivan and Hennis most of his life. He said they are men of integrity, honor and loyalty. Addressing the Governor, he said, “My Dad would respect your wisdom in choosing two men who have the right abilities at the right time.”

Judge Sorey said, “They are the best fit for the job.”

Judge Sorey said that his best advice for them comes from the Bible, Micah 6:8: do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Chief Justice Randolph said that the constitutions of all 50 states refer to God. “Be grateful to almighty God for your opportunity to serve.”

Judge Sullivan served as an assistant district attorney before he was elected for the first time in 2015. Eddie Bowen was his predecessor as both District Attorney and Circuit Judge. Bowen as District Attorney hired Sullivan as an assistant in 2007.

Judge Sullivan practiced law from 2005 to 2007 with now 13th District Chancellor Gerald Martin in Taylorsville, before Judge Martin was

elected to the bench. He served as vice-president and on the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association and was vice-chair of the Prosecutors Section of the Mississippi State Bar Executive Committee. He is a graduate of Mississippi College and earned his Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 2005.

Judge Sullivan, 40, is a lifelong resident of Mize. His family has lived in Smith County for seven generations. He is married to Kayla Dupree Sullivan, and they have a four-year-old son.

Hennis, 49, has served as an Assistant District Attorney for the past seven years. He previously served for nine years as County Prosecutor for Smith County, and was in private law practice. He served as a state trooper for seven years, and was on the SWAT team. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in criminal justice with a minor in Spanish from the University of Southern Mississippi, and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. He joined the U.S. Marines at age 17. His four-year tour of duty included Saudi Arabia and Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm.

Hennis grew up in the Beaver Dam community near Raleigh.

He and his wife, Lisa, have four children.

Judge Randi Mueller appointed to 2nd District Circuit Court

Circuit Judge Randi P. Mueller was sworn in on March 11 at a seaside pavilion in Gulfport before a crowd of judges, lawyers, civic leaders, family and friends.

Gov. Tate Reeves, who appointed Judge Mueller to a vacancy on the Second Circuit Court, said, "I have full confidence that she will do a tremendous job in her new position." He said, "I'm proud of her willingness to serve the citizens of Harrison, Hancock and Stone counties."

Judge Mueller, 45, of Biloxi, said, "I'm very grateful and honored."

Chief Justice Mike Randolph administered the oath of office and gave some advice from the Book of Exodus about the qualities of a good judge: one who fears God, is trustworthy and hates dishonest gain. He pointed out that the constitutions of all 50 states mention God. "Before you make your decisions, you need to invoke God's blessings on your work."

Judge Mueller takes the position previously held by Circuit Judge Roger Clark, who retired Nov. 30, 2020. Judge Mueller's appointment is for a term that will end Jan. 3, 2022. A special election will be held in November.

The Governor said that Judge Clark is "someone that we all know did a



Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at left, administers the oath of office to Circuit Judge Randi Mueller. Judge Mueller's husband Tom Mueller and their son Henry hold the Bible.

fantastic, fantastic job." He served for almost 16 years.

Judge Mueller thanked Judge Clark, who was seated on stage at the ceremony. "He set the bar high, and I will strive to meet that standard," she said.

She said that hearing cases in a timely manner will be a priority. "I truly believe that justice delayed is justice denied. I will keep my docket moving."

The Governor said that Mueller is an exceptionally talented lawyer who has 20 years of civil practice experience including commercial litigation, construction, gaming, personal injury, mass torts, product liability and premises liability. Mueller is licensed to practice law in five states - Mississippi, Alabama,

Arkansas, Georgia and Tennessee - and has practiced law in four of the five states.

In 2020, Super Lawyers selected Mueller as one of the Top 50 Mississippi Attorneys and one of the Top 50 Women Mid-South Attorneys. She has served as the chairman of the Toxic Tort & Environmental Law Committee in the American Bar Association's Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section.

Judge Mueller earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, *cum laude*, from the University of Mississippi. She was an English major. She earned her Juris Doctor, *cum laude*, from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 2000.

One of the things that made Mueller stand out among many well-

qualified applicants is her potential for a long career on the bench, Gov. Reeves said. "She has many, many years to serve."

Four of the five judges appointed by Gov. Reeves this year are in their 40s. Judge Mueller is 45. Circuit Judge Matthew Sullivan of Mize is 40. Circuit Judge Brad Mills of Brandon is 41. Court of Appeals Judge Joel Smith of Gulfport is 46.

Commissioner of Public Safety Sean Tindell of Gulfport, a Reeves appointee, said the Governor's judicial appointments are decisions "that drive the state for generations to come."

Mueller practiced law from 2000 to 2004 with Brunini, Grantham, Grower & Hewes, PLLC, and returned to the firm



Second District Circuit Judge Randi Mueller visits with former Circuit Judge Roger Clark, who retired Nov. 30.

as a partner in July 2020. She practiced law with her father and her brother

from 2004 to July 2020 at the firm of Page, Man- nino, Peresich & McDer-

mott, PLLC. She is the daughter of Ronald G. Peresich.

She said that her father inspired her to pursue a career in law. She recalled watching him in the courtroom from the time she was a child and thinking that’s what she wanted to do when she grew up. “He’s the reason that I’m up here today,” she said. “He also instilled in me the importance of service to the community.”

She is a former chairman and secretary of United Way of South Mississippi. She has served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Knight Nonprofit Center, Goodwill Indus-

tries of South Mississippi and the Gulf Coast Business Council. She also served on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors of the Gulf Coast Carnival Association.

Accompanying her at the ceremony were her grandmother Ruby Hennessee, parents Ronald and Ramona Peresich, and her brother Ron Peresich Jr. Her husband Tom Mueller and their son Henry Mueller held the Bible as Judge Mueller took the oath of office.

Judge Mueller thanked the crowd that turned out to watch her take the judicial oath at Jones Park. “It means the world to me,” she said.

20th Circuit Judge Brad Mills takes oath of office April 23

Veteran judges and lawyers described newly appointed Circuit Judge Brad Mills of Brandon as fair and unbiased, a man of integrity and wisdom, possessing an excellent legal mind and with energy and a work ethic to keep a busy docket moving.

Judge Mills, who took the oath of office April 23, was humbled by all of the praise. He said that he was surprised to be chosen. “It was an honor to be considered.”

He thanked Gov. Tate Reeves for appointing him to the 20th Circuit Court of Rankin and Madison counties.

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Rankin County Court Judge Kent McDaniel, at left, administers the oath of office to 20th Circuit Court Judge Brad Mills on April 23 in Brandon. Judge Mills’ wife Adrian Westbrook Mills holds the Bible as their children watch.



Judges who watched Circuit Judge Brad Mills, center, take the oath are, left to right, Madison County Judge Staci O’Neal, Chancellor John McLaurin, Court of Appeals Judge John Emfinger, Justice Jim Kitchens, Circuit Judge Steve Ratcliff, Circuit Judge Dewey Arthur; back row, Chancellor Haydn Roberts, Rankin County Judge Kent McDaniel and Chancellor Troy Odom.

Judge Mills said he is grateful for the encouragement that he has received in recent weeks. “The support that I’ve gotten means more than this appointment itself. At least somebody thought I was working hard,” he told colleagues, friends and family who gathered to watch him be sworn in.

Rankin County Court Judge Kent McDaniel administered the oath. Judge Mills’ wife, Adrian Westbrook Mills, held the Bible as their children, ages 6 and 4, stood close.

Judge Mills chose to take the oath in the Circuit Courtroom in Brandon, the one where he’s spent the most time. He estimated that he has handled between 1,500 and 2,000 cases.

Judge Mills, 41, has

been a solo practitioner for 14 years. He was an assistant public defender in Rankin County Circuit Court for nine and one-half years. He served by appointment as a public defender in U.S. District Court for the past eight years, and as an assistant public defender in Rankin County Justice Court for almost three years.

“I have spent 14 years in the trenches,” he said. That work shapes his perspective as he takes the bench. “I’m going to remember what it’s like out in the real world because I’ve been there. I get it.”

His practice areas also included family law, personal injury, debt collection, corporate and business law, and municipal law. He was municipal attorney for the Town of

Pelahatchie from August 2017 to June 2018

Attorney T. Mark Sledge of Ridgeland said, “Because Brad comes from a general practice, he comes to the bench with no agendas.”

U.S. Congressman Michael Guest, former District Attorney for Rankin and Madison counties, said, “I am proud that a man of integrity has agreed to serve.” Guest said that his prayer for Judge Mills is that God grants him the wisdom and discernment “to judge fairly and see that in every case justice is served.”

Attorney Mark Baker of Brandon said, “Everyone has to believe that they got a fair shot.” And lawyers need judges who are predictable and con-

sistent, so that they may advise their clients. He expects Judge Mills to have all of those traits. “We are so proud of you and we look forward to the great things you are going to do.”

Gov. Reeves appointed Judge Mills to the 20th District Circuit Court vacancy created when Judge John Emfinger was appointed to the Mississippi Court of Appeals. Judge Mills’ term is through Jan. 2, 2023.

Judge Mills grew up in Corinth. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Mississippi State University in 2002 and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law in 2005. He was admitted to the Mississippi and Tennessee Bars in 2006.

Programs of Hope: Children need to be told that they matter



Professor Chan Hellman, Ph.D., leads Hope Navigator Training on Jan. 26 in Jackson.

Children need to know that they matter and that they are worthy, says a psychologist whose hope-centered training could change the thinking of those responsible for safeguarding the well-being of children.

“If you want to nurture hope in a child, focus on communicating to that child that they matter,” Dr. Chan Hellman told a virtual training audience of more than 150 people on Jan. 26.

Hellman spent Jan. 26 and 27 in Jackson training people from more than 40 agencies and entities to be “hope navigators” to begin work toward building a culture of hope. Participants included judges and staff, social workers, educators, health and mental health

practitioners, advocates for children and members of the faith-based community.

“We should speak hope,” said Justice Dawn Beam, co-chair of the Commission on Children’s Justice. Speak encouraging words, not negatives.

So what is hope? Hellman says, “Hope is the belief that your future will be better than today, and you have the power to make it so.”

Hellman said that the program is not one of rainbows and unicorns.

Six principles are at work here:

- Hope is a way of thinking. Hope-centered thinking involves setting goals, finding pathways around obstacles, and finding the willpower to pursue the

goals.

- Imagination is the instrument of hope. Imagining oneself pursuing a goal, such as attending college, moves one toward attaining the goal. Touring a college campus strengthens one’s ability to imagine what it would be like to be a student there.

- Hope is not wishful thinking. Again, hope takes the idea beyond wishing by setting goals, finding pathways and maintaining willpower.

- Hope begets hope. It’s a Velcro approach. When hope rises, it pulls other positive changes with it.

- Hope is a social gift. Mentoring programs nurture hope.

- Hope can be taught.

“How do we build a culture of hope within a

courtroom? How do we build a culture of hope within a classroom?” Hellman asked.

Participants spent time in small group discussions to make plans.

Andrea Sanders recently became director of the Department of Child Protection Services, the lead agency tasked to safeguard the well-being of children. “The time is right and the players are in place” to make changes toward a culture of hope, Sanders said. “It has to be the new culture in our agency.” She is thinking of ways to put hope into practice throughout, from agency leadership practices down to how social workers talk to children.

Chancellor Rhea Sheldon of Hattiesburg, co-chair of the Commission on Children’s Justice, said all members of her court staff will be trained to utilize the power of hope. “I really want there to be an atmosphere of hope in the courtroom,” she said. “I think it’s going to be beneficial to all the families” who come into court.

Resident Jurist John N. Hudson of Natchez, who helped lead the training, said that hope needs to be infused from the top down in all Youth Court settings. “We want everything that touches this court to be hope-centered

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More than 1,100 participate in Hope Focused Court Training in April



Andrea Sanders, director of Child Protection Services, speaks April 13 in Oxford. Justice Dawn Beam is at right.

Training seeks to infuse hope in all settings involving children

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— on the juvenile delinquency side, on the child protection side — that when we bring those social workers into the courtroom, when we bring those juvenile counselors in the courtroom, their message is we are about hope here.”

Educators have an opportunity to make a difference in children’s futures. Hope needs to permeate everything in education, said Mississippi Judicial College Director Randy Pierce. “If we are not careful, well intentioned people can stifle

hope and not even know it.” Pierce in high school was told that college was not in his future. He’s a certified public accountant, lawyer, former Supreme Court Justice and author of four novels.

Hellman said, “The ultimate goal is always well-being. We are nurturing hope so that children and families can live well.”

Hellman, of Tulsa, is a professor of social work at the University of Oklahoma and Director of The Hope Research Center. He is co-author of the book *Hope Rising: How*

More than 1,100 frontline workers who safeguard the well-being of children and families participated in Hope Focused Court Training April 13-15.

The Hope training team completed a three-day marathon that took them to Oxford, Pearl and Gulfport.

Psychologist Chan Hellman, Ph.D. of Tulsa, Oklahoma, talked about the power of hope to improve the lives of children and families.

Participants included judges and court staff, Department of Child Protection Services leaders and social workers, Department of Education school attendance officers, representatives from

the Department of Human Services, representatives of the Department of Mental Health, representatives of child advocacy centers, service providers and members of the faith based community. Training included in-person and virtual learning.

Professionals responsible for protecting children participated as teams from each county as they worked to develop hope-centered plans.

Justice Dawn Beam, co-chair of the Commission on Children’s Justice, said, “There is this real thirst for how we can make systemic change in our state.”

The Commission on Children’s Justice established Programs of Hope to continue to address child neglect prevention. The model is centered on hope. The idea is to create pathways of hope for children and families.

Justice Beam said, “We are committed to help them improve their lives. We believe this is possible one person, one family, one community at a time.”

The presentations are part of the Court Improvement Program. The programs are sponsored by the Commission on Children’s Justice and Casey Family Programs in cooperation with the Mississippi Judicial College.

the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life.

Hope Navigator training videos available online

Videos of four sessions of Hope Navigator Training and other resources are on the website of the Commission on Children’s Justice, www.hope.ms.gov.

Here is the link: <https://www.hope.ms.gov/programs-hope/hope-navigator-training>.

The site also includes a list of trained Hope Navigators who may be requested as speakers.



Toni Kersh, Director of Youth Services for the Mississippi Department of Human Services, addresses training participants in Oxford on April 13.



Resident Jurist John N. Hudson talks to Hope Training participants in Gulfport.



Fox TV interviews Chancellor Rhea Sheldon in Gulfport on April 15.



A team from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians participates in training April 14 in Pearl.



A large team from Marshall County attends training in Oxford.



Pontotoc County participants discuss ideas in Oxford.

Justice Chamberlin chairs Intervention Courts Advisory Committee



Justice Robert Chamberlin

The Supreme Court in January appointed Justice Robert P. Chamberlin of Hernando to an indefinite term as chair of the Intervention Courts Advisory Committee.



Judge Robert Krebs

Justice Chamberlin has served in that role as a designee since May 2020. The Supreme Court appointed Circuit Judge Robert P. Krebs of Pascagoula and Department

of Corrections Deputy Commissioner Gary Young of Jackson to the Advisory Committee.

The Supreme Court also reappointed committee members including Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich of Hattiesburg; Circuit Judge Winston L. Kidd of Jackson; Circuit Judge Michael M. Taylor of Brookhaven; Circuit Judge Charles E. Webster of Clarksdale; Jackson County Court Judge Sharon Sigalas of Pascagoula; Stacey E. Pickering of Laurel, Executive Director of the State Veterans Affairs Board; Rep. Angela Cockerham

of Magnolia; and Melody Madaris of Oxford, Director of Substance Abuse and EAP Services at Communicare, Region II Mental Health.

Members' terms are two years.

Chief Justice Mike Randolph signed the appointment order for the unanimous Court Jan. 19.

The state currently has 44 intervention courts. There are 22 adult felony drug intervention court programs, four adult misdemeanor intervention court programs, 15 juvenile intervention courts and three family intervention courts.

Court Reporters Association to swear in new state officers April 29



Chief Justice Mike Randolph talks to Court Reporter Rose Sanchez on March 5 in Raleigh.

Fifteenth Circuit Court Reporter Rose Sanchez of

Hattiesburg will become president of the Missis-

sippi Court Reporters Association at the annual

spring conference.

Officers will be sworn in April 29.

President-elect is Phyllis K. McLarty of Mentachie, court reporter for the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi.

Melissa Grimes of Calhoun City, 14th Chancery Court reporter, will become vice-president.

Mallory Gnade of Kosciusko will become treasurer.

Susan Alford of Oxford remains secretary.

Twila Jordan-Hoover of Carriere, 10th Chancery Court Reporter, will conclude her term as Association president.

County, Chancery, Circuit appointments made to Judicial Performance



Judge Richelle Lumpkin



Chancellor Jim Persons



Judge Smith Murphey V



Judge Kent McDaniel



Chancellor Stephen Bailey



Judge Stanley Sorey

Chief Justice Mike Randolph appointed Pearl River County Court Judge Richelle Lumpkin as a member of the Commission on Judicial Performance on Jan. 7. The Chief Justice appointed Rankin County Court Judge Kent McDaniel as an alternate member of the judicial disciplinary body.

Chief Justice Randolph appointed Chancellor Jim Persons of Gulfport as a member of the Commis-

sion on Jan. 13. The Chief Justice appointed Chancellor Stephen T. Bailey of Tupelo as an alternate member.

Chief Justice Randolph appointed Circuit Judge Smith Murphey V of Batesville as a member of the Commission and Judge Stanley A. Sorey of Raleigh as an alternate member on April 12 .

Judge Murphey has served as an alternate member of the judicial disciplinary body since



House Speaker Philip Gunn recommended Judge Lumpkin as a member of the Commission and Judge McDaniel as an alternate member. Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann recommended Chancellor Persons as a member of the Commission and Chancellor Bailey as an alternate member. Appointments are for six-year terms.

Judge Lumpkin and Judge McDaniel will trade places on the Commission. Judge McDaniel previously served for six years as a member of the Commission. Judge Lumpkin has served as an alternate member since March 16, 2016.

February 2020. Gov. Tate Reeves recommended that Judge Murphey take the place on the Commission previously held by Judge John Emfinger of Brandon, and that Judge Sorey be appointed as an alternate member.

Judges Murphey and Sorey are appointed for the balance of the current Judicial Performance terms that will end Dec. 31, and for new six-year terms which will end Dec. 31, 2027.

Judge Persons replaces Chancellor Vicki Barnes of Vicksburg on the Commission, and Judge Bailey replaces Chancellor Cynthia Brewer of Madison as an alternate member. Judge Barnes served as a Commission member for six years, and as an alternate member for six years. Judge Brewer was an alternate member for six years.

Judge Persons has been a chancellor of the

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Eighth Chancery District since January 2003. He practiced law in Jackson from 1967 until 1974, then moved his practice to the Gulf Coast. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Millsaps College, a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law, and a L.L.M. in taxation from New York University. He is a past president of the Harrison County Bar Association and the Russell-Blass-Walker Chapter of the American Inns of Court. He was inducted as a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation in 2011 and received the Mississippi Bar Distinguished Service Award in 2017.

Judge Bailey has served as a chancellor of the First Chancery District since Feb. 1, 2018. He previously served as a prosecutor in Lee County Youth Court and Tupelo Municipal Court. He began his private law practice in 1996. He is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Lumpkin was elected as the first County

Court Judge of Pearl River County in November 2010 and took office in January 2011. She previously served as Youth Court Referee for eight years. She was Municipal Judge for the City of Picayune for four years. She also served for eight years as Pearl River County prosecutor. She was in private law practice for 20 years. She is a former member of the Mississippi Board of Bar Commissioners. She earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Doctor of Jurisprudence from Mississippi College School of Law.

Judge McDaniel has served as a Rankin County Court Judge since September 1997. He was chair of the Conference of County Court Judges. He was chairman and vice-chair of the Commission on Judicial Performance. He served as Flowood Municipal Judge from November 1995 until his appointment to the County Court. He served as First Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi from 1989 to 1995. He returned to

the private practice of law in 1995. He previously served as director of the Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy. He served with the 20th Special Forces Group (MSANG) from 1968-1973 and with the 112th MP Battalion (MSANG) from 1973-1978, leaving the service with the rank of First Lieutenant. He served as an adjunct faculty member at Mississippi College School of Law for 25 years, teaching trial practice. Judge McDaniel earned a Juris Doctor and a Doctor of Laws degree from Mississippi College School of Law.

Judge Murphey joined the 17th Circuit bench in January 2011. He previously served as chair, vice-chair and secretary treasurer of the Conference of Circuit Judges. He was an assistant district attorney of the 17th Circuit District for almost 15 years. He is former president of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association and former president of the Prosecutors Section of the Mississippi Bar. He has served on the Mississippi Board of Bar Admissions since January 2009. He earned

a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Mississippi and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law.

Judge Sorey has served on the 13th Circuit Court bench since January 2016. He is senior judge of the district. He was in private law practice for more than 16 years before he was elected Circuit Judge. He served as Smith County Prosecutor and municipal prosecutor for the towns of Mize and Taylorsville. He was board attorney for the Smith County Board of Supervisors for 10 years. He was president of the Smith County Bar Association for 14 years.

Judge Sorey served for six years in the Mississippi National Guard, including active duty during Operation Desert Storm. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Mississippi College and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. He also attended Jones County Junior College, Copiah-Lincoln Community College and the University of Southern Mississippi.

Circuit Judge Eddie Bowen of Raleigh died February 7



Circuit Judge Eddie H. Bowen of Raleigh died Feb. 7 of complications from COVID-19. He was 71.

A memorial ceremony was held Feb. 13 at the Smith County Courthouse in Raleigh.

Three weeks before his death, Judge Bowen tested positive for COVID-19 and received treatment. He was hospitalized for a week at Magee General Hospital before his death.

Judge Bowen's family issued this statement: "We are humbled by how many people have reached out during our time of sorrow. We see how many lives that he touched throughout his life. Dad was as tenacious of a provider and father as he was an attorney. His love for his family and his friends was true until

the moment his life transcended to a higher purpose. Words cannot express how much we love and miss him, but words are not supposed to – that is why we make memories."

Judge Bowen was the senior judge of the two-judge district. Circuit Judge Stanley Sorey said, "He was a great judge to work with, always helpful and encouraging. He will definitely be missed."

Judge Bowen served as Circuit Judge of the 13th Judicial District for more than 10 years. Gov. Haley Barbour appointed Judge Bowen, and he was sworn in for the first time on Sept. 20, 2010. The 13th Judicial District includes Covington, Jasper, Simpson and Smith counties.

Judge Bowen served as district attorney for 11 years before he was appointed to the bench. He was in private law practice for 19 years.

Former Representative Bo Eaton of Taylorsville was a longtime friend. "He was man of compassion and mercy. Jurisprudence and justice were his life as a professional, but he also had a forgiv-

ing, merciful heart too. He had a sense of humor about life."

Eaton's father, attorney Howard Eaton, hired Bowen soon after Bowen graduated from law school. They later became law partners in the firm of Eaton and Bowen in Taylorsville. Bowen opened an office for the firm in Raleigh, then went out on his own.

"My daddy really liked his humor and intellect. He was a great student of the law and a dear friend," Eaton said.

Gary King of Taylorsville worked as an assistant district attorney when Bowen was District Attorney. "I enjoyed almost five years working with him," King said. "Eddie spoke his mind. You pretty well knew where Eddie stood on things," he said.

"He liked to hunt and fish. He had a little camp outside town," King said. Judge Bowen went into quarantine at his cabin after he tested positive for COVID-19, before his condition worsened. He died two weeks before his birthday. He would have turned 72 on Feb. 21.

Judge Bowen grew up

in the Cohay Community of Smith County, the son of Howard and Eunice Bowen. He had eight siblings – four sisters and four brothers. He was the second oldest.

He joined the Mississippi National Guard in 1967, went to Officer's Candidate School, and served active duty as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army in Vietnam. He continued as a reservist until 1984, leaving the service at the rank of Major.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in secondary education from Mississippi State University and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

He is survived by his wife Sherrie Bowen; sons Jonas Bowen and Caleb Bowen; grandson Gabriel Bowen; sisters Ruth Hayes, Abby Crosby and Mary Alice Nanny; and brothers Carlie Bowen, David Bowen, Timothy Bowen and Jonathan Bowen. He was preceded in death by his parents and sister Mattie Crisler.

Retired Circuit Judge Breland Hilburn died April 5



Retired Hinds County Circuit Judge L. Breland Hilburn of Jackson died April 5 at University of Mississippi Medical Center of complications from COVID-19. He was 79.

A private family service was held April 9.

Judge Hilburn retired from the Hinds Circuit Court bench on May 31, 2002, after 30 years as a Municipal, County and Circuit Court Judge. His years of service included Jackson Municipal Court Judge 1972-1978, Hinds County Court Judge until 1981, then as a 7th Circuit Court Judge. At the time of his retirement, he was the senior judge of the 7th Circuit Court of Hinds County.

Judge Hilburn was the judge who presided over the 1994 trial of Byron De

La Beckwith for the 1963 murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers. Judge Hilburn sentenced Beckwith to life in prison at the end of a trial that received worldwide media attention.

After he retired from his elected judgeship, Judge Hilburn continued to hear cases by appointment of the Mississippi Supreme Court as a senior status judge for about 13 years. The Supreme Court appointed Judge Hilburn as a special circuit judge for Hinds County in July 2004, and he continued to hear cases to help deal with a heavy Hinds Circuit criminal case docket. He also heard numerous cases around the state by appointment of the Supreme Court. He served as a senior status judge until February 2017.

Senior Hinds Circuit Judge Tomie Green said that Judge Hilburn as a senior status judge presided over long dockets of guilty plea hearings several days a week at a time when the jail was overcrowded with pretrial detainees. "He came back to help us."

Judge Green got her

early criminal court experience as an assistant district attorney in Judge Hilburn's courtroom when she served as an assistant district attorney in Hinds and Yazoo counties. Judge Hilburn handled the Yazoo County docket before Yazoo County became part of a different judicial district. He also handled the Raymond docket and a portion of the Circuit Court cases heard in Jackson. Judge Green later served together with Judge Hilburn on the Hinds Circuit Court bench. "We looked to him for leadership and he gave us that," she said.

Former Hinds County Circuit Clerk Barbara Dunn said Judge Hilburn was easy to work with, and considerate of court staff. "We all felt kind of like a family," she said.

Retired Hinds Circuit Judge William Gowan, also a senior status judge, said, "He never tried to impress people with being a judge....He was a public servant who could identify with the public. He had served as municipal judge, as a county judge and then as circuit judge."

His death "comes as a

shock to me. I always looked forward to the Judges Conference. Breland was always a wealth of information. He was very fair, very knowledgeable of the law, and he certainly had a practical approach."

"He will be missed by everyone that knew Breland. We've been friends forever," Judge Gowan said.

They both attended Bailey Junior High School in Jackson.

Judge Hilburn earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Mississippi State University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

His daughter, Kathy Hilburn, said, "He was my Dad. He was very supportive, very loving. He was always proud of me and both of my brothers. You could not ask for somebody to be more supportive."

In addition to daughter Kathy Hilburn, Judge Hilburn is survived by his wife, JoAnn Hilburn, sons Judson Hilburn and John Holmes Hilburn, and two stepsons, Bill Dearman and Russ Dearman.