



MICHIGAN'S JUDICIARY

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MESSAGE FROM MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERT P. YOUNG, JR.

December 2016

My colleagues and I are very proud of what Michigan's judiciary has accomplished over the past six years. Our judiciary is leaner. Our courts are more customer-focused.

The administration of justice is more efficient and timely. The judges highlighted in this collection of profiles and their colleagues all across Michigan are taking the lead and making a difference in their local communities.

We are driving change in Michigan's courts by measuring more and using data to drive more decisions and improve outcomes. New technology is being implemented to increase efficiency and access to the public. More courts than ever are sharing resources, breaking down silos, and working together. In partnership with the State Court Administrative Office, we are all driving change to improve service to the public.

Like their colleagues statewide, the judges profiled in these pages are doing more than managing their dockets and hearing cases. For example, they are making the tough decisions needed to transform our judicial system by re-engineering court processes and working across jurisdictions. As a result, employees can be more productive and customers can get their business done on time. Most importantly, surveys of court users tell us the vast majority are very satisfied with their experiences in Michigan courts.

Just as important, many of these judges oversee problem-solving courts that save lives and strengthen their communities. By leading treatment courts, they are providing the tough and time-consuming supervision needed to help participants get free of addiction, find jobs, and support their families.

A commitment to serving the public is shared by every member of Michigan's judiciary. That's why we want you to get to know them better through these profiles. While only 12 judges are featured, our entire judiciary is making Michigan a model for the nation.



Find all of these profiles at www.courts.mi.gov/successstories.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert P. Young, Jr.".





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JUDGE LOUISE ALDERSON

"If you ask my mother, she'd say while I was watching 'Perry Mason,' but I think it was when I was an assistant prosecuting attorney in Clinton County that I knew I wanted to be a judge."

It was during her time with the Clinton County 65A District Court when Judge Louise Alderson was enticed by the trial process, which led her to pursue a career as a judge.

"Judge Randy Tahvonen of Clinton County had so much information — almost an encyclopedic brain, of legal information. Also, his demeanor in court I just really admired."

Now serving as Chief Judge of 54-A District Court in Lansing, she attributes much of her success to Judge Tahvonen, as well as retired Clinton County Judge Jeffrey Martlew.

"It was his ease of communications with young lawyers in front of him on the bench. He really stressed the opportunity to discuss matters of the law."

With both of these esteemed judges serving as her mentors, it's easy to see how Judge Alderson has been so successful as a district judge and as a leader within the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJl), the Supreme Court's educational division. Judge Alderson's passion for sharing knowledge and appreciation for those who came before her illustrates how MJl not only fosters judicial leadership in the courtroom and in the community, but also encourages judges to serve as teachers and mentors among their colleagues.



Judge Louise Alderson

"For MJl, I have been on various educational advisory committees. I have also done some work in training, including presentations for MJl. Most recently, we did one on pretrial release and pretrial bonds."

According to Judge Alderson, the Educational Advisory Committee has the largest impact.

"It's a group of judges who meet together to make decisions on what type of criteria will be at training sessions for the broader scope of

Judge Alderson understands that mentors matter on the career path and on the bench.



judges. Whether at our annual conference or our regional meetings, we look at what's most important in our courts at that time — where are folks struggling, what are new areas of the law that judges may need a refresher or new ideas on."

Staying involved with the MJJ is very important to Judge Alderson.

"We are a high-volume court. We are very rote in a lot of things we do. In order to stay involved with what's on the horizon for us, it's very important to partake in the resources of entities such as the District Judges Association and MJJ. It keeps me active; it ensures I am learning 'what's next.'"

In Judge Alderson's court, they are continuously making improvements and taking on new initiatives to better their services.

"We just did a Management Assistance Project (MAP), which was a coordinated effort with the State Court Administrative Office. We looked at case management, our master

calendar — a lot of things. More so, the administrative side of what we do here in the court. That has been a 2016–2017 initiative — we're really trying to get our policies and procedures in place so that as changes come, such as e-filing, we are able to assimilate much more easily into the next phase of the 21st Century court process."

The ongoing efforts of jurists such as Judge Alderson ensure that all Michigan judges have access to abundant resources through the Supreme Court and MJJ to help them handle issues in the courtroom, develop as leaders in their communities, and prepare for what lies ahead in the judiciary.

Judge Alderson began her own professional education at Michigan State University, where she earned her undergraduate degree in criminal justice. She then earned her law degree from Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

She has been married to her husband, a semi-retired public relations firm owner, for 15 years. They live in Lansing, with his three children, as well as one "Kitty."🐱



(Left to right)
Judge Louise Alderson,
Judge Michelle Rick of 29th Circuit
Court, and Judge Thomas Byerley
of Eaton County Probate Court
educated reporters about the
courts as part of the 2016 MSC
Law School for Journalists

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.

JUDGE KATHLEEN BRICKLEY

"Never underestimate the power of communication."

This is one message Chief Judge Kathleen Brickley of the 36th Circuit Court in Van Buren County says has been driven home to her many times in the last few years.

When she was appointed to the bench in 2012, she immediately saw "areas of opportunity" where the court could make changes to improve public service. Her original plan was to wait six months before trying to implement changes, but said she quickly modified that to about three days.

"We had a stalled video system implementation project, we needed help with jury management, we lacked a law clerk — many areas needed to be addressed," she said. "And it soon became apparent that all of these changes that I was hoping to implement weren't going to happen without a court administrator, so that was a big focus."

But she was also concerned about staff morale as the court embarked on this period of transition.

"Everything here had become a bit settled, and then it suddenly became a culture of change — that wasn't easy," she said. "It was unnerving for them at first to think, 'Is my job going to be eliminated?'"

So how did she address that?



Judge Kathleen Brickley

"By listening," she explained. "One quality judges need to possess is the ability to listen. When judges lose that quality, we also lose our sense of humility and our ability to learn from others."

Once the lines of communication were established and Judge Brickley reached out to the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) for help in administering several Management Assistance Plans (MAPs) for the court, Judge Brickley says that the court staff became more

**How do you re-engineer a court?
Judge Brickley believes it starts with communication.**



enthusiastic about the positive changes that were taking place.

"I cannot say enough about the capabilities and flexibility of the staff during this process," she shared. "I have seen leadership at all levels."

Eventually, the circuit court administrator position got funded, and is now held by Frank Hardester.

"I didn't realize how much as a lawyer I would need to multi-task as a judge, but there are details that I just don't have the time to handle," Judge Brickley explained. "Frank capably handles those details, and really, he is helping us better manage our own performance."

Looking back on the transition in the 36th Circuit, Judge Brickley shares some of the leadership insight she has gained along the way.

"Being a judge takes courage," she said. "Not only do you need to have the courage to do what the law requires, but you also need courage to lead the court. I tell myself this often when faced with unpopular or difficult decisions on and off the bench."

Judge Brickley credits several judicial mentors, such as retired Kalamazoo County Circuit Judge William Schma, with inspiring her to become a leader in the court. Judge Schma, in 1992, founded the Kalamazoo County Drug Treatment Court, the first of its kind in Michigan and among the first in

the nation, and later founded the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. Judge Brickley currently oversees the Van Buren County Drug Treatment Court — Women's Court.

"He taught me the importance of listening. I hear him in my head from time to time," she admitted with a laugh.

On why she wanted to become a judge, Judge Brickley explained, "It was partly because our community never had a woman judge or magistrate, and I believe that if our judiciary is to be perceived as fair, we need to truly represent the people we serve. Also, as a mother of a daughter, I wanted to inspire her. And I truly enjoy legal scholarship."

Judge Brickley earned her law degree from the University of Notre Dame, and has been married for 23 years to her husband, an emergency physician. They live in South Haven with their 11-year-old daughter.



Judge Brickley (far left) stands next to recent drug court graduate, Shanna Grubaugh, and her family. Judge Brickley told Shanna: "I don't know if you realize it, but you had an amazing support team in the court who fought to keep you in the program, even when you were struggling against it. And we will always be here for you."

JUDGE TERRENCE BRONSON

Judge Terrence P. Bronson
could have commanded a naval ship.

Trained as a Surface Warfare Officer to maintain and operate naval vessels, Judge Bronson was technically qualified by the United States Navy to command a ship, although he never did so.

He did, however, oversee several crisis shipping operational exercises to assist commercial shipping fleets in navigating areas of conflict around the globe, and served as a qualified instructor in ship handling and navigating.

Now, after retiring in 2001 from service as a Captain in the Naval Reserves, Judge Bronson navigates an entirely different kind of “ship” as Presiding Judge of the Monroe County Veterans Treatment Court in the 1st District Court.

“It started with people approaching me about the need for a local veterans treatment court, including one local attorney who is also a veteran,” he explained.

He received input from other judges, attorneys, and law enforcement officers, and visited veterans treatment courts (VTC) in Redford, East Lansing, and Ann Arbor to observe how they operated. Judge Bronson said he felt compelled to pursue the VTC model.

“During my service, I saw a lot of people affected by what they had to do, so I can obviously empathize with these individuals,” he shared. “People sometimes ask why veterans deserve this treatment, and I say, ‘Because they give their lives.’”



Judge Terrence P. Bronson

His team — including a prosecutor who is an Army veteran, veterans justice outreach coordinator, defense attorney, probation officer — meets monthly. Participants also meet regularly with volunteer mentors, and have periodic check-ins with the court.

“There are times when I feel the need to address people in veterans court as a C.O. instead of a judge,” he said. “It’s a different way of handling things, but participants respond well because it’s a language they understand.”

After earning his law degree from Cooley Law School, he was elected to the bench in 1988. Judge Bronson, whose father was also a Navy

Presiding over a veterans treatment court isn’t just a job;
it’s an adventure for Judge Bronson.



veteran and served in WWII, decided to follow his naval career with a judicial career because he liked settling disputes and said he “had the temperament for it.”

Judge Bronson believes in firmly taking charge in the court, but as politely and fairly as possible.

One of his early mentors, a family friend who was a judge, advised him: “It’s not your courtroom; it belongs to litigants and their attorneys. Make a decision, be there for them, and do your best.”

It is an approach that he has followed throughout his career.

“As an attorney, I made mental notes of how was I treated in front of judges and how I wanted to be treated,” he said.

Since it became operational in August 2014, the MCVTC has graduated two veterans, and currently has 20 participants.

“When you have a positive response and progress, it’s a really good feeling,” he remarked.

“I want the court to be a resource for individuals who are suffering from service-related maladies. My goal is to be available for as many people as possible in our county and nearby counties,” he added.

When he isn’t working, Judge Bronson enjoys reading, building wine-cork bulletin boards, and playing the flute. He has been married for 42 years to Loretta (“Lorie”), a former nurse who now works as a pastoral associate and hospital chaplain. They have five children. 🎵



Wearing his Navy “whites”



Judge Bronson’s courtroom displays flags to represent each military branch of service.

JUDGE TIMOTHY CONNORS

For Washtenaw County Circuit Judge Timothy P. Connors, keeping the peace is about more than just ruling on the docket before him; it's about healing the community, one case at a time.

Judge Connors recalls a pivotal piece of advice given to him by his mentor and predecessor, Washtenaw County Judge George Alexander, when he was appointed to the 15th District Court in 1991: "He said, 'Remember that as attorneys and judges, our obligation is to be healers of controversy. Always guide yourself that way.'"

"I realized early on how prophetic this was," Judge Connors shared. "For me, it was always about going in and winning the case, but then I realized that what we do has a far greater ripple effect."

Judge Connors has had keen eyes for this ripple effect, and has set out to bring about positive outcomes and relationships throughout his years on the bench.

When the peacemaking court concept was funded by the Supreme Court through a Court Performance Innovation Fund grant in 2013, he took on the new challenge with open arms.

Why? Judge Connors simply replied, "Because it works."

Peacemaking is a traditional Native American approach to justice that focuses on healing and restoration rather than punishment.



Judge Timothy P. Connors

What makes the peacemaking court different than other courts is the emphasis on institutional responsibility to heal controversy.

"This is accomplished through the affirmation of positive human values and relationships," Judge Connors explained. "That responsibility exists before, during, and after our jurisdictional requirements have been fulfilled."

In Washtenaw County, Judge Connors has seen cases involving vulnerable people with disabilities, elder care issues, probate estate distributions (heirs, inheritance, guardianship), civil litigation, and especially cases out of family court. He explains that most of the time in family court, there is some type of ongoing relationship between the parties after the case. That is why it makes sense to put many of these cases on the peacemaking docket, he says.

Judge Connors upholds the law and focuses on healing the community through peacemaking court.



Peacemaking courts across the country are typically found within tribal courts. For the 567 different tribes across the country, peacemaking courts have become the norm. Judge Connors says that more state courts are looking at this as a viable, concurrent path, and that Michigan is leading the efforts.

"There are 15 tribal state federal forums in the country. Of those, four are considered leaders in terms of their innovation, collaboration and communication, and vision. The four that are considered leaders are California, Arizona, New Mexico and Michigan," he said.

Judge Connors is also co-chair of the Michigan Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum, which was established to address common issues in these court systems and to continue Michigan's long history of collaboration between state and tribal courts.

In addition, he is working to bring more awareness about the benefits of peacemaking court by encouraging Michigan law schools to adopt curricula on the topic. To date, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University, where he teaches, have already adopted such a curriculum. Nationally, schools such as Columbia University, Yale University, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Washington have incorporated a peacemaking curriculum.

What's next for Washtenaw Peacemaking Court and Judge Connors?

Judge Connors with MSC Justice Bridget M. McCormack, at a Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum.

"We put a lot of energy into the reunification docket for families who are struggling," he explained. "We are now putting together a peacemaking court in domestic relations, so we're working on a very systemic approach that will launch next year."

Judge Connors received his undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan and law degree from Wayne State University. He has been married to his wife, a retired assistant prosecutor, who currently teaches with her husband, for 21 years. They have four children and four grandchildren and live in Ann Arbor.

On wearing the many hats that he wears — jurist, peacemaker, educator, volunteer, family man — Judge Connors said, "As long as the Creator is giving me two legs to move upon, I am going to keep walking as much as I can." 🦵



JUDGE SUSAN DOBRICH

One could describe Judge Susan L. Dobrich as a juggler, of sorts.

Not only does she preside over the 43rd Circuit, Probate and Family Treatment Courts in Cass County — and as of January, 1, 2016, the 4th District Court — but she also serves as President of the Michigan Association of Treatment Court Professionals, is active in the Michigan Probate Judges Association, and serves as President-elect of the Judicial Section of the State Bar of Michigan.

So how does she keep all of these balls in the air? Like many multi-court chief judges, she has become a multi-tasker.

“Sometimes, it can be fun and other times, it can be overwhelming,” Judge Dobrich remarked. “A lot of it comes down to organization and having the right staff to assist you. I am lucky to have really good staff members to help me through.”

Since being elected to the bench in 1994, the former prosecutor has not slowed down.

Seeing how substance abuse, in particular, has torn many families in her community apart over the years, Judge Dobrich started the Cass County Family Treatment Court in 2003.

“When I first started working with treatment courts, my goal was to be able to provide additional services in the area for substance abuse,” she explained. “About 80 percent of the cases that appear in family court, the abuse and neglect portion of that court, deals with substance abuse.”

In the 12 years that have passed, Judge Dobrich feels a sense of pride and gratification in witnessing the “parade of transformations” in the treatment court.



Judge Susan Dobrich

She has also learned to embrace performance measures as a tool to take her court further.

“At first, I wasn’t really focused on the performance measures; I looked at the anecdotal information and the satisfaction we all felt by having a treatment affecting changes in people’s lives,” Judge Dobrich recalled.

“But as we moved into the development of a treatment court,” she continued, “looking at the science and data, at the need to provide better service by applying for grants both at the federal and state level, we realized how important performance measures are.”

Reunifying families is how
Judge Dobrich measures her performance



Judge Dobrich outlined that as a result of performance measurements, they've been able to obtain substantial funding from the state of Michigan, as well as federal sources.

"The local Family Treatment Court in Cass County serves parents who struggle with alcohol and drug addiction, and whose children have been removed and placed in the system," she said. "Since the implementation of Family Treatment Court, we've had an overall success rate of 62 percent in reunifying these families."

Judge Dobrich also notes that this is well above the national average and a number she intends to keep improving upon.

"The grant monies that have helped our problem-solving courts in Cass County certainly contribute to doing better things: saving lives; saving money; strengthening families; and strengthening communities," shared Judge Dobrich.

She added, "We are extremely fortunate in Cass County to have a full continuum of treatment options available to persons struggling with addiction and substance abuse issues by way of the problem-solving treatment courts. From our perspective, treatment courts have been a catalyst for change and the measurements have assisted us in developing that catalyst by measuring it."

Judge Dobrich's commitment to Cass County started early, having grown up there and having gotten to know "the entire community" through her parents' bowling alley. She eventually earned her law degree from Thomas M. Cooley Law School, and returned to the area to practice law.

Judge Dobrich (right) participates in a new conference to launch the 2015 Problem-Solving Court report, alongside Judge Laura Mack, of the 29th District Court in the city of Wayne.

Her passion for helping and serving local families seems to be somewhat of a family business — her husband is a retired police officer, and her daughter is a social worker in St. Joseph.

Whether it is serving as Cass County's first female prosecutor or starting the area's first treatment court, Judge Dobrich continues to blaze trails — now with the help of performance measures. (Not to mention the actual trails she blazed when she hiked the Grand Canyon from rim to rim several years ago.)

An avid yoga practitioner in her free time, Judge Dobrich looks forward to adding yoga to the array of services and treatment options.

"As long as you can measure it as an evidence-based practice, it has potential. The military is using it. It's actually happening in some treatment courts: Judge Karen Khalil's veterans treatment court; also in Washtenaw County," she explained. "Yoga helps with the mind and body; it's about slowing you down and stress reduction, and that is helpful, especially for people who have been traumatized." 🧘



JUDGE WILLIAM KELLY

Judge William G. Kelly is a “techie” and he isn’t afraid to admit it.

“I’m one who likes to try new things,” he explained.

The court technology bug bit him in the 1990s when he visited a courtroom in Virginia that was equipped with video monitors for everyone to see the same exhibits at the same time.

“I wouldn’t have thought of doing that at the time, but when I saw it, it really made sense,” he said.

Fast-forward to his current court setting in the 62B District Court in Kentwood, where he employs technology for video arraignments, advice of rights (in four different languages), jury instructions, obtaining qualified interpreters, sentencing, witness testimony, evidence presentation, and more. The courtroom is equipped with video monitors on the bench, at the defense and prosecuting attorneys’ tables, and on the walls facing the gallery.

Judge Kelly is proud of the fact that he was able to have a great deal of input on making the court building technologically-capable when it was being constructed.

“I don’t have any other judges to rein me in, so I tend to push the envelope,” remarked the Chief Judge, laughing.

In the court entrance, 62B visitors are immediately greeted by a large video monitor that displays information about the



Judge William G. Kelly

proceedings for the day. The court’s website offers a record search, online ticket payment, court calendar, advice about procedures and rights, and links to other resources.

Judge Kelly also is looking into obtaining a document imaging system to go to a paperless environment that would be convenient for attorneys and court users.

It is definitely not his father’s court. Although Judge Kelly was elected in 1978 to succeed his father, Hon. Joseph Kelly, who served as Kentwood’s municipal judge from 1970 to 1978.

“He encouraged and motivated me to run. It was a real honor to follow him,” Judge Kelly shared. “The best moment was having him put the robe on me.”

Judge Kelly is using technology to serve the court and the community





Michigan Supreme Court Justices Bridget McCormack, Richard Bernstein and David Viviano visited Judge Kelly in October 2015 to learn more about the technology in his court..

Having first donned the robe a mere three years after graduating from University of Detroit Law School, Judge Kelly has spent most of his career on the bench. That is, after a two-year stint serving in the Peace Corps in Ghana.

So, how did that experience help shape his career?

"I learned to be patient in the Peace Corps because there are a lot of things outside of your control, and things don't always happen quickly," Judge Kelly explained. "Also, I liked the idea of service then, and I still like it now."

One of the qualities he believes is an integral part of being a judge is the ability to work with stakeholders toward a common goal. This led him to be an early proponent of dispute resolution

and mediation. He served on the board of the Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan from 2006 to 2011, and was recently honored by the Center as a "Peacemaker" in the Community Member category.

Judge Kelly's onsite mediation program for Small Claims is now replicated in the 63rd District Court. In addition, he teaches a class on small claims court for the National Judicial College, and stresses the importance of courts establishing mediation programs.

When Judge Kelly is not working, teaching, learning about new technologies, or volunteering his time, he enjoys participating in team trivia challenges and traveling when he can.

When asked how his five children — three in Grand Rapids, one in East Lansing, and one in London, England — view his career and accomplishments, Judge Kelly admitted, "I think they're all pretty proud of their dad." 🍷



Judge Kelly's father, Hon. Joseph Kelly (right), putting the robe on him.

JUDGE MABEL JOHNSON MAYFIELD

Judge Mabel Johnson Mayfield had her first “aha moment” that she might pursue a career on the bench when she was a young attorney referee conducting a preliminary hearing on a case involving neglect, abuse, and the need to remove a minor from his home.

“I fully thought there was probably a better solution for addressing this type of matter,” she recalls.

This eventually led to her desire to make a bigger impact in the community, as well as a little encouragement from retiring Berrien County Chief Judge Ronald Taylor to pursue the position he was vacating.

After being appointed to the bench in 2000, she became the first African-American judge in Berrien County.

“Currently, I am the presiding judge of the family division, and I really do love the family division work,” Judge Mayfield shares. “People who understand it might question my level of sanity in saying that, because of the difficult, complex decisions we face. Difficult, not just because of the need to appropriately apply the statutes, but because of the life circumstances that my decisions will impact for families.”

Despite all of the challenges of family court work, Judge Mayfield continually tries to look for the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. “To see something good happen at the end of a case, can give so much satisfaction.”



Judge Mabel Johnson Mayfield

“There are days when it feels very chaotic, but a productive outcome in the best interest of a child goes a long way; it can get me through a lot more weeks, months” she admits.

In addition to overseeing the court’s family division, Judge Mayfield values her involvement in her community. Former Berrien County Judge Al Butzbaugh was a mentor. “He was very involved, and he early provided me opportunities for involvement, shaping my thought process for what it really means to be a judge, and from that position how involved one should be,” explains Judge Mayfield. “I try to give back to the community as much as I can.”

Judge Mayfield’s commitment to helping families and bettering her communities goes beyond the bench.



During her time on the bench, Judge Mayfield has found guidance and support through the Supreme Court's Michigan Judicial Institute, which offers training and resources to judges and courts.

"My first experience with MJJ was going to New Judge School, which I found extremely beneficial and helpful," she says. "I have always had an appreciation for the concept that judges should continue to gain education and that we shouldn't lose connection with other judges, particularly those outside of our jurisdictions."

Since then, Judge Mayfield has worked as an educator for MJJ in a number of capacities.

"I've always been impressed with the caliber of the MJJ courses," she shares. "They're always working to ensure MJJ is top-notch, and it's a pleasure to be a part of that."

Despite having walked through the same entrance to the Berrien County courthouse for 24 years, Judge Mayfield believes it is important to continue to be innovative in the court.

"It's easy to get in a pattern — you walk in, you go to your space, you do your work, you finish your work, you get up, you walk out. I don't believe that makes for the most productive employee, and if you don't get the most efficiency out of your employees, they suffer and whole process suffers," she explains. "To prevent this, we are always engaged in trying to be a better, more efficient and productive court. For example, we initiated this year a significant focus on cracking 'N.U.T.S. (Non-Useful Things Sustained)'."

As for future goals, Judge Mayfield would like her court to be a "template of distinction and leadership" across the state, to assist other counties.

"Berrien is one of the leading counties with the state initiative School Justice Partnership that is focused on keeping young people out of prison," she outlines. "Tracking that back to the delinquency cases that come through, the majority involve students who do not achieve well in school, or do not attend school, thus finding themselves with time on their hands that they shouldn't have. This often leads to delinquent activities."

Judge Mayfield is very proud of what she has been able to accomplish so far, but she knows the end is nowhere in sight.

"We're a busy court, and our initiatives over the past three years have shown good results. Our data supports that we've had a significant impact within the county on chronic absenteeism and decreasing that across the board," she says. "The work is long from complete, but we continue to make significant progress."

As for her own education, Judge Mayfield received her undergraduate degree from Purdue University and her law degree from Valparaiso University. She and her husband, a practicing attorney whom she met in law school, have been happily married for 36 years. They have one daughter and a son-in law. 📌

JUDGE JENNIFER MAZZUCHI

Even after being on the bench for eight years, Marquette County Circuit Court Judge Jennifer Mazzuchi still takes the opportunity to don a “new judge hat” every year.

She finds great value in attending the biennial Michigan Judicial Institute’s New Judge School, and says, “Even after you’ve been a judge for a while, it is an opportunity to refresh. Listening to some of this information again causes you to read or see something that you may not practice every day.”

As the Michigan Supreme Court’s educational arm, MJJ has become an important part of her role as a jurist and as a leader. She has served on MJJ planning committees and as a program presenter.

Before joining the bench, she began her own education by earning her undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan and her law degree from Wayne State University School of Law. Judge Mazzuchi then worked in the prosecutor’s office in Marquette County for about 12 years. She is grateful for the training she received from her former boss, Gary Walker, one of the longest serving prosecutors in the state of Michigan.

“I worked for him for many years, and really learned a great deal from him,” she recalls.

Judge Mazzuchi also made sure to acknowledge fellow Marquette County Circuit Judge Tom Solka, who will be ending his 18-year tenure in December 2016.



Judge Jennifer Mazzuchi

“We’ve become close friends and colleagues,” she shares. “He’s been a mentor, even after I became a judge.”

Having been guided, educated, and supported by these mentors as she progressed in her own career has impressed upon Judge Mazzuchi the importance of planning a smooth transition. This is key now that she has taken on the role of the Circuit Court Chief Judge Pro Tem and has begun preparing the Court for a major reorganization.

Judge Mazzuchi says education,
planning key to successful court reorganization.



Because of a Supreme Court plan to reduce and reallocate judgeships throughout Michigan, Marquette County will lose the seat currently held by Judge Solka, once he retires.

Michigan's State Court Administrative Office releases a Judicial Resources Recommendations (JRR) every other year, which analyzes changes in judicial workloads and recommends the most effective number of judges statewide. All reductions are proposed to be accomplished by attrition when a judge leaves office or dies.

According to the 2013 JRR, "the Legislature eliminated one judgeship from the 25th Circuit Court and when a vacancy occurs in that court the number of judgeships in Marquette County will reduce from five to four."

With Judge Solka's retirement, this vacancy will finally take effect.

"We're losing a judge position, so that's a big focus of ours right now — how we are going to reshuffle things and realign things to accommodate that change," she explains. "Losing a judge calls for a lot of change within the county — which judges are going to do what, and how are we going to get the work done with fewer people." She is grateful for the excellent working relationships among judges in the county.

As she plans to reorganize court operations, Judge Mazzuchi is also making it a priority to improve court security.

"At the very least, we are undergoing an evaluation and cost projection on court security," she says.

Security is of the highest priority in courtrooms across the state, especially following the tragedy in Berrien County. MJJ offers many resources on courtroom security, among other critical areas.



Judge Mazzuchi in the courtroom

"I work in a small county, so the variety of issues we address calls for some degree of knowledge or expertise in many areas. MJJ offers a lot of educational materials and is always a great resource," says Judge Mazzuchi.

"From benchbooks and educational materials, to meeting other judges, making contacts and staying involved, it is very helpful," she continues.

Thanks to the commitment of jurists such as Judge Mazzuchi who devote time to sharing their knowledge and expertise with colleagues, all Michigan judges have access to the abundant resources offered through the Supreme Court and MJJ. These efforts allow Michigan's judges to better handle issues in the courtroom, develop as leaders in their communities, and prepare for what lies ahead in the judiciary.

When she isn't on the bench or contributing to an MJJ educational program, Judge Mazzuchi enjoys spending time with her husband of 15 years, a neurologist, and their children: a 13-year-old son and an 11-year-old daughter. 🏠

JUDGE PAUL SULLIVAN

Judge Paul Sullivan was not always gung-ho about measuring the performance of trial courts.

Coming from the longtime Chair of the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) Trial Court Performance Measures Committee (TCPMC), this may seem surprising.

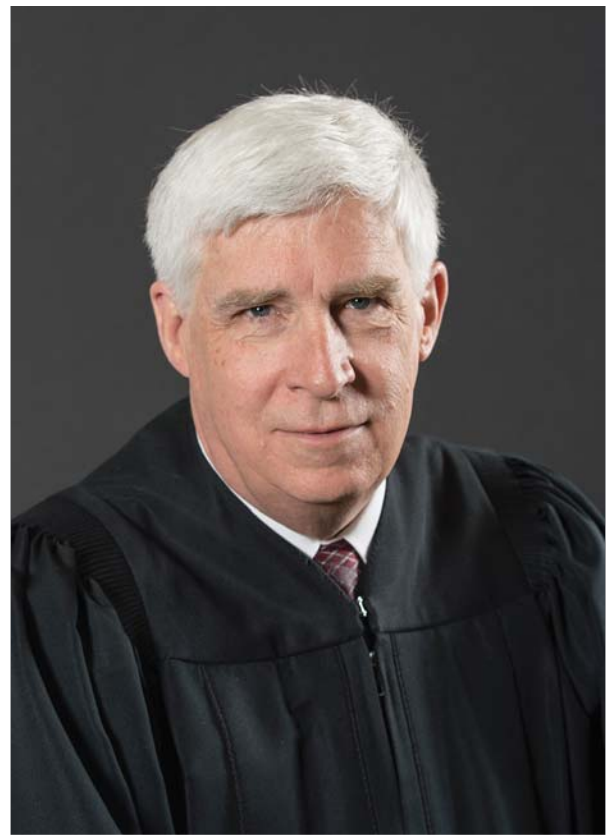
"To be honest, I was a little reluctant to get into it at first. My concern was that colleagues would fail to see the value of performance measurement," admitted the current 17th Circuit Court Judge, "and they would see this as simply one more mandate from above."

So what changed his mind?

"The county commission asked us as a court to develop performance measures," he explained, "and as chief judge at the time, I wanted to be as cooperative with our funding unit as possible."

Eventually, he recalls that SCAO found out about the court's use of performance measures and, apparently, several of the justices, including former Justice Michael Cavanagh and current Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr. were very interested in trial court performance measurement.

"Our state court administrator at the time was Carl Gromek. He and regional administrator Jim Hughes came to Grand Rapids and asked me to chair the committee in an effort to get other courts to adopt performance measures," he said.



Judge Paul Sullivan

Judge Sullivan earned his law degree from The Catholic University of America in 1972, was elected as a district judge in 1988, and was appointed to the circuit bench in 1995. He has chaired the TCPMC since its inception in June 2009.

The Committee consists of judges and administrators from circuit, probate, and district courts throughout the state. Committee members come from large courts, small courts, urban courts, rural courts, and "everything in between," according to Judge Sullivan.

Judge Sullivan wants to help courts get past their performance measurement anxieties.



"I am proud of our committee. We take seriously the considerable input communicated to us by trial court judges and administrators across the state," said Judge Sullivan. "Frankly and fortunately, they have not been reluctant to share with us issues they have with proposed and adopted performance measures. And our committee values this input."

Sullivan especially appreciates the willingness of Chief Justice Young and the other justices to listen to TCPMC's recommendations and, except in very rare cases, to adopt them.

One of the few times when the TCPMC and the Court disagreed was on the matter of Public Satisfaction Surveys, and how often to conduct them.

"Now we, as a committee, were not opposed to public satisfaction surveys. We thought they were a good idea," he explained. "But we recognized, especially due to input we had from judges and administrators throughout the state, that conducting these surveys posed certain challenges."

In hindsight, Judge Sullivan believes these annual surveys have been extremely positive for the courts.

"The people of this state who took the time to fill these out demonstrated quite clearly that they are very much satisfied with the work that the judges and our courts are doing here in Michigan, particularly at the trial court level," he said proudly. "And that's something that we can all feel good about."

Citing the overwhelmingly positive media coverage of the survey results, Judge Sullivan believes the surveys have better allowed Chief Justice Young to address concerns of the Legislature and the Governor.

"I think these surveys, as well as other performance measures, have really helped us to secure a willing ear that, in the past, we have not necessarily had," he said.

Much like the issues and people he works with on the TCPMC, Judge Sullivan greatly enjoys his work as a trial judge. "Judges deal with a great variety of issues and personalities. It is both interesting and important work that we do."

When he isn't navigating through the latest performance measures facing courts, the former licensed pilot now enjoys traveling with his wife, Mary Ellen, of 44 years, a retired registered nurse whom he met during their undergraduate years at Georgetown University. They have two grown children and recently were blessed with a wonderful new grandson, their first. ✍️



Judge Sullivan keeping order in his courtroom

JUDGE RAYMOND VOET

Judge Raymond P. Voet put two constraints on himself back when he was figuring out his career path: “I wanted to make an honest living, but more importantly, I wanted to make a difference doing something I like.”

Today, as presiding judge of the 64A District Court Veterans Treatment Court, he is doing both.

Judge Voet has always had a strong passion for history, dating back to his childhood days where he went to school in Ionia, the same city where he works today.

“I actually wanted to be a history teacher. Then my history teacher told me I should be a lawyer,” he said. Just a young teenager at the time, he would go on to follow his teacher’s advice.

“When I left Ionia for college, I didn’t have plans to come back to start my career here. But I happened to be back home studying for the bar exam and I walked into the prosecutor’s office to get a police report. The head secretary knew my dad, the former chief of police, and recognized me as ‘Little Ray.’”

She eventually convinced him to apply for assistant prosecutor, and he was later elected county prosecutor in 1992. “That woman who called me ‘Little Ray’ back in 1987, Cheryl Pinnow, is now my court administrator.”

“I was at first leery about being a prosecutor in the town I grew up in — no one’s a saint,



Judge Raymond Voet

including me,” he admits. “So I had to make a decision: can I live with being in a position of authority in a town where I had been a teenager and where I had done all of the stupid things teenagers do?”

He decided that he could, and he served as a prosecutor until 1999, when he was appointed to the bench.

“The instincts in the courts when I joined the bench were to solve problems of crime by punishing. That was the mentality of the 80s and 90s; we got tougher and tougher on crime and jails were overcrowding,” he explains.

Judge Voet’s passion for history led him full circle: helping struggling individuals and making a difference in his hometown.



During this time, Judge Voet determined there was a better way to handle cases involving offenders with underlying issues and that it was time to reevaluate Ionia's courts. "That's when we looked at the specialty court model."

On the heels of Operation: Enduring Freedom in 2001 and Operation: Iraqi Freedom in 2003, Judge Voet began to see more and more veterans come into his court.

"One veteran in particular was just heart-breaking to me. He had a drunk driving charge, and I put him on probation," he recalls. "I tried to get him some help, but he just could not stop himself from drinking. It turns out, he had a friend of his killed right beside him during their service; jail was not going to help."

At this point, veterans treatment courts were starting to be formed around the country, and he looked at those court models, in particular.

"Deeply, at a personal level, I appreciate the sacrifices people who wear a uniform for this country make. I understand the true bravery and valor that goes into being a soldier for the freedoms that I enforce and protect in the courtroom," he shares. "It was easy for me at that point to decide to start a veterans court, and I'm really glad I did."

Judge Voet appreciates the opportunity to help individuals by targeting underlying issues, such as PTSD, in the many veterans he sees.

"Not only do we help that individual, we help society. We reduce the likelihood that they're going to commit further crimes, and hurt more people, all the while reducing cost to taxpayers — incarceration, jails, etc.," he reflects. "If I can turn somebody around, if I can help them deal with the core problems that cause their criminal behavior, it's a double-win. That human being wins and society wins."

Judge Voet is very involved in the Supreme Court's Michigan Judicial Institute, as well as the Michigan District Judges Association, Criminal Justice Policy Commission, and State Court Drug Treatment Advisory Council.

He received his undergraduate degree from Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, and earned his law degree from the University of Detroit.

When he isn't working, Judge Voet likes to hunt, fish, play guitar, and spend time with his wife of 27 years, a kindergarten teacher, and their four kids. 🎸



Judge Voet with a graduate.

JUDGE PETER WADEL

In the marathon of re-engineering a court, Judge Peter J. Wadel has become a “cross-trainer.”

Since taking the reins six years ago as chief judge of Mason County Trial Courts (51st Circuit Court, 79th District Court, Mason County Probate Court), Judge Wadel has trained his team — and himself — to multi-task.

“Following election in 2003 as district judge, I directed my court administrator to institute a cross-training program in the district court,” he explained. “With the election of a new probate judge (three years ago) and a new circuit judge (one year ago), we are expanding the concept within each court and eventually across all the courts. This, to us, is a logical direction since we received approval for our concurrent jurisdiction plan.”

Judge Wadel added, “We cross-train all of our employees so that they can move the cases through without delay. We are a small court system, so we don’t have the luxury of having excess people to step in when someone is on vacation or out sick. We have to cross-train to make sure our caseload does not get stagnant.”

Judge Wadel, who earned his law degree from the University of Notre Dame, says that there are also certain times of the year when the courts have traditionally had a higher volume of filings. During these times, cross-trained employees have been helpful in assisting the clerk and moving the caseload along to ensure no one gets overloaded or slowed down.

But there are challenges to doing this, he says.

“Re-engineering is a constant change process, and there is discomfort in this for staff,” he remarked.



Judge Peter Wadel

“We try to make sure the change makes sense and bring staff along in reasonable time frames to make the changes easier on them to implement. Everything is geared toward their speed and comfort because then they can be better equipped to help the public.”

In addition to the cross-training that the Mason County Trial Courts have undergone, a concurrent jurisdiction plan was approved by the Michigan Supreme Court’s State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) in October 2015, and took effect January 1, 2016.

Judge Wadel says that as a result of the plan, there is more flexibility in moving judges where they are needed and in combining other functions. The court will merge the magistrate function with the referee function in the family court to have a combined attorney referee and magistrate. In addition, they also are working toward having

In the midst of change, Judge Wadel puts employees first so they can put customers first.



a single individual who will serve as a court administrator across all the courts.

Some of the major technology improvements the court has made include equipping staff with computers to reduce the amount of paperwork, bringing videoconferencing into the courtrooms, using digital recording, and updating telephone conferencing equipment.

So how has Judge Wadel been able to steer this re-engineering process?

"The things that make these changes work and help me do a better job are the work of fellow judges who have been changing their own courts, state court programs especially those offered through SCAO and MJJ, and exchanging information with other courts," Judge Wadel said. "I have learned from people who have gone out and tried new things and I try to 'cherry-pick' the best practices that fit our court size. I also work with my fellow judges in this community and around the state through the Internet."

In addition, he points to patience and preparation as two key qualities that he calls on to lead the Mason County Trial Courts through this period of transition, not to mention qualities that regularly help him in the courtroom.

"Whether it is a litigant or an employee, everyone needs to be heard," he shared. "Also, preparation and being ready to deal with what comes at you is essential. You need to study the issues, and do a lot of research ahead of time. That is how we are dealing with the re-engineering — preparing for what we need and taking steps to get there."

Judge Wadel says that some of the payoffs of the changes include court employees who are better equipped to do their jobs, which makes them more comfortable, and judges who are working together more directly than they ever

have before. "Until recently the individual courts worked in silos. Now we are working as a team and meeting regularly. We are addressing court administrative issues together, and we have a greater collegiality than we have ever had," he noted.

As for future goals, Judge Wadel cannot run for reelection and his position will not be refilled, so the court is preparing for that by putting together a structure for two judges to handle the load after he leaves and involving the whole staff in giving input. He also eventually wants to bring in electronic case management and e-filing, and talks about looking to SCAO for new, better, and best practices.

"The bottom line is that our customers and our employees benefit from having certainty. Giving people certainty, even if it's something they don't like, lets them get on with their lives," he shared.

An avid outdoorsman, Judge Wadel enjoys hunting and fly fishing in his free time, and jokes that November 15 is a "holy day of obligation." He considers fly fishing a calming influence that helps him attain balance. He and his wife of 33 years, Ingrid, have four grown children. 🦅



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