

New Standards Pave the Way For Manageable Records Maintenance

Court staff throughout New Jersey are taking a smarter approach to records management thanks to the implementation of new standards and best practices.

The number of files maintained by the court system statewide is truly staggering. If the Judiciary's 375,000-plus boxes of files were put end to end, they

would stretch from Cape May to the Bronx. Maintaining these files, filled with everything from transcripts of trials to notes about case progress, costs the state millions of dollars each year.

To help the courts manage files consistently and effectively throughout the state, the Conference of Vicinage Operations

Managers, in conjunction with the statewide Committee of Records Coordinators and Don Phelan, clerk of the Superior Court, developed standards and best practices for records management.

The standards were endorsed by the Administrative Council and approved by the Judicial Council

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Judiciary Times

Spring 2004

The newsletter of the New Jersey Judiciary

Helping to collect a billion dollars to help children in 2003

The Child Support Hearing Officer Program: Family-Probation Partnership Puts Kids First

The following article describes some of the activity in a "typical" day in the life of the Child Support Hearing Officer Program (CSHOP), a joint partnership between the Family and Probation Divisions. In the interest of privacy, names and addresses of litigants have been changed.

Looking bedraggled and forlorn, the defendant slouched next to his attorney in the child support hearing room. His ex-wife, seated at the plaintiff's table to his left, was demanding nearly \$18,000 in arrears that he owed to help support their three kids.

"The business I own is losing money, my insurance premiums have tripled," the defendant explained. "I pay for the kids' doctor visits, shopping trips. I don't have any more money."

The ex-wife rolled her eyes.

"Ma'am," said the plaintiff, addressing the hearing officer, "you might want to ask him where he got the thousand dollars a month for his new Hummer!"

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Hearing Officer Larry Rauer and Tracy Hardy, court clerk, in a Mount Holly courtroom.

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Succeeds Retiring Judge Sylvia Pressler

Judge Stern Named New Appellate Presiding Judge

Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz has announced the appointment of Judge Edwin H. Stern as presiding judge for administration of the Appellate Division of the Superior Court. He will assume the leader-

ship role in the Appellate Division on June 1, 2004.

Judge Stern, 62, was appointed to the bench in 1981 by then-Gov.

Brendan T. Byrne. He served in the Superior Court Law Division in Hudson County and the Superior Court Law and

Criminal Divisions in Essex County before he was temporarily assigned to the Appellate Division in 1985. That assignment became permanent in 1986 and since then Judge Stern has served in the eight

parts, or groups of judges, in the Appellate Division. He currently is the presiding judge of Part H. Over the course of his judicial career,

Judge Stern has issued 305 signed, published opinions. He has been active in education and on many Supreme Court committees and currently chairs the Criminal Practice Committee.

"I am pleased that Judge Stern has agreed to accept the enormous responsibility of presiding over the administration of the Appellate Division, where more than 7,000 appeals are resolved in a year," the

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Judiciary Times is prepared by Communication Services, Office of Communications, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) for employees of the Judiciary and volunteers who work with the court system.

The Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court is Deborah T. Poritz. The Administrative Director of the Courts is Richard J. Williams.

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Linda.Holt@judiciary.state.nj.us or send disk, photos and paper copy to: Editor, *Judiciary Times*, Office of Communications, PO Box 037, Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex, Trenton NJ 08625-0037. Submissions are subject to editing, and not all can be published.

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Thanks to the other Judiciary staff who contributed articles, information and photographs.



Judge Stern



Judge Pressler

Judge Walter R. Barisonek Appointed Union Vicinage Assignment Judge



Judge Barisonek

Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz has announced the appointment of Superior Court Judge Walter R. Barisonek as the Assignment Judge of Vicinage 12, Union County, effective Jan. 15. Judge Barisonek previously served in the Criminal Division in the Union Vicinage. He fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Assignment Judge Edward W. Beglin.

"Judge Barisonek has nearly 20 years of experience on the bench and a strong record of service to the vicinage and to the Judiciary,"

said the Chief Justice. "I am confident that he will lead the Union Vicinage well."

Judge Barisonek was appointed to the bench by then-Gov. Thomas H. Kean in 1984 and was reappointed with tenure by Gov. James J. Florio in 1991. Prior to his appointment, he was in private practice and served as municipal prosecutor in the township of Clark, New Jersey. He holds a B.A. from Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and a J.D. from Seton Hall Law School.

After initially serving in the Family Division of the Superior Court in the Union Vicinage, Judge Barisonek was made presiding judge of that division before working in both the Civil and Criminal Divisions in the vicinage.

--Tamara Kendig

Municipal Courts Open Their Doors To New In-Session Visitation Program

New Jersey's 535 municipal courts are taking part in a new visitation program to help them provide better service to citizens while court is in session.

Approved by the Judicial Council and announced in a memorandum Feb. 3, the new program complements the existing administrative municipal court visitation program that focuses on the management, facility standards and procedures established for municipal court offices.

Under the new program, municipal presiding judges and division managers visit each municipal court in their vicinage to observe court *while it is in session*. The presiding judges

learn what is happening in the municipalities and have the opportunity to share insights and information. In direct conversation with local judges and in follow-up reports, the presiding judges praise good work and help the courts find solutions to problems.

"The visitation program has a positive focus," said Judge Louis J. Belasco Jr., municipal presiding judge for the Atlantic-Cape May Vicinage. Judge Belasco is chair of the Conference of Municipal Presiding Judges and co-chair of the Joint Conference of Municipal Presiding Judges and Municipal Division Managers which proposed and developed the in-session visitation program.

"It's an important mentoring tool," Judge Belasco continued. "Through the process, presiding judges can share their vicinage-wide perspective with judges who may not know what is happening in other courts."

The new program is operating on a limited basis this spring and will be launched statewide in the court year that begins July 1.

Improving service

The process, which already has been in place informally in some vicinages, may lead to recommendations ranging from major renovations to a change in seating arrangements.

"For example, a judge may not be aware that a person sitting in the back of the courtroom is being disturbed by a door that keeps opening and slamming shut," said the judge. "This is a small problem that is easily rectified."

Details such as this can affect public perception, noted Sonya Noyes, Essex municipal division manager and co-chair with Judge Belasco of the joint conference.

"We need visitations in municipal courts because we can't see day-to-day operations," she said. Noyes, who has participated in administrative visitations since 1990, has conducted visitations to each of Essex's 22 municipal courts for the past eight years. "The purpose of visitations is to let the judges know the health of their courts."

While courts now welcome visitations of both types, it wasn't always that way.

Marsi Perkins Appointed Monmouth Trial Court Administrator



Marsi Perkins

Marsi Perkins as trial court administrator, effective Feb. 23. She replaces William Carpenter, who retired in 2003.

Under New Jersey's court rules, the administrative director of the courts appoints the trial court administrator in each vicinage. Administrative Director Judge Richard J. Williams

Assignment Judge Lawrence M. Lawson, Monmouth Vicinage, announced the appointment of

said that he named Perkins on the strong recommendation of Judge Lawson.

As the highest-ranking staff executive in the vicinage, the trial court administrator is responsible for all court operations, including overseeing budget development and expenditures, supervising all judicial support personnel, managing facilities and resources, and directing program development and analysis.

Prior to her appointment, Perkins served as finance division manager of the Essex Vicinage.

An interview with Perkins will be featured in the next issue of *Judiciary Times*.

Students “Spring Ahead” to Take Advantage Of Groundhog Job Shadow Day in Middlesex

by George Stahanovich
Municipal Division Manager
Middlesex Vicinage

What do Secretary of State Colin Powell and Middlesex Vicinage TCA Gregory Edwards have in common?

Both have been mentors on Groundhog Job Shadow Day.

On Monday, Feb. 2, while the nation’s media were engrossed in the perennial animal-interest story, a more important tale (no pun intended) was told by over one million young people throughout the country, according to Dr. Stuart Shapiro, executive director of the Job Shadow Coalition.

They, and an equal number of adults from our diverse national workforce, participated in the Seventh Annual Job Shadow Day Initiative. This was the second time that the Middlesex participated.

J. Mary Nelson, counselor at the A.C. Redshaw Elementary School, invited Gregory Edwards and Natalie Myers, vicinage human resources manager, to participate in this adventure. She carefully chose only eighth graders, convinced that this was the proper age at which our young people begin real consideration of their future, but are not yet sidetracked by unproductive diversions.

She arranged for 60 of her school’s children to visit with their mentors-for-the-day at 14 different organizations in New Brunswick. Twelve students selected to come to the county courthouse. Other kids went to such places as the

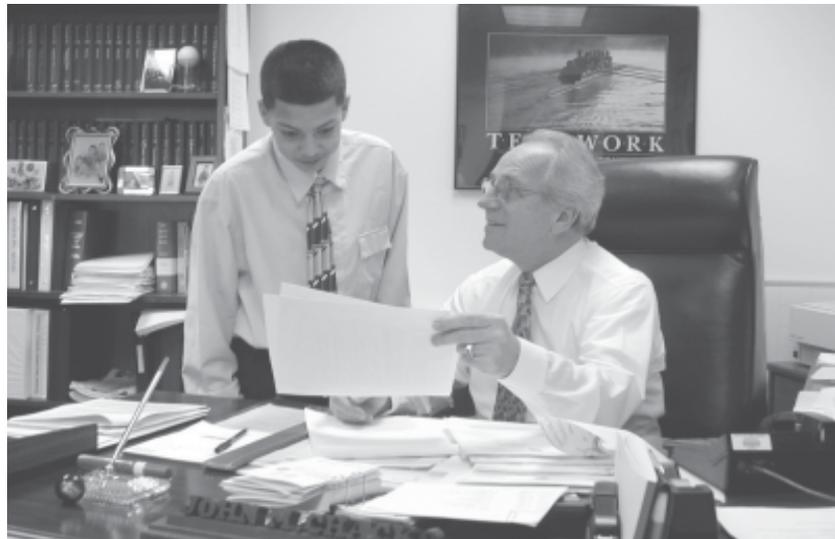
corporate headquarters of Johnson & Johnson, St. Peter’s University Hospital and Dupont.

Our 12 students were assigned to division and assistant division managers. Each participant spent about five hours with his or her mentor-for-the-day to see the kind of work that is required in our organization. Although initially shy and reticent to speak, as the day went on they began to ask studious questions and acquired useful insights into what it takes to run the justice system.

“Job shadowing is a yearlong national effort to enrich the lives of students by acquainting them with the world of work through on-the-job experiences and a carefully crafted school curriculum that ties academics to the workplace,” according the program’s Web site www.jobshadow.org. National job shadowing is based on the united

efforts of Junior Achievement, the U.S. Department of Labor, America’s Promise and The Alliance for Youth now in its seventh year.

The program was developed in response to studies that show that mentored students are more likely than non-mentored students to: 1) graduate from high school, 2) enroll in college, 3) have fewer arrests, 4) get involved in community service and 5) be hopeful about their future. A study from the Center of Intergenerational Learning at Temple University has shown that the mentoring project for high-risk middle school students in Philadelphia has resulted in less disruptive classroom behavior, better attendance, improved relationships with adults and peers, positive changes toward substance use and improved life skills.



Roy Cortes, 13-year-old eighth grade student from A.C. Redshaw Elementary School in New Brunswick, and Criminal Division Manager John Chacko review case scheduling during the recent Job Shadow Day held in the Middlesex County Superior Court. Roy, who likes baseball, hopes to go to law school, enter the military and go on to join the FBI.

Mass Tort Trial Technology Advances in Middlesex Vicinage

by Dennis Medwick
IT Analyst, Middlesex Vicinage

Advances in information technology (IT) have transformed the Middlesex County Courthouse into an environment that is fully functional, networked and both Internet and multi-media friendly.

Flip charts and photographs have been replaced by state-of-the-art, multi-media technologies, including live, streaming video, which are far more sophisticated than any PowerPoint presentation. Judge Marina Corodemus, supervising judge for the Mass Tort Section of Civil Division in Middlesex County, chairs the Middlesex technology committee that periodically meets to discuss and determine the requirements and means for the improvement of the electronic courtroom for mass tort.

Once the attorneys and consultants agree on informational and technological needs, Judge Corodemus approves or revises a plan. Depending on the technology selected, the plan may be taken to technical services for further review.

Many of these informational and courtroom media services are made available to members of the bar. Attorneys are apprised of the available technological capabilities and services, as well as their potential benefits to the legal practice.

For example, attorneys from outside New Jersey may remain out of state, yet still participate in a courtroom proceeding in Middlesex County. The use of technology allows out-of-state counsel to attend proceedings

“live” via video, therefore only requiring the physical presence of local counsel in our courtroom.

Previous meetings with the bar have demonstrated the need to communicate electronically with resources outside the courtroom. For example, attorneys may need to connect to their firms’ networks to retrieve documents and other exhibits not immediately available in the courtroom, or to receive cases or briefs in electronic format on emergent issues.

Bar members also indicated the need to connect to the Internet



[Technologies have transformed the Middlesex County Courthouse.](#)

to perform research on issues that the judge may request, to communicate with a witness, or to retrieve scientific information from various Web sites. In response, we initiated research to determine availability and feasibility of a fully high tech mass tort courtroom in Middlesex.

After researching several vendors and visiting the New York State Civil Supreme Courthouse in Manhattan, we identified a company that is clearly the leader in providing wireless courtroom technology. Furthermore, the

company provides wireless Internet access, printing services and network sharing as needed to any authorized user at *no cost to the court*. (Attorneys pay for these services.) The company accomplishes all this with only a four-by-eight-inch access point located in the courtroom.

We are also exploring field interest in video depositions using this technology. The potential time and cost savings to attorneys are enormous.

We identified another firm to provide complementary services to enable the seamless integration of technology in the courtroom. This company provides all the essential hardware and wiring required for audio/visual presentations that will be used during the trial. Typically, this could include flat panel monitors on the counsel tables, witness stand and the judge’s bench.

Speakers and a large projection screen are provided for the jurors’ viewing with a projector set up to show documents from an overhead document presenter, a videotape, or PowerPoint presentation from the attorneys’ laptops. With such equipment, counsel may visually present scientific and medical evidence in conjunction with expert witness testimony to the jurors in a manner they may better understand.

All the equipment is connected to a switch located on the judge’s bench in order for the judge to maintain complete control over what is viewed. This service is also provided at no cost to the court.

None of these advances are involved with or directly affect the

[Continued to page 10](#)

Monmouth Vicinage Participates in Diversity Festival

Staff and volunteers from the Monmouth Vicinage participated in the Cultural Diversity Festival sponsored by the Human Relations Council of Freehold Township on Saturday, Nov. 1 at the Marshall W. Errickson School in Freehold Township.



Diversity Day Participants—Pictured (left to right) are: Kathy Fread, Family Division; Sandra Williams, Civil Division; Carmen Flores, EEO/AA; Elaine Wilcher, Minority Concerns; Dr. Yolande Marlow, AOC; Helen Scott, Minority Concerns; and John Smack, Probation. Other participants (not shown) included: Arnold Heifetz, Minority Concerns; Ann Leatherman, Municipal Division; Joanne McLaughlin, Family Division; Connie Villegas, Civil Division; and Tara Williams, Probation Division. The Judiciary recruitment display booth is shown in the background.

Participants included representatives from the vicinage's Advisory Committee on Minority Concerns; Civil, Family, Municipal and Probation Divisions; Trial Court Administrator's Office; and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Some 2,000 attendees enjoyed a day of varied foods from different cultures, and musical performances, arts and crafts from throughout the world. Among the performers were a Chinese youth orchestra, Filipino traditional dancers, Hungarian folk songs, a Flamenco dance company, a belly dancer, 4H cloggers, Aztec and Irish dancers, African drummers and a salsa band.

Judiciary representatives set up a large exhibit booth to attract interest and enthusiastically gave out information on the court system and its job, volunteer and vendor opportunities.

Videotaped on site by the local cable television Channel 77, the Judiciary booth and staff were featured in a public service announcement which ran for a period of two weeks.

Monmouth Vicinage staff expressed special thanks to Dr. Ken Geigel, organizer of the festival for allowing the Judiciary to participate, and to all the Judiciary representatives and division managers for their support.

Mercer Vicinage Implements JEFIS Technology This Spring

The New Jersey Judiciary Electronic Filing and Imaging System (JEFIS)—an electronic filing and storage system—is expected to be up and running in Mercer County Superior Court in April 2004.

The project began in Monmouth County in 1999 pursuant to an order of the Supreme Court and expanded to Ocean County in 2003.

Mercer is the third vicinage to introduce this new technology which saves time and money and frees up valuable space for other uses. In the Monmouth Vicinage, for example, space that had been used to store files was converted into a new courtroom. In addition to saving space, paperless files will be available simultaneously to judges, court staff, attorneys and the public.

“We are strong supporters of technology in the Mercer Courts,” said Mercer Assignment Judge Linda R. Feinberg. “We believe that this tool will increase our efficiency and allow us to keep up with ever-increasing caseloads.”

Judge Feinberg credited Judge Paulette Sapp-Peterson, Mercer's Civil Division presiding judge, and Judge F. Patrick McManimon, supervising judge of the Special Civil Part, for their support of this new initiative.

The JEFIS Pilot Project specifically addresses lawsuits and contract actions filed in the Special Civil Part. Typically, these cases involve debt collection actions seeking damages up to \$15,000.

Mercer had 10,491 such filings during Court Year 2003, a 17 percent increase over the previous year. An additional 10 percent increase is projected for this year.

Jude Del Preore, Mercer's trial court administrator, said that judges and staff have been training on the system since February.

Partnerships In Action: A Tool For Success in Mercer

by Judith Irizarry
Ombudsman
Mercer Vicinage

Effective internal and external partnerships are improving child support services in Mercer County.

Evidence of this success was seen during the Annual Child Support Conference held in Atlantic City in December. During this joint conference held by the Human Services Department's Division of Family Development and the Administrative Office of the Courts, Mercer was named County of the Year, while Probation Officer Kristen Cunningham was named Child Support Worker of the Year.

Mercer began developing its partnership program in 2002 in order to improve child support services throughout the county.

The vicinage implemented programs to share job information, examine case processing procedures in each agency, expedite enforcement alternatives, examine the use of available resources and create a positive impact on child support services provided in the county.

According to Frank Cirillo of the Mercer County Board of Social Services, "Agencies worked

across organizational boundaries focusing on the families and the children we serve."

Mercer Assignment Judge Linda R. Feinberg commended partners for "working hard and working together to help families have adequate resources."



Acknowledging Great Work--Alfred Federico, Mercer's Family Division manager, congratulates his staff during a ceremony Jan. 30. The event celebrated Mercer's successful partnerships and the awards that the vicinage received at the Child Support Conference last year.

"The New Jersey Judiciary mission statement and Mercer's commitment to providing excellence in public service for the diverse needs of our community encourage the development of strategic partnerships," added Jude Del Preore, Mercer's trial court administrator.



Praise for Staff--Mercer Assignment Judge Linda R. Feinberg joins TCA Jude Del Preore (left) and Richard Narcini, chief of the Judiciary's Child Support Enforcement Services program, in praising staff support for partnership initiatives.

Partnerships between the Judiciary and other organizations are agreed-upon relationships developed to achieve common goals. From a vicinage perspective, their value can be measured in the development of thorough processes, increased productivity, better use of resources available, effective communication,

enhanced court services and the promotion of innovation in court management.

Successful partnerships resulted in customer-service initiatives such as a career development resume clinic.

The clinic was developed to address questions and requests for assistance in evaluating and improving resumes and interviewing skills.

In developing the clinic, Mercer Human Resources staff and

the EEO/AA officer partnered with vicinage EEO/AA officers and AOC Human Resources staff.

It is no wonder partnerships have become a tool for success in making customer service goals a reality for Mercer.

In the Vicinages

Burlington Staff “Zap” the Workplace With Positive Energy and Ideas

by Danielle Chamberlain, Administrative Assistant, Burlington Vicinage

When you come to work each day you can one of two things: you can complain about the way things are, or you can work to make them better.

You can choose to be a negative force, or you can choose to infuse the workplace with positive energy.

You can, in effect, “sap it” or “zap it”.

Staff in the Burlington Vicinage decided that the energy wasted on complaining about the way things *are* would be better used to make things the way they *could be*, so a group of about 40 enthusiastic and motivated vicinage employees have been charged with the mission of “zapping” our organization.

The result is a new committee called, The Zap Connection.

The group identifies a variety of opportunities to enhance the Burlington Vicinage work experience, to improve our attitudes toward one another, to make our office environment more enjoyable and to elevate our overall service to the public.

While our offices in Mount Holly might not be exactly the way we would like them, we nevertheless enjoy a safe working environment, plenty of free parking, comparatively little traffic congestion and a semi-rural village setting with nearby shops and places to dine.

Nevertheless, some of our employees continually complain that Burlington Vicinage could be better, and we’ve heard all sorts of advice and suggestions about how to improve it. The Zap Connection’s mission is to turn these suggestions into realities. The committee has been given the responsibility and the

authority to change things.

Staffed by front-line employees, not management, the committee has been empowered to take on the challenge of making our vicinage the best place to work in the New Jersey Judiciary.

With two elected co-chairpersons and a recording secretary, The Zap Connection comprises five subcommittees designed to tackle a wide variety of projects. The subcommittees are: Day-to-Day Activities; Special Events; Publications and Newsletters; Employee Mentoring; and Employee Orientation. The plan is to recruit additional new members to help with these

specific events and projects, eventually expanding the involvement of the vicinage’s employees. Zap activities already have included a food drive and decorating contest, and there are many more ideas in the works.

The Zap Connection is an experiment for us, a chance for front-line employees to make a difference and see what it’s like to be in charge. It’s an opportunity for employees to make court facilities pleasant, even inviting places to work and do business.

There will certainly be many successes and probably a few failures, but it’s all part of the empowerment process. At least we’re zapping and not sapping things in Mount Holly.

Mercer, Cape May, Essex and Passaic Honored at Child Support Conference

Awards for county, supervisor and worker of the year were presented at the annual New Jersey Child Support Conference held in Atlantic City in December.

Each year at the conference, the Judiciary and the Department of Human Services team up to acknowledge outstanding work in the area of child support.

This year’s Judiciary winners were:

County of the Year: Mercer
Family Division Supervisor of the Year: Madeline Faziola, team leader, Passaic County
Probation Child Support Supervisor of the Year: Peter Arsenault, court services supervisor, Cape May County

Family Division Child Support Worker of the Year: Tysha Rhymer, Judiciary clerk, Essex County
Probation Child Support Worker of the Year: Kristen Cunningham, probation officer, Mercer County

In the Vicinages

Morris/Sussex Youth Hear Attorney General, Thanks to Judicial Mentoring Program

by Jackie Reese, Minority Concerns Liaison; Janie Rodriguez, Training Coordinator; Kim Daniels Walsh, EEO/AA Officer and Ombudsman of the Morris/Sussex Vicinage

Young people from Morris and Sussex Counties got a thought-provoking “insider’s” view of the Executive Branch and the Attor-

ney General’s Office last fall when Peter C. Harvey, New Jersey attorney general, spoke to them at the Morris County Courthouse as

part of the Judicial Mentoring Program for Young Minds. The program is sponsored by the Morris/Sussex Vicinage Advisory Committee on Minority Concerns.

The attorney general detailed some of the high profile cases and issues he recently tackled and previewed the next issue he will turn his attention to: domestic violence.

Despite a decline in other types of crime, Attorney General Harvey cited a 30 percent increase in domestic violence cases in recent years. He indicated that domestic violence reduction would be a top priority for his office.

The attorney general also talked about his own career path and training. He emphasized the importance of pursuing an education, working hard and seeking out new work experiences in order to continue lifelong learning.

He stressed that in addition to study and work, young people should also cultivate other activities they enjoy performing. He noted that colleges, law schools and employers all seek “well rounded” candidates.

Following his speech, Attorney General Harvey answered students’ questions about topics such as succeeding in the fields of law and government.

The event capped six weeks of presentations by state and local government officials in Morris/Sussex as part of the mentoring program.

New Volunteers Brave Winter to Attend Training

by Carmen Flores
Monmouth EEO/AA Officer

Neither frigid temperatures nor winds and ice discouraged 23 new volunteers from Monmouth and Ocean Vicinages who braved the winter weather to attend an evening training on problem solving, communication skills and cultural diversity. The training was held on Dec. 11 in the Monmouth County Courthouse.

A requirement for all new volunteers, the training was conducted by Diane Allen of CAM Consulting Services. Assignment Judge Lawrence M. Lawson extended his warm greetings to the group, commenting that Monmouth’s cadre of close to 700 volunteers is among the largest of any vicinage statewide. It is also among the oldest, having been established in 1948.



Make a Difference: Volunteer!—Elaine Wilcher (left) of the Monmouth Vicinage Advisory Committee on Minority Concerns, Carmen Flores, EEO/AA officer, and Joanne McLaughlin provide information on volunteer opportunities to Edmond Rosenthal (center). Rosenthal became a Child Placement Review Board member volunteer in December 2003.

In-session Visitations for Municipal Courts

Continued from page 3

“Attitudes toward the administrative visitation program have changed dramatically over the years,” Noyes noted. “In the early years, it wasn’t unusual for court staff to be apprehensive about the visits. In fact, one time an administrator was so upset, he almost threw a bail book at us!”

“The whole perception of what the visitation process is about has changed,” Noyes continued. “My courts are so welcoming. It’s a pleasure to talk with staff and hear about future plans over lunch.”

An important catalyst to changing these negative attitudes was the computerization of files. “In the early years, court staff would have to prepare reams of material for review. Now we can call it up on our computer screens the day before, so there is very little preparation required on the part of court personnel,” she said.

Noyes also applauded the demise of the “big, dusty old docket books. With technology, I no longer have to devote a day per court to visitations,” she said. “In fact with the prior preparation possible with technology, an effective visitation to a small court may take as little as two hours.”

Municipal’s unique challenges

The visitation process is also in effect in the civil and family divisions. However, municipal courts pose a number of unique challenges.

“There are 535 municipal courts statewide and they vary in size from large courts with over 100 employees to small part-time courts with a single court session per month.” observed Bob Smith,

assistant director of the municipal division, Administrative Office of the Courts. “Municipal courts handle about six million of the state’s seven million cases each year.”

Another challenge is the compressed schedules of the state’s already busy municipal presiding judges.

“They are usually part-time, working one or two days a week in that capacity,” Smith said. “It is a tribute to the presiding judges’ dedication and investment in this program that they make the time to work with their courts in this way.”

Because of these challenges, in-session visitations follow a flexible schedule. Unlike the administrative visitation program, the in-session visitations do not have to be completed within a court year.

“I’ve been doing this unofficially for a year and a half in my own

vicinage,” said Judge Belasco. “It’s a comfortable process for the courts. It doesn’t interrupt the session. The visitation is very well received. More often than not, the courts are doing good work. I always try to share the positive things I see.”

According to Noyes, the visitation process also has the added benefit of serving as a feedback loop for each division manager.

“We are learning from our courts all the time,” she said. “The visitations make us more of a team and help us all do better work.

“In fact,” she added, “I’ve never been prouder of my courts than I am now!”

—Linda Brown Holt

Mass Tort Trial Technology Advances

Continued from page 5

Judiciary’s Automated Case Management System (ACMS). File servers in the Middlesex County Courthouse are now permanently connected to a T1 Internet line. T1 provides high-speed internet access similar to what we have internally among vicinages.

This service can provide streaming video of a trial to an attorney’s office, videoconferencing of events such as settlement conferences, and nearly instant retrieval of information to and from an office while in attendance at the courthouse. The courthouse is also being wired for “wireless” Internet access points on the third and

fourth floors, which may be used only by appropriate personnel with computers set up for the proper access.

The coming year promises to be an exciting one as this blend of high-end technologies allows us to provide even better access to the citizens we serve.

Correction

The article, “Hudson Vicinage and Jersey City Public Schools Hold Teen Dating Violence Education Forum,” which appeared in the Winter 2003-2004 *Judiciary Times*, was written by Kyle Warren, a Hudson Vicinage intern.

Consortium Services Help Justice Proceed Smoothly in the Union Vicinage

by Rachel Blakely
Probation Officer and
Consortium Liaison

Family Division judges are faced with many sensitive issues during custody and visitation disputes in domestic violence, non-dissolution (domestic relations) and matrimonial (divorce) matters.

Our judges also may encounter dysfunctional behavior by youth and families appearing before the court in juvenile and family crisis cases. It is often necessary for the court to seek the advice of mental health service professionals when deciding what is in the best

interest of the parties involved, as well as what is in the public interest.

The Superior Court, Family Division in Union County, has created a consortium of services to help address these needs. The purpose of this network of services is to provide diagnostic and short-term, therapeutic resources for clients involved with the family court.

The consortium program provides mental health and substance abuse evaluations, counseling and a variety of other referrals and services for clients. This consortium consists of a network

of community-based agencies which aid the court by providing services to these court-referred clients as well as many others in the community.

The vicinage's Family Division dedicates a portion of its operating budget to mental health services provided by this program. The project is also funded in part by a Department of Human Services grant.

The program ensures that judges have the ability to order valuable predispositional services such as custody and visitation evaluations, risk assessments, psychological, psychiatric and substance abuse evaluations, as well as supervised or therapeutic visitations. The evaluators offer valuable insight and make recommendations that are vital to the proper disposition of cases.

In administering this program, a Family Division professional functions as a liaison who gathers relevant information on the matter before the court and provides the consortium with the information necessary to establish services. The liaison also receives reports from the agencies and assures that this information is provided to the judges in a timely fashion.

The Union County Consortium program began operating in 1985. Today, judges and staff look forward to the program's continued operation and hope to expand its scope and services consistently to meet the changing needs of the Judiciary and the clients it serves.

***Brown v. Board at 50* Theme of Law Day '04**

With the arrival of spring, the attention of judges and Judiciary staff members throughout the state lightly turns to thoughts of...Law Day!

President Dwight D. Eisenhower proclaimed Law Day in 1958 as a way for the nation to honor its legal heritage and reflect on the role of law in creating a foundation of peace and prosperity. In 1961, a Joint Resolution of Congress designated May 1 as the official date for observing Law Day, although observances may be held at any time during April and May.

This year's Law Day theme is, "To Win Equality by Law: *Brown v. Board at 50.*"

"No milestone in this process is more important than the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in

Brown v. Board of Education," according to the Law Day Web site of the American Bar Association (ABA) at www.abanet.org.

"The culmination of a long line of court cases brought by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, *Brown* not only struck down laws segregating public schools, but also sounded the death knell for government-sanctioned segregation generally, made all Americans more aware of our Constitution's promise of equality, and helped launch the civil rights movement," the ABA site continues.

Vicinage observances include contests, mock trials, tours and presentations. Last year, the American Bar Association (ABA) recognized the Burlington Vicinage for offering one of the five best Law Day programs in the country.

Judge Stern Leads Appellate

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Chief Justice said. "His wealth of legal, judicial and management experience spans nearly 40 years. The citizens of New Jersey, the members of the Bar, and the entire Judiciary will benefit from his service in his new role," she added.

Judge Stern is a 1966 graduate of Columbia University Law School. He received his undergraduate degree from Rutgers University in 1963. Upon graduation from law school, the judge's first job in the legal profession was as law secretary, now called law clerk, to Appellate Division Judge Edward Gaulkin.

"I am truly honored that Chief Justice Poritz has asked me to serve the Judiciary and my colleagues in the Appellate Division in this position and I am grateful to her for this opportunity," said Judge Stern. "I am particularly honored to be chosen for a position that has been so well-handled by Judge Sylvia Pressler, one of the most outstanding judges we have been privileged to have in New Jersey," said Judge Stern.

Before he was appointed to the Superior Court, Judge Stern was in private practice (1967-70), and then served in the Hudson County prosecutor's office as first assistant (1970-73) and acting prosecutor (1973-74). Judge Stern continued his public service in the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) where he served as director of criminal practice (1974-77) and then moved to the Department of Law and Public Safety as a deputy attorney general (1977-80). In 1980 he rejoined the AOC as assistant director for legal services and it was from that position that he was nominated to the bench.

Judge Stern and his wife Beverly live in West Orange. They have three sons, Scott, 32, Mark, 29 and Paul, 28.

Judge Sylvia B. Pressler, who has overseen the management of the division since September 1997, retired effective April 10 and is serving on recall until the end of the court term.

"Judge Pressler is a trail-blazer in the legal profession. She was one of the first women Superior Court judges in New Jersey, the second woman appointed to the Appellate Division and the first woman presiding judge in the division. We wish her a long, productive and healthy retirement," said Chief Justice Poritz.

--Winnie Comfort



Diane Jenkins stands next to one of the Probation Services displays. She is wearing a dress from Ghana.

Probation Services Displays Celebrate Black History Month

by Diane Jenkins, Secretary I
Child Support Enforcement Services

It all began when Mary DeLeo, assistant director of Probation Services, said she would like to do something for the Probation Services Division during Black History Month in February.

In response, Kevin Cook and Tisha Williams from Interstate Central Registry and I prepared several displays to recognize contributions African-Americans have made over the last 250 years.

Cook and Williams arranged informational collages of pictures and articles about black political, literary and entertainment figures at the unit's entry area bulletin boards in the Judiciary's Jersey Street site in Trenton. Richard Narcini, chief of Child Support Enforcement Services, and I provided the photos and other materials for the displays.

Among the items posted were 100 short biographies with pictures. Each item described how these men and women shaped, and were shaped by, America's ongoing evolution from a land of slavery and racial prejudice.

These short articles allowed employees and guests to read one a day, and thus, over the month, to easily increase their knowledge of the role African-Americans played in American history. The displays were supplemented by portraits exhibited in the lobby and main walkway.

New Standards Pave the Way For Manageable Records Maintenance

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last fall. The Judicial Council's approval was announced in a memorandum sent Dec. 23 to assignment judges and trial court administrators.

As Judiciary Times goes to press, vicinages are returning completed implementation plans to the Administrative Office of the Courts detailing their program for weeding out old files and setting up a more efficient system.

"This is a true statewide effort, involving everyone from clerk typists to judges," said James Castagnoli, the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage's trial court administrator and chair of the Administrative Council's Operations Committee. "The conferences have taken the lead and are making the job easier for all people who handle the files."

Several TCAs and members of the Conference of Operations Managers have spearheaded the statewide implementation of the standards and best practices. They include: Thomas Gould, Burlington TCA; Mike O'Brien, Camden TCA; and Tricia Nikiel of Morris, co-chair of the Conference of Operations Managers.

"This will take some time to complete, but we hope to see some results in a year or two" observed Leigh Eastty, Burlington Vicinage operations manager and co-chair of the Conference of Operations Managers. "Vicinage staff are enthusiastic about tackling this challenge."

The mandatory standards call for the development of a "clean list" of what needs to be kept in a division's active file. Clean lists for each division were collected and compiled by the Administrative Council in March.

The standards also define the role of the records coordinator in each vicinage.



Files in a Judiciary storage facility in Trenton.

"The standards allow everyone in the Judiciary to do their part to help reduce unnecessary file storage," said Eastty. Staff are encouraged to remove extraneous materials on an ongoing basis and not to place unnecessary papers in files.

The standards also call for destruction of files that expire at the end of the retention schedule.

"Boxing and archiving records according to their destruction dates will greatly facilitate the

destruction process," the Dec. 23 memorandum states.

"Destroying old records is a big job, but too often in the past it has not been a high priority, which means it doesn't get done," said Castagnoli. "The new standards give us a calendar for completing various parts of the process."

Castagnoli noted that in his vicinage, close to 45,000 pounds of records were destroyed last fall under the guidance of Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem's records coordinator, Rachel Walder.

In addition, the standards mandate that every division prepare an annual inventory report and submit it to the records coordinator by Feb. 1 each year. After a review by the records coordinator and operations manager, a completed inventory will be sent to the clerk of Superior Court each year by March 1.

The records standards help implement and carry out the 2001 Judiciary Records Management Directive which sets the schedule for keeping and destroying records. Under that directive, records of routine traffic complaints (after disposition) are kept for just three years, but serious criminal case records are kept for 60 years and capital murder case records are kept forever.

"With the new standards, we are beginning to reduce records overload," said Castagnoli. "It won't happen overnight, but, thanks to the thought and commitment of judges and staff throughout the Judiciary, we are beginning to see the light."

—Linda Brown Holt

The Child Support Hearing Officer Program:

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Dramatic, moving, even amusing exchanges such as this are standard fare at child support hearings throughout New Jersey. But there's a lot more to this important Judiciary program than meets the eye.

New Jersey's Child Support Hearing Officer Program (CSHOP) is one of the first and most effective such programs in the nation. Its goal is nothing less than ensuring that the basic needs of children are met when family members cannot reach an agreement on support.

Since its beginnings in 1985, the program has developed into a unique partnership between the Judiciary's Family and Probation Divisions. The program is staffed by the Family Practice Division with 24 hearing officers, three supervising hearing officers and two support staff under the leadership of Elidema Mireles, program chief. Harry Cassidy is assistant director of the Family Practice Division.

Hearing officers, who may or may not be attorneys, hear cases and make support recommendations to local Superior Court judges. Litigants have the right to oppose these recommendations and have the right to be heard by a judge.

However, the *payment* and enforcement of child support are administered by the local Probation Division within each county. Overall program oversight is provided by the Child Support Enforcement Services unit in the Probation Division under the direction of Assistant Director Mary DeLeo. Child support enforcement staff report to the vicinage chief probation officer. Richard Narcini is chief of this unit, which oversees the collection of child support monies. In 2003, nearly *one billion dollars* in child support monies was directed to children.

The incidents that follow took place during child support hearings in Burlington (Family calendar) and Monmouth (Probation calendar) in late winter.

"Stop going to the bar!"

Don't be misled by the vase of roses and babies' breath next to the computer on the bench: This is not a wedding party. It's the weekly Probation calendar for Monmouth's child support hearings.

"I'm a union carpenter," the Sean Connery look-alike in the black turtleneck and jeans tells Kathleen E. Kitson, attorney and child support hearing officer. "But I'm on unemployment," he sighs. "Work is slow."

"I know he's been working in West Virginia!" his ex-wife, a slender woman in a two-piece black suit, exclaims. "And I've seen him working in town at a restaurant"

"I've been helping my friends. Bartering. Work is slow."

"Ms. Smith, do you have any proposal for him to pay the \$2,889 in arrears that he owes for support of your 13-year-old child?"

"Stop going to the bar!" the ex-wife suggests. "And who's paying for his trip to Florida the end of this month?"

"Ma'am, this is sarcasm!" he protests to the hearing officer.

"Mr. Smith," says Kitson, remaining cool as the room heats up with their conflict, "child support cannot be put off. You are ordered to pay \$1,500 by April 30 and \$25 a week toward the balance of the remaining arrears. If you fail to meet this obligation, there will be a warrant issued for your arrest."

"Hmm, April. I'm having a little trouble with the IRS..."

"Mr. Smith, if you can do these odd jobs for your friends, you can do them for child support," Kitson states. For now, the case is closed.

So many kids, so little cash

In Burlington, it's the weekly Family calendar. Unlike Monmouth, all the litigants are seated in the hearing room, rather than being called case by case to appear before the hearing officer.

Larry Rauer has been a hearing officer since 1985 and has conducted hearings in 20 of New Jersey's 21 counties. There is a relaxed, comfortable rapport among Rauer, Probation Officer Stu Kozek and Court Clerk Tracy Hardy. Today, Linda McCann and attorney John Kearney, both representing the Burlington Board of Social Services (welfare), are also present at the bench.

Wearing a world-weary expression and sporting a goatee, defendant Bill Doe has decided not to contest the results of genetic testing. "There's a 99.99 percent probability of paternity," Rauer notes from a report. "You realize that by making this admission, freely and voluntarily, you give up your rights forever to contest this paternity? There's no going back. You have an ongoing and continuous obligation until the child is emancipated."

"Yes, sir," says Doe with a nod. The mother, Ellen Jones, sits across from him, an imposing woman with long reddish hair and small gold-rimmed glasses.

The child, Matt, is 11 years old and lives with his mother, who is now remarried and the mother of two additional children. Her current husband also pays child support for two children from *his* earlier marriage. As the case unfolds, it is learned that in addition to support for Matt, Doe also pays child support for two daughters in Pennsylvania.

Using a program called FamilySoft™ on his computer, Rauer nimbly calculates the amount Doe will owe, a weekly sum based on a formula that takes into consideration the earning potential or incomes and obligations of both parents.

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Family-Probation Partnership Puts Kids First

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But there is an immediate need for cash today, and that's something the two parties need to work out. "Go out in the hallway and see if you can arrange a compromise," Rauer tells the two parties and Doe's attorney.

After hearing another case involving a dispute about day care, the parties return.

Doe reaches into his pocket and produces a crumpled wad of bills and hands it to his ex. She takes the money and carefully counts out \$1,000 in cash. "That will be \$108 plus \$12 a week in arrears from now on," Rauer tells Doe. "You'll get credit when your overnight visits with Matt expand. Ma'am," he says, turning to the mother, "would you like someone to walk you to your car?"

"No," says Jones, "I'll be just fine."

A peanut butter budget

Back in Monmouth, some unusual cases surface in the probation calendar, though there's hardly a day that can be called "usual" in the world of child support hearings. The hearing officer is joined by Rona Martucci, probation officer, as well as a volunteer court attendant, Gil Hickman. For Hickman, 75, the hearings represent a kind of second career he took up after he retired at age 60.

Kitson hears one case involving only alimony, no child support at all ("He gets a \$600-a-month car and I'm eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches," laments the ex-wife). Another case involves a man who is 100 percent disabled, living on a government pension of \$870 a month, who owes \$39,101 in arrears for two children who are now 20 and 21 years of age.

In another case, Kitson orders a woman who recently worked as a bartender to pay \$72 and \$10 a week toward the arrears, for a total of \$82 a week, to her ex-husband who has custody of their son.

A chatty bricklayer in a black leather jacket, wearing an earring, barely gives the hearing officer a chance to ask questions. "Yeah, I'm unemployed, and I've had a lot of medical problems...appendicitis, complications, even gangrene! But y'know what? My daughter comes first! Why, I even sold my Corvette to pay her tuition!"

But not on karate night

Back in Room 311 in Mount Holly, Rauer efficiently sets support levels for several defendants who do not show up. "The software really does help families who are in need of support get money for children's expenditures," he says during a break. "If we know an individual's occupation or field of expertise, we can look up online through the *New Jersey Department of Labor Compendium on Wages*, what their income should be in their county of employment and impute that income in our support calculations. The Child Support Hearing Officer Program has really expedited litigant access to and case resolution in the family courts of New Jersey. Prior to the this program, there was an up-to-

two-year backlog in divorce cases and tremendous delays in litigants having their cases heard."

The next case involves parents of Shakra, who is 9-1/2. She lives with Betsy Ward, the mom, who is on Social Security Disability (SS-D) and resides in Willingboro. Jose Ramon, the father, is an unemployed construction worker living in Bridgeton.

"I am having a hard time finding work because I'm not certified in my trade," Ramon states. He was released from jail two years ago in May.

Mom gets \$646 plus \$63 a month for Shakra through SS-D.

"What did you make in construction, Mr. Ramon?" asks Rauer.

"\$8 an hour," Ramon says.

"We'll base this order on an imputed income of \$8 an hour...that's \$320 a week gross..."

"Wait a minute!" says Ramon. "I was taking care of her!"



Kathleen E. Kitson (left), child support hearing officer, confers with Rona Martucci, probation officer, during a hearing in Freehold.

"Mr. Ramon, there's nothing personal about this..."

"It is personal!"

"All we are doing today, Mr. Ramon, is deciding how much you can afford to contribute to support," says Rauer in firm but gentle tones. "That will come to \$56 and \$9 arrears for a total of \$65 a week effective back to Jan.

5. And you will be responsible for 58 percent of any medical expenses for Shakra after the first \$250 deductible per year."

Ramon suggests that he would like to have his daughter for regular overnight visits, which will reduce his payments.

"I have no objection," says Betsy. "Only not Friday nights. That's when she has karate practice."

Child support hearings such as these take place every week throughout New Jersey's court system.

"In the hearing room, an observer may see parents arguing about money," observed Elidema Mireles, CSHOP chief. "But behind each discussion, there's a child with real needs. It's that child that we're here to help."

—Linda Brown Holt

Further information about the Child Support Hearing Officer program may be obtained from the InfoNet and the program's brochure. Child support hearing officers hear more than 115,000 cases a year, of which only a small percentage are appealed.

Passaic Vicinage Juvenile Drug Court Hosts First Graduation Ceremony

by Gordon R. Muth, Assistant Family Division Manager

On Dec. 2, more than 100 guests and staff attended the Passaic Vicinage's first juvenile drug court graduation. Held in the county administration building, the event celebrated the success of four young men who completed the rigorous, yearlong program.

The ceremony opened with a color guard presentation performed by officers from the Passaic County Sheriff's Department. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a rendition of the *Star Spangled Banner* performed by the Paterson's Rosa Parks High School Choir.

Following words of welcome, Assignment Judge Robert J. Passero congratulated the graduates on their accomplishments. Family Division Manager Cindy Thomson provided opening comments and thanked the members of the drug court team for their dedication and hard work. She also acknowledged the graduates' hard work and effort.

The Rev. Darlene Reynolds provided the main address to the graduates and the audience. Reynolds moved the audience with her courageous and inspiring presentation, displaying a deep and genuine concern for all the juveniles participating in the drug court program.

Following Reynolds' address, one of the graduates presented his autobiography to the audience. The graduate spoke candidly about his extensive drug history and his road to recovery.

He thanked the drug court team and everyone involved in his recovery process. It was evident that the drug court program had a positive impact on this young man's life. The audience responded to his presentation with a standing ovation.

Family Division Presiding Judge Nestor F. Guzman and Judge Stephen H. Womack, who presides over drug court cases, congratulated the graduates and offered words of encouragement before presenting each graduate with a certificate and a gift bag filled with special rewards for their accomplishments.

Paterson Mayor Jose "Joey" Torres also presented each graduate with a certificate of recognition and praised the graduates for their accomplishments. The mayor encouraged the graduates to stay the course and to continue to take advantage of all of the support that is being offered to them.

Fred W. Hogan from the Office of the Public Defender presented Judges Guzman and Womack with tokens of appreciation for their commitment and dedication to the drug court program.

New Beginnings

The judges were each given a medallion with an inscription that reads, "We cannot control the direction of the wind, but we can adjust our sails."

The ceremony closed with the Rosa Parks High School Choir's performance of the song "*Butterfly*," which signifies a new beginning. Immediately following the ceremony, the audience was invited to share refreshments and to offer personal congratulations to the graduates.

The graduation ceremony marked the first of what will become a tradition for future drug court success stories.

It is anticipated that another group of participants will be ready to complete the program in June 2004. We look forward to another special event honoring their accomplishments at that time.

NEW JERSEY
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Mission Statement of the New Jersey Court System

We are an independent branch of government constitutionally entrusted with the fair and just resolution of disputes in order to preserve the rule of law and to protect the rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States and this State.