



Judicial Council Board of Directors



The 2013-2014 Judicial Council Board met during the Fall Judicial Council conference October 16-18, 2013 in Jonesboro.

Pictured (back row, L to R): David Clark (20th Cir.); Earnest Brown, Jr. (11th W. Cir.); Lee Fergus (2nd Cir.); Charles Yeargan (9th W. Cir.); Mackie Pierce (6th Cir.); (front row, L to R): Ralph Wilson, Jr. (2nd Cir.); Vann Smith (6th Cir.); Robert Edwards (17th Cir.); J.D. Gingerich, AOC Director.

Not pictured: Gary Arnold (22nd Cir.); Xollie Duncan (19th W. Cir.); Rita Gruber (Court of Appeals); James Cox (12th Cir.); David McCormick (15th Cir.).

District Judges Board of Directors

The 2013-2014 District Judges Board met during the District Judges Fall College September 19-21, 2013 in Little Rock.

Pictured (back row, L to R): Chaney Taylor (Independence Co.); Wayne Gruber (Pulaski Co.); Stephanie Casady (Saline Co.); Reid Harrod (Ashley Co.); (front row, L to R): Alice Lightle (Pulaski Co.); Van Gearhart (Baxter Co.).

Not pictured: Mark Pate (White Co.); Steven Peer (Crawford Co.).



Supreme Court Travels to Conway for Appeals on Wheels



Justice Paul Danielson and Circuit Judge H.G. Foster meet with local middle school children during their Appeals on Wheels visit to Conway.

Last month the Supreme Court traveled to Conway for Appeals on Wheels. More than 100 students and teachers were invited to watch oral arguments held in the Reynolds Performance Hall on the campus of the University of Central Arkansas.

After oral arguments, the justices, local judges, and members of the Faulkner County Bar Association visited local schools to meet with students and discuss the judicial system. The justices met with UCA political science students, as well as junior high and middle school students.

This visit is part of the biannual Appeals on Wheels program. Twice a year the Supreme Court travels to hear oral arguments outside of Little Rock and to meet with local students.

Attorney Dependency-Neglect Ad Litem Program Receives National Attention

As a self-regulating profession, attorneys ad litem are not often evaluated on the quality of their work; but Arkansas has the nation's most comprehensive attorney evaluation process for children's attorneys, thanks to the work of the AOC's Renia Robinette, Dependency-Neglect Attorney Ad Litem (AAL) Program Director, and Janet Bledsoe, Attorney Ad Litem Assistant Director.

Robinette and Bledsoe have been working to create a statewide system for attorney evaluation using hands-on client and stakeholder feedback. In July and August, their work was recognized on a national level at separate conferences, where they were able to share their process with other child welfare professionals, and where they received very positive feedback from their colleagues from around the nation.

The conferences were the 15th

Annual American Bar Association (ABA) National Conference on Children in the Law, Raising the Bar: Lawyers as Partners for Family Well-Being on July 12 in Washington, D.C., and the National Association of Council for Children's (NACC) 36th National Child Welfare, Juvenile, and Family Law Conference, Strategies for Success: Enhancing Advocacy for Children, Youth, and Families on August 28 in Atlanta.

At both conferences, Robinette and Bledsoe conducted workshops and plenary sessions entitled Evaluating Attorney Representation in a Changing World. This session looked at the importance of evaluating the quality of legal representation of children, parents, and agencies and how Arkansas's implementation process can be used as a model for those states wishing to create similar programs.

The Arkansas Dependency-

Neglect Attorney Ad Litem Program, created in 1995, strives to ensure the representation provided to children involved in dependency-neglect cases meets the standards set forth by Arkansas Supreme Court Administrative Order No. 15. It looks at many different factors to ensure quality representation, including court observation, stakeholder input, data comparison, self-evaluation, client input, and file review. The process is intended to provide guidance and constructive feedback to each attorney ad litem and direction to staff for program improvements. The end result should be competent representation to dependent-neglected children throughout Arkansas.

For more information on the Dependency-Neglect Attorney Ad Litem Program, please contact Renia Robinette at renia.robinette@arkansas.gov.

Employee Spotlight: John Stewart



John Stewart reflects on his 35 years with the AOC.

John Stewart, Deputy Director of the AOC, celebrated his 35th year with the organization this year. He said much has changed in the judiciary during the time he has been there.

Born in Tennessee and raised on farms in Gould, Arkansas, Stewart attended Henderson State where he received a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and History with a minor in Economics. He then went on to get his Masters of Public Administration from the University of Arkansas. After serving in the military, he returned to Arkansas, started working for the Arkansas Crime Information Center, and eventually moved over to work for the Administrative Office of the Courts (known then as the Arkansas Judicial Department).

Stewart has seen many changes to the Judicial Branch, including the creation of the Court of Appeals and the elimination of chancery courts, which folded those "courts of equity" into the circuit courts. The most significant change he has seen, however, is the move to a centralized, automated court management system. Such a system allows the Administrative Office of the Courts to provide online services to the courts and the public, such as accessing court records, paying traffic tickets, and electronically submitting court filings.

"It's really going to pay off, not just for the court system but the criminal justice system as a whole," Stewart said. During his time with the AOC, its role in the court system has changed and evolved. While it originally served as statistical unit of the Supreme Court, he now sees it differently.

"We're a service provider for the courts, providing whatever we can... I think in the future it will be even more, as far as having more of a role in support services for court reporters, trial court assistants, and judges," Stewart said. This evolution is not without its challenges, however. He considers the greatest problem facing courts today to be proper funding. "Courts tend to get a bad rap. I think they're not funded like they should be funded. That's the biggest thing to overcome."

Getting adequate funding for the courts has always been a struggle, and will continue to be. But as public policy and public demand force the courts to modernize and provide more and more digital services, adequate funding will become even more important.

Stewart's retirement is not imminent, but he does provide advice to current and future judicial branch employees: education. "Continue to improve yourself because you never know what doors will be open to you as a result."

Going Digital

The Administrative Office of the Courts will eliminate the paper version of the *Friends of the Court* newsletter and go to an online only format next summer. This will allow room for regular content, more diverse court-related news, and more features on *you*, the people who do the work of the Judicial Branch.

As always, we are taking suggestions for story ideas. Do you know someone who should be spotlighted in a future issue? Is there something new happening in your court? Would you like to get the word out about a problem in your community? Let us know!

Contributions are always welcome. We need your ideas, photos, and input. Please email your submissions to meghan.sever@arkansas.gov.

New Faces in the Judiciary

AOC

Brian Lindsey - Network Manager

Fred Farnam - Network Analyst

Wes Harris - Appellate Automation Specialist

Josh Baugh - System Administrator

Kelly Hinkson - Project Manager

District Court Clerks

Green County/Marmaduke Dept.. - **Veneta**

Hargrove replaces Betty Jackson.

Jackson County/Tuckerman Dept.. - **Kaylee**

Clausen replaces Joyce Hembrey.

Randolph County/Pocahontas Dept.. - **Sarah**

Dunlap replaces Jill Cagle.

Official Court Reporters

10th Cir. (Glover) - **Polly Curry** replaces Margaret R. Norton.

Trial Court Assistants

14th Cir. (Womack) - **Gary O. Quinney** replaces Claudette Davis.

CALENDAR

January

Court Interpreter Candidate
Assessment Exam
(Little Rock)

18

District Court Clerk 14
Certification (2nd & 4th Districts)
(Texarkana)

ADR Commission Meeting
(Little Rock)

23

District Court Officers 27-28
(Hot Springs)

State Employee Grievance
Mediation Training
(Little Rock)

27-31

March

Trial Court Assistants Conference 8
(Eureka Springs)

February

Access and Visitation Program
Orientation
(Little Rock)

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Court Interpreter Candidate 15
Assessment Exam
(Little Rock)

Court Interpreter Candidate
Assessment Exam
(Springdale)

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