

JUDICIARY TIMES

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1996

THE CHANGING FACES OF JUDICIARY LEADERSHIP

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The changing faces of court leadership

By Glenn A. Grant
Administrative Director of the Courts



Look at the group photo of the 1996 Judicial Council, which appears on page four of this edition of the Judiciary Times, and you will see a group of senior leaders of the Judiciary that includes only two women.

Today, some 25 years later, the picture had changed. As you will learn in this issue, the courts first began to seriously confront gender bias 40 years ago, when Judge Marilyn Loftus sought to collect data to convince her colleagues of the existence of gender bias in the courts.

Glenn A. Grant That led to the formation, a year later, of the Supreme Court Committee on Women in the Courts, a group that continues to meet today to study and report on gender bias in order to educate the public. MaryAnn Spoto's feature story in this edition looks at the history of this important committee and its continued impact. It also charts the growth of female leadership in the Judiciary. In 1995, women made up 26 percent of court executives. Today, two out of every three court executives are women. Chief Justice Stuart Rabner has been and continues to be a champion for promoting female leadership in the Judiciary.

Beyond the numbers, you'll find stories about some of the amazing women who represent the best of today's Judiciary. In this issue, we say goodbye to two consequential assignment judges – Karen M. Cassidy of the Union Vicinage and Mary C. Jacobson of the Mercer Vicinage – while welcoming the first female Hispanic assignment judge, Union County Assignment Judge Lisa Miralles Walsh. There is also the touching story of Tax Court Judge Mary Siobhan Brennan and the lasting impact she had on a defendant who appeared before her back in 2011. I want to thank Judges Cassidy and Jacobson for their leadership and contributions to the New Jersey Judiciary. Their stories are inspirational. Judge Cassidy offered to work at her first legal job without pay while in college. Judge Jacobson applied to law school and graduate school simultaneously, the latter with the intention of becoming an English professor.

In addition, we pay tribute in this issue to two departing members of the Supreme Court: Associate Justice Jaynee LaVecchia and Associate Justice Faustino "Fuzzy" Fernandez-Vina. We also look at the recent Judicial Conference on Jury Selection, the switch to Recovery Court, Opening of the Court Ceremonies, and our spotlight on the history of New Jersey courthouses turns its focus to the Sussex County Courthouse.

As we turn a corner in the COVID crisis and return to a greater semblance of "normal" life, I would be remiss to not acknowledge and praise our Judiciary workforce, which has shown such incredible strength and character throughout the past two years. The Judiciary's successful management of the pandemic's impact on the court system was a collective effort between the vicinages and the central office to ensure the health and safety of our employees and public, while balancing the need to maintain operations and access to justice.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change." Such perseverance and adaptation to new ways of conducting our business in the face of this extraordinary societal adversity was exactly what I saw from our Judiciary employees across the state. We hope you enjoy this issue. You can also look for the Judiciary Times online at www.njcourts.gov.



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Judiciary releases 2020 annual Criminal Justice Reform report

By MaryAnn Spoto
Communications Manager
Administrative Office of the Courts

New Jersey's county jail population under Criminal Justice Reform continues to include an increasing percentage of defendants accused of serious crimes and a decreasing percentage of low-risk defendants unable to pay bail, according to an annual report released by the Administrative Office of the Courts.

The report found the percentage of individuals in jail charged with a serious offense increased for three consecutive years, from 74.9 percent in 2018 and 75.9 percent in 2019 to 79.7 percent in 2020.

At the same time, the practice of holding low-risk defendants in jail for inability to pay bail – once the catalyst for CJR – continued to decline dramatically, according to the report. In 2020, even as the overall jail population increased slightly because of the suspension of criminal jury trials necessitated by Covid-19, the percentage of jail inmates held on bail of \$2,500 or less dropped to 0.2 percent, or 14 inmates, the report found.

Both findings followed up on a 2012 jail population study that looked at a single day in October. That study found 1,547 inmates - 12 percent of the jail population – were in jail pretrial on a bail of \$2,500 or less. When that study was replicated for 2018 and 2019, the percentage had dropped to 4.6 percent and 2.4 percent, respectively.

Other annual report statistics continued to show CJR has proven effective in maintaining the balance between public safety and the rights of the accused. The rate of new indictable criminal activity for defendants released pretrial has held between 13.7 percent and 13.8 percent for three consecutive years. Court appearance rates increased slightly to 90.9 percent.

The report also found that New Jersey's jail population continues to hold a disproportionate percentage of Black men and women. Although there are fewer defendants of all races and genders in jail today under CJR, Black individuals represent 60 percent of the state's jail population.

The report notes that such racial disparities continue to exist throughout the criminal justice process and extend beyond the courts, which respond to defendants after they are brought into the judicial system. "New Jersey's justice system is fairer and safer today under Criminal Justice Reform, but we must continue to work together with stakeholders across the criminal justice system to confront inequities wherever we find them and identify responsible, meaningful solutions," Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said.

Criminal Justice Reform began in New Jersey in January 2017, replacing a cash bail system that had stood for more than a century. Under the new system, the use of bail has been minimal.

Portrait of Associate Justice Hoens dedicated

The Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Vicinage on Dec. 15 unveiled a portrait of retired Supreme Court Justice Helen E. Hoens. The portrait now hangs in the ceremonial courtroom of the Somerset County Courthouse in Somerville.

Justice Hoens sat in the vicinage when she began her judicial career in 1994. She moved to the Appellate Division in 2002 and joined the Supreme Court in 2006.



Supreme Court Committee on Women in the Courts: 40 years of protecting against gender bias

By MaryAnn Spoto
Communications Manager
Administrative Office of the Courts

More than four decades ago, Judge Marilyn Loftus attended meetings of the National Association of Women Judges, and in April 1982, she participated in a national symposium for women judges. What she heard at those national gatherings concerned her: In nearly every way that women were coming into contact with courts, they were experiencing bias because of their gender.

Acting on those concerns, then-Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz and Robert Lipscher, administrative director of the courts, created the Supreme Court Task Force on Women in the Courts to investigate the extent to which gender bias existed in New Jersey courts.

In the 40 years since, that task force now operates as a Supreme Court committee that continues to investigate gender biases, implement recommendations on how to eliminate those biases, and educate those in the legal community on how to promote fairness in the profession.

“The Supreme Court’s Committee on Women in the Courts is an invaluable organization which explores the continuing issues that women face in this profession. The Supreme Court recognized the need for this committee to rectify the disparities in the practice for women. We are indebted to the leadership of Chief Justice Robert Wilentz and Superior Court Judge Marilyn Loftus for recognizing the importance of making the practice of law inclusive for all genders,” said retired Superior Court Assignment Judge Karen Cassidy, chair of the committee for five years.

When Judge Loftus first brought her concerns to Chief

Justice Wilentz and Lipscher, they suggested she continue following those issues and make recommendations for judicial education programs to be presented at the next Judicial College. But Judge Loftus felt she needed data to convince her colleagues that gender bias existed in the courts. She asked for a committee to study the issues, and Wilentz responded in October 1982 by forming the Supreme Court Task Force on Women in the Courts, the first of its kind on the nation.

“We want to make sure, in both substance and procedure, that there is no discrimination whatsoever against women – whether they are jurors, witnesses, judges, lawyers, law clerks or litigants,” Chief Justice Wilentz said in announcing the formation of the task force. It was initially envisioned as a one-year assignment to focus on three key areas:

- The extent to which gender myths, biases and stereotypes affect judicial decision making and the law.
- The extent to which gender bias affects the ways that both women and men are treated in the courtroom and chambers and at professional gatherings.
- Ways that judges can ensure equal treatment in the courts.

Its first report, presented at the 1983 Judicial College, attracted national attention. It identified problems in the areas selected for study: awards for damages, domestic violence, juvenile justice, matrimonial law, sentencing, interactions in the court and professional environments, and court administration. Chief Justice Wilentz recognized a year was insufficient time for the task force to make meaningful progress. He extended the term of the task



When this photo of the Judicial Council was taken in 1996, there were only two women in positions of senior leadership: Chief Justice Deborah Poritz (center) and Bergen Vicinage Assignment Judge Sybil Moses (right front).

Chief Justice Poritz was the first and only female chief justice; Judge Moses was the state’s first female assignment judge.

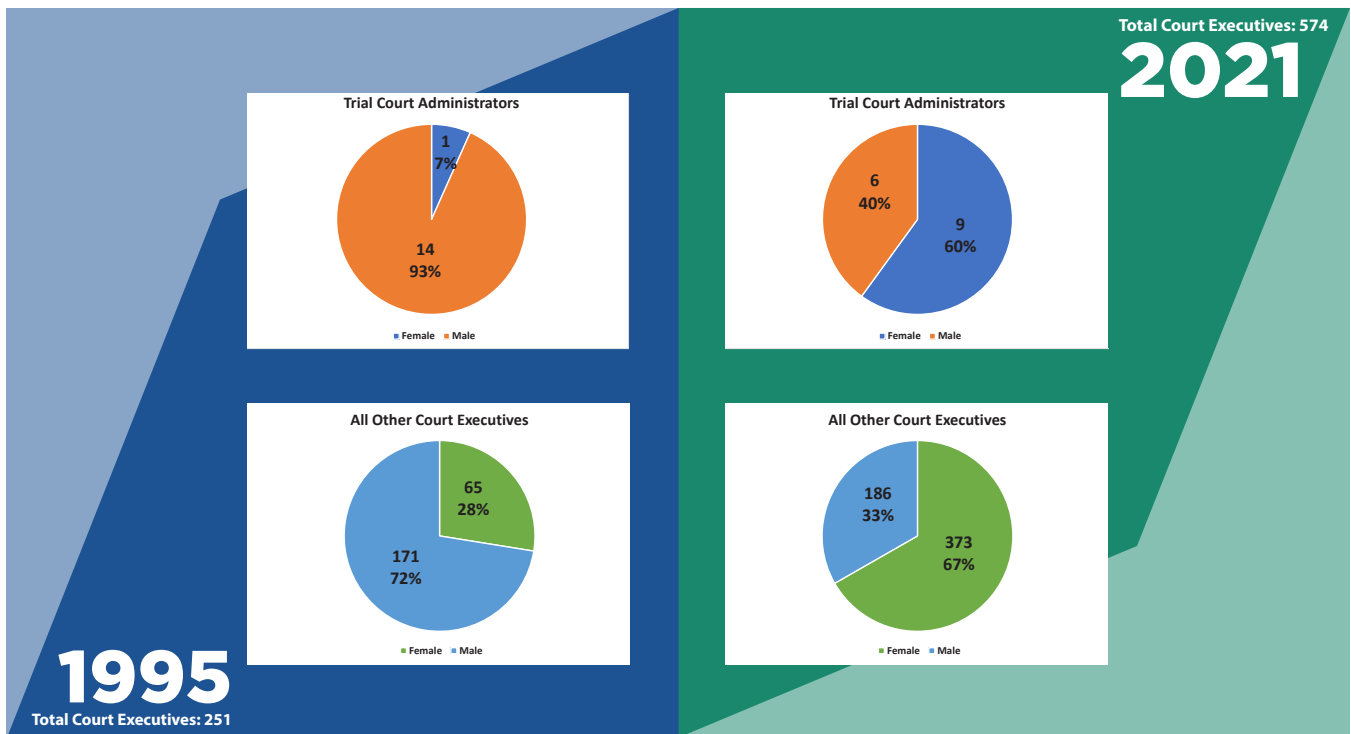


When this photo of the Judicial Council was taken in 2019, the number of female assignment judges and presiding conference judges had increased substantially.

Today, there are seven female assignment judges in the 15 vicinages, and there also are nine female trial court administrators.

Through the Years: Females in Leadership/Management Roles

Sept. 1, 1995 to Dec. 1, 2021



This chart shows that the female representation for all court executive titles has increased significantly over more than 25 years, from 26.3% in 1995 to 66.6% in 2021. The percentage of female trial court administrators has increased from 6.7% in 1995 to 60% in 2021.

force indefinitely, and in 1990 made it a Supreme Court committee.

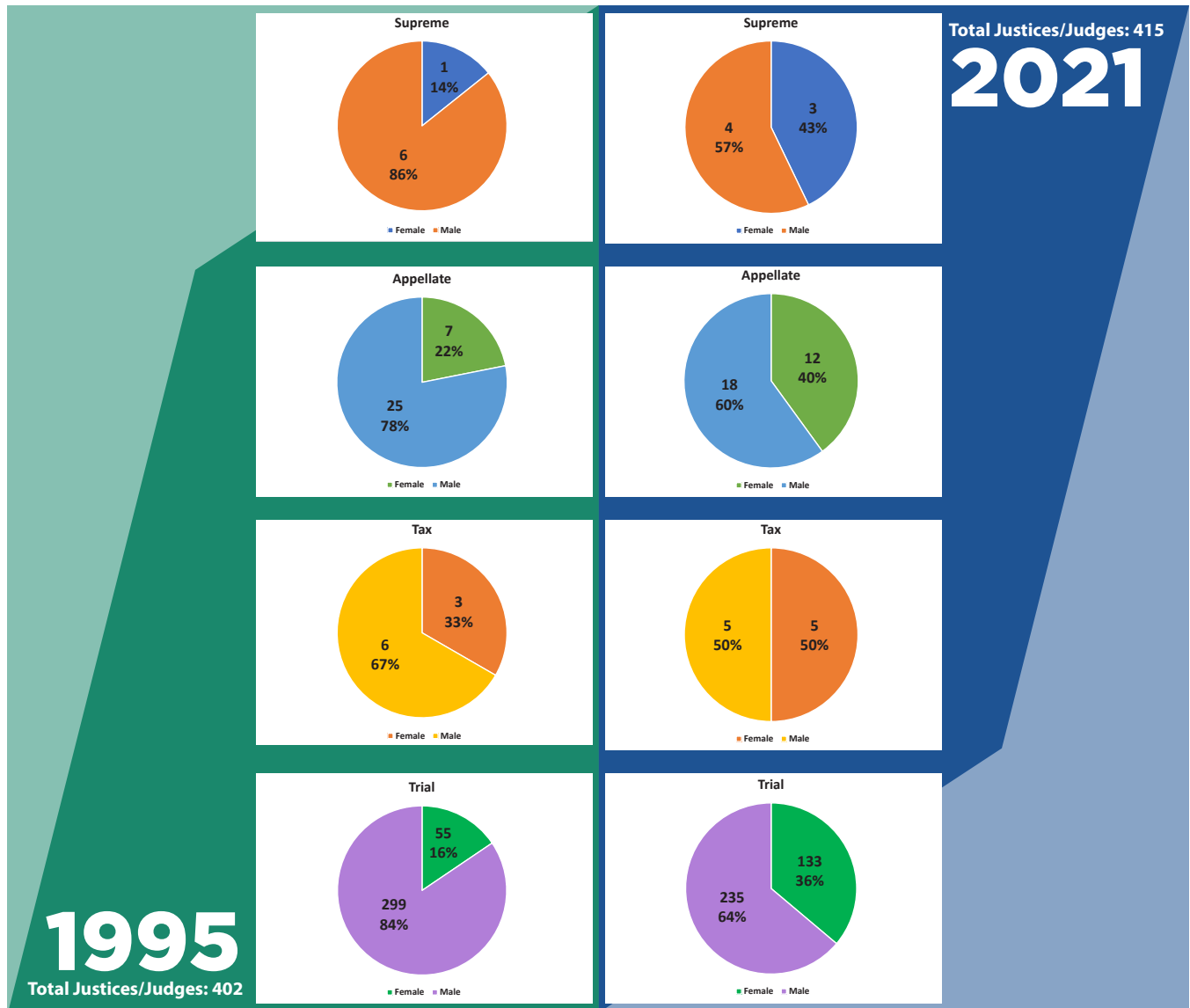
Surveys of court users, judges, attorneys and staff about their perceptions and experiences of gender bias were conducted in 1990, 1996, and 2007. The most recent survey report, published in 2009, revealed that women and minorities continue to perceive a higher incidence of

biased behavior in the courts. "From its beginnings 40 years go until now, this committee has focused on educating members of the bar. The surveys that are periodically administered provide us with the most updated areas of concern. We then go to various organizations to educate their membership and to address these issues that they otherwise may not have even realized existed," Judge Cassidy said. The committee continues to address the issue

Women in Judicial Leadership

in the Supreme, Appellate, Tax and Trial Courts

Sept. 1, 1995 to Dec. 1, 2021



of bias in the courts, largely through education.

New Jersey Judiciary

The judicial education subcommittee focuses its attention on programming and publications to help judges ensure a bias-free courtroom. The bar education subcommittee presents CLE programs at state and local bar meetings. The law school education subcommittee sponsors a program each year at one of the three New Jersey law schools. The women of color subcommittee focuses specifically on the intersection of race and gender in the New Jersey Courts and in the legal profession. The Judiciary has engaged

the services of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University to administer an updated survey created by the committee.

“As the past chair of the committee, I am proud of the work this group has done. Our membership is dedicated to being in the forefront of gender equality,” Judge Cassidy said. “Our discussions formulate the direction we take as we move forward. Issues of fairness continue to evolve, and the members regularly raise our awareness as we work together for the good of women in our profession.”

Making the most of a second chance

By Lauren Boix, Law Clerk and
Alexa DeAngelis, Secretary to
Tax Court Judge Mary Siobhan Brennan

Sameer Jaywant is an accomplished individual and lawyer. He attributes his drive to succeed to an unfortunate choice that he and his friends made while teenagers, and the subsequent encounter he had with the New Jersey Courts. This story begins and ends in the municipal courtroom in West Windsor Township, Mercer County.

On Dec. 21, 2011, Sameer Jaywant stood in front of then-Municipal Court Judge Mary Siobhan Brennan on a marijuana possession charge he received the summer before heading to college at New York University.

The incident had left him nervous and discontented. He was distracted during his first semester at college and fearful that his dream of becoming an attorney was ruined. His court date had been set for when he would return home from college for winter break. He had been dreading this day, convinced his life would change for the worse. Instead, for legitimate but fortunate reasons, the charge was dismissed.

However, Judge Brennan did not allow Jaywant to walk out of her courtroom without a stern lecture, an acknowledgment of his rare but good fortune, and a few words of wisdom. In his words, she gave him a second chance. Upon his return to New York University, Jaywant kept in the back of his mind Judge Brennan's advice to "make the best out of this opportunity." He studied harder and volunteered for worthy causes. He was accepted into Yale Law School in 2015.

Recognizing that not everyone is given the second chance that he had received, he participated in a group dedicated to criminal justice reform. The group's efforts resulted in the closure of a prison in Connecticut. After law school, he went to work at a well-known law firm in Washington, D.C. and at the federal Public Defenders Office. He repeated some of Judge Brennan's words of advice to his clients, in the hope that they too would be motivated and successful in life.

On Oct. 18, 2021, Jaywant and Judge Brennan were once again in the municipal courtroom in West Windsor Township, but for a much different reason. Earlier in the year, Jaywant passed the New Jersey Bar exam and became eligible for admission to the New Jersey Bar. He contacted Judge Brennan, now a judge in the New Jersey Tax Court, and asked her to honor him by administering his oath as an attorney in the state of New Jersey.

So, on this day, rather than standing in front of Judge Brennan as a defendant, Jaywant proudly stood beside her and took his oath to become a member of the New Jersey Bar. The West Windsor municipal clerk found the tape of the



Tax Court Judge Mary Siobhan Brennan and newly admitted attorney, Sameer Jaywant in the West Windsor municipal courtroom.

10-year-old proceeding and played it back for them both to hear. Judge Brennan's final words to Jaywant that day were, "I hope to never see you in this courtroom again."

As the tape ended and silence filled the courtroom, everyone began to laugh. Judge Brennan's wish for Jaywant had fallen through but in the best way.

Jaywant is a shining example of someone who turned a lucky break into a motivator. He started a fellowship in Washington, D.C.

Judge Brennan, who will mark her 20th year on the bench this summer, was touched by Jaywant's request that she administer his oath. She remarked that the swearing in was the most endearing and appreciative moment that she experienced as a judge in a long time. As they parted, Jaywant and Judge Brennan promised to keep in touch.

Two female legal trailblazers retire

By Mike Mathis
Judiciary Times Editor



**Assignment Judge Karen M. Cassidy
Union Vicinage**

Judges Karen M. Cassidy and Mary C. Jacobson followed in the footsteps of two of New Jersey's most revered legal leaders, yet they established their own legacies of hard work, dedication to the Judiciary and compassion for those who appeared in their courtrooms.

Judge Cassidy was the first female assignment judge (AJ) in the Union Vicinage, who at the start of her career worked as a law clerk to Assignment Judge Edward W. Beglin Jr. Judge Jacobson succeeded Linda Feinberg, the first female assignment judge in the Mercer Vicinage. Judges Cassidy and Jacobson retired last year after many years of service to the Judiciary. Judge Cassidy served for 21 years on the bench and more than 12 years as assignment judge. Judge Jacobson also served on the bench for 21 years and served as assignment judge for nine years.

"During her two decades on the bench, more than half of them as the assignment judge of the Union Vicinage, Judge Cassidy made a significant impact on the judiciary through her skilled leadership and insightful voice on important matters," Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said when he announced that Judge Lisa Miralles Walsh would succeed Judge Cassidy. Judge Cassidy was the presiding family division judge when Chief Justice Stuart Rabner named her to succeed Assignment Judge Walter R. Barisonsek when Judge Barisonsek retired

on Jan. 31, 2009. Judge Cassidy was appointed to the bench in April 2000 by then-Gov. Christie Whitman. She had served in the Union Vicinage since her appointment, first in the family division, then in the civil division from September 2002 until September 2005. She returned to the family division in 2005 to serve as presiding judge. Judge Cassidy said she was drawn to the law by an uncle who was a lawyer and by watching the 1970s legal dramas Perry Mason and Owen Marshall, Counselor at Law.

While attending American University in Washington, D.C., she picked up a phone book, found attorneys who had offices near the campus and sent them a cover letter and resume, asking if she could work without pay. One firm hired and paid her. "It was a total random thing," recalled Judge Cassidy, who was raised in Cranford and knew no one who practiced law in the nation's capital.

Judge Cassidy's first official position in the legal profession after she graduated from George Washington University Law School in 1984 was as a law clerk to Judge Beglin when he was assignment judge in the Union Vicinage. From Judge Beglin, Judge Cassidy said she learned the practical and professional aspects of being a lawyer, such as noting what lawyers did well, developing relationships, and, as a civil law clerk, "the nut and bolts of motion practice." After her clerkship, Judge Cassidy worked at the Roseland law firm of Connell Foley. She joined the firm in 1985 as an associate and was named partner in 1992. "I just wanted to get into a law firm and work," said Judge Cassidy.

Judge Cassidy said she never thought about becoming a judge until someone in the Union County Bar Association suggested she consider it. The judges she appeared before, including Judge Beglin, also encouraged her, she said. "He was so happy when I got on the bench," Judge Cassidy said of Judge Beglin, who was still sitting when she was sworn in. "It was pretty incredible."

Judge Cassidy said she enjoyed presiding over civil trials, interacting with the public and watching the reactions of jurors as they listened to testimony. She said she also understood the gravity of the cases she heard when she sat in the family division.

"I never had any experience in family court, and once you get there and you're a judge, you realize how important your role is in a family that is totally fractured," she said. "People aren't here because things are going well. These people were at such a low point, and sometimes you never got them out of there. "I thought that was a really, really important division," she said.

As assignment judge, Judge Cassidy said she enjoyed the fact that "everyday was something of an adventure" and that she dealt with an array of people, not only other judges, but also court staff and county officials. "One of the most important things an AJ can do is build relationships," she said. "The magnitude of the position and all of the moving parts... it really changed the way with how I looked at how the whole court system operates."

Judge Jacobson succeeded Judge Feinberg, who retired after 20 years on the bench and 15 years as assignment judge, when she became assignment judge on March 1, 2012. "The assignment judge for the Mercer Vicinage often hears cases relating to Executive, Legislative, and agency actions that have statewide impact. Judge Jacobson served in that role with great distinction," Chief Justice Rabner said when he named Judge Robert Loughy to succeed Judge Jacobson upon her retirement on Aug. 31, 2021.

Judge Jacobson was appointed to the bench in 2001 by then-Gov. Christine Todd Whitman. She sat on the civil bench in Essex Vicinage before moving to the general equity division. Six months later, she moved to the Mercer Vicinage, hearing civil and then family cases. She served as presiding judge of the family division from 2009 to 2010, when she was named presiding judge of general equity in the Mercer Vicinage.

A graduate of Smith College in Northampton, Mass., Judge Jacobson earned her law degree at New York University School of Law. She served as a law clerk to the late Appellate Division Judge Samuel Lerner before beginning her career at the Division of Law in the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety. After 10 years in the environmental protection section, she was named appellate supervisor and later assistant attorney general.

One of 10 children who was raised in Bayonne, Judge Jacobson said she first considered a career in the law in high school because she enjoyed public speaking in class and was a member of the debate team. She majored in English in college and applied to law school and graduate school simultaneously, the latter with the intention of becoming an English professor.

"The impact you could have on society through law was something that attracted me over the academic life," Judge Jacobson said. "But I've always had a great interest in reading and writing and literature, and I think that served me well both as a lawyer and then as a judge." While Judge Jacobson didn't become an English professor, she was able to practice her love of writing while mentoring the young lawyers who clerked for her.

"I got to do writing and analysis and working with law clerks gave me the great privilege of teaching, working with young lawyers and helping to guide their understanding of the law and the judicial process and helping them get started on their careers." One of the most challenging yet rewarding assignments Judge Jacobson had was hearing guardianship cases in Essex and Mercer vicinages. "I always tried to provide support to them,"

"The magnitude of the (assignment judge) position and all of the moving parts...it really changed the way with how I looked at how the whole court system operates."

- Assignment Judge Karen M. Cassidy, Union Vicinage



**Assignment Judge Mary C. Jacobson
Mercer Vicinage**

Judge Jacobson said of the parents applying for guardianships for their adult children. "You have milestones for your child, and this is a milestone you don't want to celebrate. As the judge, I really wanted to show incredible compassion and support."

Judge Jacobson said among the most challenging cases she heard involved the New Jersey Open Public Records Act (OPRA) in which she would have to balance the public's right to know with privacy. "Even in public records cases, particularly when you're dealing with privacy interests of individuals, that was something that was extremely important to me," she said.

Judge Jacobson said she didn't aspire to succeed Judge Feinberg as assignment judge but that she came appreciate the importance of her administrative responsibilities while working with vicinage staff. "I didn't aspire to be the assignment judge. I was encouraged to apply," she recalled. "I was wary of the administrative piece because that's not where my passion lay. "To my surprise... understanding the bigger picture of how the Judiciary works, how the administrative piece works is so very important to the success of what we do," she said.

"As the judge, I really wanted to show incredible compassion and support."

- Assignment Judge Mary C. Jacobson, Mercer Vicinage

Two associate justices leave the bench

The New Jersey Supreme Court said goodbye to two associate justices recently. The Court held ceremonies to honor them for their service to the citizens of the state and to wish them well in their future endeavors. Associate Justice Jaynee LaVecchia retired on Dec. 31, 2021 after 21 years on the state's highest court. Associate Justice Faustino "Fuzzy" Fernandez-Vina retired on Feb. 15 after serving more than eight years on the court.



Associate Justice Jaynee LaVecchia
Supreme Court of New Jersey

“There’s literally not an area that the justice has not weighed in on, and each of her opinions show an attentiveness to detail and a healthy dose of common sense that practitioners and the public praise and welcome as well as an overriding sense of fairness.”

- Chief Justice Stuart Rabner

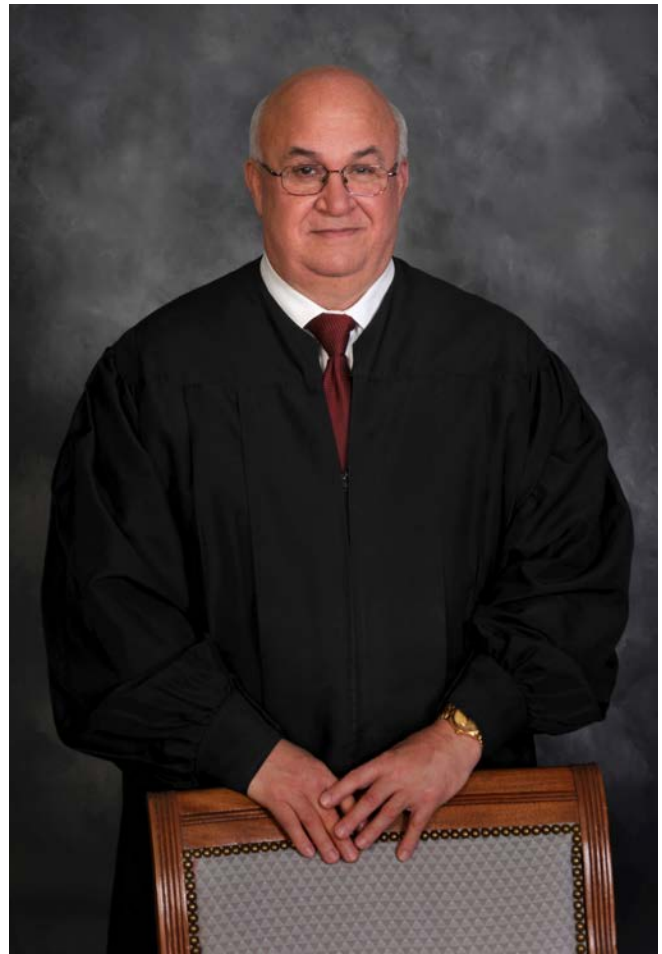
“All of the people that I serve with have contributed to the work of the court in its continued search for an improved system of justice, to the principled development in the law, to secure rights and advance individual liberties for people in an ever-changing society, and to establish procedures for furthering the truth the search for truth in an imperfect world.”

-Associate Justice Jaynee LaVecchia



“Everyone has their own Fuzzy story, whether you’ve known him for a decade or 10 minutes because of the kind of person that he is: down to earth, outgoing, warm, gruff on the outside to be sure, but a big heart underneath that he would not admit to. Funny with a sense of humor that is both disarming and most often directed against himself, and incredibly generous, with offers of advice or help or motivational war stories...or the shirt off his back if he thought that that would be of any help.”

-Chief Justice Stuart Rabner



Associate Justice Faustino "Fuzzy" Fernandez-Vina
Supreme Court of New Jersey

“The decisions we make, as you know affect people for perhaps forever. When you’re a trial judge, you’re deciding a case that’s affecting that family, those people, but here we affect the whole state. It sometimes can be daunting. It’s been a privilege not only to serve the state of New Jersey in this capacity but also to sit with these incredibly intelligent, incredibly hard-working, just good people. Everyone up here cares about what we do, cares about the state, and they’re just not only good friends and wonderful people, they are fantastic human beings.”

-Associate Justice Faustino Fernandez-Vina



Judiciary holds 2-day conference to discuss how juries are selected in New Jersey



Supreme Court chief justices from three states joined Chief Justice Stuart Rabner in one of a series of panels during the Judicial Conference on Jury Selection in November. The conference, which was Nov. 10 and Nov. 12 virtually and with limited in-person attendance at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick, provided the New Jersey Supreme Court with recommendations to improve the process of jury selection.

Chief Justice Rabner moderated a conversation with Supreme Court chief justices from Arizona, Washington and Connecticut to discuss approaches their jurisdictions have taken to guard against bias in jury selection. Justice Lee A. Solomon moderated a panel focusing on transparency in the jury selection process and the Judiciary's plan to collect juror demographic data.

Representatives from the executive and legislative branches also attended. A unanimous New Jersey Supreme Court called for the judicial conference in its July 13 opinion *State v. Andujar* that found implicit or unconscious bias "can violate a defendant's right to a fair trial in the same way that purposeful discrimination can."

Changing names: "Recovery Court" better reflect its mission of drug court program

By MaryAnn Spoto
Communications Manager
Administrative Office of the Courts

New Jersey Statewide Drug Court has been renamed the New Jersey Statewide Recovery Court. The change became effective on Jan. 1.

"This name change reflects the primary goal of the program – recovery - as we continue to work with potential employers to connect program graduates with job opportunities," said Glenn A. Grant, administrative director of the courts.

The Judiciary's JOBS (Judiciary Opportunities for Building Success) program partners with local employers to provide employment and job training, as well as professional development, for drug court graduates as well as those who complete probation. The program gives probation clients a second chance at rebuilding their lives while employers have the opportunity to support their local communities.

New Jersey's drug court program, which started as a pilot in 2001, has helped more than 6,600 graduates reclaim their lives from substance abuse. More than 26,800 participants have been enrolled in the program since April 1, 2002.

Judiciary nears full compliance with COVID-19 vaccine policy requirement statistics

More than 99 percent of New Jersey Judiciary staff have either been vaccinated against Covid-19 or submitted results of weekly COVID tests, Glenn A. Grant, administrative director of the courts, announced.

As of Dec. 27, 2021, 85 percent of Judiciary judges and staff statewide had been fully vaccinated, while 14 percent were either partially vaccinated or submitted the required testing. The remaining 1 percent have been on leave. Employees who are not vaccinated and do not submit proof of testing are required to take unpaid leave. The Judiciary announced its policy in August 2021.

Monmouth and Union vicinages jointly celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month virtually

By Trevor Campbell
Probation Officer
Monmouth Vicinage

The Monmouth and Union vicinages hosted a virtual program to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month on Oct. 26. The theme of this year's observance was "Esperanza: A Celebration of Hispanic Heritage and Hope."


Opening remarks were given by Judge Mara Zazzali-Hogan, chair of the Monmouth Vicinage Advisory Committee on Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement. Assignment Judge Lisa P. Thornton led an insightful, thought-provoking discussion with two Hispanic legal trailblazers, Union Vicinage Assignment Judge Lisa Miralles Walsh and Monmouth Vicinage Judge Lourdes

Lucas. Judge Walsh is the first female Hispanic assignment judge. Judge Lucas is the first Hispanic judge appointed in the Monmouth Vicinage and she is chair of the vicinage's EEO/AA Advisory Committee.

The judges spoke about their Hispanic heritage, identity, family values and pride. They also described their personal and professional achievements and challenges that they encountered.

Close to 100 judges, staff and community members viewed the virtual program. The event was sponsored by the Monmouth and Union vicinages in collaboration with their respective EEO/AA Advisory Committees and Committees on Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement.



 **New Jersey Courts**
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Editor's Note

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

Submissions can be sent to Mike.Mathis@njcourts.gov

Camden Vicinage hosts landlord tenant resource fair

As part of its landlord tenant outreach efforts, the Camden Vicinage held a resource fair outside the Camden County Hall of Justice in Camden on Sept. 28. Nearly 100 people participated despite the inclement weather.

In addition to civil division and ombudsman office staff, representatives from South Jersey Legal Services, the eviction clinic at Rutgers Law School in Camden, Camden County Board of Social Services, Volunteers of Americas, Senior Citizens United Community Services and the Camden Vicinage Clothing Drive were available to answer landlord tenant related questions for local court users.



Construction Corner

By Mike Mathis
Judiciary Times Editor

The following are updates on some of the construction programs around the state.

Essex

Essex County has purchased land to build a new family courthouse close to the main campus. Planning for the new 8-story family courthouse has begun. It is estimated the construction phase of the project will go out to bid by the end of 2022 with construction to begin Spring 2023.

Hudson

Brennan Courthouse – Renovations are completed.
Honorable Frank J. Guarini Justice Complex – Footings are being poured. The concrete for the fire towers is completed. Construction of a parking garage is running concurrent with construction of the justice complex.

Monmouth

Monmouth County Courthouse Security Entrance - The newly

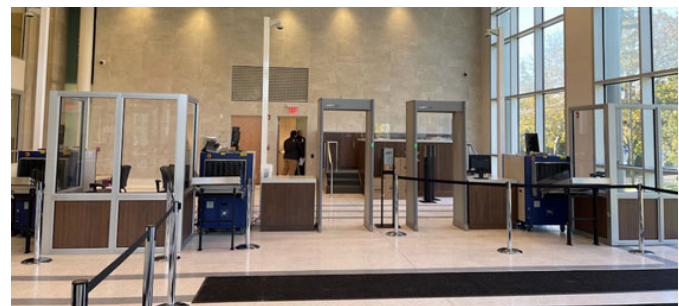
redesigned and reconstructed west wing security entrance opened on Nov. 8, 2021. The next phase of the courthouse construction project is the reconstruction of the east wing entrance stairs, with a tentative completion date of late Spring 2022.

Ocean

Ocean County Justice Complex Annex - Ocean County Commissioners are planning to construct a new building for a centralized screening point, secure judge parking, eight criminal courtrooms, criminal division staff, probation division staff, finance division staff, administration staff and jury assembly room at a projected cost of \$50 million. The vicinage is working with the architect to provide space planning requirements

Salem

Salem County Courthouse Addition - Work has begun on a 50,000-square-foot addition to the existing courthouse. The addition will include a new single point of entry, a jury assembly area and four criminal courtrooms. Site preparation continues; structural steel has arrived. Construction on new space in the courthouse was delayed due to inability to get steel; meanwhile, site preparation has begun



The exterior and interior of the newly reconstructed west wing security entrance at the Monmouth County Courthouse.

Walking to gain perspective and understanding among colleagues

By Kelley Anthes-Smith
EEO/AA Officer
Morris/Sussex Vicinage

Assignment Judge Stuart Minkowitz and Trial Court Administrator Susan Chait invited the Morris/Sussex judges to participate in a privilege walk on Oct. 13, 2021.

While the walk was short, the insight gained from one another was great. Despite busy schedules, coordinating bench time, testimony, and case management, judges made a commitment to participate and lead by example.

Morris/Sussex Vicinage leaders have been committed to providing engaging dialogue and educational opportunities focusing on diversity and inclusion for Morris/Sussex Vicinage employees and judges. Trial Court Administrator Susan Chait was inspired to bring the walk to the vicinage after participating in a privilege walk with Administrative Council in 2019.

Beginning in July 2020, a series of privilege walks have been scheduled for the vicinage, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Using creativity, outdoor space, and social distancing protocols, the privilege walks have been safe and successful. Previously, the Morris/Sussex management team including division managers and assistant division managers, participated in privilege walks, partnering with the AOC EEO/AA Office and Morris/Sussex Vicinage EEO/AA officer.

Prior to the exercise, judges were invited for a tour of the probation services building in Dover. They toured the facilities where clients report and were greeted by dedicated staff who provide supervision and enforce child support orders.

The privilege walk was held in the parking lot behind the probation services building. Participants lined up along a line of cones. A series of statements were read, and if a participant could identify with a statement, they were asked to step forward.

The questions focused on areas of privilege such as race, gender, religion, education, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and being able-bodied. The exercise visually demonstrated that the more forward steps a participant took, the more privileges they experienced in life.

Such privileges are not always noticeable and could be taken for granted. Participants who did not take many steps forward and finished in the middle or back of the group

revealed that not every person is afforded the same privileges.

Observing colleagues' positions was impactful, as it showed each had different privileges afforded to them, yet each found a way to work towards becoming a Superior Court judge.

A hybrid debrief session was held the next day. Participants gathered virtually and in person in accordance with Judiciary COVID-19 protocols.

A productive, insightful, and candid conversation occurred between the judges, who shared personal experiences, perspectives, ideas, and resources. The conversation allowed each judge to consider another's experiences, including challenges, barriers, or stereotypes.

Discussions reflected on history, current barriers and racism. How to apply these observations to a court users' life experiences also was discussed. The exercise allowed colleagues to reflect on their different experiences, paths and opportunities, enabling them to improve the administration of justice for everyone.

The Morris/Sussex vicinage will continue to schedule future privilege walks for supervisors, law clerks, and staff when warm weather returns.



Morris/Sussex Vicinage judges participate in a privilege walk in Dover, Morris County. The focus of the walk was a better understanding of diversity and inclusion.

Essex Vicinage Family Division celebrates National Adoption Day virtually

By Judge Linda L. Cavanaugh
Family Division
Essex Vicinage

The Essex Vicinage Family Division celebrated National Adoption Day on Nov. 19, 2021. This was the 19th year that the vicinage participated in this national effort to raise awareness about the more than 125,000 children waiting to be adopted from foster care in the United States and find “forever families.”

Assignment Judge Sheila Venable and Judges Wayne J. Forrest, Linda L. Cavanaugh, Nora L. Grimbergen and L. Grace Spenser conducted virtual adoptions for 21 children and their families. The virtual proceedings allowed family and friends from across the country to participate in the celebrations.

The morning opened with an interactive game where the families could participate and win prizes. Judge Venable and Family Presiding Judge David Katz welcomed the families and talked of the importance of the day.

The program also included a special presentation from Christine Norbut Beyer, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families. Beyer thanked the employees of the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP) for their exemplary dedication to the children in foster care and recognized the adoptive families for their loving commitment to the children in their care. The families were then given an interactive, virtual tour of the Essex County Turtle Back Zoo before the adoptions commenced.

Because of the generosity and support of the entities involved, each family that chose to participate in the Adoption Day proceedings received a breakfast of pastries and drinks. They also were given a basket from Edible Arrangements. Gift cards for and gift baskets with household necessities as well as age-appropriate toys and games were distributed by DCPP staff. Each family also received a gift card to the LongHorn Steak House.

The day was a direct result of the collaborative efforts of many agencies and staff, including the Judiciary, DCPP, the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Junior League of Montclair-Newark, Office of the Essex County Surrogate, Rutgers University Child Advocacy Clinic, Office of the Public Defender and the County of Essex. Their staffs worked tirelessly to ensure that the adoption files were completed and ready and that the day was extra special for all involved.



Assignment Judge Sheila Venable



Family Presiding Judge David Katz



Family Division Judge Linda L. Cavanaugh



The event featured a virtual visit from penguins and owls from the Essex County Turtle Back Zoo.

Burlington Vicinage holds job and community resources fair for recovery court participants

By Aubrey Gallagher
Recovery Court Coordinator
Burlington Vicinage

The Burlington Vicinage held a job and community resource fair for recovery court participants and probation clients on Oct. 14. The vicinage partnered with local employers and social service agencies at the event, which was held in-person

The fair, which was hosted by the criminal and probation divisions, gave clients and employers a chance to meet one another, establish professional relationships, and discuss potential job opportunities.

Attendees also learned about local services providers that offer educational opportunities, parenting classes, childcare, housing resources and low-cost or free baby supplies.

Representatives from several potential employers, including Amazon, ACCU Staffing, and the Occupational Training Center met with participants to discuss available positions.

Representatives from the American Job Center helped

attendees explore career counseling, job search assistance, various workshops, and training to prepare for career development or change. Representatives from Rowan College of Burlington County and Burlington County Institute of Technology provided information about the educational opportunities available at their institutions.

Attendees explored the many resources and services available in Burlington County by speaking with representatives from local agencies such as The Father Center, Generations Family Success Center, LIHEAP Energy Assistance, Riverbank Transportation, Burlington County Community Action Partnership and Mosaic Early Learning.

Individuals looking for information about addiction and recovery support met with four local treatment providers: Unity Place, Solstice Counseling Services, Legacy Treatment Services and Burlington Comprehensive Counseling, the Burlington County Recovery Center, and visited the Hope One van and its numerous resources.



The fair was held in the yard at the old Burlington County Prison in Mount Holly, which is adjacent to the Burlington County Courts Facility.

Opening of the Court ceremonies

For the second consecutive year, three vicinages held their annual opening of the court and memorial services virtually due to the pandemic.

The Camden Vicinage and the Camden County Bar Association held its ceremony and service on Sept. 20. Assignment Judge Deborah Silverman Katz presided over the ceremony, with Camden County Bar Association officers and trustees coordinating the presentations. This year, the memorial service paid tribute to Superior Court Judge Theodore Z. Davis, as well as bar members Kenneth G. Andres Jr., Joseph P. Briglia, Leslie J. Jandoli, Thomas Bantivoglio, John J. Palitto Jr., James Crovo and Donald S. Levenson.



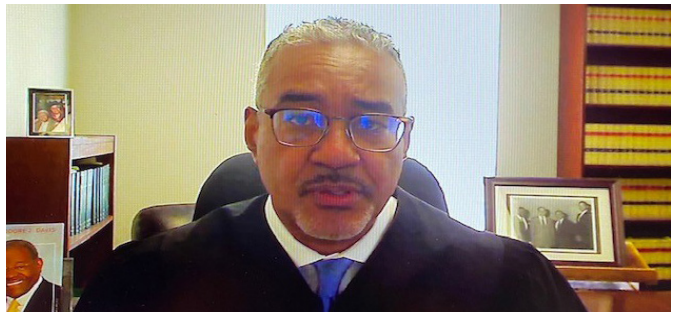
Assignment Judge Deborah Silverman Katz
Camden Vicinage

The Burlington Vicinage, in partnership with the Burlington County Bar Association, held its ceremony and service on Sept. 13. Assignment Judge Jeanne T. Covert presided over the ceremony and Brett Gorman, president of the bar association, spoke and presided over the memorial service. This year, the vicinage and bar memorialized eight late members of the bar: D. Neil Manuel, Daniel Kehler, David Parker, Donald Levenson, Edward Kirn III, John "Jack" F. Vassallo Jr., Kenneth G. Andres, and William M.E. Powers.



Mercer Vicinage Assignment Judge Robert Lougy
presided over the ceremony in the criminal courthouse.

The Mercer Vicinage, in partnership with the Mercer County Bar Association, held its ceremony and service on Sept. 9. Assignment Judge Robert Lougy presided over the ceremony and Tanya Phillips, president of the bar association, spoke and presided over the memorial service.



Appellate Division Judge Morris G. Smith

The vicinage and the bar memorialized Morton I. Greenberg, retired U.S. Circuit judge; Stephen W. Townsend, retired clerk of the New Jersey Supreme Court; and attorneys Clifford C. Halper, Frank Perley Reiche, Ivette Santiago-Green, Lewis J. Pepperman, Paul Sollami, Robert Gladstone, and Thomas Patterson Weidner.



Associate Justice Faustino Fernandez-Vina
Supreme Court of New Jersey



Mercer County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard displays flags
at the start of the ceremony.

Three vicinages hold JOBS fairs

The Bergen, Camden and Middlesex vicinages hosted their first Judiciary Opportunities for Building Success (JOBS) program fairs. The JOBS program connects private companies and non-profit organizations with successful recovery court and probation clients who want to rebuild their lives and want to work



Bergen Vicinage



Camden Vicinage



Middlesex Vicinage

Chief Justice Names Lisa Miralles Walsh to lead the Union Vicinage; succeeds Judge Karen M. Cassidy

By MaryAnn Spoto
Communications Manager
Administrative Office of the Courts



**Assignment Judge Lisa Miralles Walsh
Union Vicinage**

Chief Justice Stuart Rabner named Superior Court Judge Lisa Miralles Walsh to lead the Union Vicinage, effective Sept. 1, 2021

Judge Walsh succeeded Judge Karen M. Cassidy, who retired after 21 years on the bench and more than 12 years as assignment judge.

“During her two decades on the bench, more than half of them as the assignment judge of the Union Vicinage, Judge Cassidy made a significant impact on the judiciary through her skilled leadership and insightful voice on important matters,” Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said. “Judge Walsh is a gifted and talented jurist with a range of experience

in different areas of the justice system. She is poised to continue the fine tradition of court leadership in the Union Vicinage.”

Judge Walsh worked as an assistant prosecutor in the Middlesex County Prosecutor’s Office from 1999 to 2009 and from 2014 to 2017, where she served as a trial team leader and a member of the sex crimes and child abuse unit.

In between, she worked as a solo practitioner, specializing in criminal defense and real estate tax appeals. She was appointed to the bench in January 2017 by then-Gov. Chris Christie.

“I am thankful to the Chief Justice Rabner for his trust in my abilities and honored to be chosen to lead the Union Vicinage. I am humbled to follow the trail blazed by Assignment Judge Karen Cassidy and to continue her tireless work to ensure fairness and justice to all litigants and attorneys who appear in our courts,” Judge Walsh said. “I look forward to working collaboratively with the exceptional judges and staff of the Union County Courthouse as well as all members of the Bar as we carry on with the work of the Judiciary in these unprecedented times.”

Judge Walsh was raised and educated in Elizabeth and graduated from Rutgers University in New Brunswick.

While attending Seton Hall University School of Law, she interned at the Office of the Public Defender in Elizabeth and at the Union County Prosecutor’s Office. After earning her law degree, she clerked in the Criminal and Chancery divisions for Superior Court Judges Miriam N. Span and Edwin R. Alley in the Union Vicinage.

*Worked as an assistant
prosecutor in Middlesex
County.*

*Graduate of Seton Hall
University School of Law.*

Judge Kevin Shanahan leads Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Vicinage; succeeds Judge Thomas C. Miller

By MaryAnn Spoto
Communications Manager
Administrative Office of the Courts

Superior Court Judge Kevin M. Shanahan is the new assignment judge in the Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Vicinage, effective Jan. 13, 2022.

Judge Shanahan succeeded Judge Thomas C. Miller, who retired after more than 10 years on the bench and 18 months as assignment judge.

"Judge Miller is a gifted jurist and a thoughtful leader who will be missed. I am confident Judge Shanahan will continue the history of capable, wise, and effective leaders who have served the residents of Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren counties," Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said.

Judge Shanahan had served as the presiding judge of the civil division in the vicinage since July 2020. He was appointed to the bench on Aug. 18, 2014, serving first in the family division and then moving to the civil division a year later. Judge Shanahan also served as the presiding judge of the criminal division from 2017 to 2020. Nominated for reappointment in 2021, Judge Shanahan received tenure in August.

"The confidence Chief Justice Rabner has shown in my ability to lead the vicinage is extremely humbling," Judge Shanahan said. "I hope to uphold the high standards that Judge Miller – and Judge (Yolanda) Ciccone before him – have set."

Before being appointed to the bench, Judge Shanahan was in private practice, specializing in personal injury litigation. Prior to his judicial career, he regularly served as a faculty member at the Widener University School of Law and Hofstra University School of Law and taught trial advocacy courses through the National Institute for Trial Advocacy.

Judge Shanahan earned his bachelor's degree from St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia in 1977 and his law degree from Rutgers Law School in Camden in 1980. He clerked for Superior Court Assignment Judge George Schock and, starting in 1981, worked as an assistant Mercer County prosecutor for two years.

Beginning his career in private practice in 1983 as a partner in a three-person law firm, Judge Shanahan also served as part-time municipal prosecutor for West Windsor during those two years. From 1985 to 1988, Judge Shanahan worked as senior trial attorney for Selective Insurance Co. of America. He spent the next eight years at a private law



**Assignment Judge Kevin M. Shanahan
Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Vicinage**

firm representing plaintiffs and defendants in personal injury litigation, medical malpractice, and criminal defense matters at trial.

*Earned law degree from Rutgers
Law School in Camden.*

*Worked as a clerk for former
Assignment Judge George
Schock in the Mercer Vicinage.*

Chief Justice Names Michael J. Blee to lead Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage; succeeding Judge Julio L. Mendez

By MaryAnn Spoto
 Communications Manager
 Administrative Office of the Courts



**Assignment Judge Michael J. Blee
 Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage**

Chief Justice Stuart Rabner announced Feb. 7. that Superior Court Judge Michael J. Blee will lead the Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage, effective March 1.

Judge Blee will succeed Judge Julio L. Mendez, who will retire after more than 10 years as assignment judge, capping 20 years on the Superior Court bench.

“From his leadership in municipal court reform, to his efforts to connect recovery court graduates with jobs, and so much more, Judge Mendez leaves a legacy of innovation in pursuit of justice,” Chief Justice Rabner said. “The Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage will remain in capable hands under the leadership of Judge Blee, a talented and fair-minded jurist with a wide range of legal experience.”

Judge Blee has served more than four years as presiding

judge of the vicinage’s chancery division. Beginning his career on the bench in 2012, Judge Blee spent more than three years in the vicinage’s family division before he was appointed to the criminal division in 2015. A municipal court judge for eight months before joining the bench, Judge Blee was in private practice for 24 years.

Born and raised in Atlantic County, Judge Blee practiced law primarily in Atlantic and Cape May counties. In private practice from 1988 to 2012, Judge Blee had extensive jury trial experience in state and federal courts and engaged extensively in municipal court practice. He served as an assistant prosecutor for Northfield from 1990 to 1992, labor relations counsel for Egg Harbor Township from 1996 to 1997, special prosecutor for Brigantine from 1997 to 1999, and prosecutor for Absecon from 1993 to 1996 and from 1998-1999.

Judge Blee was a public defender for Brigantine and Margate until 2011 and the solicitor for the Somers Point Planning Board from 2009 to 2012. He served as a municipal court judge for Linwood and Northfield from October 2011 to June 2012. From 2004 to 2012, he served as solicitor for Galloway Township. He also served as solicitor for Absecon from 1996 to 1998 and from 2000 to 2012.

“I am grateful to Chief Justice Rabner for his confidence in my ability to lead this vicinage. I’m very excited about this new challenge of continuing the exemplary work of Judge Mendez,” Judge Blee said.

A graduate of Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA., Judge Blee earned his law degree from Rutgers Law School in Camden.

Served as a prosecutor, public defender, solicitor and municipal court judge in several Atlantic County municipalities.

Superior Court Judge Forrester passes

By Mike Mathis
Judiciary Times Editor

F. Lee Forrester, who as a Superior Court judge in the Mercer Vicinage for more than 20 years was distinguished as a staunch advocate for children, died of complications from cancer on Aug. 30, 2021. He was 70.

Judge Forrester had served nearly 15 years as a public defender when then-Gov. Jim Florio nominated him to the bench in 1992. He served nearly his entire career in the family division, except for a short stint in the criminal division when he was first seated, until he retired in 2014.

Judge Forrester's career as a child advocate early in his career as an attorney with the Office of the Public Defender and the Office of the Public Advocate, where he gained experience in the education, social and legal rights of children.

Judge Forrester's commitment to children and their needs transcended the courthouse. With his wife Lisa, Judge Forrester founded The Harmony Schools, and he served as president of the New Jersey Child Care Association for many years.

After he retired from the bench, Judge Forrester continued to work in the interest of children, including as a board member of the Advocates for Children of New Jersey, and as a member of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee, New Jersey Council of Juvenile Justice System Improvement, the Task Force for the Continued Transformation of Youth Justice in New Jersey, and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice.

He was especially proud of his association with the Juvenile Justice and Youth Development program at Rutgers University. Judge Forrester provided a grant to Rutgers to establish the project and was a founding member of the program's advisory council.

Raised in the Chambersburg section of Trenton, Judge Forrester was a graduate of the Peddie School, Villanova University, and Rutgers Law School in Newark. He served as a law clerk to Judge A. Jerome Moore in the Mercer Vicinage.

Judge Forrester is survived by his wife Lisa, three children and six grandchildren.



Superior Court Judge F. Lee Forrester
Mercer Vicinage

Ocean Vicinage hosts its first JOBS Fair



Five probation clients accepted positions during Ocean Vicinage's JOBS fair on Sept. 23 at the Ocean County Library in Toms River.

Presiding Criminal Division Judge Wendel E. Daniels (left) addressed the crowd.

Spotlight: Sussex County Courthouse

This story is the 18th in a series detailing the rich histories of New Jersey's courthouses.

By Mike Mathis
Judiciary Times Editor

One of the nation's oldest courthouses isn't located in Newark, Paterson or Jersey City. Tucked in the far northwestern corner of New Jersey near the Delaware Water Gap, the old Sussex County Courthouse at High and Spring streets in Newton, the county seat of Sussex County, dates to before the Revolutionary War.

Only one other courthouse in New Jersey is older: The Old Salem County Courthouse, built in 1735, is the second oldest in the country. The history of Sussex County goes back to 1709, when the provinces of East Jersey and West Jersey were established. What is now Sussex County was situated into the boundaries of Burlington County in West Jersey.

In 1713, Hunterdon County was formed from Burlington County. Hunterdon County included present-day Morris, Passaic, Sussex and Warren counties. Morris County was formed from Hunterdon County in 1738 and included Sussex and Warren counties.

Sussex County became a separate county in 1753 and included all of what is now Sussex and Warren counties. Warren County was formed in 1824.

The first Sussex County Courthouse was built in 1765. The original building was constructed so that it would face a center green, according to the Sussex County website. The land was donated by Jonathan Hampton specifically for the two-story building, which was constructed of local fieldstone.

The courthouse was the site of a daring raid during

the American Revolution by one of the Loyalists' best operatives, Lt. James Moody. In 1780, Moody led several men to free eight Loyalist prisoners held in the courthouse. Despite a pursuit lasting several days, Revolutionary forces failed to capture them. The courthouse was destroyed by fire on Jan. 28, 1847. The building was rebuilt with the original fieldstone walls and reopened on May 1, 1848.

In December, 1910, a second fire occurred, resulting in extensive damage to the courtroom, attic and cupola. The damage was repaired, and the charred beams from that second fire remain in the building.

The courthouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places on July 23, 1979 for its Greek Revival temple-style architecture.

The interior and exterior of building has undergone extensive renovations. However, officials eventually determined that they needed more space, and the modern Sussex County Judicial Complex was built in 1992.

The first Sussex County Courthouse was built in 1765.

The second courthouse opened on May 1, 1848.



The Sussex County Courthouse opened on May, 1, 1848. It was built with the fieldstone walls used in the first courthouse, which dates to 1765.



The Sussex County Judicial Center in Newton as it appears today.