

JUDGE CURTIS BELL

“Family: The lens from which you view the world is created from your upbringing.”

So says Kalamazoo County Chief Judge Curtis J. Bell.

“I had great parents who really instilled in me the values that I took to the practice of law,” he continued. “Working harder for the person who hires you, and the community that you serve than you do for your own self.”

Ten years after he became an attorney, a local judge retired and Judge Bell’s first instinct wasn’t to put his name in for consideration, but rather, to consult with his wife.

“We started talking about the good that can be done from such a position. If I could become a judge, perhaps I would have a better ability to impact more lives in a positive way,” he recalled. “I went ahead after consulting a great deal with my wife, and put my name in to be considered.”

Judge Bell was appointed to the Kalamazoo County Probate Court and starting serving in the Family Division in 2005.

“I always think that it’s good for people to do different things throughout their lives. Even though I was loving the practice of law, becoming a judge would give me a different vantage, a new opportunity, and a new challenge,” he remarked.



Judge Curtis Bell

Adding to the bliss was Judge Bell’s absolute devotion to Kalamazoo.

“Kalamazoo is my home. It’s our community that’s great, our county government commission and administrators, our court administrators are wonderful, and the colleagues that we have are great. It really lends itself to a wonderful environment,” he shared.

Judge Bell was in the circuit court family division for about 10 years, until the chief judge at the time retired. At that point, Judge

Judge Bell’s family-centric approach is helping to build a better future for local kids.



Bell took on the chief position, putting the probate court on his plate.

This past year, Judge Bell started a juvenile mental health court, as well as a therapeutic program created to help at-risk youth.

“When I was in family division, we noticed the increasing numbers of youth who were having significant mental health concerns,” Judge Bell said. “However, resources simply were not available to do all of what we needed.”

“SCAO, the administrative arm of the Michigan Supreme Court, had opened up the opportunity for funding to create a juvenile mental health court,” he continued. “As soon as the opportunity was available, we jumped on it. It has been a blessing to have the support of SCAO, it gives us the ability to support a family in a wrap-around fashion that we weren’t able to do before.”

In addition to presiding over the specialty juvenile court, he is involved in another effort to help Kalamazoo’s youth. He and a team of administrators, managers, supervisors, and front line staff, started KEYS: Kalamazoo Empowering Youth for Success.

In KEYS, the emphasis is on figuring out what a specific individual may need in terms of assessing their condition, whether it is mental health, substance abuse, etc.

“Whatever that need is, we must have the services specifically geared for that need, for that individual. We hope to reduce delinquencies,” Judge Bell said.

The program, which includes such approaches as music therapy, is generally appreciated by youth, their families, and even by the staff.

“We have some great people who are really dedicated,” Judge Bell said. “I rely on good people every day; I’m blessed to have great people in my court. It is a true team approach: everyone is involved and everyone is dedicated to the success of all our programs.”

Judge Bell is a graduate of Michigan State University, as well as the University of Iowa, where he received his law degree. He lives in Kalamazoo with his wife, Cheri, and their three children. 🏠



The Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home is home to the KEYS program.