

Mississippi Courts

April 2023

Published by the Administrative Office of Courts

Sharkey County Courthouse is sentinel amid tornado destruction



The Sharkey County Courthouse sits battered among the ruins of the

town of Rolling Fork, one of only a few buildings still standing in the path of

an F-4 tornado that cut a swath through the small Delta town on the evening

of March 24.

Part of the tile roof was ripped off. Daylight showed through a gaping hole in the roof over the second floor jury room. Bricks lay scattered from a damaged wall near the roofline, and a crack snaked down the rear of the building. Shattered glass and debris littered the second floor judges chamber. Tattered blinds rattled behind broken windows.

But the Courthouse, built in 1902, is largely intact – a stark contrast to the broad path of splintered structures and mangled trees in a razed landscape that stretches the length of the little town. The Courthouse is now

Continued on page 2

Drug intervention courts reach milestone of 10,000 graduates

Drug intervention courts in Mississippi marked a milestone of 10,000 graduates in March 2023 after years of offering life-changing programs for people struggling with drug addiction.

“Intervention courts work to help participants succeed,” said State Director of Intervention Courts Pam Holmes. “It takes teamwork. It takes a dedicated drug intervention court team working together and working with the community. It takes committed judges, coordinators, case managers and

field officers.”

The Legislature in recent years has given intervention courts additional resources to make a difference in the lives of people who struggle with addiction. The Legislature funded five pilot mental health courts which began operations this year. Those programs use a treatment approach in lieu of more traditional court procedures for non-violent offenders who have been screened and diagnosed with mental illnesses. The program includes screening, clinical assessment,

education, referral for treatment, counseling and rehabilitative care, service coordination and case management.

Holmes said, “The Legislature recognizes the measurable value of drug intervention and now, mental health treatment courts and the role these courts play in saving lives in all counties throughout the state. The 10,000 graduate milestone reinforces the ongoing legislative commitment to appropriate annual funds to financially support these court programs. The

state’s annual investment in drug intervention courts helps save the lives of participants in active addiction. Participation in drug court and successful completion represents significant savings in the millions of dollars each year and is the return on investment the state seeks.”

Intervention courts are an alternative to incarceration. Taxpayers get the benefit of not paying to incarcerate people who can in turn earn a living for themselves and support their families. Avoided

Continued on page 2



Circuit Judge Tony Terrett looks at damage in jury room.

visible from Highway 61. Circuit Judge Tony Terrett visited the Courthouse on March 29. "It is amazing. With all the damage, you can see the Courthouse still standing. Hopefully, this is symbolic that the heart of the community is still here," she said. "You look around and everything is destroyed, but the Courthouse is here. Maybe this is hope." Senior Circuit Judge M.

James Chaney said, "It's good to see that the structure in downtown Rolling Fork that seems to be most prominent is the Courthouse. (That is) compared to so many places that don't have anything standing, just a pile of bricks. Maybe that it is still standing will give hope to people." Sharkey County Chanery and Circuit Clerk

Continued on page 3



A piece of roof was ripped away over the jury room.



Daylight streams through a hole in ceiling above jury room.

Drug intervention courts milestone, *continued from page 1*

incarceration costs for intervention court participants saved \$57.6 million during the 2022 fiscal year. Since FY 2006, intervention courts saved Mississippi taxpayers more than \$1 billion. With requirements that participants pay all their fines and fees, intervention courts also return money to the counties. Total fines collected for FY2022 was \$1,387,715, and total fees collected was \$1,832,758. Babies born drug-free saved taxpayers an estimated \$701.25 million since 2006.

Intervention courts give offenders whose non-violent crimes are rooted in drug addiction an opportunity to put their lives in order and become productive and self-supporting. People who

were alienated from their families often reunite with their loved ones. Some are able to regain custody of their children.

People who struggle with addiction receive access to resources to help them recover, including access to in-patient and out-patient treatment and counseling. The average participant will spend three years in the program. They are required to abstain from drug and alcohol use. If they don't comply, they will be imprisoned.

Intervention courts equip participants with job skills, education and life skills that will enable them to support themselves and their families. Participants are required to get and keep a job. Before participating in drug intervention court, many spent years

focused only on getting their next fix. Intervention courts provide the framework of discipline to help participants learn to go to work, on time, every day.

Business and industry play a vital role in the success of intervention programs when employers are willing to hire people who have made mistakes. Employers provide job skills and training and help instill a work ethic. Employers receive the benefit of workers who are under the supervision of a probation officer and are drug-tested as often as twice a week.

Intervention courts require participants to seek a high school equivalency degree if they dropped out of school. With the help and encouragement of intervention courts, 881 people have earned a high

school equivalency degree, 774 attended vocational schools and 1,550 attended post-secondary schools since 2015.

Intervention court participants also are required to do community service. Their work ranges from picking up litter to helping at a local food pantry. The community benefits from their efforts. Participants who have gotten a second chance gain an understanding of the need to give back. Intervention court participants performed more than 21,000 hours of community service during FY 2022.

Mississippi's adult felony drug intervention courts had a recidivism rate of 2.9 percent, compared to a recidivism rate of 35.4 percent for people who go to prison and are released.



Circuit and Chancery Clerk Murindia Williams, seated at left, Tax Collector Donna Anderson and Board of Supervisors President Bill Newsom talk in the clerk’s office.

Murindia Williams was out of town when the storm hit. “When I came back, I turned the corner and I thought I was going to be absolutely sick. I’ve never been able to see the Courthouse from my back door,” she said. Several days later, she got disoriented while driving and couldn’t find her way. Mountains of debris and downed trees line the roads. Houses, trees, street signs and landmarks are gone.

“I feel like I want to cry and the more I look, the worse it gets,” she said on the morning of March 29 as she and Tax Collector Donna Anderson worked in their dark offices on the first floor. Offices and records were intact, although the place smelled of mildew from wet carpet. The power was off. “We are doing as much as we can by hand,” Williams said.

Power was restored a few days later, allowing Circuit and Chancery clerk staff to have access to doc-

uments in Mississippi Electronic Courts. Sharkey County Chancery Court joined MEC in 2017, and Circuit Court in 2021.

Circuit and Chancery Court records in paper files and row upon row of docket books sat undamaged in the records room. But a rainstorm a few days later sent water pouring through the leaking roof, putting records in peril. Bill Newsom, president of the Sharkey County Board of Supervisors, said records were not water damaged, but “we’ve got humidifiers running in the Courthouse.”

Williams and her staff covered the files to protect them on Friday before the rain hit on Sunday. She found standing water that Monday morning.

“I fell on my knees and cried. It hurt me so bad. I’ve been at that courthouse longer than my house that I own,” she said. She started work as deputy clerk in 1992. But she says she’s fortunate.

Her home has roof and window damage, but she’s able to live there. “I’m fine. Some people, all they have is a slab.”

Chancery Court rescheduled some matters for the May Calendar, Williams said. Hearings on the June calendar can be held in Mayersville in neighboring Issaquena County.

The next Circuit Court proceedings were scheduled for June, “so we don’t have anything really pressing,” Judge Chaney said. He and Judge Terrett have discussed whether to conduct Sharkey County proceedings in Issaquena or Warren County. The courthouse in Mayersville is closer, but Vicksburg has more accommodations.

The first floor Justice Court offices were heavily damaged. Windows and glass doors were blown out, the ceiling fell, furnishings and computers were damaged and there was water on the floor. “It was glass everywhere and paper everywhere. It was a

total disaster” said Justice Court Clerk Princess Turner.

Justice Court records from before 2019, which were stored on the third floor, suffered water damage, along with some first-floor records. “We are drying them out...We are trying to salvage as much as we can,” Turner said.

Fortunately, all Justice Court operations are computerized. Despite the damage, “the information on the hard drive is still there,” Turner said.

A double-wide FEMA trailer in the back parking lot serves all county offices. The Circuit and Chancery Clerk, the Justice Court Clerk, the Tax Collector and other county offices moved to the FEMA trailer. “They are selling car tags. People can pay their garbage bill there,” Newsom said. The Board of Supervisors meets there.

Preservation architects and other experts with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History surveyed damage to the 121-year-old Courthouse on March 29. Barry White, director of the Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Archives and History, said, “This is a very salvageable building. It’s going to take a lot of work. The first priority is to stabilize it and get it water tight, put on a temporary roof.”

Preservation architect Belinda Stewart of Eupora agreed. “It’s absolutely repairable. There’s just a lot of work to be done,” said Stewart, an independent architect who specializes in historic preservation. She accompanied MDAH staff on the sur-

Continued on page 4



The Sharkey County Courthouse, in background, is surrounded by destroyed buildings.



The American flag flies, suspended from a crane, over damaged buildings in Rolling Fork.

vey.
 The Courthouse is designated as a Mississippi landmark, White said. Department of Archives and History has permitting and regulatory authority over such landmarks. “We will expedite anything that needs to happen” toward making repairs, he said.

A roofing company and a subcontractor are at work making temporary repairs to the Courthouse to prevent further water damage. More extensive renovation will follow.

Newsom said, “We are going to do everything possible and by the book” to see that renovations

comply with Archives and History’s requirements.

Newsom said the cost figures he’s heard for repairs are in the range of \$4 million to \$5 million. Insurance may pay for some of the cost.

People wanting to help have swarmed the tiny town. Warren County

Court Judge Marcie Southerland went to Rolling Fork on the day after the tornado struck and has made multiple trips there since. She said she saw devotion to duty tested and proven. For instance, Child Protection Services worker Shirlene Hill of Rolling Fork lost her home. The next Monday morning, she was in Youth Court in Warren County. Judge Southerland said Hill told her, “I have to be here. I’ve got children to take care of.” It showed her dedication to her job and the children she serves, Judge Southerland said.

Warren County EOC Director John Elfer coordinated search and rescue efforts in Rolling Fork immediately after the tornado hit. “This is Katrina on a smaller scale. There are 255 houses gone,” said Elfer, who rode out Hurricane Katrina in Gulfport. In 30 years of work in emergency operations, “I’ve never been involved in one that had this many injuries and as many lives lost.”

Thirteen people were killed in Sharkey County; a total of 21 died in Sharkey, Humphreys, Carroll and Monroe counties. Winds from the wedge tornado reached as high as 170 miles per hour as the monster tore a southwest to northeast path nearly 60 miles long.

Newsom recalled looking outside when he heard the roar. He saw the huge wedge tornado in flashes of lightning. “I’ll never forget the sound,” he said. He and his wife took refuge in their storm cellar. Their dog Todd ran away. Insurance declared the house a loss. Todd survived. They found him unhurt under a truck.

21 new judges recently sworn in to trial court bench



Newly elected judges gathered for a group picture at the University of Mississippi School of Law on December 5, 2022. Several judges who were appointed earlier also participated in training provided by the Mississippi Judicial College.

Twenty-one new trial court judges have taken the bench since January 1. November 2022 elections brought 19 new judges to the bench, and there were two appointments to fill vacancies. There are three new chancellors, nine new Circuit Court judges and nine new County Court judges.

Here's an introduction to the new judges:



Chancellor Ashlee Cole of

Gautier was elected to the 16th Chancery District. She practiced law in Jackson, George and Greene counties for more than 10 years. She previously was a special master in Jackson County Chancery Court and was a guardian ad litem for Jackson, George and Greene counties. She was municipal court prosecutor for the city of Moss Point. She is former president of the Jackson County Bar Association. She is a member of the Pascagoula Rotary Club and Junior Auxiliary of Pascagoula-Moss Point. She served as PTO president of Resurrection Catholic School. She is a graduate of East Central High School and the University of Alabama, and earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



Chancellor Tametrice Hodges of Jackson was elected to the 5th Chancery District. She practiced law in Jackson for 12 years, doing family law in private practice, then as Hinds County assistant district attorney. She volunteered with Mission First and was a member of the Mississippi Bar Child Welfare and Advocacy Committee. She volunteers at Stewpot and is a corporate board member of

Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi. She is active in PTA and mentors middle school students. She attended Piney Woods Country Life School. She is a graduate of Denison University in Granville, Ohio, and Mississippi College School of Law.



Chancellor Chase Ford Morgan of Sumrall was elected to the 10th Chancery District. She

Continued on Page 6



Fifth District Chancellor Tametrice Hodges speaks after taking the oath of office on Dec. 29.

cuit District. She practiced law for 24 years. She was Clay County Prosecuting Attorney and prosecutor for the city of West Point. She is a fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation and served on the Board of Commissioners of the Mississippi Bar. She was chair and board member of West Point Clay County Community Growth Alliance, president of the West Point Rotary Club and Rotary assistant District Governor. She was parish chancellor, vestry member and Sunday School teacher at Episcopal Church of the Incarnation.



Circuit Judge Debra Gibbs of Jackson was elected to the 7th Circuit District of Hinds County. She practiced law for 22 years. She served in the Mississippi House of Representatives from District 72, representing Hinds and Madison counties, for six years. She served as vice-chair of the Tourism Committee and was a member of the Banking and Financial Services, Education, Ethics, Judiciary B, Judiciary En Banc and Medicaid committees. She taught accounting at Jackson State University and was founding director of JSU's School of Business Center for Professional Development. She served as Director of Accounting and Finance at the Mississippi

practiced law for 13 years before she was elected to the bench. She currently serves as president of the South Central Mississippi Bar Association. She served for several years on the Family Law Section of the Mississippi Bar, including as chair 2016-2017. She was selected in 2010 as a national member of the Order of Barristers, and was named in 2014 in the Top 10 Under 40 in Mississippi by the National Academy of Family Law Attorneys. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration in international business with a minor in Spanish from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



Circuit Judge Carmen Brooks Drake of Natchez was elected to the 6th Circuit District. She practiced law for 25 years. She was Adams County Prosecutor from January 2019 until she took the bench. She was a public defender 2008-2018, and was Youth Court defender and a guardian ad litem 2006-2008. She was Port Gibson Municipal Court Judge

2017-2018 and was Port Gibson City Attorney 2018-2022. She was CEO of AJFC Community Action Agency, Inc. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Jackson State University and a law degree from George Washington University Law School.



Circuit Judge Michelle Easterling of West Point was elected to the 16th Cir-



10th District Chancellor Chase Ford Morgan, surrounded by her family, takes the ceremonial oath at an investiture on April 13 in Hattiesburg.

Department of Human Services. Gov. Haley Barbour appointed her as a Commissioner of the Mississippi Workers Compensation Commission in 2010. She grew up in Gulfport and attended Gulfport Public Schools. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from the University of Southern Mississippi, a Masters of Business Administration from Mississippi College and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. She was a law clerk for Justice Jim Smith.



Circuit Judge Lee "Jay" Howard V of Starkville was elected to

the 16th Circuit District. He has practiced law for more than 14 years. He served as an assistant district attorney in the 5th District Circuit Court for 12 years. He was elected to the judgeship which his father held for 33½ years. He earned Bachelor and Masters degrees in business administration from Mississippi State University and a Juris Doctor from Mississippi College School of Law. He served as a law clerk in the 20th Circuit Court.



Circuit Judge Alan "Devo" Lancaster of Grenada was elected to the 5th

Circuit District. He has practiced law for 45 years. He was Winona Municipal Judge for 12 years, and Grenada Municipal Judge eight years. For 36 years, he was attorney for the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, the Montgomery County Economic Development District and the North Central Planning and Development District. He was attorney for the Carroll-Montgomery Regional Correctional Facility for 17 years. He was chair of the Bar Young Lawyers Committee, the Litigation/General Practice Section, Court Liaison and Judicial Administration Committee and the Local Bar Leadership Committee. He was Executive Director of the Board of Bar Commissioners, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Bar Foundation for 21 years, and President of the Montgomery County Bar Association. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Mississippi, a Masters Degree from Mississippi State

University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



Circuit Judge Robert "Keith" Miller of Pascagoula was elected to the 19th Circuit District. He practiced law for 30 years. He was appointed to the Jackson County Court on May 28, 2022. He was Municipal Court judge in Moss Point for five years. He served as District Attorney for the 19th District. He also was assistant district attorney, city prosecutor for Ocean Springs and Moss Point, and was a Special Assistant Attorney General. He is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi. He earned a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law.



Circuit Judge William "Hunter" Nowell of Merigold was elected to the 11th Circuit District. He practiced law for more than 16



Circuit Judge Carmen Brooks Drake, second from left, is pictured with her husband, Reginald Drake, left, Court of Appeals Judge Deborah McDonald, who administered the oath on Dec. 29, and Adams County Circuit Clerk Eva Givens.

years. Previous service includes Bolivar County Court Judge for eight and a half years, attorney for the town of Merigold, and public defender in Cleveland, Rosedale, Ruleville and Bolivar County Justice Court. He earned a bachelor's degree in finance from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from University of Mississippi School of Law.



Circuit Judge Calvin Taylor of Ocean Springs was elected to the 19th Circuit District. He practiced law for 30 years. Previous service includes Ocean Springs Municipal Judge

for five years, judge pro tempore in municipal courts of Moss Point and Gautier and Jackson County Youth Court, Jackson County Chancery Court special master, and prosecutor pro tempore for Pascagoula and Jackson County. He is former president of the Jackson County Bar Association. He earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



Circuit Judge Brad Touchstone of Purvis was appointed to the 15th Circuit District on Jan. 1. He

practiced law for 13 years. He served for four years as Lamar County Court and Youth Court Judge. He was state Representative for House District 101 2016-2018. He was County Attorney for Lamar County 2010-2015. He graduated from Pearl River Community College, earned bachelor and masters of business administration from Millsaps College, and earned a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law.



County Court Judge Alison Baker of Gulfport was elected to Harrison County Court. She prac-

ticed law for 17 years, 13 as assistant district attorney in the 2nd Circuit. She was president of the Harrison County Bar, chair of the Unauthorized Practice of Law Committee and Women in the Profession Committee, a member of the Board of Bar Commissioners and a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation. She was Mississippi Young Lawyer of the Year 2013. She served on the Access to Justice Commission and was Board President of the Gulf Coast Center for Non-Violence. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



County Court Judge David Brewer of Summit was elected to the Pike County Court. He practiced law for 21 years. He served as Pike County Youth Court Prosecutor, Pike County Attorney and McComb Municipal Court Prosecutor. He was interim county attorney and Youth Court prosecutor for Walthall County and interim city prosecutor for Tybertown Municipal Court. He is former president of the Southwest Mississippi Bar Association. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in behavioral science from the U.S. Air Force



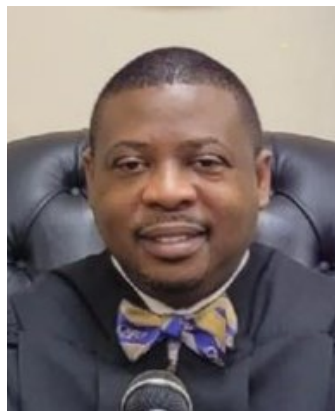
Retiring Circuit Judge Lee Howard IV, at left, swears in his son Lee “Jay” Howard V on Dec. 29. Mary Howard holds her son’s robe.

Academy and served as a Missile Combat Crew Commander at Minot Air Force Base. He earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law and a Masters of Social Science in sociology with a minor in psychology from the University of Mississippi.



County Court Judge Tiffany Kilpatrick of Oxford was elected to the newly created Lafayette County Court. She practiced law for 17 years. She was a law clerk for U.S. Magistrate Judge S. Allan Alexander. She is an adjunct professor at the University of Mississippi School of Law, teaching legal research. She was

President of the Tri-County Young Lawyers Association and on the Executive Board of the Young Lawyers Division of the Mississippi Bar, Women in the Profession Committee and the Gender Fairness Task Force. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor, *cum laude*, from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



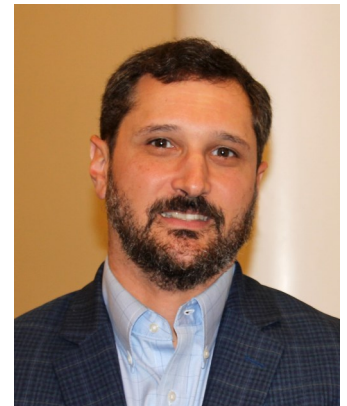
County Court Judge James K. Littleton III of Greenwood was elected to the Leflore County Court. He practiced law for 24 years. He served as Leflore County Justice Court Judge and public defender in Sunflower County. He

was Greenwood municipal judge and was city attorney for the towns of Greenwood, Arcola and Mound Bayou. He is a graduate of Mississippi Valley State University and William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul, Minn.



County Court Judge Joseph P. Parker of Purvis was appointed to the Lamar County Court on Feb. 20. He practiced law for 15 years. He was Lamar County and Youth Court prosecuting attorney and prosecuting attorney for the city of Lumberton. He is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi and earned a Juris Doctor from University of Mississippi School

of Law.



County Court Judge Stephen Spencer of Saitlilo was elected to the Lee County Court. He practiced law in Tupelo for more than 16 years. He served as a court appointed guardian ad litem in Chancery Court for four years. He was president of the Lee County Bar Association and the Lee County Young Lawyers. He served on the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from Mississippi College School of Law. He was a law clerk for Court of Appeals Judge Donna Barnes.



County Court Judge Aelicia Thomas of Rosedale was elected to the Bolivar County Court. She has practiced law for

Continued on Page 10

25 years. She was Mayor of Rosedale and Bolivar County Prosecuting Attorney. She was Chair of the Board of Directors for Bolivar County Community Action Agency. She is a member and minister of Changing Your World Ministries in Rosedale. She is co-founder and Executive Director of the non-profit I Believe Project. She served on the legislative committee of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association. She is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and the Order of Eastern Star. She grew up in Maben. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Alcorn State University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



County Court Judge Lee Ann S. Turner of Starkville was elected to the newly created Oktibbeha County Court. She practiced law for 26 years. Her practice included family law and other chancery court matters. In 2009, she was appointed special master for commitments and Youth Court Referee for Oktibbeha County. She also served as a guardian ad litem. She was the Starkville School District's Student Disciplinary Hearing Officer, and served on the Board of Directors of Safe Haven, a domestic



Circuit Judge Calvin Taylor, at left, takes oath before Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens on Jan. 3.



Pike County Court Judge David Lee Brewer, left, takes the oath of office from his predecessor, Judge John Price, on Dec. 15. Judge Brewer's wife Deidre holds the Bible.

violence shelter in Columbus. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in communications from the University of Alabama and a Juris Doctor from the University of Alabama School of Law.

County Court Judge Stacie Zorn of Ocean Springs was elected to the Jackson County Court. She practiced law for 19 years. She served as a Chancery Court family master, and as Ocean Springs municipi-

pal judge pro tempore. She



served as an ambassador for the United MSD Foundation. She earned a Bachelor of Science in psychology from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. While in law school, she was a member of the Public Interest Law Clinic and the Delta Theta Phi Fraternity, serving as both president and treasurer.

12th District Chancellor Larry Primeaux retired on March 31



Chancellor Larry Primeaux speaks at his retirement reception at the Lauderdale County Courthouse on March 24.

Chancellor Larry Primeaux of Meridian retired on March 31.

He left the bench to take care of his wife of 51 years. Lisa Meierhoefer Primeaux, a retired registered nurse, died April 8. She was 73.

The Governor is expected to appoint a judge to the vacancy, with the appointee to serve until January 2025. A special election is expected to be scheduled in November 2024, with that judge taking office in January 2025.

Judge Primeaux, 73, served for 16 years as one of two chancellors of the 12th Chancery Court. He took office on Jan. 2, 2007. The 12th Chancery District includes Lauderdale and Clarke counties.

Judge Primeaux served as chair of the Conference of Chancery Judges 2018-2019. He also served a term as vice-chair of the conference. He was a member of the Mississippi

Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules 2010-2022. He was a member of the Mississippi Commission on Guardianships and Conservatorships, which proposed legislation that the Mississippi Legislature adopted in 2019 as the GAP Act, for “guard and protect.”

He published the award-winning Better Chancery Practice Blog for 10 years. Editors of the *ABA Journal* in 2016 selected the publication as one of the nation's 100 best blogs for a legal audience. Judge Primeaux stopped publishing his weekly legal analysis in June 2020, but the blog, still available online, remains a highly regarded source of information about family law practice.

Judge Primeaux practiced law for 33 years before being elected to the bench. He practiced law for two years in Memphis, then worked as an appeals officer for the U.S. Civil

Service Commission in Atlanta for four years. He was managing attorney for the former East Mississippi Legal Services office 1978-1981. He began his private law practice in Meridian in 1981. He served as attorney for the city of Meridian, the Meridian Civil Service Commission, the Meridian Airport Authority and the Meridian Transportation Commission. He is a former president of the Lauderdale County Bar Association and former chairman of the State Charity Hospital Board. He served on the East Mississippi State Hospital Community Advisory Committee, and on the boards of directors of the Lauderdale County Group Home, St. Francis

Homes Inc., and Friendship Center. He was president of United Way of Lauderdale County and of the Mental Health Association of Lauderdale County. He is a former director of the Meridian Rotary Club. He was a member of the East Mississippi Business Development Corporation and of the Navy League of Meridian.

The Abbeville, La., native attended the University of Southwestern Louisiana and Nicholls State University. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, sociology and anthropology from the University of Mississippi, and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Court Administrator Bethany Lewis retires



Court Administrator Bethany Lewis retired from the 15th Chancery Court on March 31 after 23 years of service. Pictured with her at her March 23 retirement reception are Chancellor Joseph Durr and former Chancellor Ed Patten.

Legislation strengthens access to court language interpreters

The 2023 Mississippi Legislature revised laws requiring language interpreters for people of limited English proficiency in court proceedings to provide broader access to assistance for people who don't understand English.

The new law, which goes into effect July 1, 2023, says, "A Limited English Proficient (LEP) individual is entitled to use an interpreter in any instance arising out of or pertaining to the individual's involvement in litigation." This provision ensures that LEP individuals have a right to an interpreter during all phases of litigation, including hearings and depositions. This provision applies not only to litigant, but also to witnesses, said Deenie Miller, director of language access for the Administrative Office of Courts.

With regard to criminal cases, Section 99-17-7 says the court "shall" appoint a "qualified" interpreter "at no cost to the defendant" with the cost borne by the county or municipality.

"The cost of the interpreter can no longer be assessed to the LEP," Miller told a meeting of the Access to Justice Commission on April 18 in Jackson.

The Administrative Office of Courts requested the legislation to make sure that people of limited English proficiency receive all of the protections required by federal law.

The legislation expanded the definition of who is a person of limited English proficiency, or LEP, beyond the former definition

of simply a party or witness who cannot readily understand or communicate in spoken English. New language in the statute adds "or who does not speak English as his or her primary language" and "has a limited ability to read, speak, write or understand English."

Miller said, "There has been a lot of argument as to who has to have an interpreter, so this takes that question out."

The legislation recognizes three categories of court interpreters: certified, registered and non-credentialed and defines those. The legislation also adopts an order of preference, with certified interpreters first, then registered, then non-credentialed. "This will ensure that every LEP individual has the right to the most qualified interpreter available," Miller said.

"Certified court interpreter" means an interpreter who successfully has met all requirements promulgated by the Administrative Office of Courts to be designated a registered court interpreter and has scored at least 70 percent on each of the three sections of an approved criterion-referenced oral performance examination.

"Registered court interpreter" means an interpreter who has attended an approved two-day, 14-hour ethics and skill building workshop; passed an approved criterion-referenced written examination with a minimum overall score of 80 percent; submitted to a criminal background check;



Deenie Miller, director of language access for the Administrative Office of Courts, outlines provisions of 2023 court interpreter legislation to the Access to Justice Commission.

provided verification of the legal right to work in the United States; executed the Interpreter Oath; and satisfied any additional requirements that AOC may establish in order to be listed as a registered court interpreter on the roster.

"Non-credentialed interpreter" means an interpreter who has not met the requirements promulgated by AOC to be classified as a registered or certified court interpreter.

House Bill 1217 was introduced by House Judiciary A and Judiciary En Banc Chair Angela Cocke and House Judiciary A Vice-Chair Rep. Thomas U. Reynolds of Charleston and Rep. Otis Anthony of Indianola. The legislation was adopted without any changes to the language proposed by AOC, Miller said. Gov. Tate Reeves approved the legislation on March 13.

The Legislature also

appropriated \$150,000 to the court's budget for language access. The funds will help efforts to make LEP individuals aware of their right to an interpreter. Miller said, "A big thing is going to be having signs in the courtrooms so that people know they are entitled to an interpreter."

AOC provides all state courts with a list of language interpreters who have demonstrated proficiency in oral and written interpretation of court proceedings.

The Language Access Coordinator assists the courts in meeting the needs of people with limited English proficiency. The Coordinator is in charge of educating judges, court staff and attorneys about requirements for providing court interpreters for people of limited English proficiency as well as recruiting more foreign language interpreters.

Invisible Wounds of War Symposium targets veterans' legal issues

Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton of the Mississippi Court of Appeals, Circuit Judge Kelly Mims and Intervention Court Coordinator Lucy Davenport were among panelists at the Invisible Wounds of War symposium on March 31 at Mississippi College School of Law.

The 2023 Law Review Symposium explored legal issues facing veterans.

Judge Carlton, of Jackson, has more than 24 years of military service. As an Army JAG officer, she served at various times as prosecutor, defense counsel, deputy staff judge advocate, staff judge advocate and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Army. She served as a mili-



Circuit Judge Kelly Mims and Intervention Court Coordinator Lucy Davenport participate in March 31 panel.



Judge Virginia Carlton is a retired military judge.

tary trial judge for the U.S. Army Reserve, then as a military appellate judge on the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals.

Judge Mims, of Tupelo, retired from the Army National Guard at the rank of brigadier general in Au-

gust 2022 after 34 years of military service. He served three tours of active duty, including two deployments to the Middle East in Operation Desert Storm/ Shield and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Davenport, of Hatties-

burg, has served as coordinator of the 12th Circuit Intervention Court since the program was created in 2003. The 12th Circuit has one of the state's original Veterans Courts.

Adoption ceremonies celebrate forever homes for foster children

Adoption ceremonies were held in Meridian, Gulfport, Jackson and Pascagoula as the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services worked with attorneys and judges across the state to finalize adoptions for 129 foster children in its Home for the Holidays campaign.

Adoptions at the Dec. 19 Jackson ceremony included teenagers who had been in foster care since they were toddlers. Angel-leek Johnson of Jackson, who adopted a 14-year-old whom she has fostered since age 4, said, "We are excited that this day has finally come. This is her forever home."

As a teacher, Roshunda Harris of Byram has seen siblings in foster care separated. She asked to adopt siblings to keep them to-

gether. She adopted 15- and 12-year-old sisters. Earlier, she adopted brothers. "I wanted to be part of the change."

Chancellor Tiffany Grove presented each child with an adoption certificate. "I am pleased to be able to give you the first thing with your new name," she told them.

Judge Grove said she was especially happy to get to preside over the ceremony. "My mother was adopted, and my uncle."

CPS Commissioner Andrea Sanders was adopted when she was a week old. Her parents had adopted a son before her. She said there is an urgency to find permanency for children who cannot be reunited with biological family. "We are all committed to seeing that children don't



Chancellor Tiffany Grove gives certificates to adopted siblings.

stay in custody one day longer than they have to."

Attorney Will Manuel was beaming as he left the courthouse after assisting in finalizing some of the adoptions. "It's nice to do something where everyone

leaves the courthouse happy," he said. He ordinarily deals with products liability and commercial and employment litigation, but adoption is close to his heart. "Both of my kids are adopted."

Chancery, Circuit, County Court Conferences elect leadership



Chancellor Gerald Martin



Chancellor Cynthia Brewer



Chancellor Larry Little



Judge Dal Williamson



Judge Tomika Irving



Judge Christopher Schmidt

Chancellor Gerald Martin of Raleigh was elected chair of the Conference of Chancery Court Judges during the Fall 2022 Conference. Chancellor Cynthia Brewer of Madison was elected vice-chair, and Chancellor Larry Little of Oxford was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

Circuit Judge Dal Williamson of Laurel was elected chair of the Conference of Circuit Court Judges. Circuit Judge Tomika Irving of Fayette was elected Conference vice-chair, and Circuit Judge Christopher Schmidt of Pass Christian was elected secretary-treasurer.

County Court Judges re-elected Madison County

Court Judge Edwin Hannan as chairman, Washington County Court Judge Vernita King Johnson as vice-chair, and Lauderdale County Court Judge Veldore Young Graham as secretary of the Conference of County Court Judges.

Conference elections were held Oct. 27 during the fall Trial and Appellate Judges Conference in Biloxi.

Judge Martin previously served as vice-chair of the Conference of Chancery Judges. He has served on the 13th Chancery Court bench since January 2015. The district includes Covington, Jefferson Davis, Lawrence, Simpson and

Smith counties. He previously served as a court appointed mediator in Circuit and Chancery courts, and as a special master. He served as attorney for the Smith County Economic Development District, was attorney for the towns of Raleigh and Taylorsville, and was municipal prosecutor for Raleigh. While in private practice, he provided pro bono legal counsel to local churches, youth sports leagues and other non-profit organizations. He coached children's soccer and was president of Mississippi 4-H. Judge Martin earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Mississippi State University and a law degree from

the University of Alabama School of Law.

Judge Brewer previously served as chair of the Conference of Chancery Judges in 2012, and as vice-chair in 2011. She has served on the 11th Chancery Court since January 2007, hearing cases in Madison and Leake counties. She previously served for four years as Madison County Court Judge, where her duties also included part of the docket for the Madison County Youth Court. She initiated a Teen Court to use peer pressure to hold juveniles accountable for their actions. She also previously served as a special master in Chancery Court, and as a Municipal, County and Youth Court prosecutor in Hinds County. She started the Jackson Metropolitan Crime Commission's Courtwatch program in the 1990s. She served on the Commission on Judicial Performance as the alternate Chancery Court member. Judge Brewer earned her undergraduate degree from the University of South Alabama, and her Juris Doctorate from Mississippi College School of Law. She is a visiting instructor at the National Judicial College in Reno. She previously served as an adjunct professor at the Mississippi College School of Law.

Judge Little has served as secretary-treasurer of the Conference of Chancery Judges since October 2019. He took office as chancellor in the 18th Chancery Court in January 2019. The district includes Benton, Calhoun, Lafa-

Continued on page 15



Judge Edwin Hannan



Judge Vernita King Johnson



Judge Veldore Young Graham



Judge Thomas Broome

ette, Marshall and Tippah counties. He served as district attorney for the Third Circuit for 10 years, and for 19 years as part-time Oxford Municipal Judge. He was an adjunct professor at the University of Mississippi School of Law. He is a graduate of the University of Mississippi, and earned his law degree from the former Jackson School of Law, now Mississippi College School of Law.

Judge Williamson previously served as conference vice-chair and secretary-treasurer. He has served as Jones County Circuit Judge since January 2015. He practiced law in Laurel and Jones County for 34 years before election to the bench. He is a past president of the Jones County



Referee Joey Cobb

Bar Association, and served as a Bar Commissioner. He earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law. He is a graduate of Jones County Junior College and Mississippi State University.

Judge Irving previously served as conference secretary-treasurer. She has served as judge of the 22nd Circuit Court District since January 2019. The district includes Claiborne, Copiah and Jefferson counties. She previously served for 12 years as Municipal Judge for the town of Crosby, and for six years as Jefferson County Justice Court Judge. Her private law practice included family law, criminal defense and civil litigation in state and federal courts. She

earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in political science and journalism from the University of Southern Mississippi, a Master of Arts degree in political science from Mississippi State University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. She has doctoral studies in administration of justice from USM, and teaching certification to teach 7th through 12th grade social studies and journalism.

Judge Schmidt has served since January 2015 in the Second Circuit District of Hancock, Harrison and Stone counties. He was an assistant district attorney in the Second Circuit for 14 years. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Hannan 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 secretary in April 2012.

Judge Hannan, of Madison, began his service as

Madison County Court Judge in January 2007. He previously served for more than nine years as Madison Municipal Judge. He practiced law for 25 years before he was elected to the Madison County Court. He is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Johnson, of Greenville, has served as Washington County Court Judge since 1999. She was Hollandale Municipal Court Judge 1986-1994, Arcola Municipal Court Judge 1992-1998, and Greenville Municipal Court Judge 1996-1998. She was Washington County Youth Court prosecutor 1981-1994. She is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Young Graham, of Meridian, has served on the Lauderdale County Court bench since January 2007. She served for seven years as assistant district attorney, and for two years as a public defender for the 10th Circuit Court District of Clarke, Kemper, Lauderdale and Wayne counties. She practiced law in Jackson before becoming a public defender.

Rankin County and Youth Court Judge Thomas Broome is chair of the Council of Youth Court Judges, a position which he has held since September 2011. Judge Broome has served as Youth Court Judge since January 2003. Tishomingo County Youth Court Referee Joey Cobb has served as vice-chair since September 2011. Judge Young Graham has served as secretary-treasurer of the Council since September 2017.

Supreme Court appoints new members to Rules Advisory Committee



Judge Crystal Wise Martin

Three judges and two attorneys have been appointed to serve on the Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules, and two attorneys were reappointed.

New members are Hinds County Chancellor Crystal Wise Martin of Jackson, Circuit Judge Celeste Embrey Wilson of Southaven, Forrest County Court Judge Carol Jones Russell of Hattiesburg, attorney Lauren R. Hillery of Gulfport and attorney Katherine S. Kerby of Columbus. Reappointed to the committee are attorney Edwin A. Snyder of Madison and Charles R. Mullins of Jackson.

Judge Martin and Judge Jones Russell filled vacancies on the Advisory Committee. Judge Martin began her service on the Advisory Committee on Dec. 5, 2022; her term extends through Dec. 31, 2025. Judge Jones Russell's appointment order was signed Jan. 26 for a term that will end Dec. 31, 2024. All other appointees' terms began Jan. 1, 2023, and extend through Dec. 31, 2025.



Judge Celeste Wilson

Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph signed the appointments orders on behalf of the unanimous Supreme Court.

The Advisory Committee on Rules advises the Supreme Court on needs for changes in procedural rules that govern the handling of matters in the courts of the state. The committee includes two representatives each from the Conference of Chancery Judges, the Conference of Circuit Judges, the Mississippi Bar, the Mississippi Association for Justice and the Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association, and one member each from the Conference of County Court Judges, the Mississippi College School of Law, the University of Mississippi School of Law, the Mississippi Prosecutors Association and the Mississippi Public Defenders Association.

Judge Martin was nominated by the Conference of Chancery Court Judges. She replaced Chancellor Lawrence Primeaux of



Judge Carol Jones Russell

Meridian on the committee. She has served as a Hinds County Chancellor for four years. She previously served as attorney for the Hinds County Board of Supervisors for about six years. She was special master in Hinds County Chancery Court, and was an assistant prosecuting attorney for Hinds County. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemistry from Spelman College, a Bachelor of Chemical Engineering Degree from Georgia Tech and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law. She is past president of the Magnolia Bar Association. She is a fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation. She was chair of the Hurricane Katrina Relief Committee of the Mississippi Association for Justice and was a delegate for the state of Mississippi to the American Association for Justice.

Judge Wilson, nominated by the Conference of Circuit Court Judges, replaced Circuit Judge Anthony Mzingo of Oak

Grove, who retired Dec. 31. Judge Wilson served as a Circuit Judge of the 17th Circuit District since Feb. 6, 2017. She began her term on the newly created 23rd Circuit Court of DeSoto County on Jan. 1. Judge Wilson served as a DeSoto County Court and Youth Court Judge for more than eight years. She was vice chair of the Council of Youth Court Judges and a member of the Council for Interstate Compact of Juveniles, the Juvenile Detention and Alternatives Task Force and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. She served as Assistant District Attorney in the 17th District 2002-2008. She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Delta State University and her law degree from the University of Memphis.

The Conference of County Court Judges nominated Judge Russell to replace former Leflore County Court Judge Kevin Adams on the Advisory Committee. Judge Russell has served as Forrest County Court and Youth Court Judge since January 2019. She previously served as Hattiesburg Municipal Court Judge 2012-2018. Her private law practice was in family law. She is a graduate of Hattiesburg High School. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from the University of Southern Mississippi and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Continued on page 17

Chancellor Mark Maples appointed to Bar Complaint Tribunal



Chancellor Mark Maples

The Mississippi Supreme Court has appointed Chancellor Mark A. Ma-

ples of Lucedale to the Bar Complaint Tribunal.

Chief Justice Mike Randolph signed the appointment order on behalf of the unanimous Supreme Court. The one-year term began Jan. 1 and will end on Dec. 31, 2023. Judge Maples replaced Circuit Judge Anthony A. Mozingo of Oak Grove, who retired from the bench Dec. 31, 2022. Judge Mozingo served for five years on the Complaint Tribunal.

Members of the Tribunal hear and decide disciplinary matters arising from complaints against

attorneys. Discipline may range from private reprimand to disbarment. Decisions from the Tribunal may be appealed to the Mississippi Supreme Court. Actions by the Tribunal are final if not appealed.

The 27-member Complaint Tribunal is made up of nine judges and 18 lawyers selected by the nine members of the Supreme Court from three Supreme Court districts. The Tribunal sits in panels of three, with each panel comprised of two attorneys and one judge.

Judge Maples has served for four years on the 16th Chancery Court of George, Greene and Jackson counties. He previously served for 28 years as George County Prosecutor. He was the attorney for Singing River Electric Power Association for 28 years, and was board attorney for George County Schools for 18 years. He is a graduate of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, the University of Mississippi and Mississippi College School of Law.

Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules, *continued from page 16*

Hillery was nominated by the Mississippi Bar to replace attorney Colette Oldmixon of Poplarville on the Rules Advisory Committee. Hillery is an assistant public defender in Harrison County, and previously worked as an assistant public defender in Hinds County. In private practice, she worked for the Biloxi law firm of Don Dornan, and for Copeland, Cook, Taylor and Bush in Ridgeland. She served on the Board of Directors of the Young Lawyers Division of the Mississippi Bar. She also was active with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project. Hillery earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. She worked with the Innocence Project while in law school, and as a law clerk for the 19th Circuit

Court in her early legal career.

Kerby is a solo practitioner and owner of the Kerby Law Firm in Columbus. She represents clients statewide with emphasis on public entity civil litigation defense. She has practiced law for 40 years. She was nominated to the Rules Advisory Committee by the Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association, for which she served as president in 2002. She replaced attorney George F. Bloss III of Jackson on the Rules Advisory Committee. She also was MDLA vice-president, MDLA Quarterly editor, and a board member for 12 years. She served as a Defense Research Institute state representative and is a past winner of the national Sievert leadership award presented by the Defense Research Institute. She is serving her second term on the Federal

Local Civil Rules Advisory Committee for Mississippi. She served two terms as chair of the Mississippi Bar Government Law Section and multiple terms on the Bar Complaints Tribunal by appointment of the Mississippi Supreme Court. She currently serves on the Bar's Women in the Profession Committee. She was named a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation in 2022. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in public administration and English from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Snyder, nominated by the Mississippi Prosecutors Association, is the longest currently serving member of the Advisory Committee on Rules, with 37 years of service. He served terms as committee chair, and has been chair

of the Mississippi Rules of Evidence Subcommittee for 35 years. He is a former district attorney and special assistant attorney general. He was a founding member of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association. He has practiced law for 54 years.

Mullins has served on the Advisory Committee on Rules since January 2005 as a representative of the Mississippi Association for Justice. He is a partner at Coxwell and Mullins in Jackson. His practice includes criminal defense, criminal and civil appeals, personal injury and other plaintiff representation. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in political science from West Virginia State University and a Juris Doctorate from Mississippi College School of Law.

Access to Justice and Volunteer Lawyers Project offer clinic for 11th Chancery



Volunteer attorneys provide free legal advice to low-income people during a Jan. 20 family law clinic for the 11th Chancery.



Access to Justice Commission Executive Director Nicole McLaughlin, at left, and MVLP Executive Director Gayla Carpenter-Sanders discuss clinic proceedings.

The Access to Justice Commission and the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project kicked off 2023 by joining forces with the Leadership Mississippi Bar Program to provide a free family law clinic for the 11th Chancery Court.

Attorneys' temporary work stations filled the Madison County Supervisors' board room in Can-

ton during a Jan. 20 clinic.

Eighteen people received services at the clinic. Nine volunteer attorneys and seven law students staffed the clinic. They drafted 14 pleadings and six letters of legal advice for low-income people, said MVLP staff attorney Seirra S. Williams. Volunteer lawyers provided services to clients from Madison, Hinds, Holmes,

Lee, Leake and Rankin counties.

Chancellor Cynthia Brewer said the free legal clinic is an important resource for needy people

and the court. "A clinic gives participants quicker relief, and the clinic gives the Court the information that it needs to make a decision on the issues."

Workers Compensation Chair takes oath



Court of Appeals Judge Virginia Carlton swore in Mississippi Workers' Compensation Commission Chairman Mark Formby to begin a new term on April 13.

Retired Chancellor Melvin McClure of Senatobia died March 25



Retired Chancellor Melvin McClure

Retired Chancellor Melvin McClure of Senatobia died on March 25. He was 74.

A funeral service was held on March 29 at First United Methodist Church in Senatobia, where he was a lifelong member.

Small wonder



A red Knockout rose outside the Board of Supervisors' office, photographed on March 29, shows little damage from the tornado that splintered massive oaks a few feet away at the Sharkey County Courthouse in Rolling Fork.

Judge McClure served as judge of the Third Chancery District for 14 ½ years. Gov. Kirk Fordice appointed him when Chancellor Leon Hannaford retired in June 1992. He left the bench in December 2006.

Friends recalled a jovial colleague who loved to talk about history. He was deeply involved in activities ranging from choir to organizing vacation bible school at First United Methodist Church in Senatobia.

His family in his obituary said, "He was a great talker. He could talk to anyone and would talk to anyone who would listen. His favorite topics: Jesus and history. If you invited him to speak to a group of people about something historical, you better make sure they had plenty of time because he could and would talk for hours about

his favorite historical topics." He was a member of Senatobia's historical preservation committee.

Senatobia attorney John Lamar II said, "He knew history. He loved history. He could speak on history and Tate County and the Civil War for hours."

Retired Supreme Court Justice Ann Lamar said, "He was a dear friend. He enjoyed Senatobia and Tate County and writing its history....He enjoyed his time on the bench but he also enjoyed his retirement years....He was funny. He enjoyed a good laugh."

In 2016, McClure published *Forrest's Calvary in The Battle of Hurricane Creek* about a Civil War battle fought near Bryant, Ark., on Oct. 23, 1864.

Luther Melvin McClure was born on Feb. 23, 1949, in Memphis, Tenn., to Luther Melvin McClure Sr. and Clara Lee Fudge McClure. He grew up around the courthouse. His father served for many years as Tate County Chancery Clerk, and his mother worked in the clerk's office.

He graduated from Senatobia High School and Mississippi State University, then served in the National Guard. He earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law. He was admitted to the Mississippi Bar in December 1974.

Chancellor Robert Q. Whitwell of Oxford practiced law with McClure. In 1975, McClure joined Whitwell's firm. "We were good friends. He was a good lawyer. I consider him a pillar of the Senatobia community."

Before he was appointed to the Chancery bench, McClure served as Senatobia Municipal Judge, city prosecutor for the town of Coldwater, and later was city prosecutor in Senatobia, John Lamar recalled. "He was a good public servant."

Like his father before him, he served for many years as a director of the Senatobia/Sycamore Bank.

Retired Chancellor John Grant III of Pearl said, "He was not only a good judge but a good man." He recalled judicial conference camaraderie.

Judge McClure was a huge Mississippi State football fan and a game was televised during the conference. "We were all piled up in one room to watch." McClure relished the game and was exuberant in a victory for MSU. "He was just a little boy at heart."

Colleagues also remembered his ever-present cigar, unlit and chomped.

The family said in the obituary, "Melvin loved his dogs, his horses and his farm and could spend hours out there taking in God's beauty."

"He might be gruff on the outside but deep down he had a love like no other." He deeply loved and was proud of his children and grandchildren.

Survivors are his wife of 51 years, Mary Claire Dowdle McClure of Senatobia; sons Doug McClure, Senatobia, and Rob McClure, Madison; grandchildren, Paige Nickens, Peyton McClure, Micah McClure, Lily McClure, and Hadley McClure; his great-grandchildren, Blaire Nickens and Will Nickens; and his sister, Elizabeth McClure Jackson of Iuka.

Retired DeSoto County Court Judge Mills Barbee died on April 11



Retired DeSoto County Court Judge Mills Barbee

Retired DeSoto County Court Judge Mills Barbee died on April 11. He passed away surrounded by loved ones in the same house in Hernando where he was raised, and where he raised his daughters. He was 77.

A memorial service was held on April 15 at Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tenn.

Judge Barbee was DeSoto County's first County Court and Youth Court Judge. He was elected when the position was created in 1981. He served for 26 years.

"He is the father of the Youth Court in DeSoto County," said Supreme Court Justice Robert Chamberlin of Hernando.

When DeSoto County completed a new facility for the Youth Court in February 2018, local officials

named it in Judge Barbee's honor. It is the Mills E. Barbee Juvenile Justice Center. Family members said he was both surprised and humbled.

Judge Barbee left elected office in December 2006. After that, he practiced law in Hernando and continued to hear cases around the state by appointment of the Supreme Court as a senior status judge. He retired in 2020.

Those who practiced before him recalled a judge who was gracious with his time and willing to share his knowledge of the law.

DeSoto County Court Judge Allen Couch, who succeeded Judge Barbee, said he learned a lot from his predecessor. "My first case as a young lawyer was in front of Mills. I had no idea what I was doing,

and he very gently let me know that without destroying my confidence or embarrassing me. Lesson learned! I will always be grateful for that." Judge Couch said, "I can only imagine how many lawyers cut their teeth in his court, and if they were paying attention, they became better for it."

Justice Chamberlin shared similar experiences from Judge Barbee's courtroom. "I always found him to be fair, of even temperament, and dedicated to trying to apply the rule of law." In his early career, Chamberlin handled eminent domain cases in County Court, and as City Prosecutor he tried cases appealed from City Court to County Court. "My first jury trials as a lawyer were in front of Judge Barbee. I was a brand new attorney. He nudged you in the right direction as far as mistakes you might be making in the courtroom, but didn't take the opportunity to embarrass you," he recalled.

Justice Chamberlin grew up three houses down the street from Judge Barbee in a neighborhood within walking distance of the Courthouse. He recalled Judge Barbee's reaction when neighborhood kids expressed their ideas for new street names by painting utility poles – what might be considered graffiti. Judge Barbee jokingly told parents that if they wanted to change street names, go to City Hall.

Judge Barbee grew up in Hernando. He was a sixth generation DeSoto

Countian. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor degree from the Jackson School of Law, now Mississippi College School of Law. He served as a law clerk for the Mississippi Supreme Court, then returned to Hernando to practice law. He was a member of the Mississippi Bar for almost 51 years, having been admitted to practice on May 10, 1972.

Mills Eugene Barbee Jr. was born on March 30, 1946, the son of Mills Barbee Sr. and Willie Belle Smith of Hernando. He married Laurie Allen in 1979 at the First Presbyterian Church in Hernando.

Family said that the couple "absolutely adored one another and shared over 43 years of marriage together." The birth of their daughters, Ashleigh Murdock and Brittany Barbee, "were the highlights of his life."

His family said in the obituary, "Although a man of few words, Mills was an empathetic man who loved fiercely, lived humbly, and treated each person he met with kindness and acceptance. He loved Ole Miss football, ZZ Top, and black-eyed peas and cornbread."

Survivors include his wife Laurie; his daughters Ashleigh Murdock (Jeremy) and Brittany Barbee (Taylor Weglicki); three grandchildren, Finnley, Hawkins, and Kitch; and a host of loved ones. He was preceded in death by his parents and his sister, Brenda Ballard.