

# JUDICIARY TIMES

A Publication of the New Jersey Courts | Fall 2019 / Winter 2020



Administrative Office of the Courts | Trenton, NJ

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# Ombudsmen make courts user friendly

By Judge Glenn A. Grant  
Acting Administrative Director of the Courts



Judge  
Glenn A. Grant

Years ago, it was rare for anyone to arrive at the courthouse without an attorney to help them navigate the sometimes-confusing legal process. If you go to any of our courthouses today however, it is much different. In Court Year 2019, more than 51 percent of the parties in special civil part cases did not have attorneys; more than 62 percent in landlord/tenant cases; and more than 91 percent in small claims matters.

In the family dissolution docket (from January 2019 - June 2019), more than 65 percent of parties were self-represented at some point in their case and more than 90 percent in the non-dissolution docket did not have

attorneys. Our organization anticipated this change more than two decades ago and one of the ways we responded to this challenge was through the creation of the ombudsman program.

In the years following the 2005 statewide rollout of the program, the Judiciary witnessed an increase in the number of individuals assisted through the ombudsman offices from 9,068 recorded contacts in 2006 to 76,570 in 2018. Having a neutral staff person in every vicinage available to provide that one-on-one interaction has helped bridge the gap between the community and the courts. As we look to the future of the ombudsman program and the Judiciary's customer service goals, we see the expansion our network of self-help resource centers, which now exist in several vicinages - Atlantic/Cape May, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Monmouth, Morris/Sussex, Ocean, Passaic, and Union. The resource centers are serving as the one-stop shops for getting forms, accessing case information, having questions answered, and obtaining information about community outreach events. Leveraging technology through the use of the internet, we have further enhanced customer service in our continuous efforts to advance the quality and effectiveness of the services that we provide.

With the development of "JIA" (the Judiciary Information Agent), we are incorporating artificial intelligence or machine learning applications, in order to reach and assist more individuals who may not be able to travel to the courthouses. Further, by increasing the number of instructional videos, expanding our language services options, and providing more self-service kiosks, among the many other initiatives being developed, we look to always keep moving the ball forward in our goal of providing quality customer service for our court users.

Our approach is much like that of the Disney Corporation, which is known and respected for its attention to customer service and the customer experience. As described by founder Walt Disney, "We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things." A story about the ombudsman program can be found on Page 10, and information about the ombudsman program and resources for self-represented litigants can be found at [www.njcourts.gov/public/ombuds.html](http://www.njcourts.gov/public/ombuds.html)

*Judiciary Times* is published quarterly by the Office of Communications and Community Relations, Administrative Office of the Courts.

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## Correction from the Summer Edition

A quote attributed to Judge Morris G. Smith in a story about Law Day activities in the Camden Vicinage should have read, "The First Amendment, does it work both ways?"



# Somerset civil division pilots evening hours for landlord/tenant cases

By Laura T. Gilsenan  
Assistant Civil Division Manager  
Somerset / Hunterdon / Warren Vicinage

In an attempt to make the courts more accessible to the public, the civil division in Somerset County is piloting an extension of hours for judges to hear landlord/tenant cases.

Court officials also hope the six-month pilot, which was authorized by the New Jersey Supreme Court, will result in a reduction in the number of tenants who fail to appear in court on the day of their trial. The pilot began in June and is scheduled to end in December.

"A professional Judiciary adapts to the needs of its citizenry," said Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Assignment Judge Yolanda Ciccone, who introduced the idea to the civil division. "It's our responsibility to accommodate the working citizens of Somerset County by expanding court hours. The landlord/tenant calendar is a good place to start."

Two additional tenancy trial calendars were added to the Somerset docket on the second and fourth Tuesday each month from 4 to 7 p.m. The evening calendars are randomly populated. A civil division judge is assigned to preside over each calendar, announce the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants, and try any unsettled matters. Staff members call the calendar, distribute and review paperwork, and assist with settlement talks between parties.

Attorneys in the vicinage, including Legal Services of Northwest Jersey, received a Notice to the Bar from Judge

Ciccone in May announcing the pilot. Tenants receive a separate notice, also prepared by Judge Ciccone, which instructs them how to request an evening trial date.

The court attaches the notice to every tenancy summons and complaint that is served. "The working poor are frequently faced with the unenviable choice of having to lose a day's pay, or come to court to save their home, a choice that only serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty," said Civil Division Manager Joseph Bolles. "Evening hours eliminates the anxiety litigants face when court hours are limited to 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m."

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey attorney Matthew Bradley said his organization appears at night court, just as it does for the regular calendar, with an intake paralegal and at least one attorney to advise and represent eligible tenants who first ask LSNWJ for services in court.

"Night court benefits litigants with day jobs who would otherwise have to take a day off to go to court," Bradley said. "Imagine being sued for nonpayment of rent and then losing a day's pay to go to court to try to work out an agreement to catch up on the rent."

A customer service survey for the pilot was created by the Administrative Office of the Courts to be used to determine whether its intended objectives have been met. It is available to litigants and their attorneys on the day of trial.



Among the participants in the Somerset civil division's pilot program are (from left) Sharon Dawson-Hampton, Marissa Mclean, Ryan Murray, Theresa Spark, Reta Wahba, Civil Division Presiding Judge Thomas C. Miller, Eleida Marti, Joseph Bolles and Judge Michael J. Rogers.

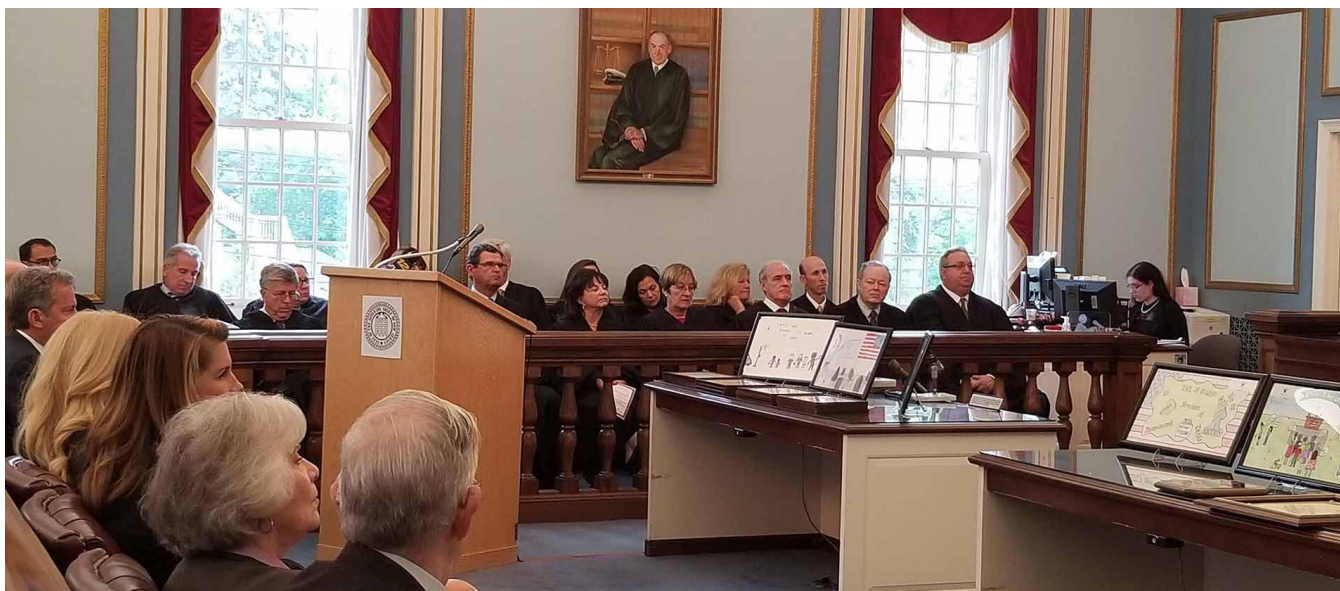


# Hudson commemorates the 9-11 fallen



In commemoration of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Hudson County placed flags on the front lawn in front of the main entrance to the William Brennan Courthouse in Jersey City. Each flag bears the name of one of the 156 county residents killed in the attacks.

# Monmouth wins ABA award for Law Day theme



Monmouth Vicinage has won the American Bar Association's Law Day 2019 Outstanding Activity Award for Best Theme Interpretation. The ABA said it was 'impressed with the range' of the vicinage's Law Day programming. The vicinage will be honored along with other winners at a luncheon in February in Austin, Texas. This year's Law Day theme was *Free Speech, Free Press, Free Society*.

# Essex Vicinage Drug Court: A day of fun

**By Ana C. Rivera**  
Assistant Criminal Division Manager  
Essex Vicinage

One of the most memorable moments for a child is meeting their favorite animal for the first time. Children of all ages love animals and are intrigued by their bravery and beauty, but not every child has the opportunity to meet their favorite animal in person.

The Essex Vicinage drug court team, in collaboration with the Bar Association of Essex County, made this memorable experience a reality for some children of drug court participants on July 19. Drug court participants and their children were invited to spend the day at the Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange.

The participants and their children received admission tickets, carousel ride tickets and snack bags to enjoy during the day. Although it was hot, the participants and their children were able to enjoy all the zoo had to offer. The drug court team, including Judge John I. Gizzo, witnessed the joy on the children's faces as they walked the trails of the zoo. Some were excited to see the giraffes and the reptiles, while others like "Bella" really wanted to meet a unicorn.

The children enjoyed the sprinklers throughout the zoo, and while the parents enjoyed the opportunity to cool off, children walked through a tent as butterflies flew all around them. They enjoyed the carousel ride and the beautiful scenic train ride around the South Mountain Reservation. Even the drug court team took a few rides on the train to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

Participants said they were thankful for the opportunity to share a memorable experience with their children and the drug court team. It was a day of fun, education and most importantly an opportunity for the drug court participants to escape the daily challenges and hurdles they face on their road to recovery.



**Essex Vicinage judges and drug court staff accompanied drug court participants and their children to the Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange in July. The excursion was a way for drug court participants to escape the daily challenges they face on their road to recovery.**

## Core Correctional Practices marks milestone

**The Office of Probation Services has reached an important milestone. In September 2018, the New Jersey Judiciary began a year-long process to train probation division chiefs, assistant chiefs, court service officers, probation officers, and Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) staff on Core Correctional Practices (CCP).**

**CCP is an evidence-based model grounded in cognitive behavioral theory that aims to reduce recidivism through supervision by focusing on teaching clients how to engage in long-term prosocial behavior. As of Sept. 3, more than 1,100 staff has been trained through 44 CCP sessions. Five additional trainings are scheduled.**

**The Judiciary has 29 CCP trainers, all of whom successfully completed a comprehensive and intensive five-day training for their certification.**

**CCP trainers were recognized for their efforts during a luncheon in August. Some of the trainers explained how they are implementing different processes in their vicinages to assist and mentor probation officers in the delivery of CCP techniques during office visits.**



# Ceremonies mark new court year

## Atlantic

At the Opening of the Courts Ceremony and Memorial Service in Atlantic County on Sept. 3, Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Waldman performed a musical selection with attorney Nancianne Aydelotte.

This year's memorial service was a remembrance of Judges Dennis J. Braithwaite and Michael Mazzoni along with attorneys Roy Baylinson, Jay Collins, Frank Olivo, Mark Pfeffer, David Spitalnick, Mark Vasser and Judiciary employees Elaine Lee and Tracy Patterson.

**The Opening of the Courts Ceremony and Memorial Service was held in Atlantic County on Sept. 3 (left).**



## Burlington

The Burlington Vicinage, in partnership with the Burlington County Bar Association, held its annual Opening of the Courts Ceremony and Memorial Service in the Historic Courthouse in Mount Holly on Sept. 3. Trial Court Administrator Alba R. Rivera opened the ceremony. Assignment Judge Jeanne T. Covert presided over ceremony, and Pamela A. Mulligan, president of the Burlington County Bar Association, spoke and presided over the memorial service.

The late Superior Court Judges Marvin E. Schlosser and Charles A. Little, and attorney Mitchell Joseph Rabil were memorialized. Assignment Judge Covert also acknowledged the passing of three jurists with local ties to Burlington County: U.S. District Court Judges William Walls and Jerome Simandle, and N.J. Worker's Compensation Judge William D. Hill.

Judge Gerard Breland sang *Borrowed Angels* in remembrance of all who passed. Judge Covert closed the ceremony with a moment of silence for those departed but not forgotten. The month-long activities culminated with an art contest award ceremony. Fourth- and fifth-grade students were honored for the artwork on the Law Day theme. The vicinage's goal to inform, educate, unite and inspire, reached more than 1,600 county residents.



**Judge Mark Tarantino speaks during the Burlington Vicinage's annual Opening of the Courts Ceremony and Memorial Service on Sept. 3.**



**Burlington Vicinage Judge Gerard Breland sang *Borrowed Angels* in remembrance of all who passed.**

Continued on page 7

## Camden

The Camden Vicinage held its Opening of the Court and Memorial Ceremony Sept. 9. The memorial ceremony recognized judges and attorneys who passed away during the previous court year.



**Assignment Judge Deborah Silverman Katz presided over the opening ceremony and memorial services in the Camden Vicinage. This year, the service paid tribute to Judges John J. Spence Jr., Alan Vogelston and George Stransky, as well as bar members Walter Wolf, Craig Huber, Frank Bitonti and Daniel Weitzman.**

## Cape May

The Judiciary recognized Superior Court Judge Dennis J. Braithwaite, attorneys William M. Balliette and Harry Delventhal, and employee Kathy Fournier, who all passed away during the previous court year, at the Opening of the Courts and Memorial Ceremony in Cape May County on Sept. 4.

**Assignment Judge Julio L. Mendez listens as judges and staff are memorialized.**



## Gloucester

The Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage held its annual Opening of the Courts ceremony on Sept. 11 at the Old Gloucester County Courthouse in Woodbury.

The ceremony, held in conjunction with the Gloucester County Bar Association, included a memorial service, over which Superior Court Judge Samuel J. Ragonese Jr. presided.

Judge Ragonese memorialized attorney Michael P. Albano, who passed during the previous court year.

**Judges from the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage (right) listen as Superior Court Judge Samuel J. Ragonese Jr. memorialized attorney Michael P. Albano, who passed during the previous court year.**



Continued on page 8



## Mercer

The Mercer Vicinage held its Opening of the Courts Ceremony and Memorial Service on Sept. 3 in conjunction with the Mercer County Bar Association. After eulogies for those memorialized, Assignment Judge Mary C. Jacobson presided over a silent prayer and the lowering of the gavel. The Mercer County Sheriff Honor Guard conducted the presentation of colors.

The memorial service was in remembrance of Tax Court Judge Gail Menyuk and attorneys Ronald Berman, Eunice Samuels Lewis, Donald Stewart Driggers, Lori Beth Prapas, Joseph A. Vales, Stanley H. Needell, Douglas Bauer and Morton Deitz.



**Mercer Vicinage Assignment Judge Mary C. Jacobson presides over the opening of court and memorial service at the Mercer County Criminal Courthouse in Trenton.**

# Judge A. Donald Bigley, retired Camden Vicinage AJ, passes

**By Mike Mathis**  
Judiciary Times Editor

Judge A. Donald Bigley, a retired Camden Vicinage assignment judge whose career in public service spanned all three branches of government, died Aug. 30 at Virtua Hospital in Voorhees. He was 93.

Judge Bigley, who lived in Voorhees, served Camden County in several roles during his career. He sat in the state Assembly from 1961 to 1963 and in the state Senate from 1965 to 1967. Judge Bigley was the last part-time Camden County prosecutor, serving in that role from 1967-1972, and was appointed to the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court the following year. He also served as a District Court judge in 1973 and on the Camden County Court from 1973 until 1978, when he became a Superior Court judge.

Judge Bigley sat in the criminal and civil divisions before Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz named him assignment judge of the Camden Vicinage in 1989. Judge Bigley succeeded Judge I.V. DiMartino, who retired. Judge Bigley retired in 1992. Current Assignment Judge Deborah Silverman Katz said judges sought out Judge Bigley for his knowledge of the Rules of Court and the even-mannered way he treated litigants.

She said he was a mentor not only to his law clerks but also to many attorneys. His protégés included Judges Angelo J. DiCamillo, Samuel D. Natal and Albert J. Scarduzio. "In all capacities, he was well respected and well liked," Judge Silverman Katz said. "The judge was kind and very funny to be around. He treated all litigants and their counsel fairly and evenly." Judge Bigley was born in Magnolia, Camden County. After serving for two years in the U.S. Air Force, he attended St. Joseph's College, graduating in 1950, and graduated from Rutgers University School of Law in 1953.



**Judge A. Donald Bigley**

Judge Bigley then served as a law clerk and an associate with Vincent L. Gallagher. While on the bench, Judge Bigley was on the faculty of the National Judicial College. Judge Bigley's wife Mary Jane (nee McBride), predeceased him. He is survived by his four children and six grandchildren. Judge Bigley's funeral was held Sept. 6 at St. Rose of Lima Church in Haddon Heights.



**Judge A. Donald Bigley (lower left), pictured with (from upper left) current Assignment Judge Deborah Silverman Katz and former Assignment Judges Faustino Fernandez-Vina, Francis J. Orlando Jr. and Lee A. Solomon.**



# Professionalism Day 2019

## Atlantic

The Superior Court in Atlantic County marked Professionalism Day on Oct. 4 with a program featuring a presentation on cybersecurity.

The topics included emerging issues related to the changing environment of cybersecurity, cyberwar, legal issues, cybersecurity awareness, personal responsibility, and privacy.

**Atlantic/Cape May Assignment Judge Julio L. Mendez (third from right) gave the opening remarks at the Professionalism Day event in Atlantic County. A similar event was held in Cape May County on Oct. 3.**



## Camden

The Camden Vicinage partnered with the Camden County Bar Association to recognize Professionalism Day Oct. 17 with a seminar focused on ethical and professional conduct in the courtroom.

Superior Court Judges Kurt Kramer, Sherri L. Schweitzer and Francisco Dominguez sat on the panel with experienced attorneys to discuss how to address various scenarios.

**Ethical and professional conduct was the focus of Professionalism Day at the Hall of Justice in Camden on Oct. 17. The panel discussion included three Superior Court judges and several attorneys.**



## Probation Services conference: 'Partners in Progress: Innovating, Integrating'

The Office of Probation Services held its second annual Education Conference on Oct. 7 and 8 at the Seaview Dolce Hotel in Galloway, Atlantic County. A total of 42 training sessions were offered during the conference, including sessions on medicinal marijuana, supervisor and child support and dealing with stress, facilitating meetings and writing cohesive procedures. The largest area of focus was on probation's transition to evidence-based practices. Probation Services Director Rashad Shabaka-Burns and Morris/Sussex Vicinage Chief Probation Officer Michael Lasko were among those who spoke at the conference.



# Ombudsmen: Liaisons to the community

By MaryAnn Spoto  
Communications Manager  
Administrative Office of the Courts

There's no doubt that courthouses can be intimidating places. Court processes and procedures can appear daunting to those who don't have regular business with the Judiciary.

Yet, at a time when the public started using the courts' services more than ever before, the Administrative Office of the Courts had to assure that all members of the public had access to court services.

It was with the mission of ensuring the fair administration of justice for all that the New Jersey Judiciary created its ombudsman program more than 20 years ago. That mission became even more crucial with the economic downturn a decade ago: many court users couldn't afford to hire attorneys; many legal assistance programs were either reduced in funding or eliminated; and the courts had their own operational and financial limitations in providing assistance.

The program, which put an ombudsman office in each vicinage, started as a pilot in 1997 with the first ombudsman in the Camden Vicinage and the second in the Essex Vicinage the following year.

By 2005, ombudsmen were in all 15 vicinages. It is the only program in the nation in which court ombudsmen can assist court users in every docket type in every county in the state.

Today, ombudsmen play a major role in assuring equal access to the courts. Their interaction with court users has grown exponentially while their role has expanded to meet the various needs of a diverse population. In the past 12 years, the number of contacts with court users increased from 9,068 in 2006 to 76,570 in 2018.

"I have the privilege of working closely with our Judiciary ombudsmen, and I know that every day they make a difference in the lives of our court users," said Janie Rodriguez, chief of Litigant Services and Outreach. "Their dedication, patience, and empathy help court users find a way through the most challenging events of their lives." Two-thirds of the Judiciary's court users come to court with no attorney, most because they cannot afford representation.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of those helped by ombudsmen are self-represented litigants. Ombudsmen help self-represented litigants navigate the intricacies of court operations and services; however, like all Judiciary employees, they cannot provide legal advice. They also receive and refer complaints from the public, develop outreach and educational programs, and make referrals to the appropriate judiciary division, outside agency or disciplinary body.

As the need for help has increased, many ombudsman offices developed self-help centers, located in an easily accessible area of the courthouse. In the center, court users can obtain information from the ombudsman and trained staff, ask questions, fill out court paperwork, and conduct their own legal research using available written materials and public access terminals.

By far, in vicinages that have full-service self-help centers, most of the contact between ombudsmen and court users is in person. In 2018, ombudsmen reported having a total of 76,570 total contacts with members of the public. Nearly half of those 76,570 contacts related to matters in the family division.

As their outreach efforts and daily requests for individual assistance continue to grow, Judiciary ombudsmen serve as a bridge between the court and the community. As they carry out their responsibilities, they demonstrate the Judiciary's core values of independence, integrity, fairness, and quality service.

"We call the ombudsman program a 'bridge between court and community' but for many court users they are more like a life preserver," Rodriguez said. "Just when the court user feels they could sink under the weight of their legal issues, the ombudsman listens, provides information, answers questions, and offers referrals to community services that can help them."



**The door to the Self-Help Resource Center in the Atlantic County Civil Courthouse in Atlantic City. The Judiciary's ombudsman program began as a pilot in the Camden Vicinage in 1997, followed by Essex Vicinage in 1998. By 2005, each vicinage had an ombudsman to assist and provide procedural guidance to court users.**



# 'Trial of the Century' on stage: The Hall Mills murder

By Mike Mathis  
Judiciary Times Editor

Many people regard the case of the man tried, convicted and executed for the 1932 kidnapping and murder of the baby son of aviator Charles Lindbergh as the "Trial of the Century." The January 1935 case at the Hunterdon County Courthouse in Flemington garnered international media attention.

Just nine years earlier, there was another "Trial of the Century," also held in New Jersey. That case is the focus of a play written by Middlesex Vicinage Family Division Judge John Jorgensen and his wife. *Trial of the Century – the Hall Mills Murder Trial Play*, details the 1922 murders of a New Brunswick pastor, his lover – who sang in the church choir – and the pastor's wife and her two brothers who were charged with and tried for the killings. The three were acquitted.

The play debuted on June 12 in the courtroom in the Somerset County Courthouse in Somerville where the 1926 trial took place. The bodies of the Rev. Edward Hall and Eleanor Mills were discovered on a lover's lane in Franklin Township, just over the Middlesex County-Somerset County border. Several Middlesex Vicinage Family Court judges, as well as attorneys of the matrimonial bar, played the roles. They are all members of the Aldona E. Appleton Family Law Inn of Court, based in Middlesex County.

"It's generated a buzz in Central New Jersey," said Judge Jorgensen, who narrated the play as reporter Damon Runyon, a well-known journalist and writer of the time who covered the trial. "It's a fascinating thing." The play recreated the sensational double homicide involving the murder of the Rev. Hall, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church in New Brunswick, and Mills. The two had been having an affair for four years. The case attracted media attention from across the country. Years later, it was the subject of a 1964 book written by attorney William Kunsler, best known for defending politically unpopular clients in the 1960s and 1970s.

Judge Jorgensen said he had been intrigued by the case since 1982, when as a young lawyer he tried a case in the courtroom where the trial was held. He was in the chambers of Judge Arthur S. Meredith one day when he noticed a photograph of the prosecution's key witness, a pig farmer named Jane Gibson, lying on a gurney while she testified. Judge Meredith explained the story behind the photograph and showed Judge Jorgensen a panel missing from the Tiffany glass in the courtroom ceiling. The panel had been removed to accommodate a camera used to take photographs of the trial.

After a discussion with family attorneys in Middlesex County, Judge Jorgensen suggested putting on the play. He received permission from Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Assignment



**To accommodate still cameras used to photograph the trial, two sections of the stained glass above the courtroom (circled in red) were removed.**

Judge Yolanda Ciccone to hold the play in the courtroom where the trial took place.

To write the script, Judge Jorgensen spent much of his spare time at the state archives in Trenton, where the 5,000-page transcript of the trial was stored in 14 boxes. He said he used the camera on his cellphone to photograph the pages so he would not amass a large copying bill. Using the first draft of the script, the play ran about three hours in length. After eight revisions, the final version runs one hour and 40 minutes. After its debut in Somerville, the play was produced as part of a continuing education seminar for lawyers at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick on Oct. 18. Next summer, the public will learn about the case when the play is presented at the Avenel Arts Center in Woodbridge on July 22, 23, 24 and 25.

"I'm hoping the public will come see the play next July," Judge Jorgensen said. Judge Jorgensen said he is working on another production, a one-person show about U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, a former governor of New York who ran unsuccessfully for president in 1916.



***Trial of the Century-the Hall Mills Murder Trial Play*, debuted in the Somerset County courtroom where the actual trial was held in 1926.**

# Devang M. Merchant named trial court administrator in Union Vicinage

By MaryAnn Spoto  
Communications Manager  
Administrative Office of the Courts



**Devang M. Merchant**

Devang M. Merchant is the new trial court administrator in the Union Vicinage, Assignment Judge Karen M. Cassidy announced. Merchant's appointment became effective on Nov. 1. Merchant started with the Judiciary in June 2013 as the vicinage's jury manager.

Since 2015, he has served as the operations division manager. "Devang has been a great asset to the Union Vicinage and

I am confident he will continue to serve the public and Judiciary employees with the same dedication in his new role," said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts.

Before joining the Judiciary in 2013, Merchant held senior management positions in the private sector. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania. "I am honored to be appointed to the role of trial court administrator," Merchant said. "I look forward to serving the public in this new role alongside the judges and staff of Union Vicinage."

Merchant succeeded James Agro, who retired after 15 years with the Judiciary. Merchant will work closely with Judge Cassidy and vicinage leadership to manage a court operation that includes 27 judges and approximately 454 staff.

"Devang's extensive management experience both in the private sector as well as here in Union County will serve him well in assisting in the management of our vicinage," Judge Cassidy said. "He has demonstrated strong leadership capabilities in his work on several important projects, including the new family division courthouse."

The trial court administrator, who is appointed by the administrative director of the courts, is the highest ranking staff executive in the vicinage in charge of all court operations, including financial management, human resources, information systems, case coordination, case flow management, probation services, jury utilization, facilities, equipment, maintenance, records management and statistical analysis.

## ISP Screening Boards

**Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) judge panels from across the state swore in new ISP Screening Board community member volunteers in September and October. The Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) provides an opportunity for nonviolent inmates to serve the rest of their prison term in the community under strict probation supervision.**

**ISP Screening Boards are composed of community members, corrections staff and an ISP employee who review applications for admission into the program. A panel of judges who make the final decision then considers those selected.**

**The new board members are from Atlantic, Burlington, Gloucester, Monmouth and Passaic counties.**

### *Career Snapshot*

*Joined Judiciary in 2013*

*Served as operations division manager*

*Held senior management positions in private sector*



# James Agro retires from Judiciary

By Mike Mathis  
Judiciary Times Editor

No matter where Jim Agro worked, he climbed the ladder quickly in his career. Agro was just 20 years old when he was hired as a field auditor for the Thom McAn Shoe Co., the youngest of 55 people to hold the position at the time. He had already had five years of service with the company, working in several stores in various positions since he was 15. More than a quarter century later, Agro joined the New Jersey Judiciary, holding several high-level positions before becoming trial court administrator in the Union Vicinage in August 2015.

Agro retired on Nov. 30, capping a second career in the public sector that has made him one of the court system's most respected leaders. "Jim's departure will leave a void in our courthouse family," Assignment Judge Karen M. Cassidy said. "His expertise in various matters as well as his capable and calm demeanor has put our vicinage on solid footing. He has earned the respect of our entire management team as well as with our judges."

Agro said he had little difficulty transitioning from the private sector to the public sector. "I love working in the public sector," said Agro, 60, who lives in Manchester, Ocean County. "I like helping people and I like working with our judges, managers and staff. They are dedicated, hard-working people who have one common goal in mind."

Unlike many of the Judiciary's senior leaders over the years, Agro did not begin or spend his entire career in the courts. After working for Thom McAn and holding several leadership positions there, Agro took a sabbatical from his field auditor position to complete his studies. He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from New York University Regents and later earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Monmouth University.

After 15 years at Thom McAn, Agro took a position with a real estate development firm that owned and operated parking lots, parking garages and storage facilities, moving from field auditor to audit manager, operations manager and finally vice president of financial operations. After 11 years with the real estate firm, Agro decided in 2004 that he wanted to move into government service and responded to an advertisement in *The Star-Ledger* for a finance division manager in the Essex Vicinage, to which he was appointed that July.

When then-Trial Court Administrator Collins Ijoma held his first performance review with him, Agro didn't hesitate to tell him what his career goal was. "I told him I wanted his position," Agro recalled, emphasizing he wanted a trial court administrator's position, not Collins' actual job. "I wanted to move up pretty quickly." However, Agro first needed more experience in court management. He served as assistant trial



James A. Agro

court administrator in Essex Vicinage for four years and was assistant director of management and financial services at the Administrative Office of the Courts for five years. He then moved to the Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage, where he served as assistant trial court administrator for almost a year. "Since I was not a career Judiciary employee, I thought it would help me in advancing my career by having both the vicinage and AOC experience," Agro said.

Agro was named trial court administrator in the Union Vicinage in August 2015. Operations Division Manager Devang Merchant has been tapped to succeed him. "Jim's career reflects the kind of dedication and commitment that is expected of all our employees," said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. "His tremendous investment and belief in our Judiciary is something we will miss."

Agro is a certified court manager and a certified instructor for the Institute for Court Management (ICM) and the National Center for State Courts. (NCSC)

Agro said he plans to spend more time with his family and hopes to continue to teach for ICM. "I thought it was time to start enjoying the next phase of my life," said Agro, who is married and has a son living in Oklahoma.

## Career Snapshot

*Joined the Judiciary in 2004 as finance  
division manager in Essex Vicinage  
Became Union Vicinage TCA in 2015*

# Jill Vito named trial court administrator in Ocean Vicinage

By MaryAnn Spoto  
Communications Manager  
Administrative Office of the Courts



Jill Vito

Jill Vito is the new trial court administrator in the Ocean Vicinage, Assignment Judge Marlene Lynch Ford announced. She succeeds Kenneth Kerwin, who retired after serving 44 years in the Judiciary.

She has worked as the vicinage's family division manager since 2016. "Jill worked her way up through the Judiciary

and has shown the dedication necessary to be a valuable contributor to our system of justice," said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. "We wish her well in her new role and have every confidence that she will continue the level of excellence the vicinage has shown over the years."

Vito started working in the Judiciary in 2001 as a law clerk to Judge Ford. She was hired the following year as a court services supervisor in the civil division, where she later served as assistant division manager and manager during her 14 years there. She has been the family division manager since April 2016.

She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Montclair State University and obtained her law degree from Widener University Delaware Law School.

"Jill has earned the respect of all who have worked with her, including judges, staff, attorneys, county personnel and litigants," Judge Ford said. "Her professionalism, knowledge of the challenges within our vicinage and commitment to serving all court users will make her a valued and respected leader." Vito will work closely with Judge Ford and vicinage leadership to manage a court operation that includes 23 judges and 414 employees.

"I am honored to accept the position of trial court administrator for the Ocean Vicinage. I am looking forward to working with Assignment Judge Ford, our judges, managers and dedicated staff as we strive to provide quality service to all court users," Vito said. "I want to thank Assignment Judge Ford and Administrative Director Grant for this opportunity. In addition, I'd like to express my gratitude to retiring TCA Ken Kerwin for his leadership and years of service."

## Career Snapshot

*Joined Judiciary in 2001 as a law clerk to Judge Marlene Lynch Ford*

*Served as family division manager since 2016*

## Have an interesting story idea?

Feature stories about court programs and newsworthy profiles about judges and court staff are welcome.

Submissions can be sent to [Mike.Mathis@njcourts.gov](mailto:Mike.Mathis@njcourts.gov).



# Ken Kerwin retires after 44 years

By Mike Mathis  
Judiciary Times Editor

Ken Kerwin was just 21 years old when he began working for the New Jersey Courts. Ocean County was 25 years into a population boom brought about by the construction of the Garden State Parkway. The Ocean County Mall in Toms River had just been proposed and Ocean County College was approaching its 10th birthday. Ocean County continues to grow, but for the first time in four decades, Kerwin - who has been the trial court administrator in the Ocean Vicinage for eight years - won't be working for the courts.

Kerwin, 65, retired from the Judiciary on Nov. 30 after 44 years of service dating to when Ocean and Burlington counties comprised one vicinage. Kerwin, who has been trial court administrator since 2011, spent his entire Judiciary career in the Ocean Vicinage, where he started as a probation officer in 1975. He was named assistant family division manager in 1986 and was promoted to family division manager the following year.

In 1992, he was named chief probation officer, a position he held until 2005, when he became civil division manager. "Ken was an outstanding trial court administrator who was instrumental in advancing the policy initiatives of our court system," said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. "He leaves a proud legacy in Ocean County." Kerwin began his career in government service as a summer laborer with the Ocean County Highway Department. After earning a bachelor's degree in management from St. Bonaventure University in St. Bonaventure, N.Y., Kerwin remained with the county, administering a summer employment program before accepting a position in the probation division.

There were 20 employees working in probation when Kerwin began working there in 1975; there are 125 there today. "You did everything," Kerwin recalled of his early years in probation. "You were a jack of all trades." Because of his lengthy tenure, Kerwin has seen many changes in the New Jersey Courts and in Ocean County, where services expanded as the population soared from 346,038 in 1980 to 510,916 in 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The county's estimated population in July 2018 was 601,651. As the county population increased, Kerwin was involved in several initiatives, including coordinating a community service worksite for those who had been sentenced for driving while intoxicated. He wrote his thesis on the reorganization of the Ocean County Detention Center while studying for his master's degree in public administration from Farleigh Dickinson University.

"I was on the front end of a lot of new initiatives," Kerwin said. One of the biggest changes occurred with unification of the courts in the mid-1990s, which shifted responsibility for operating costs from the counties to the state. Court



**Kenneth W. Kerwin**

workers who had been employed by the counties became state employees. It wasn't a seamless transition, he said, and it took nearly a decade for it to be fully embraced. He credits Judge Grant for making that happen. "The expectation is that everything will be treated the same across the state and that everyone follows the same rules," Kerwin said. After spending nearly 30 years in the probation and family divisions, Kerwin became civil division manager in 2004. "I wanted a new challenge," Kerwin said. "I knew a little about a lot of things."

Kerwin said he didn't consider becoming the vicinage's trial court administrator until the early 2000s. The first time he applied for the position, it was given to Richard Prifold, who had been a probation officer and was the vicinage's first manager in the family, civil and human resources divisions. Kerwin considers Prifold a mentor.

**Continued on page 19**

## *Career Snapshot*

*Began working for the Judiciary in 1975*

*Spent his entire career in Ocean Vicinage*

*Became TCA in 2011*

# Gregory A. Lambard named trial court administrator in Middlesex Vicinage

By MaryAnn Spoto  
Communications Manager  
Administrative Office of the Courts



**Gregory A. Lambard**

Gregory A. Lambard is the new trial court administrator in the Middlesex Vicinage, effective Sept. 30, Assignment Judge Alberto Rivas announced. Lambard, who succeeded Dawn Brevard-Waters, was chief probation officer for the Burlington Vicinage and has spent 22 years working for the Judiciary in various positions in three vicinages.

"Greg has experience across multiple vicinages," said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. "He is well prepared to assume the responsibilities of a trial court administrator."

Lambard began his career with the Judiciary in 1991 as an administrative assistant in the Essex Vicinage's criminal division. Beginning in 1994, he spent five years working as a research analyst for the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Lambard spent three years in the governor's office as a special assistant to the chief information officer before returning to the Judiciary in 2002 as the assistant family division manager in the Morris/Sussex Vicinage.

In that vicinage, he also held the positions of family division manager, assistant trial court administrator and criminal division manager. He had been the Burlington Vicinage's chief probation officer since 2013. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Maryland and a master's

degree from Rutgers University.

Lambard will work closely with Judge Rivas and vicinage leadership to manage a court operation that includes 35 judges and more than 500 staff.

"We are pleased that Greg is joining the Middlesex Vicinage, which will greatly benefit from his knowledge of the judicial system," Judge Rivas said. "With his two decades of experience in the Judiciary, we are confident we will continue to provide high quality service to the public."

The trial court administrator, who is appointed by the administrative director of the courts, is the highest ranking staff executive in the vicinage in charge of all court operations, including financial management, human resources, information systems, case coordination, case flow management, probation services, jury utilization, facilities, equipment, maintenance, records management and statistical analysis.

"I am honored and humbled to be given this opportunity to serve the citizens, judges, and court staff of Middlesex County," Lambard said.

## *Career Snapshot*

*Joined Judiciary in 1991 in Essex Vicinage*

*Served in various roles in Morris/Sussex Vicinage*

*Was chief vicinage probation officer in Burlington Vicinage when named TCA in Middlesex*



# Camden Vicinage holds street fair



The Camden Vicinage on Sept. 16 hosted its second annual courtyard community celebration at the Hall of Justice in Camden, where many civic community partners came together to provide services and information to the public.

## Tax Court Judge Gail Menyuk passes

By MaryAnn Spoto  
Communications Manager  
Administrative Office of the Courts

Judge Gail L. Menyuk, the first Tax Court clerk to sit on the Tax Court, died on July 20 after a brief illness. She was 72.

Judge Menyuk started her law career in 1982 in private practice before becoming a deputy attorney general first assigned to NJ Transit. Later, she was assigned to the Division of Taxation until she was appointed a Tax Court judge in 2002.

Before becoming a lawyer, Judge Menyuk worked at AT&T as a correspondent but left the workforce to raise her children. As a stay-at-home mother, she enrolled in a night-school program at Rutgers Law School in 1978 and was an editor at the Rutgers Law Review. She graduated with honors in 1982.

After retiring from the bench in 2013, she and her husband Steven Menyuk moved to Center City Philadelphia.

Born in the Bronx, Judge Menyuk grew up in Plainview, N.Y. on Long Island and graduated from Harpur College, State University of New York at Binghamton in 1967 with a major in psychology.

Besides her husband of 51 years, she is survived by her brother Kenneth Johnson; her children Brian and Jill Menyuk; and grandchildren Madeleine Kelly, Guinevere Menyuk and Nathaniel Kelly.

The family celebrated a memorial service on Sept. 7 at Christ Church in Toms River.



**Judge Gail Menyuk**

# Judge Samuel G. DeSimone dies at 88

By Mike Mathis  
Judiciary Times Editor

Samuel G. DeSimone, the beloved and respected jurist who was the first assignment judge of the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage, died on Oct. 10 at his Gloucester County home. He was 88. Judge DeSimone, affectionately known by his colleagues as "Big Sam," was appointed to the Superior Court by Gov. Brendan Byrne in 1975. He served in every division before Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz named him assignment judge of the newly created vicinage in 1983, when the number of vicinages was increased from 12 to 15.

Prior to 1982, Cumberland and Salem counties were in the same vicinage as Atlantic and Cape May counties and Gloucester and Camden counties were paired. Judge DeSimone also was a Korean War veteran and educator who lectured about the courts across the country and abroad. "Judge DeSimone was revered as a decorated U.S. Army veteran, a talented jurist, and a committed educator who taught judges on five continents," said Chief Justice Stuart Rabner. "He left his mark as a respected 25-year veteran of the bench and the first assignment judge of the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem vicinage. His was a life well-lived." Judge DeSimone was born in Paulsboro, Gloucester County, the only child of Italian immigrants. He was a 1948 graduate of Paulsboro High School and a 1952 graduate of Gettysburg College.

Judge DeSimone was proud of his Italian heritage, a trait that made an impression on at least one former law school student and future judge. "He gave us our take home final exam on the first day of class (at Widener Law School) and gave a new Italian food recipe at the beginning of each class," recalled current Assignment Judge Benjamin C. Telsey. "Even though we already had the exam in hand and had no reason to go to his lecture, we all attended because we did not want to miss his recipes." Retired Assignment Judge Georgia Curio, who met Judge DeSimone when she was an attorney who often appeared before him in the civil division, said he provided gentle guidance, especially to young lawyers. When Judge Curio was appointed to the bench in 1995, Judge DeSimone became her boss.

"He provided advice and guidance and was supportive in many ways, always with a view to helping me and the other judges succeed," Judge Curio said. "He reinforced the notion that to be best at the job, you couldn't take the cases and the litigants' problems home with you. 'If you were well prepared and did your best, you would have confidence in your decisions and wouldn't be inclined to second-guess yourself or dwell on concluded cases,'" Judge Curio said. "In that way you could move on to all the other matters requiring your attention, stave off burnout and better serve the public." Before he embarked on his legal career, Judge DeSimone served in the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant. He became the commanding officer of a rifle company that was deployed along the demilitarized zone in Korea and was decorated for his overseas service.



**Judge Samuel G. DeSimone**

When he returned home, Judge DeSimone earned a law degree from Georgetown University Law School in 1958. He was a law clerk at a Camden law firm, worked at a law firm in Woodbury and served as an assistant prosecutor in Gloucester County and as a solicitor for governing bodies and zoning and planning boards before becoming a judge. Judge Telsey, who in 1994 substituted as a law clerk to Judge DeSimone, said the judge treated everyone who appeared before him with dignity and respect.

"As a civil judge, he was one of the best at settling civil cases," Judge Telsey said. "He met with counsel in chambers and advised them they better settle their case before he screws it up. Most of his cases settled. 'Before each case, he addressed each of the attorney's and thanked them for the wonderful job they did on their written pleadings,'" Judge Telsey said. "He never embarrassed anyone, but instead treated each and every one with dignity and respect." Judge DeSimone was a faculty member of the National Judicial College at the University of Nevada, Reno, from 1986 to 2011. He traveled to the Republic of Georgia, Australia, Argentina, and Bosnia to teach court procedures. He was asked by the U.S. State Department to consult with Italian jurists on judicial efficiency and education.

In 1996, he was awarded the New Jersey State Bar Association Medal of Honor for his contributions to the administration of justice. "As the present assignment judge, I do not even try to fill the shoes of 'Big Sam,' they are just too big," said Judge Telsey. "He is universally beloved. It is literally impossible to find anyone to say a negative thing about him. He was simply adored."

Judge DeSimone is survived by his wife, Elizabeth "Eileen" Heilman; six children, 21 grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren. Judge DeSimone's funeral was held on Oct. 15 at St. Clair of Assisi Roman Catholic Church in Gibbstown.



# Three vicinages welcome new citizens

## Burlington

Supreme Court Justice Faustino Fernandez-Vina presided over a naturalization ceremony with Assignment Judge Jeanne T. Covert for 20 Burlington County residents on Sept. 19. The ceremony, part of the vicinage's celebration of Constitution Week, was held in the Historic Courthouse in Mount Holly. Trial Court Administrator Alba R. Rivera opened the ceremony. Students from Pemberton Township High School, Burlington County Institute of Technology, and Sacred Heart Elementary School in Mount Holly participated. Judge Gerard Breland closed the ceremony by singing America the Beautiful and Judge Covert read a proclamation declaring Constitution and Citizenship Day. This year marked the 232<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787.



**A total of 20 Burlington County residents became new citizens during a naturalization ceremony in Mount Holly on Sept. 19.**

## Monmouth

A total of 37 people from 26 countries became American citizens in a ceremony hosted by the Monmouth Vicinage on Oct. 11.

Superior Court Assignment Judge Lisa P. Thornton and Judge Lourdes Lucas officiated the ceremony and provided remarks.

Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso and Freeholder Director Thomas Arnone offered remarks.

Supervisory Immigration Officer Keith Dorr recognized each candidate for citizenship.



**Monmouth Vicinage Assignment Judge Lisa P. Thornton congratulates a new citizen during a naturalization ceremony in Freehold on Oct. 11.**

## Ocean

The Ocean Vicinage on Sept. 17 welcomed 23 new United States citizens during its naturalization ceremony. Jose Linares, retired chief judge of the U.S. District Court for New Jersey, administered the Oath of Allegiance and gave the keynote address. The Ocean County Vocational Technical School's Performing Arts Academy gave a vocal performance during the ceremony. The new citizens came from 19 different countries and five continents.



**Ocean Vicinage Assignment Judge Marlene Lynch Ford congratulates a new citizen during naturalization ceremonies in Toms River on Sept. 17.**

## Kerwin retires

**Continued from page 15**

Kerwin admits that he wasn't prepared to take the job had it been offered to him then. "If I had gotten the job then, I would've been crushed," Kerwin said. "I didn't know then how difficult it was."

During his tenure as trial court administrator, Kerwin said he has forged positive relationships with county partners and colleagues in other vicinages and at the Administrative Office of the Courts. Those partnerships are critical to succeeding, he said. "This job is really about relationships, not the nitty gritty of the business of the courts," Kerwin said. "You have to know how people tick." In retirement, Kerwin said he plans to spend time with his four children and six grandchildren and volunteer in the community. "After 44 years of service within the Judiciary, Ken has earned a well-deserved retirement," Assignment Judge Marlene Lynch Ford said. "We are all grateful for his past service and envious of his future that will be spent enjoying his family and friends."

# Spotlight: Passaic County Courthouse

*This story is the 13<sup>th</sup> in a series detailing the rich histories of New Jersey's courthouses.*

**By Mike Mathis**  
Judiciary Times Editor

Passaic County was created from parts of Essex and Bergen counties under the same legislation that created Atlantic County in 1837. Similar to many other New Jersey counties in the 19th Century, as the population of Passaic County grew, the need for suitable space for court functions also increased.

When Passaic County was formed, court sessions were held in a private home in Paterson, later known as the Passaic Hotel, and then in a Methodist church before a permanent courthouse and jail were built at Main and Oliver streets in Paterson, according to the book *The History of Bergen and Passaic Counties, New Jersey*. The courthouse was dedicated on July 10, 1839 and was enlarged between 1871 and 1872.

Just 20 years later, county officials recognized that the building still lacked sufficient space for the courts and county offices. In March 1895, the Passaic County Board of Freeholders decided to erect a new courthouse and in December, a courthouse commission comprised of three citizens was formed to oversee the construction of a building at 71 Hamilton St. in Paterson.

A total of \$350,000 was allocated for the project, an amount that climbed to \$500,000, which included furnishings and equipment. S. Burrage Reed of New York City was selected from 48 architects who submitted design proposals for the four-story building, which was constructed of marble, granite, limestone and a thin copper shell covering the dome. The rotunda area, with a glass circular pattern that is imbedded in the marble floor, is considered one of the most unique indoor spaces in New Jersey. The cornerstone was placed in April 1898 and the building was open to the public in January 1903. The building's third

floor features a gallery of oil paintings of retired judges. In the early 1970's, a group of lawyers and judges raised funds to partially restore the oil paintings of judges that were located throughout the courthouse. The second building to be added to the court complex is the Passaic County Courthouse Annex. The former Paterson Post Office, the building features a brick façade trimmed with beige limestone, an arched entrance, paired ornamental windows, an intersecting gable roof with stepped gable parapets and an ornate tower. The building opened in October 1899. The freeholders became interested in the building to house county offices in the 1930s and purchased it in 1936. The U.S. Postal Service moved into a larger facility on Dill Plaza, a section of Ward Street, where it remains today.

Both the courthouse and annex buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the New Jersey Register of Historic Places. The modern Passaic County Court House at 77 Hamilton St. was constructed in 1968 to house the courts and county administrative offices. The adjacent Passaic County Administration Building at 401 Grand St. was built in 1994.



**The second Passaic County Courthouse opened in 1899.**



**The Passaic County Courthouse Annex was a post office when the county bought it for court use in 1936.**

*Cornerstone placed in April 1898*

*Replaced earlier courthouse dating to 1839*

*Annex building purchased in 1936*