

# Mississippi Courts

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## Judge Keith Starrett honored with 2019 Chief Justice Award



U.S. District Judge Keith Starrett of the Southern District of Mississippi received the 2019 Chief Justice Award on July 12. Mississippi Supreme

Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph presented the award during the Mississippi Bar Convention.

Judge Starrett was recognized for his leadership and innovation as founder of the state's drug court program, for his work to implement criminal justice reforms, and for his continuing efforts to implement reentry programs that reduce recidivism and help former offenders become productive citizens.

In presenting the award, Chief Justice Randolph read from the plaque: "Your efforts have impacted thousands. Your actions

have led to the restoration of countless lives and the reunification of innumerable families. You have worked tirelessly to bring reform to our courts and redemption to the lives of those who have strayed."

Judge Starrett launched the Drug Court movement in Mississippi 20 years ago as a Circuit Court judge with his creation of the state's first felony adult Drug Court in the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit District of Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties. Judge Starrett started the program with no funding and no statutory framework. Now there are 40

drug courts statewide. Almost 4,000 people are enrolled in drug court programs. The successful drug court model in recent years expanded into a broader program of problem solving courts, first with the development of a few veterans drug court programs, then a more recent push to create mental health courts.

Judge Starrett served on the Board of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals for eight years and was Board Chair for two years. He was selected for the Goldstein

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## GAP Act effective Jan. 1, 2020 to protect children, vulnerable adults



Gov. Phil Bryant ceremonially signs the GAP Act on May 29. He is flanked by Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves and members of the Commission on Guardianship and Conservatorship. See story, Page 2.

## Guardianship and Conservatorship Commission work changes laws

Gov. Phil Bryant on May 29 included the Mississippi Guardianship and Conservatorship Act in bill signing ceremonies.

“It has been a long time coming,” Gov. Bryant said before he ceremonially signed the GAP Act. He officially signed the legislation into law on April 16. The new laws will go into effect Jan. 1, 2020.

“The purpose is to protect the most vulnerable,” said Justice Dawn Beam, co-chair of the Commission on Guardianship and Conservatorship.

State laws of guardianships and conservatorships had not been substantially changed in more than 30 years. Provisions for oversight, monitoring and accountability were lacking. There were incidents of fraud and abuse of vulnerable people. The Supreme Court on April 13, 2017, created the Mississippi Commission on Guardianship and Conservatorship to develop recommendations to improve the way the courts protect children, vulnerable adults and estates.

The Commission made recommendations after nearly two years of intense study. The Legislature passed Senate Bill 2828, introduced by Sen. Joey Fillingane. The GAP Act, for “guard and protect,” aims to improve court processes for protecting children and vulnerable adults and their assets. The Commission recommended a clear and workable statuto-

ry framework, modern and enforceable reporting requirements, comprehensive court monitoring procedures, state driven accountability measures, protection of the ward’s fundamental rights, and transparency from all parties.

The old statutes are confusing and vague, said Chancellor Joseph Kilgore of Philadelphia, co-chair of the Commission subcommittee on estate guardianships. Nothing in the old statutes told a conservator exactly what they could or could not do. “I truly feel that this bill makes great strides in the protection of the most vulnerable people among us,” Judge Kilgore said.

Chancellor Catherine Farris-Carter of Cleveland, co-chair of the adult guardianship subcommittee, has seen cases in which family members misused a ward’s resources. “They absolutely waste and squander the resources.”

Jackson elder law attorney Richard Courtney, co-chair of the subcommittee on estate guardianships, said, “For years, lawyers have struggled to deal with outdated guardianship and conservatorship procedures. This GAP Act will systematize the procedures for accountability and oversight of children and adults under guardianships and conservatorships.”

The new law goes beyond accounting for money and possessions. Justice Beam said, “The GAP Act

places the well-being of the person on the same footing as their assets, which is huge for ensuring daily needs such as food, housing and medical care are met for vulnerable children and adults.”

The new law also allows judges to tailor guardianship and conservatorship orders to the needs of the person, allowing vulnerable adults to maintain some independence. Justice Beam said, “Judges now have options for respecting the dignity of the person by recognizing there are varying degrees of disabilities. This allows the court to tailor the restrictions on the ward’s rights, providing protections where needed while allowing the ward to maintain independence when possible.” The GAP Act sets out a process for ending legal restrictions when the ward recovers from an impairment.

Chancellor Farris-Carter said, “The thing that I am most excited about is that we finally have a process in place wherein consideration has to be given to the desires and wants of the ward. Just because they have a physical limitation doesn’t mean they have mental limitations.”

Mississippi Electronic Courts provides a mechanism for monitoring and tracking guardianships and conservatorships. With the GAP Act set to go into effect in January 2020, “we will have plenty of time to train court person-

nel on how the court’s computer system will assist judges in overseeing the care of our citizens,” Justice Beam said.

MEC is working to develop and implement a management information system that will automate many of the notifications for annual well-being reports and accountings required under the GAP Act. Pilot programs utilizing the management information system are under-way in the Sixth and Tenth Chancery Courts.

Justice Beam thanked the Governor, legislators and members of the Commission for their work. She thanked the Mississippi Medical Association, the Bankers Association, AARP and disability advocates whose help was vital.

Judicial College Executive Director Randy Pierce, co-chair of the Commission, said, “This is a perfect example of how the private sector and the public sector can come together to protect the most vulnerable.”

Other members of the Commission are Chancellors Deborah Gambrell, Lawrence Primeaux and George Ward and former Chancellor Sanford Steckler; Resident Jurist John Hudson; Commissioner of Child Protection Services Jess H. Dickinson; attorney Anna Claire Steel of CPS; attorneys Gray Edmondson of Oxford, Tiffany Graves of Jackson, Da-

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## Pro Bono awards honor those who provide legal assistance to the poor



**Chancellor Deborah Gambrell and Shakita Taylor**



**Ellen Robb**



**Seth Shannon**

Chancellor Deborah Gambrell of Hattiesburg was honored Sept. 12 with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project’s Beacon of Justice Award.

Others honored were attorneys Shakita Taylor of Hattiesburg, Ellen Robb of Ridgeland and Seth Shannon of Jackson, the Lee County Bar Association, and the law firm of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings. The awards were presented during the annual Pro Bono Awards Reception in Jackson.

The Beacon of Justice

Award is given annually to a member of the judiciary who provides outstanding leadership in promoting and supporting equal access to justice, said Sam H. Buchanan of Hattiesburg, Executive Director of the Mississippi Center for Legal Services and a member of the MVLP Board of Directors. Judge Gambrell is an advocate for ensuring access to justice for all and a leader in organizing programs to provide legal help. As senior chancellor of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chancery District, she en-

courages attorney involvement in pro bono representation. Judge Gambrell worked with Christian Services of Hattiesburg, Legal Services and the South Central Bar to organize extensive pro bono efforts and works with pro se clinics. She assisted in developing templates to assist self-represented litigants in the 10<sup>th</sup> Chancery, and shared the value of templates with her fellow judges across the state.

Judge Gambrell is a member of the Access to Justice Commission. She

is on the leadership team of the Mississippi Family First Initiative pilot program for Pearl River County. She serves on the Commission on Guardianship and Conservatorship. She served on the Board of Directors of South Mississippi Legal Services for more than 10 years.

Pro Bono Awards recognize attorneys, law firms and legal organizations involved in significant pro bono efforts, said MVLP Executive Director Gayla Carpenter-Sanders.

Taylor “has maintained a consistent presence with MVLP for the last decade,” Carpenter-Sanders said. Taylor handled more than a dozen cases for MVLP clients, including divorce and child support cases. Recently, she was able to obtain visitation rights for a father who had been unable to see his daughter. Taylor has also spoken at “know your rights” clinics.

Taylor practices family law, is public defender for

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## Guardianship and Conservatorship, *continued from Page 2*

vid Marchetti of Jackson, John Smallwood of Hattiesburg and Bob Williford of Ridgeland; State Board of Education member Johnny Franklin; Special Assistant Attorney General Joe Hemleben; Department of Mental Health Community Services Bureau Director Jake Hutchins; Dr. Luke Lamp-

ton; attorney and Mississippi Bankers Association member Nicole Lewellyn; Micah Distro of Disability Rights Mississippi; Department of Mental Health Division of Children and Youth Services Director Sandra Parks; Rankin County Chancery Clerk Larry Swales; Amie Mondello of the Rankin

County Chancery Clerk’s Office; and former Coahoma County Chancery Clerk Ed Peacock III.

Commission staff are attorney Whitney Griffin, Supreme Court Central Legal Staff Attorney Gabe Goza and Administrative Office of Courts Youth Court Programs Director Mary Fuller.



Members of the Lee County Bar Association who attended the ceremony are, left to right, Deedy Boland, Stephen Spencer, Chancellor Jacqueline Mask, Angela Jones, Brad Morris, Cynthia Lee, Robert Bass, Tyler Pirkle and Nicole McLaughlin.



The Bradley Arant firm received MVL's Torchbearer Award. Bradley Arant Pro Bono Counsel Tiffany Graves, center, holds the award. Left to right are Wayne Drinkwater, Christina Seanor, MVL Immediate Past President Jennie Eichelberger, Tiffany Graves, Mary Clay Morgan, Lindy Brown and Stevie Rushing.

the city of Hattiesburg, and does contract work for Legal Services.

Ellen Robb has worked as an MVL volunteer since 2013. Recent volunteer work included establishing legal guardianships for children being raised by persons other than parents and representing clients in obtaining divorce. Robb also successfully assisted a disabled woman who had been sued for unpaid credit card debt incurred by her late husband, without the woman's knowledge.

Robb is a member of the Mitchell Day law firm in Ridgeland. She is vice president of the Board of

Directors for the Mississippi Women Lawyers Association. She is Regional Chair for Alabama and Mississippi for the American Bar Association subsection Women in Dispute Resolution, and is vice chair of the ABA's General Practice Solo Division Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee.

Attorney Seth Shannon of Jackson was honored with the Curtis E. Coker Access to Justice Award, presented annually to recognize outstanding pro bono legal services. Shannon, an MVL volunteer since 2011, has handled 62 cases, assisting in some capacity with every type of

legal issue for which MVL provides assistance, said Courtney Cockrell, vice chair of the MVL Board of Directors. Shannon was recently recognized by the American Bar Association as an ABA Free Legal Answers Pro Bono Leader. He is a volunteer with the Mission First Legal Aid Office and is on the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Housing Partnership. He is on the Young Lawyers Division Homeless Youth and Disaster Legal Assistance committees. He is a member of the Mississippi Bar's Access to Justice Committee and the Community Outreach & Pro Bono Committee of

the Capital Area Bar Association.

The Lee County Bar Association received a Pro Bono Award for its efforts that included conducting 16 free legal clinics since the Lee County Chancery Court began conducting quarterly family law clinics in 2014. More than 300 people have received assistance as a result of the efforts of 83 attorneys who volunteered their time, Carpenter-Sanders said.

"We are grateful for their commitment to access to justice for underserved Mississippians," Carpenter-Sanders said.

The concerted efforts in Lee County grew into a district-wide program of free legal clinics in the First Chancery District in 2015, and statewide free legal clinics in 2018 and 2019. Senior Chancellor Jacqueline Mask of Tupelo, co-chair of the Access to Justice Commission, worked with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project, the University of Mississippi School of Law Pro Bono Initiative and bar associations across eight counties to schedule a free legal clinic in every courthouse of the First Chancery District. Free family law clinics provided assistance to low income people in matters such as divorce, child support, guardianship, emancipation and name change.

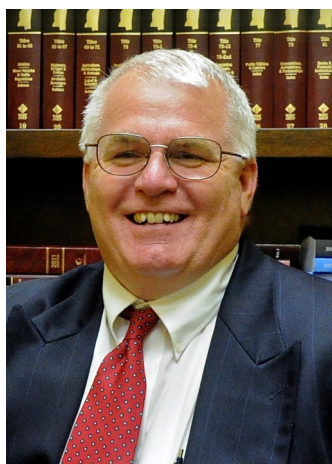
The Lee County Bar Association's efforts inspired former Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. to urge chancellors and attorneys to con-

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## Circuit, County Court Conference officers were selected in April



**Lisa Dodson**



**Kelly Luther**



**Tony Mozingo**



**Ed Hannan**



**Vernita King Johnson**



**Veldore Young Graham**

Circuit Judge Lisa P. Dodson of Gulfport was elected chair of the Conference of Circuit Court Judges. Circuit Judge Kelly Luther of Ripley was elected vice-chair, and Circuit Judge Tony Mozingo of Oak Grove was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

The Conference of County Court Judges re-elected Madison County Court Judge Ed Hannan as chairman, Washington County Court Judge Vernita King Johnson as vice-chair, and Lauderdale County Court Judge Veldore Young Graham as secretary.

Conference officers were elected by their colleagues on April 25 during the Spring Trial and Appellate Judges Conference in Biloxi.

Judge Dodson succeeded 20<sup>th</sup> District Circuit Judge John Emfinger of Brandon as chairman of the Conference of Circuit Court Judges. She previously served as vice-chair of the Conference. Judge Mozingo was elected to his second term as Circuit Conference secretary-treasurer.

Judge Hannan, of Madison, has served as chairman of the Conference of County Court Judges since 2015. Judge Johnson has been vice-chair since October 2004. Judge Young Graham began her service as Conference of County Court Judges secretary in April 2012.

### Pro Bono Awards, *continued from page 4*

duct free legal clinics statewide. In 2018, more than 450 lawyers provided more than 1,300 hours of free legal services to 850 people. For that effort, the American Bar Association in July honored the Mississippi Bar with the 2019 Harrison Tweed Award. The prestigious award recognizes bar associations that have made extraordinary efforts to improve civil legal services or indigent defense services for people living in poverty. Family law clinics across the state this year are on

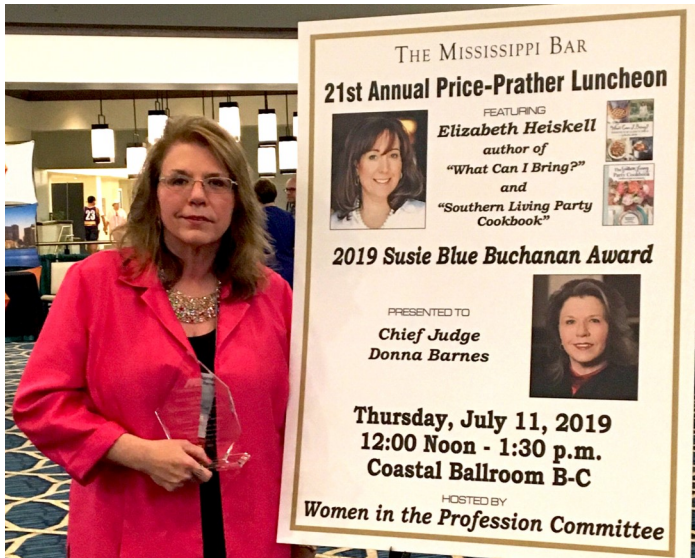
track to exceed the number of clients served in 2018, said Access to Justice Commission Executive Director Nicole McLaughlin of Tupelo.

Volunteer attorneys working with MVLP in the past year donated 2,193 hours of service worth an estimated \$383,775, said Kimberly Merchant, chair of the MVLP Board of Directors.

MVLP honored the law firm of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP with the Torchbearer Award for its financial contributions.

Jennie Eichelberger, Immediate Past Chair of the MVLP Board of Directors, thanked the firm for “being an unwavering, leading force in providing financial resources to MVLP so that MVLP can carry out its programs.” Since 2014, the firm contributed \$36,100 that financed 30 pro se clinics across the state, impacting more than 250 individuals, and supported MVLP’s direct representation of needy clients, impacting more than 150 individuals, Eichelberger said.

## Chief Judge Barnes receives Susie Blue Buchanan Award



Mississippi Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna M. Barnes was honored July 11 as a trailblazer among women lawyers.

The first woman Chief Judge of the state Court of Appeals received the 2019 Susie Blue Buchanan Award. The award, presented by the Mississippi Bar's Women in the Profession Committee, honors an outstanding woman lawyer who has achieved professional excellence and has actively paved the way to success for other women lawyers. The award was presented during the Price-Prather Luncheon at the Mississippi Bar Convention.

The award is named for Susie Blue Buchanan of Brandon, who in 1916 became the first woman qualified to practice before the Mississippi Supreme Court. The luncheon is named for the state's first woman judge, Washington County Court Judge Zelma Wells Price of Greenville, and the first Mississippi

woman chancellor, Supreme Court Justice and Chief Justice, Lenore Loving Prather of Columbus.

Among former award winners are Chief Justice Prather; former Presiding Justice Kay Cobb; former Justice Ann Lamar; Justice Dawn Beam; former Lt. Gov. Evelyn Gandy; former Court of Appeals Judge Mary Libby Payne, the first woman to serve on that court; Joy Lambert Phillips, the first woman president of the Mississippi Bar; Mississippi College School of Law Dean and former Mississippi Bar President Patricia Bennett; civil rights pioneer and former Assistant Secretary of State Constance Slaughter-Harvey; and U.S. District Judge Sharion Aycock.

Chief Judge Barnes said, "It's truly humbling to be on the list with the former award winners. That my name is now linked with these extraordinary ladies who previously won this award is

indeed humbling. I will do my best to live up to the award."

She said, "It's not that they were just the first, but what they did as the first." Judge Price was elected to the House of Representatives in 1943, and authored the state's Youth Court Act, creating Mississippi's first court system for juveniles. Gov. Hugh White appointed her to the Washington County Court in 1953. She was the first to put women on a jury when state law didn't permit women to serve. Justice Prather wrote the landmark decisions of *Albright v. Albright* and *Ferguson v. Ferguson*.

Chief Judge Barnes said, "Without these women, our true trailblazers, none of us would be sitting here today." She said that it is her intent "to endeavor to make the path easier for those who come after us."

Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph named Chief Judge Barnes to lead the Court of Appeals on Feb. 1, 2019. She also was the first woman Presiding Judge of the intermediate appellate court. She has served on the Court of Appeals for 15 years, having first been appointed by Gov. Haley Barbour on July 26, 2004. She has been elected three times.

Chief Judge Barnes grew up in Natchez. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Mississippi, *summa cum laude*, with majors in

classical civilizations and English. She earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law, where she graduated *magna cum laude*. She practiced law in Tupelo with Mitchell, McNutt and Sams for more than 18 years.

In 1996, she took sabbatical to study law at the University of Cambridge. She was one of three American students in the LL.M. program which admitted 152 attorneys from 48 countries. Her studies included international commercial litigation, comparative public law, international human rights, and law and practice of civil liberties. A member of Magdalene College, she earned her Master of Law in 1997.

She is a member of the Mississippi Judicial College Board of Governors and the Criminal Code Revision Consulting Group. She is a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation and a member of the University of Mississippi Lamar Order. She is a former member of the Access to Justice Commission and the Judicial Advisory Study Committee. She was president of the Lee County Bar Association and Lee County Young Lawyers Association. She is a member of All Saints Episcopal Church and the Mary Stuart Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, both of Tupelo.

## Maxwell, McDonald, Adams reappointed to judicial education committee



Supreme Court Justice James D. Maxwell II of Oxford, Court of Appeals Judge Deborah A. McDonald of Fayette and Leflore County Court Judge Kevin Adams of Greenwood were re-appointed to the Committee on Continuing



Judicial Education. The Conference of County Court Judges selected Judge Adams, who began his service on the Committee on Oct. 16, 2014. Justice Maxwell and Judge McDonald are appointees of the Chief



Justice. Justice Maxwell has served on the Committee since March 2, 2017. Judge McDonald has been a member since Feb. 28, having filled a vacancy on the Committee.

The two-year terms began Aug. 1.

The six-member Committee on Continuing Judicial Education exercises general supervisory authority over the administration of the Rules and Regulations for Mandatory Continuing Judicial Education and recommends rule changes to the Supreme Court. The rules govern the nature and number of mandatory judicial education hours which judges must receive before taking office and annually. The rules cover Supreme Court justices and judges of the Court of Appeals, Circuit, Chancery, County and Youth Courts, including Youth Court referees, as well as senior judges.

## Judge Emfinger named to Judicial Performance Commission; Judge Collins is alternate



Chief Justice Mike Randolph has appointed Circuit Judge John Emfinger of Brandon as a member of the Commission on Judicial Performance, and appointed Circuit Judge Christopher Collins of Union as an alternate member of the Commission.



Gov. Phil Bryant recommended Judge Emfinger and Judge Collins in a letter to the Supreme Court on July 16. Judge Emfinger has served as an alternate member of the judicial disciplinary body since Jan. 1, 2016, having previously been recom-

mended by the Governor. The new appointment is for a term which will end Dec. 31, 2021.

Judge Emfinger took the Commission position previously held by Circuit Judge James L. Roberts Jr. of Pontotoc. Judge Roberts stepped down from the Commission on June 13. Judge Roberts was appointed by the Supreme Court on the recommendation of the Governor as a member of the Commission for a term that began Jan. 1, 2016. He previously served for six years as an alternate member.

Judge Collins' term as an alternate member of the Commission also will end Dec. 31, 2021.

An alternate member sits on a hearing panel when a member has a conflict.

Judge Emfinger has been a Circuit Judge of the 20th Circuit Court District of Rankin and Madison counties since January 2011. He is former chairman of the Conference of Circuit Court Judges.

Judge Collins has served as Circuit Judge of the Eighth District of Leake, Neshoba, Newton and Scott counties since March 31, 2016, having been appointed by the Governor. He previously served for 16 years as a judge of the Tribal Courts of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

## Judiciary celebrates legacy of nation's first female federal trial judge



**Copiah County Chancery Clerk Steve Amos, at left, and U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth stand beside a portrait of U.S. District Judge Burnita Shelton Matthews.**

Judge Burnita Shelton Matthews' brothers were lawyers, but her father wanted her to be a musician. There were no women lawyers or judges in Copiah County, or in Mississippi 100 years ago.

On Sept. 16, Circuit Judge Tomika Harris-Irving, the first woman and first African-American judge of Mississippi's 22nd Circuit Court District, greeted a crowd of more than 100 who gathered in the courtroom in Hazlehurst to celebrate the historic career of Judge Matthews.

Judge Irving invoked the soaring aspirations of astronaut Mae Jemison, who said, "Never limit yourself because of others'

limited imagination; never limit others because of your own limited imagination."

Judge Matthews "was ahead of her time, and a trailblazer," said Judge Royce C. Lamberth, former Chief United States District Judge for the District of Columbia, who knew her well.

Matthews became the first female federal trial court judge in the nation when President Harry S. Truman appointed her to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on Oct. 21, 1949.

The state of Mississippi would wait another 58 years to see the first female federal district judge preside in a Mississippi

courtroom. Chief U. S. District Judge Sharion Aycock of Fulton was nominated by President George W. Bush on March 19, 2007, and confirmed by Congress on Oct. 4, 2007. She became Chief Judge of the Northern District of Mississippi – the first woman chief judge of the federal district court in Mississippi – on June 2, 2014.

Judge Aycock said that she learned of Judge Matthews after joining the federal bench. "Her story is incredible and so inspiring," Judge Aycock said.

Among the crowd that gathered to honor Judge Matthews' legacy were about a dozen women judges, including some

whose careers marked milestones for women in the judiciary. U.S. Magistrate Judge Linda Anderson of Jackson is the first female magistrate and the first African American magistrate of the Southern District of Mississippi. Chief U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Katharine Samson of Gulfport is the first woman bankruptcy judge in Mississippi and the first female chief bankruptcy judge in the state. Justice Dawn Beam of Sumrall is the only woman currently serving on the Supreme Court. Mississippi Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes of Tupelo is the state's first female Court of Appeals Chief Judge. All four of the female state Court of Appeals judges attended: Chief Judge Barnes, Presiding Judge Virginia C. Carlton of Jackson, Court of Appeals Judge Latrice Westbrooks of Lexington, and Court of Appeals Judge Deborah McDonald of Fayette.

Other guests included Judge James E. Graves Jr. of the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Chief Judge Daniel Jordan of the Southern District of Mississippi; U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves; Senior Judges David Bramlette III, Louis Guirrola Jr., and Tom S. Lee; and U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert Walker.

Matthews as a teenager may have sat in the courtroom in Hazlehurst where

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**Pictured after the ceremony are Judge James E. Graves Jr. of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, 22nd District Circuit Judge Tomika Harris-Irving, Mississippi Court of Appeals Judge Deborah McDonald and Court of Appeals Judge Latrice Westbrooks.**



**Justice Dawn Beam, Chief Judge Sharion Aycock of the Northern District of Mississippi and Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton of the Mississippi Court of Appeals were guests.**

the ceremony was held. The Copiah County Courthouse would have been new then. Construction was completed in 1903.

Matthews was interested in law from an early age. Her father, Burnell Shelton, was Copiah County Chancery Clerk and Tax

Collector. Matthews worked in the Chancery Clerk's office.

After a brief time teaching music in Fayette, Texas and Georgia, Matthews, a Cincinnati Conservatory of Music graduate, moved to Washington, D.C. There she could get

into law school, something not possible then in Mississippi. When she earned her second law degree in 1920, no firm or agency would hire her – not even the Veterans Administration, where she had worked by day as a clerk while attending classes at

night. So she formed her own successful law firm and joined the women's movement.

As a member of the National Woman's Party, Matthews participated in silent pickets outside the White House as women sought the right to vote. She would later recount that she never spoke during the pickets, as anyone who spoke was at risk of being arrested, and an arrest on her record could have prevented her from being able to practice law.

Matthews served as counsel to the National Woman's Party 1921-1934. The National Woman's Party was a leading force for passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which in 1920 granted women the right to vote. Matthews also worked on unsuccessful efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. Judge Lamberth said that one of her goals was to see adoption of the proposed amendment before she died. Congress adopted the ERA in 1972, but the measure failed to gain ratification in three-fourths of state legislatures.

Matthews also left her mark on Washington as a real estate lawyer. The U.S. Supreme Court sits on the site which was once the office of the National Woman's Party. William Howard Taft wanted the property to build a courthouse for the Supreme Court, which at that time heard cases in the Capitol. Taft, who was Chief Jus-

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Mississippi College School of Law Dean Patricia Bennett, Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes, Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens and U.S. Magistrate Judge Linda Anderson visit.



**Burnita Shelton Matthews**

tice of the U.S. Supreme Court after he served as President, prevailed in acquiring the property, but at a steeper price than the government wanted to pay. The National Woman's Party lost at condemnations proceedings that took the property, but Matthews negotiated a settlement of almost \$300,000 for the building, a huge sum for

that time. The Woman's Party moved to a spot nearby.

Judge Lamberth noted that U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg considered Judge Matthews a trailblazer and inspiration.

President Truman's appointment of Matthews was a recess appointment to a newly created seat on the court. President Truman nominated Matthews to the same position on Jan. 5, 1950. Judge Matthews was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on April 4, 1950, and received her commission on April 7, 1950.

Judge Matthews' commission, signed by the President, and her portrait are displayed in the courtroom in Hazlehurst.

Judge Lamberth noted that Judge Matthews hired only women as her law clerks. She believed in

providing opportunities to capable women in the male dominated field. Her former clerks were high achievers, including one who became a judge and two who became assistant U.S. attorneys.

As a federal district judge, Judge Matthews presided over trials for murder, rape, robbery and other crimes. Among famous defendants was Jimmy Hoffa, then vice-president of the teamsters union. A jury acquitted him of bribery.

Judge Matthews took senior status on March 1, 1968, but continued to hear cases for 10 years. In addition to presiding over trials, she sat on appellate panels of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. One of her notable cases was a 1971 U.S. Court of Appeals ruling that said disabled people receiving So-

cial Security benefits were entitled to hearings before benefits were terminated. She also heard cases before the United States Court of Customs and Patent Appeals. She had earned a master's degree in patent law in 1920 from the National University School of Law, now George Washington University Law School. She earned an LL.B. in 1919.

Judge Lamberth said that one of the highlights of his 1987 investiture was that Judge Matthews attended and wished him well. She died the following year in Washington at age 93. Judge Lamberth knew Judge Matthews before he went on the bench, from his time in the U.S. Attorney's Office. He recalled many conversations about her efforts as a suffragist. She was particularly interested in later policies regarding demonstrations. Lamberth, as Chief of the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office, was the point person coordinating with law enforcement regarding demonstrations around the Capitol.

Bessie Shelton Trovato lives near the Shelton Cemetery where Judge Matthews is buried. She said the event will help people across the state learn of the judge's contributions, especially in advancing the role of women.

Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens is a lifelong resident of Crystal Springs. "The incredible, uplifting saga of Judge Burnita Shelton Matthews was

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## New Webster County Courthouse in Walthall holds open house



County offices moved into the new Webster County Courthouse in Walthall on July 19. An open house was held Oct. 6.

Several hundred people crowded the halls of the new Webster County Courthouse in Walthall on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 6,

as county officials held an open house.

“We think that we have built a courthouse that is very pleasing to Webster

County and will last 100 years, like the old one did,” said Pat Cummings, President of the Webster County Board of Supervi-

sors. Cummings thanked everyone who worked together to make the new facility possible.

County offices moved into the new building on July 19, six and a half years after fire destroyed the old courthouse on Jan. 17, 2013.

The new 17,000 square foot, two-story brick Courthouse is at the intersection of Highway 9 and Highway 50. It has arched windows and entrance features reminiscent of the old building. JH&H Architects of Flowood was directed to design a building that captured some of the look of the old building, said architect Adam Haver. “Everyone loved the old one. We tried to not copy it, but use elements from it so that it paid homage,” he said.

County offices and the Board of Supervisors board room are on the first floor. Two courtrooms,

### Judge Burnita Shelton Matthews, *continued from Page 10*

news to me! I’ve known of the Shelton Cemetery for a long time, but had no idea that a person of such historic importance is buried there. Judge Shelton’s extraordinary life and her achievements – all highly unlikely during the times in which she lived – provide another good reason for me to be proud to be a Mississippian, and, in particular, a Copiah Countian. My only regret is that I didn’t know her.”

One of the happiest people was Copiah County Chancery Clerk Steve Amos, who organized the ceremony. Amos, an avid historian, devotes much energy to historic preservation. He called Judge Matthews’ history “one of

the American dreams.”

Judge Matthews was the third woman in the nation to serve at any level of the federal judiciary. In 1928, President Calvin Coolidge nominated Genevieve Rose Cline of Ohio to the U.S. Customs Court, now known as the Court of International Trade. In 1934, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt named Judge Florence Allen of Ohio to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.

In 1953, three years after Matthews was appointed to the federal bench, Gov. Hugh White appointed Mississippi’s first female judge, Zelma Wells Price of Greenville, to the Washington County Court. Price put women on juries

when state law didn’t permit women to serve.

Today, almost a third of state court judges are women: 50 of 150 judges, not including Justice Court and Municipal judges, whose ranks also include many women. Copiah County’s two Justice Court judges are women. Thirty percent of the lawyers licensed in Mississippi are woman: 2,752 of 9,033 in active practice. The President of the Mississippi Bar and deans of both law schools are women. Nationwide, there are 363 female federal trial and appellate judges, including three U.S. Supreme Court justices. Women make up one-third of active federal judges in the country.

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**Tax Collector Barbara Gore, Board of Supervisors President Pat Cummings and Board Vice President Paul Crowley are pictured at the open house.**



**Circuit Judges Joseph Loper and George Mitchell are pictured with Eupora businesswoman Janice McKinnis at the open house.**



**Carolyn Lang listens as Circuit Clerk Sherry Henderson talks to a guest in the Circuit Clerk's Office during the open house.**

judges' chambers and the jury room are upstairs.

"I couldn't be any happier," Circuit Judge Joseph Loper said as he looked over the large second floor circuit courtroom. It is built in a traditional style, with dark wood benches and furnishings, but has modern features including an electronic evidence presentation system and good acoustics.

Loper hasn't held court there yet. He will be the only one of two circuit judges and three chancellors to have presided in

both the old and new Courthouses.

After the fire, the early sentiment was to attempt to restore the old structure. But, Judge Loper said, "Long after we are gone, this building will still be here."

Webster County Chancery Clerk Russell Turner said it's been a pleasant adjustment. "It's nice to be back where you are not sitting on top of each other, where you can have a private conversation. It's great to go to court and it's just upstairs, and the board

meeting is in the same building. For six years we juggled that. It made us become very flexible."

After the fire, county offices moved into a building in Eupora that previously housed only Justice Court, the probation office and the Webster County Extension Service.

In her new office, Tax Collector Barbara Gore said, "We have more room. Our space is just arranged better."

During the open house, Webster County Circuit Clerk Sherry Henderson greeted visitors at the counter in her large office. In the former shared offices, "You could roll around in your chair and go where you needed to go." She added, "We were fortunate to have some place that we could all fit into. But it's a breath of fresh air being back out here."

Circuit Court held trials at the Choctaw County Courthouse in Ackerman while awaiting a new facility. "We have carried Webster County to Choctaw County in a box for

six and a half years," Henderson said.

Webster County Chancery Court used Eupora's municipal courtroom, and occasionally the Justice Court courtroom.

Turner said the new building and infrastructure cost almost \$6 million. The Courthouse was built with insurance proceeds from the fire, and a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission paid for infrastructure.

While they celebrated the new Courthouse, visitors also fondly recalled the old one. Emmy Eidson Stephenson said she grew up playing on the old Courthouse steps. Her grandmother lived across the street, and she lived within sight of the building. Her grandfather, M. M. Eidson, was Webster County Circuit Clerk in the 1940s.

"A lot of my memories are about that Courthouse. There wasn't a lot to do in Walthall. We would go sit on the Courthouse steps at night." She cried when her

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**Choctaw County Justice Court Judge Andy Stephenson, Emmy Eidson Stephenson and Carroll County Chancery Clerk Stanley “Sugar” Mullins visit the second floor.**



**Perval Hunt holds a copy of her marriage certificate. She and Garland Hunt were married 76 years ago in the old Webster County Courthouse in Walthall.**

sister called to tell her that the Courthouse was on fire.

The old Webster County Courthouse was special to Perval and Garland Hunt of West Point. “That’s where we became Mr. and Mrs. Hunt,” she said. They have been married for 76 years. Walthall Mayor H.T. Morehead performed their wedding at the Webster County Courthouse on April 24, 1943. She turned 93 Oct. 7. He is 95. When she heard about the open house, she knew that she had to attend.



**This photograph of the old Webster County Courthouse was taken in March 2011, less than two years before the devastating fire.**

## **Bar Memorial recognizes 76 lawyers who died during past year**



The annual Mississippi Bar Memorial Service, held on Oct. 15 at the Supreme Court, gave tribute to 76 lawyers who died during the past year.

Former judges who died included Chancellor Woodrow W. Brand Jr., Court of Appeals Judge James P. Brantley, Chancellor James N. Randall Jr. and Chancellor Thomas W. Teel.

## Family First Initiative job fair in Cleveland draws more than 500



**Job fair organizer Pam Chatman, at right, talks to Chris Jones of FedEx Ground and applicant Brenda Williams-Ford.**



**Job applicants sign in before completing applications and sitting for a job interview.**

More than 500 people lined up at a church gymnasium in Cleveland to apply for jobs as FedEx Ground package handlers during a Sept. 19 job fair organized by state, local and non-profit groups.

The parking lot was full and people began to fill the bleachers at the United Family Life Center by 9:30 a.m., half an hour before the job fair was scheduled to start. By 2:30 p.m., 515 people had signed up, said Pam Chatman, steering committee chair for the Mississippi Family First Initiative in Bolivar County.

“There is a great need,” Bolivar County District 5 Supervisor Larry King said as he watched people filling out applications and waiting to be interviewed. “This is a really positive thing that’s going on here today. People need jobs to build a better life for themselves and cut down on crime and social ills.” By the size of the crowd, “it says to me that young peo-

ple want to work. They want a job.”

Chatman, who has spearheaded organization of three job fairs in the past 10 months, said, “My number one focus is to show the state of Mississippi that the Mississippi Delta has a work force...We have a work force that wants to work.”

Last December, the retired television broadcaster set to work to recruit potential employers to hold job fairs for residents of the Delta. The first to come was FedEx Express, headquartered in Memphis. Chatman said that the company hired local people and now provides two buses during the day and three buses at night to transport workers. Representatives from Toyota’s Blue Springs plant held a job fair in Cleveland in August, attracting nearly 500 people. Applicants are waiting to see if they will be hired. FedEx Ground, a separate entity, sent a human resources team to

Cleveland on Sept. 19 to accept applications and conduct interviews for jobs as package handlers at its Olive Branch facility.

“We heard that there was a need,” said FedEx Ground Senior Human Resources Business Partner Chris Jones. “We have a need at our Olive Branch hub for full-time and part-time employees.”

Brenda Williams-Ford, 54, of Cleveland, came to the job fair hoping to land one of those jobs. She has been looking for a job since the compounding pharmacy where she had worked closed last spring. “My hope is that I get a job and let my work speak for itself. I’m a dedicated hard worker and a team player,” she said after her work interview.

Tamia Fleming, 18, of Cleveland, applied for part-time work. She is a student at Holmes Community College in Goodman.

Darius Walker, 20, of Memphis, has a semester of college in criminal jus-

tice. “There aren’t many jobs in this area so in order to find better work, you have to venture out,” he said.

Rundell James III, 21, of Mound Bayou balanced his one-year old son on his hip while filling out a form at the sign-in table. With a year of community college credit, he had applied for a job at a fast-food restaurant the day before. He saw a Facebook post about the job fair and came with hopes of better work. “I was trying to be here early, 10 on the dot, and it looks like I’m late,” he said, resigning himself to a wait for an interview.

Sharkey County Chancery and Circuit Clerk Murinda Williams heard about the job fair and arranged for a church van to transport local residents. “We brought a van with eight or nine people. People need jobs. We are trying to give them an opportunity.”

Veterans Administration

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## More than 130 seek help at Hinds County Family Law Clinic



Attorney Coolidge Anderson, at right, confers with Chancellor Tiffany Grove and attorney Jason Owens, at left, background, looks at a document with Chancellor Denise Owens. Chancellor Crystal Wise Martin is at left, foreground.

A Hinds Chancery Courtroom and the third floor lobby were packed on July 26 as people waited to get free legal help to establish guardianships for school enrollment, expunge records and file for

divorce.

The Hinds County Family Law Clinic was scheduled to help people who are too poor to hire an attorney. Forty people pre-registered and more than 90 came as walk-ins. Forty

two volunteer lawyers worked with clients in courtrooms and conference rooms. Four judges walked the crowded hallways, conferring with attorneys and signing documents if cases were able to be con-

cluded. Before 11:30 a.m., clinic organizers started turning people away, as they were not able to accommodate any more. The clinic was scheduled to end at 1 p.m., but lawyers and judges stayed until after 4 p.m. to offer help, according to Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project Executive Director Gayla Carpenter-Sanders.

The turnout was about twice what was expected, said Chancellor Crystal Wise Martin.

“It’s absolutely overwhelming and amazing. We find people every day in court that need assistance, and a lot of the matters are not very difficult,” Chancellor Wise Martin said.

But even simple legal matters can be daunting for people who can’t afford to hire a lawyer. The legal requirements of filing correct documents with proper pleadings mean that many unrepresented litigants have to make multiple trips to court to try to conclude a matter. Volunteer lawyers at the free legal clinic helped draft documents and gave legal advice to help move cases to conclusion.

Hinds County Chancellor Tiffany Grove said, “We have seen a substantial increase in pro se litigants, which demonstrates the need for this today, and the attendance just confirms that.”

Chancellor Grove and

## Bolivar County Family First Job Fair, *continued from Page 14*

Employment Coordinator Jennifer James and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Yoshekia Wilson came to ask about openings for their clients. They assist veterans with disabilities in finding employment.

Government and non-profit partners in the job fair included the Department of Human Services Division of Work Force Development, the Department of Employment Security, the Family Re-

source Center of North Mississippi and the Mississippi Family First Initiative.

Bolivar County is among eight counties in which Family First Initiative pilot programs were created a year ago to assist families in need. The 24-member local steering committee, with Chatman as chair, identified employment and transportation among their priorities for change, along with education, crime, substance abuse treatment and do-

mestic violence prevention.

The Mississippi Family First Initiative was created by the Commission on Children’s Justice. The Family First Initiative works to address needs of struggling families by directing them to services and resources that will strengthen families, improve family stability and create safer home environments for children.

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## Hinds Family Law Clinic, *continued from Page 15*

others would like to schedule the free legal clinics more often, based on the need. "Our hope is that we are going to do it quarterly," she said.

Chancellor Wise Martin agreed. "I would love to have these quarterly."

A follow-up clinic is scheduled for Oct. 18. for clients who were not able to conclude their matters.

Among the clients who sought services on July 26 was a grandmother who needed guardianships for five of her six grandchildren. Their mother died of breast cancer in 2016, Carpenter-Sanders said. The children range in age from 4 to 21. The grandmother obtained a judge's signature on five guardianships. She was able to enroll the school-age children.

The Chancery Court waived the \$150 per child guardianship filing fees, Carpenter-Sanders said. It was a huge help for the grandmother, who supports her family on an income of \$1,200 a month,

with \$900 of that from a disability benefit.

The annual guardianship clinic has been held in Hinds County since 2008. It is always scheduled a few days before the start of the school year to assist grandparents and other family members who need to obtain legal guardianships of children to enroll them in school. Chancellor Denise Owens started the annual clinic as a way to avoid delays for enrolling children in school.

Three attorneys from Jackson Public Schools were at the Courthouse to answer questions from parents and guardians on enrollment and other issues. JoAnne Nelson Shepherd, general counsel for Jackson Public Schools, said, "The District has a push to increase enrollment. In the Jackson Public School District, we are trying to make sure we register as many children as possible." The school year began Aug. 7.

The annual Hinds Coun-

ty guardianship clinic was expanded this year for other family law needs including uncontested irrecconcilable differences divorce, custody, visitation, name changes, birth certificate corrections, uncontested emancipation, power of attorney, simple wills and expungements.

Attorney Chad King regularly represents indigent parents in Hinds County Youth Court. At the clinic, he worked on divorce cases and was available to help with expungements. People with criminal records have a hard time getting hired. Some crimes are eligible to be expunged. "It gives them access to better jobs. It gives them every opportunity that everyone else has. It's a fresh start," King said.

Attorney Seth Shannon helped a man draft documents for expungement of arrests that did not result in convictions. "I'm helping him to move on with his life and not be saddled

with these charges."

Law students helped interview clients and draft documents under the supervision of attorneys. "It's a teaching moment, actually putting into practice all that legal education" said Edward Kennebrew of Jackson, in his third year of studies at Mississippi College School of Law.

The event was organized by the Hinds County Chancery Court and the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project in partnership with Mission First and Mississippi College School of Law, the Mississippi Center for Legal Services, Forman Watkins & Krutz LLP, the Capital Area Bar Association and AARP Mississippi.

Carpenter-Sanders said, "We had the backing of the Judiciary. We are fortunate in Hinds County to have four chancellors who want these services done and are willing to help recruit attorneys to get this done."

## Judge Starrett recognized for work with drug courts, *continued from Page 1*

National Drug Court Hall of Fame.

Judge Starrett started one of the first federal reentry courts in the country. He wanted offenders to have drug treatment and learn employment skills and coping skills to avoid lapsing back into drug addiction and criminal behavior after they served out their sentences. He

leads Federal Reentry Courts in the Southern District of Mississippi and serves as Chair of the Reentry Committee for the Fifth Circuit. He has served as chairman of the Mississippi Reentry Council since it began in December 2013. The Reentry Council works to create effective strategies to assist former inmates in

their return to society, reduce recidivism, provide ample funds for operating the state prison system and improve public safety.

Judge Starrett's 27-year judicial career began in 1992 when Gov. Kirk Fordice appointed him as Circuit Judge for the 14th Circuit Court District. In 2005, President George W. Bush appointed him to the

U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi. On April 30, he took senior status, but continues to carry a caseload.

He graduated from Mississippi State University and University of Mississippi School of Law.

He divides his time between residences in Hattiesburg and McComb.