

Court of Appeals schedules arguments in Greenville Jan. 28

January 25, 2010

The Mississippi Court of Appeals will convene at the Washington County Courthouse in Greenville on Jan. 28 to hear oral arguments in two cases. Oral arguments are scheduled for 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. in the large second floor Circuit Court courtroom.

Visiting judges at 10 a.m. will also tour a new courtroom which is nearing completion. A formal courtroom dedication will be held within a few months, said Senior Circuit Judge Betty W. Sanders. The additional courtroom, which will be used by circuit judges, will allow the court to more efficiently move civil cases on the docket, Judge Sanders said.

A three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals will hear oral arguments in Greenville as part of the Court on the Road program. The Court of Appeals is located in Jackson. Members of the Court of Appeals occasionally travel to other locations to hear oral arguments. The Court on the Road program provides an opportunity for students and the general public to observe an appellate level proceeding and learn about the operation of the courts.

Students from five area high schools have been invited to watch the appellate oral arguments. Judges usually talk to the students afterwards and answer questions. Judges talk about how the appellate process works, but not about the cases themselves.

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Leslie D. King of Greenville said the programs benefit the students as well as the judges. Questions posed by students can give judges a different perspective. "I believe that the opportunity to interact with the students makes us better judges. Students say some things that we would not have thought of," he said.

Chief Judge King said that providing the opportunity for students and the public to watch live court proceedings helps them to understand the judicial system, and to see the difference between television dramas and what really happens in courtrooms.

"When people understand, their respect for the system is enhanced. The public does not really have to agree with the decision, but it needs to respect the process that was utilized in reaching that decision," Chief Judge King said.

It's also an opportunity to explain the importance of involvement by citizens as well as by those who work in the justice system. Chief Judge King said, "Our justice system only works if each of us is willing to play our part in it.... It means jury service. It means casting an informed vote" during elections.

Chief Judge King said that he hopes the experience may spark students' interest in a legal career or some other related field.

"I talk to too many young people who think there is no place in the system for them," said Chief Judge King, who served in the Mississippi House of Representatives for 15 years before he was elected to the Court of Appeals in 1994. "Change comes from within the system, not from without," he said. "Become a part of the system and make your voice heard. Nobody is going to agree with you 100 percent of the time, but you can make a difference."

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This will be the second time that the Court of Appeals has convened at a County Courthouse. The Court heard arguments at the Marion County Courthouse in Columbia in September 2008.

Most Court on the Road arguments are heard on college campuses. The Court of Appeals has heard arguments at Mississippi State University, Mississippi College School of Law, the University of Mississippi School of Law and the University of Southern Mississippi. The Court also is working to schedule oral arguments for the first time on the campus of Mississippi Valley State University this fall.

The Court will hear arguments at 11 a.m. in the criminal appeal of *Stephen E. "Bo" Seal v. State of Mississippi*, case number 2008-KA-01424-COA. Seal, formerly of Indianola, pleaded guilty on Jan. 9, 2008, in Sunflower County Circuit Court to two counts of manslaughter by culpable negligence. Court records show that Laurie Thomas was shot in the head on March 6, 2006, while visiting in Indianola. She and her unborn child died two days later. Seal was sentenced to 20 years on each charge, with the sentences running concurrently. Seal is seeking a reduction in sentence. Seal is represented by Greenville attorneys Gaines S. Dyer and Rabun Jones. Special Assistant Attorney General Lisa L. Blount represents the state.

At 1:30 p.m., the Court will hear arguments in the civil appeal of *P. Gayle Moorman v. George T. Crocker*, case number 2008-CA-01937-COA. The case involves a disagreement over personal loans made by Crocker to Moorman in 2006. Court records show that the parties reached a settlement in Yalobusha County Chancery Court. Crocker then filed suit in Yalobusha County Justice Court. Moorman appealed to Yalobusha County Circuit Court, then pursued her case before the Court of Appeals. Moorman is represented by attorney R. Stewart Guernsey of Water Valley. Crocker is represented by attorney Tommy W. Defer of Water Valley.

The attorneys in both cases are allowed 30 minutes per side to make their arguments.

Media wishing to photograph or videotape the oral arguments must follow the Rules for Electronic and Photographic Coverage of Judicial Proceedings. Media must file a **Camera Coverage Notice** at least 48 hours prior to the commencement of the proceeding. The Camera Coverage Notice should be filed with Assistant Court Administrator Amy Smith, fax number 601-576-4708, and Clerk of the Court Kathy Gillis, fax number 601-359-2407. The Camera Coverage Notice form is available on the State of Mississippi Judiciary web site at <http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/forms/camnotice.pdf>. Camera coverage rules are available on the web site at http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/rules/msrulesofcourt/rules_electronicphotographic_coverage.pdf. Cameras should be set up in the courtroom 10 minutes before the start of the oral arguments.

The oral arguments will not be broadcast via the court's Internet web site, since the Court of Appeals is convening a special session away from its camera-equipped courtroom.

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