

# Mississippi Courts

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## Mississippi Court of Appeals celebrates 30-year anniversary



Six of the 10 original judges of the Mississippi Court of Appeals were recognized at the Governor's Mansion. They are, left to right, Presiding Justice Leslie D. King, 5th Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Leslie Southwick, retired Judge Mary Libby Payne, retired Presiding Justice Oliver Diaz, retired Judge Thomas Coleman and retired Chief Judge Roger McMillin Jr.

Current and former judges who have served on the Mississippi Court of Appeals during the past 30 years gathered to share recollections and talk about the history of the court on Jan. 9 as they launched an anniversary celebration.

Gov. Tate Reeves said after a luncheon honoring the jurists, "For three decades, the Court of Appeals has played a vital and indispensable role in our state's judiciary."

Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph of Hattiesburg said that the Court of Appeals is an important component of providing timely decisions on appeal. He told early

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## Supreme Court Justices, Court of Appeals Judges take oaths on January 6



**Justice Jenifer Branning**

Gov. Tate Reeves told new and returning Supreme Court Justices and Court of Appeals Judges who took their oaths on



**Justice David Sullivan**

Jan. 6 that he hopes they will look back on the day as a defining moment in their successes.

"This Court is a special



**Judge Amy Lassitter St. Pe'**

body and the role that you play here on the Mississippi Supreme Court, and the role that you all play on the Court of Appeals, is

integral to our success as a state," the Governor said at the oath ceremony for Supreme Court Justices, which was also attended by many members of the Court of Appeals.

Justice Jenifer B. Branning of Philadelphia and Justice David P. Sullivan of Biloxi took their oaths to begin their judicial service. Presiding Justice Josiah D. Coleman of Ackerman, the third longest currently serving Justice, took his oath to begin his leadership duties as a Presiding Justice. Justice James D. Maxwell II of Oxford and Justice Robert

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### Five Supreme Court Justices take oaths of office on January 6, *continued from page 1*



Justice Jenifer Branning, fourth from right, surrounded by family, takes the oath of office on Jan. 6 at the Mississippi Supreme Court. Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at right, administers the oath.



Justice David Sullivan, fourth from right, takes the oath of office as his family watches. Chief Justice Mike Randolph administers the oath.

P. Chamberlin of Hernando, unopposed for reelection, took their oaths to begin new terms.

Gov. Reeves said, "It is a fact that the judiciary's success rests on men and

women of the highest intellect and the highest moral clarity who dedicate your lives to interpreting the law, not as you want it to be, but interpreting the law as it is written, without

fear or favor, with an unwavering commitment to our Constitution."

The Governor recalled the words "Equal Justice Under Law" that are engraved above the entrance

to the U.S. Supreme Court. Not just words, "they are the foundation of our legal system, they are the bedrock of our society. The law and the protections of the United States apply equally. It doesn't matter who you are....It doesn't matter where you are from. It doesn't matter what you do....All that matters is that you are a citizen of this great country."

The Governor said, "We all have the opportunity to serve in different, co-equal branches of government. We all have our role to play. I am confident that each of you are here to play your role in making this state the great place that it is."

Chief Justice Mike Randolph, who administered the oaths of office to the Supreme Court Justices, explained that the judicial oath is different from those of any other elected officials, as the duties of the judiciary are unique.

The Mississippi Constitution requires each Justice and Judge to swear or affirm "that I will administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich, and that I will faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all the duties incumbent upon me as (name of office) according to the best of my ability and understanding, agreeably to the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution and laws of the State of Mississippi. So help me God."

He noted Justice Branning's prior service in two other branches of government, as a State Senator for nine years representing

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**Presiding Justice Josiah D. Coleman, second from right, takes the oath to begin his duties as Presiding Judge as his wife Ashleigh Coleman holds the Bible.**



**Justice James D. Maxwell II, second from right, takes oath of office, surrounded by family. Chief Justice Mike Randolph administers the oath.**



**Justice Robert P. Chamberlin, center, takes the oath of office as Clerk of Courts Jeremy Whitmire holds the Bible.**

Neshoba and parts of Leake and Winston counties, and as a staff member in the Secretary of State’s office. Justice Sullivan’s varied law practice included representing clients in private civil and criminal practice and serving as a prosecutor, public defender and municipal judge. Those varied experiences are important to the state’s highest court. “We need all kinds of people to serve on the courts with those different experiences.”

Chief Justice Randolph pointed out that Justice Sullivan was a Gulfport city prosecutor at the same time that Justice David Ishee was a Gulfport municipal judge.

He said that Justice Sullivan “is bringing the Sullivan name back to the Mississippi Supreme Court.” Justice Sullivan’s father, the late Presiding Justice Michael Sullivan of Hattiesburg, served on the Mississippi Supreme Court from 1984 until his death in 2000.

Justice Branning is the fifth woman to serve on the Mississippi Supreme Court.

In a separate ceremony on the afternoon of Jan. 6, Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes administered oaths of office to new Judge Amy Lassiter St. Pe’ of Pascagoula, Presiding Judge Jack L. Wilson of Madison and Judge Latrice A. Westbrooks of Lexington.

Explaining the importance of the oath, Chief Judge Barnes said, “We are committing ourselves not only to perform a job, but to uphold a standard of integrity and to work toward an ideal for the good



Judge Amy Lassitter St. Pe', center, takes the oath on Jan. 6 surrounded by her family.



Chief Judge Donna Barnes, at left, administers the oath to Presiding Judge Jack L. Wilson, center.



Judge Latrice Westbrooks, center, takes the oath of office as cousins hold the Bible.

of society as a whole.”

Judge St. Pe' thanked outgoing Judge Joel Smith of Gulfport for lending his robe to her for the ceremony. Judge St. Pe's father, Bennie Lassitter, helped her don the robe. She said afterwards of her father, “Of all the influences in my life, he has definitely been the biggest. He has worked tirelessly his whole life and if he has taught me anything, he taught me that there is one way to success and that is hard work. Don't ever expect it to be given to you.”

Presiding Judge Wilson said, “It's been a privilege to serve on this court for eight years. It's really the best job that I could imagine in the legal profession and I'm looking forward to continuing the work that I've done.”

Judge Westbrook said, “It is an honor and a privilege to be able to serve on the Court of Appeals and I thank the people of District 2 for allowing me to serve them for another eight years.” With her voice filled with emotion, she recalled that her grandmother stood with her when she was sworn in for the first time. Her grandmother passed away two years ago. “It meant a lot to have her in her 90s at that time to be here and to witness that.”

Supreme Court Presiding Justice Leslie King, whose arrival was delayed, ceremonially gave the oath to Judge Westbrook again.

The Supreme Court oath ceremony may be viewed at this link: <https://vimeo.com/event/4820655>. The Court of Appeals ceremony is at this link: <https://vimeo.com/event/4827406>.

## Court of Appeals 30th Anniversary, *continued from page 1*

members of the Court of Appeals, “Job well done. Thank you to you pioneers.”

Twenty-four of the 39 judges who have served on the Court of Appeals, including all six of the still living original 10, attended some of the day’s events. The six are Supreme Court Presiding Justice Leslie D. King of Greenville, former Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals; former Chief Judge Roger McMillin Jr. of New Albany; former Judge Thomas Coleman of Madison; former Judge and later Supreme Court Presiding Justice Oliver Diaz of Jackson; former Judge Mary Libby Payne of Pearl; and Judge Leslie Southwick of Jackson, now a judge of the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Chief Judge Donna Barnes of Tupelo said after the luncheon, “I can assure you that we on the Court today appreciate the legacy you left to us and we strive every day to meet the standards you have set.”

Later, at a panel discussion in the Court of Appeals Courtroom, she noted that the operating procedures established by the original 10 judges are still in use. “We are definitely following the system that the 10...created and I think it’s been working very well....We owe you so much, the 10 originals, six remaining.”

Chief Judge Barnes became the second woman to serve on the Court of Appeals when she was appointed in 2004, and the Court’s first female Chief Judge when she took that leadership role on Feb. 1,



**Court of Appeals Judges, from left to right, are Judge Deborah McDonald, Judge Latrice Westbrooks, Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton, former Judge Mary Libby Payne, Chief Judge Donna Barnes and Judge Amy Lassitter St. Pe'.**

2019. Now, half of the Court of Appeals judges are women. The most recent female jurist, Judge Amy Lassitter St. Pe' of Pascagoula, was sworn in on Jan. 6.

The Mississippi Senate and House of Representatives adopted a concurrent resolution honoring the Court of Appeals on its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and documenting the history of the Court’s creation. Sen. Brice Wiggins of Pascagoula, who presented Senate Concurrent Resolution 501 to the Court of Appeals on Jan. 9, said the bill was the first legislation agreed upon by the two chambers during the 2025 Session.

Presiding Justice King, Judge Southwick and U.S. District Judge Michael P. Mills of Fulton, now a senior status judge, outlined not just the history of the court, but some colorful back stories during the



**Sen. Bryce Wiggins reads a Senate Concurrent Resolution honoring the Court of Appeals on Jan. 9.**

afternoon panel discussion. Presiding Justice King, Judge Mills and former Judge Diaz all served in the Mississippi House of Representatives when the Legislature created the Court of Appeals. Justice Mills authored the original House bill which called for creation of the Court of Appeals and the Adminis-

trative Office of Courts. Two Senate bills won final approval. But that’s getting ahead of the story.

By the 1980s, a backlog of cases began to accumulate before the Supreme Court. A backlog of 500 cases in 1982 doubled to 1,000 by 1984, and reached about 1,300 by

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**U.S. District Judge Mike Mills and Presiding Justice Leslie King talk before the start of a panel discussion about efforts to create the Court of Appeals. Both served in the Legislature at the time the Court of Appeals was created.**

1990. Judge Southwick cited the case of a lawyer from the Gulf Coast who, when contacted by a news reporter about an appellate decision in his case, had to search his memory because the case had been on appeal for three years. There were more appeals than the nine-member Supreme Court could handle in a timely manner.

Presiding Justice King said, “The numbers had been growing for years and years and members of the Supreme Court had been reaching out to the Legislature on an ongoing basis talking about the difficulty in maintaining the caseload and getting things done timely, to no avail.”

With legislatively provided funding, the Supreme Court appointed three magistrates in October 1990 to review cases and write recommendations, but the Supreme Court still had to review and decide all cases. In the 1993 legislative session,

the Justices convinced the Legislature to create a whole new intermediate appellate court to address the backlog. But there still was resistance from some legislators regarding funding.

Presiding Justice King said that legislation introduced in 1993 to create the Court of Appeals called for 10 judges. Both houses had approved 10. The bill went to a conference committee to work out details, and came out of conference as five judicial positions – one to be elected from each of then five congressional districts.

Presiding Justice King said, “As it turned out, the reason for those five was that (House) Appropriations Committee Chair Charlie Capps from Bolivar County ... essentially said you can put as many judges in it as you want to, but Appropriations is only going to give you money for five, and that’s how we ended up with the five.”

Presiding Justice King said, “Now again you have to know a little bit about the Legislature. There is a lot of horse trading going on there. In order to get to the 10 the next year, Chairman Mills in his wisdom recognized that there was something that Chairman Capps wanted...He

negotiated with Chairman Capps and got his approval to provide the five additional judges in the 1994 session.”

Judge Mills, who handled the bill as Chairman of the House Judiciary A Committee, said, “The next year, Charlie Capps needed a new judge in his district, as it turned out.” The Legislature studied the caseloads and needs of the trial courts across the state. “We came back with a new bill that created a total of 10 judgeships for the Court of Appeals and 14 new chancery and circuit judges across the state.”

Judge Mills said that attorneys who put forth a tremendous effort to make the Court of Appeals a reality were Mississippi Bar President Grady Tollison; later Bar President Nina Tollison; Amy Whitten, a former Supreme Court Administrator; and Allan Alexander, who later served as U.S. Magistrate Judge. “Those lawyers, those members of the Bar

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**Judge Leslie Southwick describes the increasingly heavy caseload that prompted creation of the Court of Appeals.**

were very involved in everything we did and deserve as much credit as anybody else for the creation of the Court of Appeals and the Administrative Office,” Judge Mills said. Former House Judiciary B Chairman Ed Blackmon also was instrumental in passage. “None of this would have happened without Ed.”

“It was very hard for African Americans to get elected to judgeships under the districts that we had at that time and the way that the posts were set up, so we created new slots and new posts and new positions to allow people of color to also be elected judges as opposed to being appointed,” Judge Mills said.

The final hurdle for creating the Court of Appeals was gaining approval of then-Gov. Kirk Fordice. Proponents feared that Fordice, who had run on a platform of creating no new programs, would veto the legislation. Judge Mills said that he and Grady Tollison went to see the Governor. “I said from a businessman’s standpoint, it is to work on the inventory, that we’ve got this inventory that’s piling up and these cases are building up and we don’t have the manpower to do it,” Judge Mills recalled. “He understood that and he told us that he would sign the bill into law. That’s how it happened.”

The legislation was signed on April 6, 1994. On Nov. 8, 1994, 10 judges were elected to the new court in non-partisan races.

Former Judge Payne, a former law professor and Dean of Mississippi College School of Law, recalled campaigning in 19

counties and having to explain what the new court was as well as who she was. “I am still convinced that getting this job is harder than doing it, although doing it is hard,” she said.

Former Judge Diaz, who was elected from a district on the Gulf Coast, said, “Being elected was the second most important thing that happened to me that day.” He recalled watching election results with his wife Jennifer when she said, “It’s time.” She went into labor. He recounted that as they were on the way to a hospital, the labor pains subsided and his wife said it would be all right if they stopped at the North Gulfport voting precinct to check on the vote count. He saw Rep. Frances Fredericks at the precinct. “She got a purse and she hit me and she pushed me out of the precinct...and she said, ‘Get this woman to a hospital right now.’”

Presiding Justice King recalled, “On January 3, 1995, the 10 of us stood in the old Supreme Court Chamber at the Capitol and took the oath of office in a most impressive ceremony....After that impressive ceremony, we then marched over to the offices on State Street, which were, to put it charitably, not quite as impressive. As I recall each of us basically had a desk, a desk chair, probably a legal pad and a pen. And that was it.”

The building was rented, as the old Gartin Justice Building that housed the Supreme Court had no space for a new court. There was no place to hold oral arguments before the Court of Appeals during the first few months. The



**Retired Judge Mary Libby Payne recalls her service on the Court of Appeals during the anniversary program.**



**Retired Chief Judge Roger McMillin and former Judge and Justice Oliver Diaz talk during the reception.**

building had to be remodeled to create a courtroom. The building leaked, there was mildew and there were plumbing problems.

The new judges had to figure out operating procedures, get to know each other and develop a work-

ing relationship.

Judge Southwick said, “We had to create those relationships to understand what it meant to disagree in an agreeable fashion, to write opinions.”

Judges were collegial

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**Supreme Court Presiding Justice Leslie D. King greets former Court of Appeals colleague Judge Thomas Coleman.**



**Justice David Ishee recalls Court of Appeals judges as "like family."**

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even when they disagreed. "We never got personal about disagreement," said former Judge Payne.

Former Judge Jim M. Greenlee of Oxford, who retired on June 30, 2024, said, "There is nothing wrong with disagreeing. There is something wrong with disagreeing disagreeably. And this court has the ability to take all of these issues...and to sit down and decide."

Judge Southwick said the mission from the inception was to speed up the process of deciding cases. "We were given deadlines.... The idea was to decide every case within 270 days as mandated by the Legislature, and we met those deadlines."

A month after the judges took the oath, the Court of Appeals handed down its first batch of cases, 26 opinions. The Court of Appeals issued 525 decisions on the merits in 1995.

Former Judge Diaz said, "We created this from nothing, and it was such an amazing experience to be a part of that."

"They put the life into the legislation," Chief Judge Barnes said. "They

gave it their brains, their hands."

During the past 30 years, the court has issued more than 15,000 decisions on the merits. "We think that has made a good dent in the caseload," Chief Judge Barnes said.

The Court of Appeals speeded up the time it takes to finalize a decision. In 2024, the Court of Appeals' average time from the filing of the final ap-

peal brief to issuance of a decision was 210 days – 60 days sooner than required.

"It's a working court and I'm very proud to have been a part of it during its first decade," said Justice David Ishee of Gulfport, who served on the Court of Appeals before moving to the Supreme Court. Four Justices are former members of the Court of Appeals.

Justice Ishee recalled collegiality and friendships. "About 10 months after I came on the Court, I swam out of my living room during Hurricane Katrina," he said. "Running back and forth trying to attend to a family and build a house and being a brand new judge was not an easy period." Colleagues on the Court stepped up to help "like family."

## **Court sets Appellate Law Day Camp for high school students**

The Mississippi Court of Appeals has invited high school students to spend two days learning about careers in the legal profession. The Appellate Law Day Camp will be held June 26 and 27, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., in Jackson at the Gartin Justice Building at 450 High Street.

Students entering grades 10, 11 and 12 this fall have an opportunity to get an overview of the Mississippi court system, then focus on the work of the appellate courts. Participants will spend time preparing and presenting oral arguments based on scenarios. Appellate judges and lawyers will spend time mentoring small groups.

Court of Appeals Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton of Jackson said, "This year marks the 30-year anniversary of the establishment of the Mississippi Court of Appeals, and we are thrilled to have the opportunity to make the judicial system more transparent to students and the community. The court has long held 'Court on the Road' at various colleges and universities to provide community education about the appellate judicial process. We are now adding a summer Appellate Law Day Camp to our community education outreach efforts."

The Appellate Law Day Camp will allow judges to

mentor students interested in the legal profession, Presiding Judge Carlton said. "The students will learn about the career paths of the sitting judges and law clerks, the life of an appeal, the Mississippi court system, professionalism, law schools, and more."

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes will preside over a graduation program at 3 p.m. on June 27. Students who complete the program will receive an Appellate Law Day Camp Certificate.

The deadline for registration is May 1. The program is free. Lunch will be provided.

# Capitol Complex Improvement District Court gets underway



Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at left, introduces Capitol Complex Improvement District Judges Stanley Alexander, James Holland and Christopher Collins at a ceremony on Jan. 24.



House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Rep. Trey Lamar, principal author House Bill 1020, speaks at the opening ceremony at the CCID Court.

The Capitol Complex Improvement District Court called its first docket on Jan. 27.

In the two and a half months since, the CCID

Court has handled 254 cases, including 63 felonies, 54 misdemeanors and 137 traffic offenses.

The CCID Court adjudicates misdemeanor offenses

investigated by State Capitol Police and traffic citations written by Capitol Police, as well as conduct s initial appearances for felony offenses investigated by Capitol Police. Some individuals arrested by the by the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics and University of Mississippi Medical Center also come to CCID Court for initial appearances. Initial appearances are conducted each weekday morning. Traffic court is held each Tuesday. Misdemeanor trials are on Thursdays. All fines collected by the CCID Court are forwarded to the City of Jackson.

Chief Justice Mike Randolph swore in three judges and the Clerk of Court during a ceremony at the new court on Jan. 24. Judges James Holland and

Stanley Alexander are full-time judges of the CCID Court, and Judge Christopher Collins serves as a part-time judge to sign search warrants and take the bench if the full-time judges have a conflict. All live in Jackson.

Every seat in the courtroom was taken and people stood along three of the four walls during the Jan. 24 ceremony. Gov. Tate Reeves exclaimed, “Wow! What a turnout. I can recall going to press conferences where I thought it was really important and nobody showed up.”

Gov. Reeves said, “The opening of the CCID Court is yet another major step toward a safer Jackson. Jackson is a city of great importance to Mississippi. It is our capital. It is a seat of government. It’s a cultural hub for our state and it is filled with incredible people.”

Referring to the fight over House Bill 1020 that created the CCID Court, the Governor said, “We all know it hasn’t always been easy and it hasn’t always been popular, but every single resident in the city of Jackson deserves to feel safe when they walk outside their homes. The court we open today is another critical step in the long-term success of our great capital city.”

Gov. Reeves said that State Capitol Police during 2024 made more than 900 felony arrests and seized more than 300 illegal firearms. “Every gun and every drug seizure saves lives,” he said.

House Ways and Means Chairman Rep. Trey Lamar of Senatobia, principal author House Bill 1020,



**Chief Justice Mike Randolph, at left, swears in CCID Court Clerk Dr. Bryana Smith McDougal on Jan. 27. Dr. McDougal's husband Joshua McDougal holds the Bible.**

said the bill was about safety for the citizens of Jackson and visitors, about a justice system which works effectively, and about encouraging capital investment and job creation in Jackson. "This CCID Court is for the regular people of Jackson, the ones who want their children and their grandchildren to be able to play outside in the yard without fearing for their safety," he said. "The CCID Court is for the families who will be supported by jobs, the future jobs that will be located right here in Jackson because of entrepreneurs and job creators that felt safe enough to invest capital here inside our capital city."

Department of Public Safety Commissioner Sean Tindell supervises multiple state law enforcement agencies, including Capitol Police. He said, "I can assure you that from the Department of Public Safety standpoint and the Capitol

Police and other divisions, that we will always work tirelessly for a safer Mississippi and a safer Jackson."

Tindell thanked state leaders and behind the scenes workers who helped transition Capitol Police from a separate agency into a larger police force under the Department of Public Safety. He also noted the work that the Department of Finance and Administration put into remodeling a former bus station to create a facility that signifies the dignity of a courthouse.

Chief Justice Randolph recalled media inquiries in recent months about the CCID Court opening date and appointment of judges. He waited until the courthouse was ready to make the announcement. In recent months, he answered inquiries with a question: "Have you ever seen a case tried outside?" At the ceremony, he repeated, "I've never tried one outside either."

Chief Justice Randolph recalled litigation in opposition to the CCID Court. He was dismissed as a defendant, based on judicial immunity, in state and federal court. "Those days are gone. It's time for people to get together, to unify and to work together to have a good court that will represent the people in Jackson, everybody in Jackson."

Chief Justice Randolph brought along the three books on which he relies: The Constitution of the State of Mississippi, the Bible and the Mississippi Rules of Court. "I told all three of these judges, 'I want you to look at the Constitution, I want you to read it and know it and understand it.'" He gave each a copy.

He pointed out that the constitution of every state invokes the blessing of God or a supreme being. He said that he was impressed that all three CCID judges are very involved in

their churches. Alexander and Collins are church deacons, and Holland is a former Episcopal warden.

Chief Justice Randolph said, "I am not afraid to put people on here that will look to the Lord to assist them, because you realize that as a judge that the problems that you face are bigger than you, the person. You have to reach to a higher source."

It was important that the CCID judges have community ties to Jackson. "I wanted people that are local, that know Jackson," Chief Justice Randolph said. Alexander is a life-long resident of Jackson. Holland lives on the same street where he grew up. Collins moved to Jackson. Referring to Judge Holland and his wife, he said, "Their church is in the district. They shop in the district. That's their life." He said that Holland gave up a well-paying position in private law practice. "He sacrificed himself to serve because he cares."

He also cited letters of recommendation that people around the state and around the country wrote to him regarding the judges' qualifications. He read a letter that a prosecutor in the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit District wrote regarding Alexander: "He works hard. He's efficient. He works tirelessly. He diligently seeks justice for crime victims. He's tough but fair. He'll be great. His intelligence, leadership skills, enthusiasm and work ethic are admirable and inspiring. He's wise. He's patient. His congenial temperament will make him an excellent judge."

He noted that Collins has a wide range of experience as a tribal judge, cir-

cuit judge and municipal judge as well as serving as both a prosecutor and a public defender.

Chief Justice Randolph also swore in Dr. Bryana Smith McDougal of Madison as Clerk of the CCID Court. “You know how proud I am of you,” he said. She recently completed her Doctor of Business Administration/ Strategic Management degree from Belhaven University. She worked as a judicial assistant to Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens before taking the position of CCID Court clerk.

The court system will be paperless, said Katharine Surkin, Director of the Administrative Office of Courts. “We have partnered with DigiCourt to create a paperless case management system that links directly to Capitol Police and is accessible by prosecutors and defense attorneys alike.”

The Legislature tasked the Administrative Office of Courts with building the CCID Court, she said. “We worked and continue to work with DFA and their team of architects to create a space that could successfully operate as a court....We have worked with attorneys from the Mississippi Judicial College, the Attorney General’s Office, Hinds County Public Defender’s Office and the State Public Defender’s Office to draft local rules, manuals, policies and procedures. We are working closely with DPS, Capitol Police and the City of Jackson to ensure that this court operates efficiently and safely.”

CCID judges’ appointments are for terms which began Jan. 1, 2025, and continue through July 1, 2027.

Chief Justice Randolph noted that CCID judges have strong ties to Jackson.

Judge Holland has lived in the Fondren area of Jackson for more than 50 years. He has practiced law for more than 40 years and has extensive trial experience. He has defended litigation in both state and federal courts against individuals and companies in Mississippi since earning a degree in political science from Millsaps College and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

He provided invaluable assistance to the Administrative Office of Courts in helping to create the court from the ground up.

Judge Holland earned the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association. He is a former president of the Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association and was national president of the Association of Defense Trial Attorneys. He was recognized as a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation and a Life Fellow of the American Bar Foundation. He served on the Board of Directors of the Defense Research Institute (DRI), and was twice a recipient of the DRI Distinguished Service Award. He also was invited to join the International Association of Defense Trial Attorneys (IADC) and the Federation of Defense and Corporate Counsel. He was an instructor for the IADC Trial Academy at Stanford University. He was vice-chair of the Mississippi Supreme Court Plain Language Jury Instruction Task Force and was vice-chair of the Business Court Study Commit-

tee appointed by then-Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann. He also served as chair of the Mississippi Bar’s Summer School for Lawyers and has been a speaker at legal seminars and continuing legal education programs around the country.

Judge Alexander served as a prosecutor for more than 20 years. He has served as an assistant district attorney in the Fourth, Sixth and Seventh Judicial Districts. He served for the past three years as Senior Assistant District Attorney for the Fourth Judicial District. He was a Special Assistant Attorney General 1995-2001, representing the Department of Human Services. He returned to the Attorney General’s office in 2008, and was Director of the Division of Public Integrity 2009-2020. He served as an Assistant Attorney General 2010-2020. He is Chair of the Prosecutors Section of the Mississippi Bar. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in political science with a minor in criminal justice from Mississippi College in 1989, and lettered in varsity football at Mississippi College. He earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 1994. He was an Earl Warren Scholar, president of the Black Law Students Association, and worked in the law school’s housing law clinic.

Judge Collins has served as a judge since 1999, including almost four years as Circuit Judge for the Eighth Judicial District, comprised of Leake,

Neshoba, Newton, and Scott counties; as a Civil Judge, Domestic Violence Court Judge and Supreme Court Justice pro tem for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; and as Municipal Judge for the City of Carthage. He has 21 years of experience as a municipal prosecutor with the cities of Union and Decatur, and was a special prosecutor for the Lauderdale and Winston County Circuit Courts. He returned to private law practice Jan. 1, 2020. He has been appointed as public defender in Attala, Lafayette, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton, and Winston counties.

Judge Collins received an Associate of Arts degree from East Central Community College and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Mississippi College. He received a Juris Doctor from the Mississippi College School of Law.

Dr. McDougal recently completed her Doctor of Business Administration/ Strategic Management degree from Belhaven University. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Management and a Master of Business Administration degree, both from Belhaven University.

She was Judicial Assistant to Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens for more than three years. She previously worked for almost two years as an Assistant Deputy Clerk in the office of the Supreme Court Clerk. She worked for more than two years as a Rankin County Justice Court Deputy Clerk and for a year as an Information Security Analyst. She worked for more than three years as an Executive Assistant for the Narcotics Unit of the Hinds County Sheriff’s Office.

## Judge Betty Sanders named to Ole Miss Law Hall of Fame



Former Circuit Judge Betty Sanders, fourth from right, was joined at the Hall of Fame ceremony by fellow judges, left to right, Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes, Court of Appeals Judge Latrice Westbrooks, Chancellor Cynthia Brewer, retired Chancellor Denise Owens, retired Circuit Judge Lillie Blackmon Sanders, Circuit Judge Jannie Lewis-Blackmon, former Circuit Judge Shirley Byers, Circuit Judge Debra Gibbs and Court of Appeals Judge Deborah McDonald.

Retired Circuit Judge Betty W. Sanders was inducted into the University of Mississippi School of Law Hall of Fame on March 29.

Dozens of friends, some she has known since high school, came to honor her. She didn't expect to see all of them. "It was almost like a surprise birthday party!" she said.

"I was really humbled by it," she said of the Hall of Fame induction. "I was

surprised and excited to receive it."

Judge Sanders credited her late husband, Alix Sanders Sr., for many of her accomplishments. She followed his lead. She quoted Dolly Parton's recent song of tribute to her recently deceased husband: "If You Hadn't Been There."

Alix Sanders Sr. was a trailblazing attorney, working for the Lawyers Committee for Civil

Rights under law and North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, where he became director. He was the first African American elected to the Leflore County Board of Supervisors.

When she joined her husband's law firm in Greenwood, she soon became the first African American attorney to serve as co-counsel to the Greenwood Public School District.

She graduated from law school 10 years after her husband. Her first career was as an educator. She taught business at Coahoma Junior College, then at Mississippi Valley State University, where she was acting department chair. She needed to pursue doctoral studies if she was to keep the position.

Instead, she chose law as more versatile. It was a last-minute choice. As the law school registration deadline approached, "on the last day, I telephoned the registrar."

She enrolled in law school after two of their three children were born. She recalled the difficulty of leaving two young children at home with their father and her family in Greenwood while she lived in Oxford.

"I went to Oxford alone....That was the most difficult, being separated from family." Going home every weekend wasn't pos-

## Infant drug exposure is topic for May 9 in Biloxi

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services will host a Plans of Safe Care Convening facilitated by the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW).

The program will be held on May 9, from 2 to 4 p.m., in Biloxi in the County Court Courtroom at the Harrison County Courthouse at 731 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

This event will bring together cross-systems partners to discuss state and national trends involving infants prenatally exposed to substances. Facilitated discussions will cover opportunities and challenges to serving infants with prenatal substance exposure, and how Mississippi can leverage Plans of Safe Care (POSC) and the provisions of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)

to increase collaboration and improve outcomes for infants and their families affected by substance use. Discussion will also focus on improving outcomes through cross-systems collaboration.

There is no cost to attend. Here is the link for registration: [Registration: MS POSC Convening.](#)

Contact Sean Couch at [scouch@cffutures.org](mailto:scouch@cffutures.org) for more information.

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## Chancellor Cynthia Brewer to receive Susie Blue Buchanan Award



**Chancellor Cynthia Brewer**

Chancellor Cynthia L. Brewer of Madison will be honored for her exemplary work and service as a role model for women in the legal profession.

The Women in the Profession Section of the Mississippi Bar selected Judge Brewer as the 2025 recipient of the Susie Blue Buchanan Award. The award will be presented on July 10 at the Price-Prather Luncheon during the Mississippi Bar Convention in

Sandestin, Fla. The annual award honors an outstanding woman lawyer who has achieved professional excellence and has actively paved the way to success for other women lawyers.

Judge Brewer said, "To be recognized among my peers for the work that I have diligently and with love done, is beyond words wonderful. I'm still in awe."

The award is named for Susie Blue Buchanan of Brandon, who in 1916 became the first woman lawyer qualified to practice before the Mississippi Supreme Court. The Price-Prather Luncheon, now in its 27<sup>th</sup> year, 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. Chief Justice Prather re-

ceived the Susie Blue Buchanan Award in 2005.

Among other former recipients of the award are former Lt. Gov. Evelyn Gandy, Mississippi Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna Barnes, former Mississippi Court of Appeals Judge Mary Libby Payne, the late Presiding Justice Kay Cobb, the late law professor Carol West, former Justice Ann Lamar, former Justice Dawn Beam, Chancellor Jacqueline Mask, former Chancellor Denise Owens, U.S. District Judge Debra Brown, U.S. District Judge Sharion Aycock and former U.S. Magistrate Judge Linda Anderson.

Judge Brewer is senior chancellor of the 11<sup>th</sup> Chancery Court, hearing cases in Madison and Leake counties. She became a chancellor in January 2007. She served twice as chair of the Conference of Chancery Court Judges, having been elect-

ed by her colleagues. She is a member of the Board of Governors of the Mississippi Judicial College. She served on the Commission on Judicial Performance as the alternate Chancery Court member. 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 also previously served as a special master in Chancery Court, and as a Municipal, County and Youth Court prosecutor in Hinds County.

Judge Brewer has been a visiting instructor at the National Judicial College in Reno for 18 years. She also served as an adjunct professor at Mississippi College School of Law.

She earned an undergraduate degree from the University of South Alabama, and her Juris Doctor from Mississippi College School of Law.

## Judge Sanders inducted into UM Law Hall of Fame, *continued from page 12*

sible. She needed to study. She had an auto accident while driving home in her second year. She recovered in time for exams.

She worked for North Mississippi Rural Legal Services in Oxford while in law school, then for Legal Services in Greenwood 1979-1981. She continued to teach business law and court systems at MVSU.

In 1989, she was appointed as a magistrate to hear cases filed by prisoners at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. She served as magistrate until 1994.

She was the first African-American elected to

Subdistrict 3 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court in 1994. She established a Drug Court for the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit of Leflore, Sunflower and Washington counties in June 2002. It was the state's third felony drug court. She served as Circuit Judge until 2014, and continued to hear cases as a senior status judge for another 20 years. She recently retired as Senior Status judge.

She is former chair, vice-chair and secretary-treasurer of the Conference of Circuit Judges. She served on the Commission on Judicial Performance, the Complaint Tribunal

and Ethics Committee of the Mississippi Bar, and as secretary of the Magnolia Bar Association. She was a faculty facilitator at the National Judicial College. She also served on the Mississippi Model Jury Instructions Commission.

She served for more than 20 years on the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project. She joined the Board of Directors of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services in 2021.

She was honored with the 2023 Chief Justice Award. She received special recognition from the Judicial Division of the

American Bar Association. She served on the ABA National Conference of State Trial Judges and the National Association of Women Judges Racial and Cultural Diversity Committee. She received the Magnolia Bar Association Government Service Awards in 1997 and 2003. She was inducted as a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation in 2006. The Mississippi House of Representatives honored her with a resolution commending her career in 2015.

She now divides her time between family in Greenwood and Tupelo.

## MVLP honors Chancellor Bennie Richard with Beacon of Justice Award



**Chancellor Bennie Richard, third from left, was accompanied at the award ceremony by his family, including his father, Bennie Lee Richard; his wife, Circuit Judge Carol White-Richard; and his brother, Crandall Richard.**

The Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project honored Chancellor Bennie Richard of Greenville with the 2024 Beacon of Justice Award for his work providing access to courts through quarterly free family law clinics for low-income people.

Judicial leadership is crucial in providing access to the courts for people who cannot afford to hire an attorney.

Gayla Carpenter-Sanders, Executive Director and General Counsel of MVLP, said, "The Beacon of Justice Award began in 2014 with the focus on honoring a member of the judiciary who expressed the desire to promote access to justice within the courtroom and implemented programs to serve vulnerable populations within his or her community."

She said, "Since taking the bench in January 2019,

Judge Richard's steadfast leadership and unwavering commitment to the community has created access to justice for 864 individuals, granting them the opportunity to pursue a fresh start in life through the resolution of their divorces."

Judge Richard presided over 24 family law clinics for self-represented litigants. His work "has set a gold standard for access to justice, with his model being replicated in clinics across the state."

Judge Richard continued the program which his predecessor, former Chancellor Marie Wilson, began in 2007 in Washington County. Judge Wilson was honored as a Beacon of Justice recipient in 2016 for her development and oversight of the quarterly free family law clinics.

Judge Richard said that the family law clinic model has been refined so that

a majority of the litigants are able to finalize their matters in court at the clinic or shortly thereafter. Some of the change came about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Because of the pandemic, we were no-contact or virtual. We learned how to do this more efficiently," he said.

Now, Sanders and volunteer attorneys are in contact with pro se litigants before the family law clinic is held. They are able to make corrections to documents that the litigants have filed so that the need for revisions doesn't delay resolution of cases.

Sanders said, "Even amidst the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Judge Richard's unwavering dedication ensured these clinics continued uninterrupted, pioneering safe and innovative alternatives to give litigants their rightful day in court."

Across the state, MVLP hosted 28 free legal clinics in 2024, providing help to 321 individuals, said MVLP Board Chair Alicia Hall. The impact of volunteer attorneys is tremendous. During the past year, "together, we have served 1,423 individuals who reached out for assistance, opened 967 cases, and successfully closed 825 cases with services....Since 1982, we have proudly served over 48,000 Mississippians," Hall said.

Attorneys honored with Pro Bono Awards for their volunteer service are Stephen Fritz of Jackson, Karmel Keeton of Ridgeland and Charles Yow II of Oxford. The Jackson law firm of Forman Watkins &

Krutz, LLP, was honored with the Curtis E. Coker Award for providing consistent, outstanding pro bono legal services.

Judge Richard grew up in Jackson and graduated from Tougaloo College. He moved to Greenville shortly after graduating from the University of Mississippi School of Law. He and Circuit Judge Carol White-Richard, a native of Holly Springs, have been married for 25 years. They are the first husband and wife holding Chancery and Circuit Court judicial seats, he in the Ninth Chancery since 2019 and she in the Fourth Circuit District since 2015.

Circuit Judge Richard, Chancellor Richard's father Bennie Lee Richard, and his brother Crandall Richard, both of Jackson, accompanied him at the ceremony. His brother Tony Richard of Nolensville, Tenn., was unable to attend, but sent a message that was read at the ceremony. He said, "In our society, being a judge is a powerful and privileged position. The very title draws attention, invites looks and shifts behaviors. With it comes a huge responsibility as your decisions change the trajectory of many lives for generations to come. I believe that it was Dr. King that said, 'Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.' This award is an outward display of how you are seen by your peers and the judicial system...that you are able to hold both power and love at the same time."

## Judge Kings focuses on moving Hinds County Court docket

In his first three and a half months on the bench, Hinds County Court Judge Yemi Kings has closed more than 1,400 cases on the civil docket.

Some were stale cases; others were active. He conducted docket calls for inactive cases, requiring attorneys for the parties to appear and state their intentions.

Judge Kings, who handles mostly civil cases, said, “We are moving. We are working hard. I’m enjoying being able to get into this backlog we’ve had and giving folks their day in court. The main thing is to try to make sure we keep moving.” He said there are about 3,000 pending cases on his docket.

Judge Kings also proposed conducting an expungement clinic. He discussed the idea with Sen-

ior County Court Judge Johnnie McDaniels, who implemented a periodic expungement docket.

“There’s a class of people that we know are absolutely entitled to expungement because cases were dismissed,” Judge Kings said. The court makes time available to hear those cases “so people can try to move on with their lives and gain employment.”

Judge Kings served as both a prosecutor and as a public defender before being elected to the bench. “It certainly prepared me, just being able to analyze different controversies and hear both sides. Having made those same arguments myself was a tremendous help,” he said.

He served as a Warren County public defender for about eight years, and as a Hinds County public de-



Hinds County Court Judge Yemi Kings took office in January 2024.

fender for about five years. Then he served as an assistant and deputy Hinds County prosecutor for about eight years.

Judge Kings is a lifelong resident of Jackson. He grew up in the Georgetown neighborhood

and graduated from Lanier High School. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Tougaloo College and a law degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University.

## Judge Joshua McCrory joins Rankin County Court



Judge Richard Redfern, at left, administers the oath of office to Rankin County Court Judge Joshua McCrory, at right, as Judge McCrory’s wife Tonya holds the Bible.

Rankin County Court and Youth Court Judge Joshua McCrory will deal with the issues that come before him with fairness, kindness and compassion, colleagues said on Jan. 3 before he took the oath of office.

Fellow Rankin County Court Judge David Morrow Jr. said, “The children of Rankin County are winners today because of the heart of Josh McCrory.”

Attorney Mark Baker, Judge McCrory’s law partner for 13 years, said that he possesses “not just the legal acumen for the position, but the temperament and wisdom.”

Judge McCrory was surrounded by his children and his parents as he took the oath. His wife Tonya McCrory held the Bible as

Justice Court Judge Richard Redfern administered the oath.

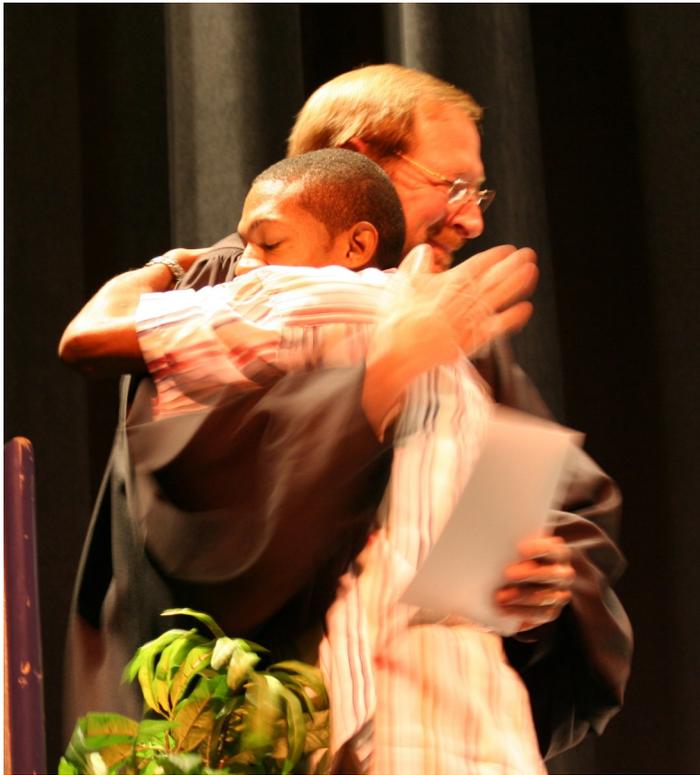
Judge McCrory said afterwards, “I’m really humbled by the responsibility that God has given me in this position and I’m looking forward to meeting those expectations.”

Judge McCrory previously served for 19 years as a Rankin County Justice Court Judge. He has practiced law for 22 years. He studied international business at the University of Mississippi and earned a Juris Doctor at the University of Mississippi School of Law. He is a lifelong resident of Brandon.

Judge McCrory was elected in November 2024 to the seat most recently

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## Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich to retire from bench June 30



**Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich hugs one of the many drug court graduates at a ceremony on Dec. 11, 2006.**

Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich of Hattiesburg has informed the Governor of his intent to retire effective June 30.

He has served as Circuit Judge of the 12th Circuit District of Forrest and Perry counties for more than 22 years.

He has been a leader in drug intervention courts. Judge Helfrich created a

drug court in the 12th Circuit shortly after he took office in 2003. He was among the earliest to create separate tracks for veterans and DUI offenders within drug court. He was appointed in 2009 to the Board of Directors of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, which later became known as All Rise. He has served

### **Judge McCrory, continued from page 15**

held by Judge Kent McDaniel, who returned from retirement to accept appointment to the court after the May 21, 2023, death of Judge Thomas Broome. "We were blessed to have Tom Broome do that for the last 20 years," Judge Morrow said.

Family, friends and most of the Rankin County judiciary attended the ceremony at the Rankin Coun-

ty Justice Center in Brandon. Rankin County Chancery Clerk Mark Scarborough, a longtime family friend, cited scripture and called on the judges to seek God's guidance. "This country was built on laws. Those laws also mention compassion and the word of God. Get on your knees and thank Him for what we have and ask him to protect our future."

on the State Intervention Courts Advisory Committee for 12 years.

As an assistant district attorney for the 12th Circuit District, Helfrich reopened and prosecuted racially motivated crimes from the Civil Rights era. Helfrich headed the team that prosecuted Ku Klux Klan Imperial Wizard Samuel Bowers in 1998 for ordering the 1966 firebombing death of Vernon F. Dahmer Sr. Four trials in the 1960s had ended in hung juries.

Trial testimony showed that at Bowers' direction, Klansmen drove to the Dahmer home on the night of Jan. 10, 1966, and hurled flaming gasoline into the house. Dahmer, a Civil Rights activist, successful businessman and farmer, had allowed Blacks to pay poll taxes at his store and had assisted with

voter registration. Burning gas fumes seared Dahmer's lungs as shot at the attackers as his wife and youngest children escaped the house.

In 1999, the prosecution of businessman Charles Noble, also accused of involvement in the Dahmer firebombing, resulted in a mistrial.

The Robert B. Helfrich Papers at the University of Southern Mississippi are an archive of the 1966 investigation and the 1998 and 1999 trials.

Judge Helfrich worked as an assistant public defender before he joined the district attorney's office. He is a veteran of the United States Coast Guard.

He earned his undergraduate degree from George Mason University and his Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.



**Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich speaks at the dedication of a statue of Vernon F. Dahmer Sr. outside the Forrest County Courthouse on Jan. 6, 2020.**

# 19th District Chancellor Billie Graham plans to retire on June 30



Chancellor Billie Graham makes a comment during the fall Trial and Appellate Judges Conference on Oct. 27, 2021.

Nineteenth District of Laurel has notified the Chancellor Billie Graham Governor that she plans to

retire on June 30.

She will have served almost five years as chancellor of the district that includes Jones and Wayne counties. Gov. Tate Reeves appointed her on July 23, 2020, to a vacancy.

Judge Graham came to the chancery bench after a lengthy career in private law practice which included domestic relations and personal injury. She also served as a guardian ad litem in Chancery and Youth Court, and as a public defender in Jones County Youth Court. She served for nine years as a Jones County Justice Court Judge.

She previously served as president of the Family Law Section in the Mississippi Bar and president of

the Jones County Bar Association. She has been listed in the Family Law Section of Best Lawyers in America as well as Mid-South Super Lawyers. She is a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation.

Judge Graham is originally from Stringer. She is a graduate of Jones County Junior College. She earned Bachelor of Science degrees in English and political science from Mississippi University for Women, and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Graham is a member of First United Methodist Church in Laurel and has participated in local, national and international mission projects.

# Supreme Court makes appointments to Intervention Courts Advisory Committee



Justice Robert Chamberlin

The Supreme Court recently appointed First District Circuit Judge John R. White of Iuka and Rep. Kevin Horan of Grenada to the State Intervention Courts Advisory Committee, and reappointed nine veteran members of the Advisory Committee. The Supreme Court also ap-



Judge John R. White

pointed Fourth Circuit District Attorney W. Dewayne Richardson as an alternate member, and reappointed three previously serving alternates.

Chief Justice Mike Randolph signed the appointment order on behalf of the unanimous court on April 10. Appointment terms are



Rep. Kevin Horan

through Dec. 31, 2026.

Justice Robert Chamberlin was reappointed as chairman designee. Members reappointed to SICAC are Circuit Judge Randi P. Mueller of the Second Circuit District, Circuit Judge Winston L. Kidd of the Seventh Circuit District, Circuit Judge Charles



DA Dewayne Richardson

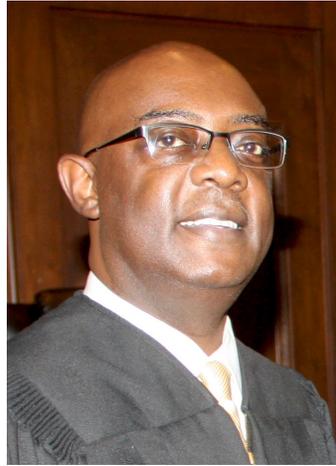
Webster of the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit District, Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich of the 12<sup>th</sup> Circuit District, Circuit Judge Michael Taylor of the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit District, Circuit Judge Kathy King Jackson of the 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit District, 18<sup>th</sup> District Drug Court Coordinator Con-

*continued on page 18*

### Reappointed to Intervention Courts Advisory Committee, *continued from page 17*



**Judge Randi Mueller**



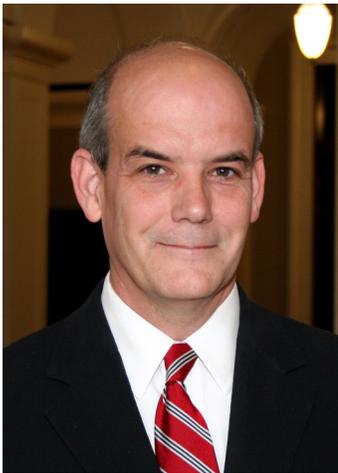
**Judge Winston Kidd**



**Judge Charles Webster**



**Judge Robert Helfrich**



**Judge Michael Taylor**



**Judge Kathy King Jackson**



**Consuelo Walley**



**Nathan Blevins**



**Andrea Sanders**



**Judge Walt Brown**



**Judge Mike Dickinson**



**Judge Betsy Cotton**

suelo Walley, Mississippi Department of Corrections Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections Nathan Blevins, and Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services

Commissioner Andrea Sanders. Reappointed alternate members are Adams County Court Judge Walt Brown, Harrison County

Court Judge Mike Dickinson, and Yazoo County Court Judge Betsy Cotton. Judge White was elected to the First Circuit Court in November 2018 and

took the bench in January 2019. He was in private law practice for about 30 years. In his early practice, he handled insurance

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# Judges Schmidt, Wilson and White-Richard lead Circuit Conference



Judge Christopher Schmidt



Judge Celeste Wilson



Judge Carol White-Richard

Circuit and County Court Judges elected new officers at the fall 2024 Trial and Appellate Judges Conference in Biloxi.

Circuit Judge Christopher Schmidt of Pass Christian was chosen as chair of the Conference of Circuit Court Judges. He previously served as vice-chair. Circuit Judge Celeste Wilson of Southaven is vice-chair, having previously served as conference secretary. Circuit Judge Carol White-Richard of Greenville was elected as conference secretary-treasurer.

Lauderdale County Court Judge Lisa Howell of Meridian was elected chair of the Conference of County Court Judges. For-

rest County Court Judge Carol Jones Russell of Hattiesburg is vice-chair, and Yazoo County Court Judge Betsy Cotton of Yazoo City is secretary.

New officers were elected on Oct. 24, 2024.

County Court judges thanked three long-serving officers, outgoing Conference chairman Judge Ed Hannan of Madison, outgoing vice-chair Judge Vernita King Johnson of Greenville, and outgoing conference secretary Judge Veldore Young Graham of Meridian. 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 Gra-

ham began her service as Conference secretary in April 2012.

Judge Schmidt has served since January 2015 in the Second Circuit District of Hancock, Harrison and Stone counties. He previously was an assistant district attorney in the Second Circuit for 14 years. He was in private law practice from 2010 until his election in 2014. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Wilson has served as a Circuit Judge for more than seven years. She was appointed in February

2017 to the 17<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court. She was elected to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Circuit Court District in November 2022 and took office in January 2023 when DeSoto County became a separate Circuit Court district. She serves on the Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules.

Judge Wilson previously served for eight years as a DeSoto County Court Judge. She served as vice chair of the Council of Youth Court Judges and was 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.

Judge Wilson earned a Bachelor's Degree in business administration from Delta State University and a law degree from the University of Memphis.

Judge White-Richard was elected in November 2014 and took office in January 2015 in the Fourth Circuit Court District that includes Leflore, Sunflower and Washington counties. Before taking the bench, she was a criminal

*continued on page 20*

## Intervention Courts Advisory Committee, *continued from page 18*

defense litigation. During the latter half of his private practice, he was a criminal defense lawyer.

Judge White earned a bachelor's degree and a Masters of Business Administration from the University of Mississippi, and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Rep. Horan is Chair of

the House Judiciary B Committee. He has served House District 34 since 2012, representing Carroll, Grenada, Holmes, Leflore and Tallahatchie counties. He is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and Mississippi College School of Law.

Richardson has served as a prosecutor in the Mississippi Delta since 2003,

serving first as an assistant district attorney. He was elected District Attorney in 2007. Elected at age 30, he was the second youngest District Attorney in state history. When he was elected president of the Mississippi Prosecutors association in 2012, he was the association's first Black president. He is a board member of the Na-

tional District Attorneys Association. He is a member of 100 Black Men of the Mississippi Delta, where he serves as scholarship chair.

Richardson earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Tougaloo College and a Juris Doctorate from Mississippi College School of Law.

# County Conference leaders are Judges Howell, Russell and Cotton



Judge Lisa Howell

*continued from page 19*  
defense attorney and assistant district attorney. She is past president of the Mississippi Public Defenders Association. She also served as part-time faculty of Gideon's Promise.

Judge White-Richard is a graduate of Tulane University with a double major in English and communications. She earned a law degree from Vanderbilt School of Law.

Judge Howell was appointed to the Lauderdale County Court on Nov. 1, 2017. She serves as County Court and Youth Court



Judge Carol Jones Russell

Judge. She previously served for 22 years as an assistant district attorney for the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court District of Lauderdale, Clarke, Kemper and Wayne counties. She was in private law practice after earning a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Southern Mississippi.

Judge Russell was elected to the Forrest County Court in November 2018 and took office in January 2019. She serves as County Court and Youth Court



Judge Betsy Cotton

Judge. The Supreme Court reappointed her to the Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules on Nov. 5. Judge Russell was the recipient of the 2024 Judicial Excellence Award presented by the Mississippi Bar. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation, serving as Policy and By-laws Committee chair. She previously served as Hattiesburg Municipal Court Judge 2012-2018. Her private practice was in family law. She earned a Bachelor of Science de-

gree in business administration from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Cotton was elected to the Yazoo County Court in November 2018 and took office in January 2019. She serves as County Court and Youth Court Judge. She is an alternate member of the State Intervention Courts Advisory Committee. She was the Yazoo County Youth Court public defender and Yazoo County Youth Court guardian ad litem from 2012 until 2017, when she was appointed as Yazoo County prosecutor for Justice Court, Youth Court, and County Court. She also served as a guardian ad litem in Chancery Court. She began her career as a legal secretary before earning a Bachelor's Degree in business administration, *summa cum laude*, from Belhaven College. She earned her law degree from Mississippi College School of Law.

## Court of Appeals Judges discuss decisions impacting Workers Compensation

Court of Appeals Judges gave a presentation about recent workers compensation appeal decisions on April 10 at the Mississippi Workers' Compensation Educational Association Conference in Biloxi.

Participating in the panel discussion were, left to right, Judge David Neil McCarty, Judge Deborah McDonald and Presiding Judge Virginia Carlton.

The three-day conference was attended by employers, insurers, third-party administrators, attorneys, health care professionals and rehabilitation providers.



# Supreme Court makes appointments to Complaint Tribunal



**DA Angel Myers McIlrath**



**Judge Michelle Easterling**



**Mary Largent Purvis**



**Judge Robert Fant Walker**



**Alicia S. Hall**



**Robert E. Quimby**

The Supreme Court appointed three new members to the Bar Complaint Tribunal and reappointed three members to terms which began Jan. 1.

New members joining the Complaint Tribunal are District Attorney Angel Myers McIlrath of Ocean Springs, Circuit Judge Michelle Easterling of Clay County and Associate Dean Mary Largent Purvis of Jackson.

The unanimous Supreme Court reappointed Gulfport Municipal Court Judge Robert Fant Walker and attorneys Alicia S. Hall of Jackson and Robert E. Quimby of Tupelo.

Judge Easterling, Associate Dean Purvis and DA

McIlrath replaced Complaint Tribunal members Circuit Judge Joseph H. Loper Jr. of Ackerman, Mississippi College School of Law Associate Professor Donald E. Campbell of Jackson and attorney James E. Lambert III of Gulfport. Judge Loper, Campbell and Lambert served on the Tribunal since January 2019.

Chief Justice Mike Randolph signed the appointment order on Nov. 19, 2024. The three-year terms will end on Dec. 31, 2027.

Members of the Complaint Tribunal hear and decide disciplinary matters arising out of complaints against attorneys. The 27-member 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 Complaint Tribunal sits in panels of three, with each panel made up of two attorneys and one judge. McIlrath has been a prosecutor on the Gulf Coast for 18 years. She has served as District Attorney of the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial District of Jackson, George and Greene counties for the past six years. She was an assistant district attorney for 12 years and served as director of the District Attorney's Child Protection Unit for five years. She has served the Mississippi Prosecutors Association as president, vice-president and secretary treasurer as well as serving on the MPA Board of Directors, Legislative Committee and Curriculum Committee. She was involved in drafting and pushing for passage of legislation including revising statutes for prosecution of child abuse and voyeurism against children and establishing degrees of murder. She is a member of the Mississippi Attorney General's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, the National District Attorneys Association and the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. She served as an adjunct instructor at the Jackson County campus of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, teaching criminal investigations and criminal law, and is a frequent speaker on topics including physical abuse and neglect of children, child exploitation, Constitutional law and investigative practices.

She was an associate for two years in the firm of Daniel Coker Horton & Bell.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from the University of Southern Mississippi and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law.

She is founder and president of the SoSo Strong Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation, which she created in honor of her daughter Sophia, who died of Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma at age 7. She coached and completed numerous marathons and

*continued on page 22*

## Complaint Tribunal members appointed, *continued from page 21*

half-marathons for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Team in Training. She is a former board member and nominating committee member of the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Arts Center. She is a life member of the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Junior Auxiliary and a member of the Pascagoula Rotary Club, Pascagoula Kiwanis Club and the Duchess Club of Ocean Springs.

Judge Easterling was elected to the 16th Circuit Court of Clay, Lowndes, Noxubee and Oktibbeha counties in November 2022 and took office in January 2023. She previously served as the Clay County Prosecuting Attorney for 10 years and Municipal Prosecutor for the City of West Point for seven years. Her 24 years of private practice included domestic relations, estate planning, business law and real estate. She served on the Board of Bar Commissioners. She worked on Bar committees including Professionalism and the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, and was chair of the Women in the Profession Standing Committee. She is a member of the West Point Rotary Club and the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation.

Judge Easterling earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, *magna cum laude*, from Millsaps College and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Purvis is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and an Assistant Professor at Mississippi College School of Law, where she has taught legal analysis

and communication, criminal law, secured transactions, sales and leasing, and advanced legal analysis. She graduated *magna cum laude* from Millsaps College, and graduated *summa cum laude* from Mississippi College School of Law, where she was a member of the Law Review. She received her Doctorate of Education in Higher Education Administration from the University of Southern Mississippi. She serves as Board Chair for CASA Mississippi, Board President for Healthy Centers Healthy Kids, and Chair for the Women's Foundation of Mississippi. She served as a Mississippi Legal Ambassador through the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project in 2023. She also serves on the boards of the Junior League of Jackson, Ballet Mississippi, the Mississippi Capital Area Habitat for Humanity, and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. She is a member of the Capital Area Bar Association and Mississippi Women Lawyers Association.

Judge Walker has served for 15 years as a Gulfport Municipal Judge. He previously was an assistant district attorney in the Second Circuit District. He was a law clerk for the Mississippi Court of Appeals. He is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Hall is Senior Counsel with Entergy. She previously was in private practice in the Jackson area for seven years. She is chair of the Board of Directors of

the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project. She served as 2017-2018 president of Jackson Young Lawyers. Hall graduated from the College of Charleston with degrees in psychology and political science. She received her Juris Doctor from Mississippi College School of Law, *magna cum laude*.

Quimby practices law with the firm of Mitchell, McNutt, & Sams in Tupelo. His practice areas include business and commercial litigation, governmental representation, estate planning, probate and elder law. He represents numerous governmental entities, businesses

and individuals. He serves on the Board of Directors and as secretary of Reed Manufacturing Co., Inc. He served as a Municipal Court Judge for the City of Hernando 2014-2020. He is admitted to practice law in Mississippi and Tennessee. He is a board member of Northeast Mississippi Habitat for Humanity. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree, *cum laude*, from Millsaps College and a Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude*, from Mississippi College School of Law, where he served as executive editor of the Mississippi College Law Review and was a member of the Moot Court Board.

## Court on the Road visits campuses



Left to right, Judges Deborah McDonald, Latrice Westbrook and Amy St. Pe' convened to hear oral arguments at Mississippi Valley State University March 25. *continued on page 23*

# Supreme Court makes appointments to Advisory Committee on Rules



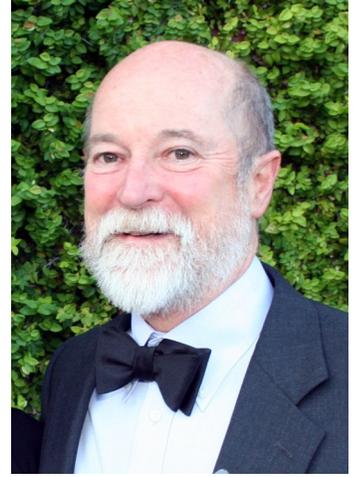
**Judge Latrice Westbrook**



**William M. Gage**



**Graham P. Carner**



**Judge Carter Bise**



**Judge Ashley Hines**



**Judge Carol Jones Russell**



**Justin T. Cook**



**Nicholas K. Thompson**

Court of Appeals Judge Latrice Westbrook of Lexington and attorneys William M. Gage of Ridgeland

and Graham P. Carner of Jackson joined the Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Rules on

Jan. 1.

The Supreme Court reappointed Advisory Committee members Chancellor

Carter Bise of Gulfport, Circuit Judge W. Ashley Hines of Greenville, For-

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## Court on the Road takes oral arguments to college campuses

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The Mississippi Court of Appeals convened on the campus of Mississippi Valley State University at Itta Bena on March 25.

Judges Deborah McDonald, Latrice Westbrook and Amy St. Pe' heard oral arguments in a criminal appeal in the W.A. Butts Social Science Building Auditorium.

A week later, on April 1, the Court of Appeals

convened on the campus of Alcorn State University in Lorman to hear another appeal.

The Court of Appeals visits the campuses annually as part of its Court on the Road program. The Court schedules oral arguments on college campuses and occasionally at other locations as a teaching tool to give students and the public opportunities to watch proceedings in cases

on appeal. Court on the Road offers a unique learning experience for students with an interest in law, government, journalism and a variety of other fields. The general public may attend to gain a better understanding of appellate court proceedings.

Judge Westbrook, who coordinated the visit to MVSU, said, "The Court on the Road program offers the opportunity for

transparency and education. It elevates the public's understanding of Mississippi's judicial system. It also encourages civic engagement and exposes the students to the Court in a way that is not adversarial. There are no witnesses and no jury."

The Court of Appeals began the Court on the Road program as a part of its regular calendar for oral arguments in 2005.

## Attorneys Gage, Carner join Advisory Committee on Rules

*continued from page 23*

rest County Court Judge Carol Jones Russell of Hattiesburg, attorney Justin T. Cook of Jackson, and attorney Nicholas K. Thompson of Hattiesburg.

The three-year terms extend through Dec. 31, 2027.

The 15-member Advisory Committee advises the Supreme Court on needs for changes in procedural rules. Terms are staggered.

Judge Westbrook was nominated to the Advisory Committee on Rules by Court of Appeals Chief Judge Donna M. Barnes. Judge Westbrook was elected to the Court of Appeals in November 2016 and took office in January 2017. She was re-elected to the Court in 2024. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Austin Peay State University, and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Detroit Mercy Law School. In October 1997, shortly after graduating from law school, she became the first African American woman Assistant District Attorney in the Second Circuit Court District. She joined the Jackson law

firm of Byrd and Associates in 2000, then opened her own law practice in 2001, representing clients in both criminal and civil matters.

She served as prosecutor for the city of Durant and as city attorney for the town of Isola. For almost 10 years, she served as a public defender in Holmes County. She served as interim communications director for the city of Jackson, then joined the Jackson City Attorney's Office as legal counsel for the Jackson Police Department. She returned to private law practice in 2014. She was appointed Municipal Judge for the city of Lexington in 2015 and served until she was elected to the Court of Appeals. Judge Westbrook was named as Outstanding Woman Lawyer of 2017 by the Mississippi Women Lawyers Association, inducted as a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation in 2022, and named an Outstanding Alumna of Austin Peay State University in 2023.

Gage was nominated by the Mississippi Bar. He is an attorney in Butler Snow

LLP's Pharmaceutical, Medical Device & Healthcare Litigation Group. He previously served as chair of the firm's Litigation Department. He has more than 30 years of experience defending mass torts involving products, drugs and medical devices. He was recognized for his work managing defense of complex multidistrict litigation. He has been involved in several of the nation's largest mass tort multidistrict litigation cases.

Gage was profiled as one of *Law360's* 2016 Trial Pros and is recognized by industry publications including *Chambers USA*, *The Legal 500 US*, *Who's Who Legal*, *Product Liability Defense*, *Benchmark Litigation*, *The Best Lawyers in America*, and *Mid-South Super Lawyers*. He is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and the International Academy of Trial Lawyers.

Gage earned a Bachelor of Arts in accountancy, *cum laude*, from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor, *cum laude*, from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Carner was nominated by the Mississippi Association for Justice. A solo practitioner, he has extensive experience litigating in state and federal courts in Mississippi. He is a member of the Criminal Justice Act panel for representation of clients on Death Row in federal court habeas corpus proceedings. He serves as a public defender for the city of Clinton, and formerly served as public defender for Lincoln County and the city of Byram. Carner also

represents a variety of professionals, including attorneys, nurses and doctors, in licensure and disciplinary matters.

Carner is a past president of the Mississippi Association for Justice and currently serves on its Board of Governors. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Capital Area Bar Association, Mississippi Public Defenders Association, Association of Professional Responsibility Lawyers, and National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

Carner earned a degree in English and history from Mississippi College and earned a law degree from Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Judge Bise, renominated to the Advisory Committee by the Conference of Chancery Court Judges, has served as a chancellor of the Eighth Chancery Court of Hancock, Harrison and Stone counties since January 2002.

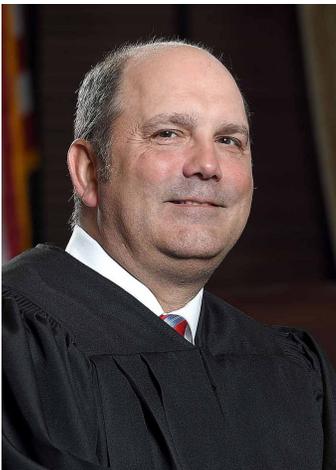
He practiced law on the Gulf Coast for 20 years before he took the bench. He served twice as president of the Harrison County Young Lawyers, and on the boards of Lynn Meadows Discovery Center, Harrison County Habitat for Humanity, and South Mississippi AIDS Task Force.

Judge Bise earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Belhaven College, now Belhaven University, and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Hines, renominated by the Conference of

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## Justice Chamberlin talks about dicta



Supreme Court Justice Robert P. Chamberlin of Hernando spoke to a continuing legal education symposium for appellate judges on March 14 in Little Rock. The 2025 Corbin Appellate Symposium began March 13 on the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Main Campus. Justice Chamberlin talked about the value of dicta in court opinions. He titled his presentation "Dicta: A rose by any other name."

## Judicial performance lay member and alternate trade places



**Retired Col. Silvanus Johnson and Jeffery M. Adcock**

A member of the Commission on Judicial Performance and an alternate member traded places in new terms on Jan. 1.

Jeffery M. Adcock of Jackson resumed his service as a lay member of the Commission on Judi-

cial Performance, and retired Col. Silvanus Johnson of Brandon became the alternate lay member.

Both men have previously served as a lay member and alternate. Adcock was first appointed as a member of the commission

on March 1, 2012, and served through Dec. 31, 2019, when he became the alternate. Johnson served as an alternate member from Aug. 22, 2014, until Dec. 31, 2019, when he and Adcock traded places, with Johnson serving as a member of the commission until Dec. 31, 2024.

The new terms extend through Dec. 31, 2030. Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Randolph signed the appointment order on Dec. 30, 2024.

Adcock retired in 2009 as director of administration for the State Auditor's Office. After retirement from state government, he has been involved in real estate management and investment. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree and a Masters of

Business Administration from Mississippi State University.

Johnson previously served as vice-chairman of the Commission. He is a retired medical services officer. He was the first African American enlisted soldier to enter the Mississippi Army National Guard, and was the first African American member of the Board of Directors for the Mississippi Military Museum at Camp Shelby. He was a special education and biology learning strategy teacher at Mendenhall High School, where he was Teacher of the Year 2013-2014. He is a graduate of Jackson State University and was the Senior Assistant Professor of the Military Science Department at JSU.

## Reappointments to Advisory Committee on Rules, *continued from page 24*

Circuit Judges, has served as chairman of the Advisory Committee on Rules for the past nine years. He has served as a judge of the Fourth Circuit Court District of Leflore, Sunflower and Washington counties since January 1996.

He was a Scoutmaster for 15 years. He is a Worship Leader at St. James' Episcopal Church, where he also served as Junior Warden and Senior Warden. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Judge Russell was renominated by the Conference of County Court Judges, for which she serves as vice-chair. She previously served as secre-

tary of the Conference. Judge Russell was elected to the Forrest County Court in November 2018 and took office in January 2019. She serves as County Court and Youth Court Judge.

Judge Russell received the Mississippi Bar's 2024 Judicial Excellence Award. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation, serving as Policy and By-laws Committee chair. She previously served as Hattiesburg Municipal Court Judge 2012-2018. Her private practice was in family law. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from the University of Southern Mississippi and a Juris Doctor from

the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Cook, renominated by the Mississippi Public Defenders Association, has been an assistant state defender in the Mississippi Office of the State Public Defender for more than 13 years. He previously served for three and a half years as a staff attorney in the Mississippi Office of Indigent Appeals.

Cook earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from the College of Charleston and a Juris Doctor from the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Thompson, renominated by the Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association, is a shareholder in the firm of Copeland, Cook, Taylor and Bush. His practice

areas include appellate practice, business law, insurance and risk management, transportation, and wealth preservation and estates.

Thompson earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, *cum laude*, in philosophy from Mississippi State University in 2002, a BA in journalism from MSU in 2005, and a Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude*, from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 2009.

Thompson served as a law clerk for U.S. Magistrate Judge Michael T. Parker in 2007 and as a law clerk for Supreme Court Chief Justice William L. Waller Jr. 2009-2010.

He is a volunteer with Hattiesburg Area Habitat for Humanity.

## Mississippi hosts Mexican prosecutor and law enforcement training



A Mexican prosecutor questions a witness during a mock trial conducted at the Mississippi Supreme Court on Nov. 20, 2024, as part of a training program of the national Attorney General Alliance.

Mexican prosecutors and investigators honed their skills in a Mississippi

courtroom last November in a training program provided by the national At-

torney General Alliance.

Sixteen prosecutors and staff from Durango State

and Colima State and the Attorney General of Coli-

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## 9th Chancery Court participates in Adopt-a-Highway as community service



**Chancellor Debra Giles**

Chancellor Debra Giles helped unveil an Adopt-a-Highway sign on south-bound U.S. Highway 49 at

Caile on Jan. 17 as youth and specialty courts of the 9th Chancery Court kicked off a new community service effort.

Participants in Youth Court, Juvenile Drug Intervention Court and Family Treatment Court in Sunflower and Humphreys counties work on the beautification project. Judge Giles said that groups of youths and parents will undertake the cleanup efforts on Saturdays four times a year. They will be responsible for about a mile alongside U.S. 49 from Caile to near the north Humphreys County line.

Sunflower and Humphreys County Sheriff's Offices are expected to provide traffic patrolling to safeguard the youths and parents. "We have great support from Sheriff's Offices in Sunflower and Humphreys counties," Judge Giles said. Children will be provided with safety gear and helmets, which also will serve to maintain Youth Court's requirement that the young people not be identified.

The beautification project, suggested by a new court intake officer, will provide another option for community service. "One

of the struggles we have in the Delta is finding individuals and organizations to help us with community service," Judge Giles said. Other options include helping with local food pantries and at Delta Mission.

Judge Giles said she will pick up litter too. "Keeping our community clean and beautiful is something that's important to me. I'm going to be out there. I can't expect for my kids to experience what keeping our community clean means unless I'm out there. I'm vested in the kids that I serve and I'm vested in the community."



**Justice David Ishee, at right, talks to Mexican attorneys about the state judicial system.**

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ma State spent a week with attorneys from the Mississippi Attorney General's Office and the Attorney General Alliance.

Participants spent Nov. 19, 2024, listening to coaching from Attorney General's Office prosecutors and criminal appellate attorneys as well as AGA trainers. Mexican attorneys participated in a mock trial of a homicide prosecution on Nov. 20 and 21 in the En Banc Courtroom at the Mississippi Supreme Court. About 1,300 prosecutors and staff across Mexico were invited to view the live streamed proceeding.

"We teach prosecutors, investigators, forensic experts and criminal analysts to better investigate and prosecute crime," said Frank Collins, Chief Financial Officer and Director of the Alliance Partnership Mexico for the Attorney General Alliance. "We are trying to help Mexico have a better law enforcement system."

Attorneys General in Alabama, Arizona, Geor-

gia, Kansas and Texas recently hosted similar programs, said Selene Collins, Administrative Director of the Alliance Partnership.

Attorney General Lynn Fitch invited the Attorney General Alliance to Mississippi.

"It was an honor to host prosecutors from Mexico's Colima and Durango states in Mississippi this week for a mock trial as they explore these improvements to Mexico's criminal justice system," Fitch said in a statement. "This meeting offers a rare opportunity to share our best legal practices and engage in a partnership between the United States and Mexico that promotes better safety and security for us all."

The concept of oral advocacy, with prosecutors questioning live witnesses in a courtroom before a judge, is relatively new in Mexico. In 2008, federal constitutional reforms in Mexico gave Mexican states until 2016 to implement oral adversarial criminal trials. The system does not include juries. The for-

mer system was a paper system that relied on written inquiries and legal arguments with transcribed depositions submitted to a judge for decision.

All of the questioning by prosecutors and defense attorneys and witness testimony during the mock trial was in Spanish. Three interpreters took turns providing simultaneous translation to the English speaking participants via headsets.

During a break in the mock trial, Mississippi Supreme Court Justice David Ishee of Gulfport gave the participants an overview of the state's judicial system, explaining the roles of Mississippi's Justice, Municipal, County, Chancery and Circuit courts, the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. Justice Ishee recently marked his 20<sup>th</sup> year as an appellate judge, having served first on the Court of Appeals, then the Supreme Court. As a former prosecutor, defense lawyer and municipal judge, he joked that he's sat in every chair in a courtroom except that

of a criminal defendant.

Participants quizzed Justice Ishee about an elective versus an appointive system of selecting judges; about political party involvement, politics and fundraising in an elective system; and about background and training for judges. In Mexico, lawyers may pursue a judicial career track without first practicing law.

Justice Ishee said there are pros and cons to both systems of judicial selection. He was appointed then elected to both the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court.

Justice Ishee said that practicing law and serving as a prosecutor provides good training and perspective for future judges. "Diversity is important. I've been a prosecutor and a defense lawyer," he said. "Open your minds to the idea that lawyers moving on to become judges is a good thing."

Frank Collins said, "We are not here to tell you it's good or bad to elect." Rather, it is an opportunity to see how the system works.

The program aims to teach best practices in an oral advocacy system.

Justice Ishee said, "It was an honor to be here with you. Thank you very much and welcome to Mississippi."

Judges for the mock trial included Arizona Judge María Elena Cruz of the Court of Appeals, who has worked with the training program for many years; Mississippi Deputy Attorney General Lindsay Cranford; Director of the Attorney General's Public Integrity Division Brandon Ogburn; and Director of

*continued on page 28*

## Desk holds more than 100 years of Supreme Court history



Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens signed the historic desk.

As Supreme Court Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens cleaned out his desk in December 2024 near the end of his term, he signed his name inside a drawer. In a tradition that goes back more than 100 years, more than a dozen justices have left their signatures inside the desk.

Presiding Justice Kitchens said the desk reminded him that he was “standing on the shoulders of giants.” He said, “I looked frequently at the names in that drawer, all well known in our state’s legal community....That old desk had an humbling effect on me during all the years that I used it.”

Justice Kenneth Griffis, who moved into Kitchens’ former office, said that the desk “certainly gives me a star to shoot at, to emulate and aspire to.” He said, “It appeals to me because I am part of an historic institution that does revere the

work of those that have gone through here in times gone by.”

Justice Griffis said that he is honored to work at a desk once occupied by Chief Justice Lenore Prather, a mentor and friend, as well as his contemporaries, former Chief Justice William L. Waller Jr. and former Presiding Justice Jess H. Dickinson.

The Supreme Court has two of the historic desks. Justice David Ishee has the second desk, which was signed by three former Chief Justices: Edwin Lloyd Pittman, James W. Smith Jr. and Waller. Justices signed when they moved to a different office or left office.

The desks are double-sided, built for two occupants, one on each side. In the furniture industry, the style is sometimes referred to as a “partners desk” and was used by law partners.

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## Mexican prosecutors visit Mississippi

*continued from page 27*

the Attorney General’s Medicaid Fraud Control Unit Marty Miller. Coaches included Mississippi Special Assistant Attorneys General Danielle Burks, Barbara Byrd, Sam Martin, Brantley Walton and Luke Williamson; and Stephanie Brown, Deputy Director of the AG’s Special Victims Unit. Other Attorney General Alliance staff instructors were Anthony Da Silva, formerly of the California Attorney General’s Office, and retired Benton County, Oregon, District Attorney John Haroldson.

## CEU training offered for credentialed language interpreters



**Eighteen credentialed court interpreters attended a continuing education seminar on March 12 in Jackson. Fifteen first time candidates attended an Ethics and Skill Building Seminar March 13-14. Seven new interpreters received credentials after the seminar.**

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The historic desks were part of the original furnishings of the New Capitol when it opened in 1903. At that time, only three Justices served on the Supreme Court, and their chambers were in the Capitol.

Justice Griffis said that he was disappointed to learn that there weren't more historic furnishings in use. He hopes that those in charge of remodeling or refurbishing courthouses around the state will be mindful of preserving books, pictures and furnishings.

The earliest jurist to sign what is now Justice Griffis' desk was Justice John Burt Holden, former mayor of Summit. He signed "J.B. Holden" and noted the start of his first term in January 1916 and his 1924 re-election. Chief Justice Harvey McGeehee was the second longest serving Mississippi Justice in history. Chief Justice Virgil A. Griffith, a former chancellor, wrote the highly regarded *Mississippi Chancery Practice*, a book which guided generations of lawyers. Chief Justice Robert G. Gillespie streamlined the hearing process, allowing the court to sit in panels of three. Chief Justice Neville Patterson authored landmark decisions that established the Supreme Court's rule making authority for state courts and removed legislators from state executive boards and commissions. Chief Justice Roy Noble Lee gave leadership to the enactment of legislation that created the Administrative Office of Courts and the Court of Appeals.

Chief Justice Prather was the state's first female chancellor, the first female Supreme Court Justice,

and the state's only woman Chief Justice. Chief Justice Waller gave leadership to reforms in the administration of justice through legislation and rule changes. He led development of the Mississippi Electronic Courts e-filing system now used in appellate courts and most trial courts, pushed expansion of drug intervention courts statewide, and championed meaningful access to the courts for all people. In his earlier years on the Court, he helped create the Office of Capital Post-Conviction Counsel and the Office of Indigent Appeals.

Other Presiding Justices who used the desk were William Roberds, Michael Sullivan, Chuck McRae and Jess H. Dickinson. Justice Roberds, a law professor and lawyer who did not seek the appointment,

was picked by a Governor on his reputation. Justice Sullivan was known for his quick wit, sharp tongue, tremendous intellect and ability to cut to the heart of an issue. His son David Sullivan was sworn in as a Supreme Court Justice on Jan. 6. Justice McRae was a colorful maverick adventurer and former president of the Mississippi Trial Lawyers Association. Justice Dickinson, a founding member of the Access to Justice Commission and a talented musician, led the Department of Child Protection Services after he left the Court.

Chief Justice Pittman worked tirelessly to improve efficiency and transparency of the courts; to protect judicial independence and strengthen ethics, impartiality and fairness

within the judiciary and the legal profession; and to improve access to justice for the poor. He put appellate court dockets online, established webcasting of oral arguments, and led rule making changes that allowed media cameras in courtrooms. He laid the groundwork for establishing the Access to Justice Commission.

Chief Justice Smith insisted on timely appellate decisions, eliminating a backlog within three months of becoming Chief Justice. The former County Court and Youth Court judge worked to protect children. He signed the order that created the Access to Justice Commission in 2006. He spearheaded formation of the Task Force for Youth Court Rules that developed uniform rules of procedure.

## Career Day: from courtroom to classroom

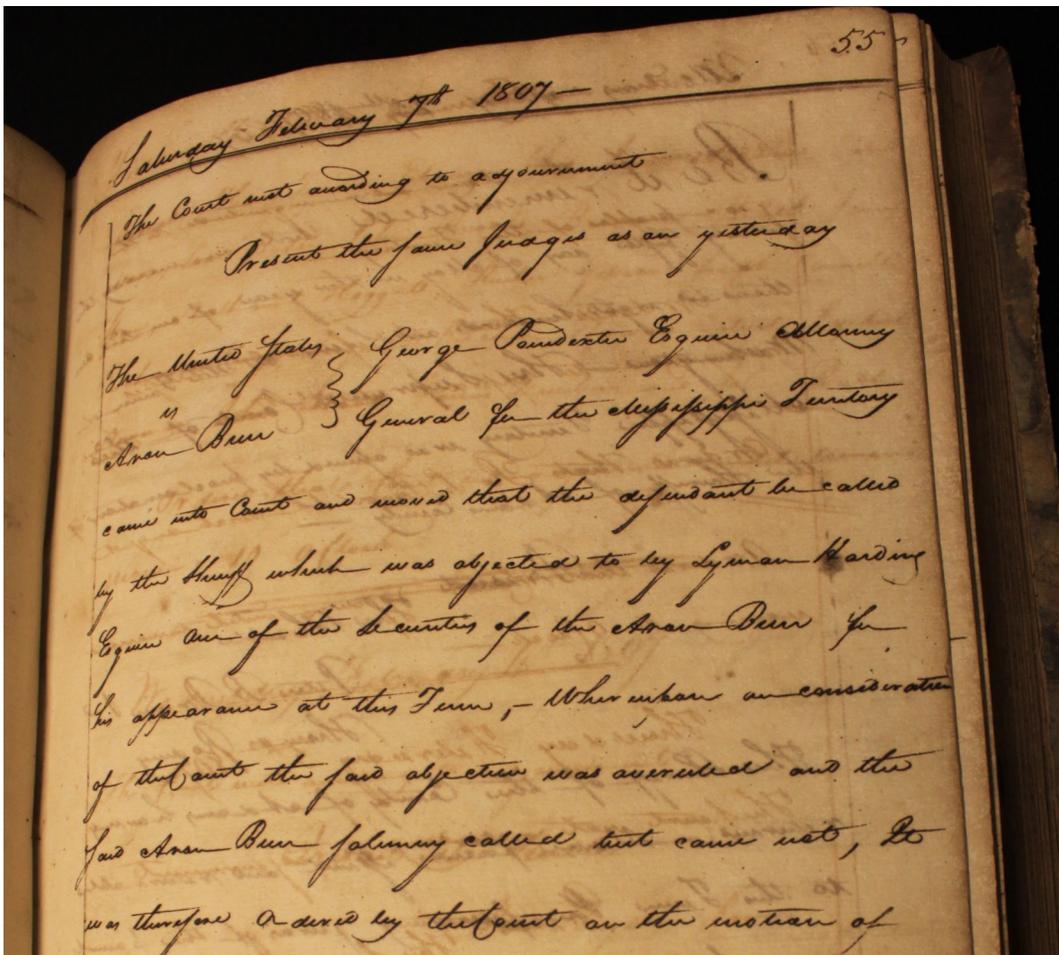


**Hinds County Sheriff's Deputy Christopher Sawyer, business strategist and consultant Samantha Marshall-Sawyer and Chancellor Cynthia Brewer were among more than 30 people who participated in Career Day at Madison Crossing Elementary School on April 4.**

## UPDATE: Mississippi Territorial court records posted online



Jennifer McGillan, Coordinator of Manuscripts for Mississippi State University Libraries, examines one of the Territorial minute books on June 20, 2024.



A Territorial Minute Book entry from Feb. 7, 1807, details proceedings against Aaron Burr.

Records of the Supreme Court of the Mississippi Territory spanning 1799 to 1809 were added to the digital archive of the State Law Library in Jackson on Jan. 10 and are available for viewing online.

Here is the link: <https://courts.ms.gov/research/statelibrary/minutes.php>.

The 1805-1809 Minute Book of the Supreme Court of the Mississippi Territory documents early stages of the 1807 arrest and attempted prosecution of former U.S. Vice President Aaron Burr on treason charges. An entry dated Feb. 4, 1807, says that a grand jury found no reason to hold Burr. The document reads, "The Grand Jury of the Mississippi Territory as a due consideration of the evidence brought before them are of opinion that Aaron Burr has not been guilty of any Crime or misdemeanor against the laws of the United States or of this territory or given any just occasion for the alarm...." An entry records that Attorney General George Poindexter appeared before the Territorial Supreme Court on Feb. 7, 1807, and "moved that the defendant be called by the Sheriff, which was objected to by Lyman Harding Esquire one of the Securities of this Aaron Burr for his appearance at this Term." Penned in elegant, flowing script, the document says that Burr was "called but came not." Burr was arrested nearly a week later, on Feb. 13, 1807, in what is now Alabama, then still part of the Mississippi Territory.

The U.S. Congress cre-  
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**State Librarian Stephen Parks, at left, shows a volume of records of the Mississippi Territory to students and parents from Magnolia Christian School during a tour on March 27.**

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ated the Mississippi Territory in 1798. Natchez was the first territorial capital, and was replaced in 1802 by nearby Washington. Mississippi became a state in 1817, and Jackson became the state capital in 1822. Alabama gained statehood in 1819.

The two volumes represent only part of the Territorial records. Records from 1804 and 1810-1817 are missing.

The 1799-1803 Minute Book of the Supreme Court of the Mississippi Territory, coverless and tattered, opens with a who's who of territorial history, documenting that William McGuire, Chief Justice, and Peter Bryan Bruin, Second Judge, presented their commissions under the hand and seal of the President of the United States. The handwritten script, a corner of which is missing, reads, "At a Supreme Court held for the Mississippi Territory...

Town of Natchez in the County of Adams on...twenty third day of September in the year of...one thousand seven hundred and ninety nine....The Honorable – William McGuire Chief Justice, and Peter Bryan Bruin second Judge, ...their commissions under the hand and seal of the President of the United States, the first as Chief Justice and the other as Second Judge of the Mississippi Territory, and the court being opened in the usual form the same are read."

The ragged brown opening page goes on to record Robert Stark's oath as Clerk of the Supreme Court of the Territory and Lyman Harding's oath as Attorney General, both having received commissions from the Territorial Governor.

State Librarian Stephen Parks said, "These are a primary source documenting the establishment of and the early proceedings

of the legal system of this territory that became Mississippi. We are appreciative of Mr. Freddie Rush assisting us in obtaining these items. It's not often that items as rare as these come up for sale, or even viewing."

Access to the original minute books is restricted, as the paper and binding are fragile.

With the documents scanned into digital copies, anyone with access to the internet can view most of the pages. Parks said that he hopes to have the documents transcribed in the future. The digital copies are not easy to read, despite the writers' near-perfect penmanship.

The 1799-1803 Minute Book is 171 scanned pages, as the scan includes backs of some pages. The original paper copy has 121 pages of minute entries plus an alphabetical index. The 1805-1809 volume is 142 scanned pages. The original is 117 pages of minute entries

and an index.

The volumes had been in the library of the late Lucius B. Dabney Jr. of Vicksburg, a sixth generation attorney. Parks discovered the books in March 2024 among thousands of volumes slated for an April 2024 estate sale in Vicksburg. Supreme Court Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens requested the minute books as property of the Court. Attorney Freddie Rush of Carrollton, executor of the estate which had the books, purchased them from the estate before the auction and gave them to the Supreme Court.

In October 2024, the City of Vicksburg dedicated an historical marker recognizing the Dabney and Dabney law firm as the oldest family-owned law firm in Mississippi. Retired Circuit Judge Frank Vollor of Vicksburg said that Dabney "was very proud of that – the history of his firm."

The Dabney family's history as lawyers goes back further than the Territorial Minutes. The firm began in 1794 in Virginia, moved to Raymond in 1835, then to Vicksburg in 1885. Lucius Dabney Jr. joined the firm in 1949, and practiced law in Vicksburg until several years before his death on Aug. 11, 2022, at age 96.

It's unclear when or how Dabney acquired the minute books. His library and collection included original documents signed by John Hancock and Alexander Hamilton, historic pictures and newspapers, Confederate currency and other Civil War relics.

Jennifer McGillan, Coordinator of Manuscripts

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## Retired Judge J. Max Kilpatrick died December 10, 2024

Former legislator and Chancellor J. Max Kilpatrick of Philadelphia died on Dec. 10. He was 79.

Colleagues recalled his diverse and successful legal career.

“He was one of those guys that what he did, he did well,” said Retired Chancellor Edward Fenwick of Kosciusko. “Max could walk into Circuit Court and try a criminal case. He could walk into Chancery Court and try a divorce case. He was a capable, good lawyer and a good and conscientious judge,” said Judge Fenwick, who served the Sixth Chancery Court alongside Judge Kilpatrick. Also, “He loved politics. He loved to get involved in hometown politics,” Judge

Fenwick said.

Former Chancellor Joseph Kilgore of Philadelphia said, “Judge Kilpatrick was firm, but he always followed his oath as a judge by doing equal right to the poor and to the rich. He knew the law and was decisive, thorough, and expedient in his rulings. Above all, he was a friend and mentor to me throughout my career. I valued and often sought his advice long after he left the bench, as did many others. He will be greatly missed in our legal community.”

Johnnie Max Kilpatrick was born on Jan. 24, 1945, the son of Johnnie and Desma Kilpatrick. He graduated from Philadelphia High School in 1963 and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from Mississippi State University. While pursuing a law degree at the University of Mississippi School of Law, he was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives. He represented Leake and Neshoba counties from 1972 to 1980. He earned a Juris Doctor in 1973, and opened his law practice in Philadelphia. He served as District Attorney for the Eighth Judicial District of Neshoba, Newton, Leake and Scott counties in 1980. He also served as board attorney for the Neshoba County Board of Supervisors for 17 years.

Gov. Haley Barbour appointed Judge Kilpatrick in June 2005 to a vacancy on the Sixth Chancery Court. Judge Kilpatrick was elected to a four-year term in November 2006. He served as an officer of the Conference of Chancery Judges. He laid the



Retired Chancellor J. Max Kilpatrick

### Territorial records *continued from page 27*

for Mississippi State University Libraries, said, “Lucius Dabney was a significant collector of historic Mississippi matters,” as was his father. MSU purchased some of his collection a few years ago. However, a significant part of Dabney’s Natchez Trace collection went to the University of Texas at Austin.

Judge Vollor said he had not seen the Territorial Minutes, but appreciates the significance of their survival and return to public view after having been in Dabney’s safekeeping. “His contribution is priceless. We’ve lost so much of our history, and he was very involved in preserving history, where we came from and how we got to where we are. He made a tremendous contribution.”

groundwork for creation of juvenile drug intervention courts in the Sixth Chancery before he retired from the chancery bench on June 30, 2010. The Sixth Chancery District includes Attala, Carroll, Choctaw, Kemper, Neshoba and Winston counties. While continuing his private law practice, he served as Kemper County Youth Court Referee. He retired on June 30, 2022.

His family said in an obituary, “His dedication to public service was further exemplified by proudly serving in the Mississippi National Guard, retiring with the rank of Major after 26 years. J. Max embraced life with enthusiasm. He enjoyed practicing law, hunting, attending races at Talladega Superspeedway, traveling, spending time at the beach,

and proudly supporting the Ole Miss Rebels. Above all, he treasured the moments spent with his family, building lasting memories together.”

Survivors are his wife, Kathy House Kilpatrick; his children, Kim Kilpatrick Rea (John), Amy Kilpatrick Taylor (Mark), and Jay Max Kilpatrick (Shelly); his stepson, Jarrod Bates; seven grandchildren, Austin Rea (Karington), Mary Grace Rea, Peyton Rea, Ayden Kilpatrick, Emma Taylor, Kathryn Kilpatrick, and Maggie Taylor; one great-grandchild, Maddox Rea; his sister, Linda Kilpatrick Kitchens (Allen); and his sister-in-law, Peggy Kilpatrick. He was preceded in death by his brother, Gerald Kilpatrick, and their parents, Johnnie and Desma Kilpatrick.