

# FULL COURT PRESS

Newsletter for The District of Columbia Courts



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE TEAM

We hope you and your families are doing well and that you are practicing self-care. We are going through unprecedented times -a pandemic that has lasted for 7 months and public outcry for racial equality and equal justice for all, and in the middle of these difficult circumstances, the public is counting on us to fulfill our mission of administering justice and to live up to our vision of being Open to All, Trusted by All, and providing Justice for All. This pandemic is testing our strength not only as individuals but also as an organization. However, the DC Courts have a history of rising to meet challenges, and throughout these challenges we have continued, and in many instances, enhanced court services to meet the needs of the public. You have continued to demonstrate your resilience, strength, and commitment to our mission of delivering justice and serving our community. We could not be prouder of how you have responded to the current pandemic situation, nor more grateful to each of you for your contributions, innovations, and engagement during these uncertain times. We want to express our appreciation to you for being empathetic, resilient, flexible, professional, and so much more.... **(continued on pg.4)**



# 2020, A Year of Change

## The Honorable Anita M. Josey-Herring Sworn In as Chief Judge of DC Superior Court

On Tuesday, July 21, the DC Judicial Nomination Commission designated The Honorable Judge Anita M. Josey-Herring as the next DC Superior Court Chief Judge. On Thursday, October 1st, she made history, being sworn in as the first-ever female Chief Judge of DC Superior Court. On Friday, October 16th, she made history once again by having the first ever Zoom investiture ceremony.

Judge Josey-Herring has devoted her legal career to serving the citizens of the District of Columbia. Chief Judge Josey-Herring obtained her Juris Doctor degree from the Georgetown University Law Center, which she attended as an evening division student while working full-time. Following law school, Judge Josey-Herring served as a law clerk to the Honorable Herbert Dixon, Jr., on the Superior Court. She then joined the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia as a staff attorney, where she handled misdemeanor and complex felony cases in the Superior Court, and argued cases before the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. Judge Josey-Herring was ultimately appointed by the Board of Trustees of the Public Defender Service to the position of Deputy Director of the agency. In 1997, President William Jefferson Clinton appointed Judge Josey-Herring to serve as an Associate Judge on the Superior Court. Since her appointment to the bench nearly twenty-three years ago, Judge Josey-Herring has served in the Family, Civil, and Criminal Divisions of the Superior Court.

In 2000, Judge Josey-Herring was appointed by the Chief Judge to serve as the Deputy Presiding Judge of the Family Court, and she later served as the Presiding Judge of the Family Court from 2006 to 2008. Judge Josey-Herring has demonstrated exceptional leadership abilities throughout her tenure, and she has led numerous initiatives to improve the quality of justice and service to litigants and attorneys alike. During her tenure on the Superior Court, Judge Josey-Herring has served on numerous committees, including the Chair of the Judicial Education and Training Committee and the Advisory Committee on Workplace Conduct.

Judge Josey-Herring has also demonstrated a strong dedication to community service and has participated in numerous activities to further the exposure and increase the knowledge of students at every level, ranging from grade school to law school.

Judge Josey-Herring served on numerous court committees and she is currently the 4th District Vice Chair of the National Association of Women Judges ("NAWJ") and a board member of NAWJ and the Greater Washington Area Chapter of the Women's Division, National Bar Association. She has also served on other boards, served as a law professor, and has received many awards and recognitions.

Despite circumstances presented by Covid-19, many gathered with masks in tow, to honor Chief Judge Josey-Herring's Investiture, including Chief Judge Morin, Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, Anna Blackburne-Rigsby and fellow colleagues. A musical selection was performed by Magistrate Judge Tara Fentress and remarks were given by The Honorable Rhonda Reid Winston, Senior Judge of the Superior Court and Jo-Ann Wallace, President & CEO of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association.

### Congratulations to the new Chief Judge!



# THE 39TH ANNUAL EMPLOYEE AWARDS CEREMONY

by Dormowa Sherman

On September 24th, the D.C. Courts held its 39th Annual Employee Awards Ceremony. Spurred by the current climate, this year's recognition of employee milestones and excellent public service went virtual and was the very first of its kind.

In the past two years our country has seen immensely tumultuous times. The Government shutdown of 2018-19, a global public health crisis, and smoldering racial and social unrest have created challenges for many of us. Yet, in the midst of it all, D.C. Courts' employees have remained steadfast in demonstrating the resilience, professionalism, and commitment that the District of Columbia has come to know and respect.

This year we recognize select employees for enterprise, management achievement, public service, technical achievement, and unsung heroism.

The 39th Annual Employee Awards Ceremony was hosted by D.C. Courts' Digital Communications and Outreach Specialist, Ms. Jasmine Turner; and was opened with a wonderful musical performance by our very own Just Us. Opening remarks were delivered by D.C. Court of Appeals Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby; D.C. Superior Court Chief Judge Morin; and Dr. Cheryl Bailey, Interim Executive Officer of the D.C. Courts.

Special tributes were paid to Chief Judge Robert E. Morin and Darlene "Tilly" Ellis. Also honored during the virtual ceremony were Special Achievement Award recipients, 2020 Management Training Program graduates, 2019 retirees, and employees who have achieved an incredible thirty, twenty, and ten years of service with the D.C. Courts.

## Congratulations to the 2020 Special Achievement Award recipients:

Courtroom Technology  
- ENTERPRISE AWARD

Norma Thompson of the IT Division - MANAGEMENT ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Dr. Jasmine Hedge, Charles Burke, and Ron Scott for the Court Navigator Program - PUBLIC SERVICE GROUP AWARD

Oriana Williams of the Family Court Division - PUBLIC SERVICE INDIVIDUAL AWARD

Willa Obel of the Civil Division - TECHNICAL SPECIALIST ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Jessica Aparicio of the Civil Division - UNSUNG HERO AWARD

Timothy Martin of the Family Court Social Services Division - UNSUNG HERO AWARD



Courtroom Technology worked 'round the clock to put together the final, virtual presentation of this year's Employee Awards Ceremony. Everything was pre-recorded and then broadcast for Court employees to view.

**"This year has been like no other...thank you for your tremendous efforts and all that you have done for keeping the Courts running."**

**-Chief Judge, Anna Blackburne-Rigsby**



## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE TEAM (CONT.)

We have many accomplishments to celebrate. We successfully transitioned to a remote work environment in a matter of days, and continued to serve the community and the enterprise with excellence. The Court of Appeals, Superior Court, and Court System continued to achieve the Courts' Strategic Goals – Access to Justice for All, Fair and Timely Case Resolution, Engaged and Professional Workforce, Resilient and Responsive Technology and Effective Court Management and Administration. Following are some significant accomplishments that we have achieved during the past four months.

Despite being closed to the public since March due to the COVID19 pandemic, the Court of Appeals (DCCA) continued to provide the public with access to justice by using technology. Specifically, we transitioned almost entirely to remote operations. Since May 2020 the DCCA has conducted all oral arguments via Zoom. The oral arguments are streamed live and are available on DCCA's YouTube Channel. There are currently 400 subscribers on the channel. In addition, the DCCA is conducting mediations remotely via Zoom.

The Committee on Admissions successfully administered a remote Bar Exam in October 2020 with a commitment to release the scores in December 2020. Over 1600 applicants took the first remote Bar Exam administered by the DCCA. The Committee on Admissions coordinated and administered remote proctoring for each applicant during the exam. Also, the Committee on Admissions arranged for reciprocity agreements with 12 other jurisdictions. In order to protect court employees and the public from the COVID19 pandemic, the DCCA created alternative means for the public to maintain access to justice. For example, pro se litigants who are not registered to efile, are allowed to submit their pleadings by email. In addition, those pro se litigants who are unable to submit their pleadings by email are allowed to submit their filings by depositing them in the drop boxes located in the lobby of the Historic Courthouse. The drop boxes are available for depositing filings 24 hours a day seven days a week.

The DCCA mediation program held an online informational session for Catholic University law students regarding the appellate mediation program's law school initiative. The initiative pairs interested law students with members of the pro bono mediation counsel panel. Law students assist attorneys with preparing for mediation and then have the opportunity to observe the mediation. The DCCA mediation program has moved this initiative online due to the pandemic.

The Superior Court has continued to provide access to justice through innovation and technology amidst the pandemic. We implemented a new electronic payment platform that allows our customers to pay for services remotely including fines and court ordered payments. We are operating 78 courtrooms remotely and posted WebEx access information, tip sheets and the scheduled remote hearings on the internet to enhance access to these hearings. We also provided a guide on scheduling remote hearings to judicial officers and court staff and guidance to indicate the remote status of all hearings on notices. The Family Court Self-Help Center has been instrumental in providing access for self-represented litigants and the Probate Division recently opened their self-help center remotely to support self-represented litigants with the increasing number of estate administration matters. Our subject matter experts, IT staff and contractors have continued to develop our new case management system, Odyssey in a remote environment. They are currently configuring the calendar and hearings phase of the project. You can stay abreast of the progress of Odyssey by visiting the IJS2 portal located on the intranet.

Although we have been able to provide services remotely there are some activities that have required limited onsite operations which include hearings that require the appearance of the defendant or witness, processing mail, and accepting cash payments for protective orders and the distribution of food cards to crime victims. In addition to improving the customer experience during this time, we have also focused on the employee experience with the implementation of standardized performance plans for branch chiefs. Some of our new initiatives include the development of additional self-guided interviews for self represented litigants; digitization of additional documents in the domestic violence and family court operations divisions and developing standardized performance plans for courtroom clerks and deputy clerks.

# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE TEAM (CONT.)

Former Chief Judge Robert Morin completed his four year term as Chief Judge and assumed senior status and Chief Judge Anita M. Josey-Herring was appointed as the first female Chief Judge for the Superior Court. The Family Court Social Services Division transitioned back under the leadership of Superior Court. Congratulations to Rita Blandino, Director of the Domestic Violence Division for winning the American Legal Technology Award for her work with ProBonoNet to ensure remote access to justice to our Domestic Violence customers.

Since the DC Courts moved to a remote posture in March 2020, Court System has provided significant operational support for the Court of Appeals and the Superior Court. At the outset of the pandemic, the Information Technology (IT) Division immediately began deploying equipment and tools to enable the DC Courts to establish remote operations, even while, in the interest of safety, our courthouse doors were physically closed to members of the public. Since that time, and over the last four months, the Courtroom Technology Branch has ensured that we now have the capability to operate 78 courtrooms remotely. In July 2020, the IT Division was reorganized to formally include technology support for the Court of Appeals. The purpose for the reorganization is to enhance the overall delivery of IT services for the DC Courts, and to broaden the technical skills of all staff within the IT Division. In addition to enhancing technology services for our judicial officers and staff, Court System has enhanced technology services for the public. As exciting as it has been to see the DC Courts' technological capacity expand during the pandemic, we have also been sensitive to the "digital divide" that exists in our city; whereby many members of the public do not have access to computers or internet access. To enhance access to justice, the Courts have established five remote sites throughout the city, to enable members of the public to participate in their scheduled court hearings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the way in which we stay engaged and connected as a court family. Moreover, the pandemic has forced us to be very intentional about how best to leverage technology to maintain continuity of various programs and events. To that end, and through the efforts of the Center for Education and Training (CET) and the Management Training Committee (MTC), the Management Training Program (MTP) conducted the first ever remote presentation of team projects. All team members exemplified a high degree of creativity, excellence, and resilience in showcasing the fruits of their year-long training. That event was followed by the first ever remote graduation ceremony for the MTP Class of 2020. Through the tremendous efforts of the Courts' Employee Awards Committee, in September 2020 we were also able to hold our first ever virtual Annual Employee Awards Ceremony. Like the MTP events, the virtual Employee Awards Ceremony was well-attended, and a huge success.

To ensure that our court buildings are as safe as possible for staff and the public, the Courts have secured contract services to provide guidance on how best to ensure operational safety. An environmental hygienist was contracted to test and make recommendations regarding the Courts' water and air quality. Additionally, the services of an epidemiologist were procured to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the management of a safe on-site presence. Finally, the DC Courts have hired a production company to assist in developing a "DC Courts' COVID19 Pandemic Response" video that will inform the public and staff of the steps that we have, and continue to take in ensuring the health and safety of court staff and the public.

These are all examples of what we have achieved during the past four months under extraordinary circumstances. We know there are many more. We want to thank you for your ongoing collaboration and engagement. Your excellence, dedication, and innovation make the DC Courts "A Great Place to Work." Together we will be successful and together we will come out of this crisis as a stronger organization. DC Courts' staff, you are appreciated!! Stay safe, stay well, and remain positive!

**E-Team,**  
**Cheryl Bailey, Acting Executive Officer**  
**Herb Rouson, Acting Deputy Executive Officer**  
**Julio Castillo, Clerk of the Court of Appeals**  
**Zabrina Dempson, Clerk of the Superior Court**

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# CONGRATS!

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Congratulations are in order for **Ron Berry** who has been appointed Acting Director and CIO of the IT Division. Mr. Berry began his career with the DC Court in April 2010 as a Production Support Branch Manager, having served as a Senior Principal Consultant for Oracle America; and as an Associate with Booze Allen Hamilton. In his role as Branch Manager, Mr. Berry managed the team that oversaw software testing, quality assurance, and configuration management; designing, implementing and supporting web sites, web-applications, database systems and corresponding Commercial Off-the-Shelf (COTS) applications. He also provided support to the DC Courts' Business Intelligence project; performing physical data modeling, creation, normalization, loading, performance tuning and monitoring of over forty Oracle databases, over thirty SQL Server databases and ten Oracle Application/WebLogic servers. Mr. Berry developed software quality assurance plans, and worked with various project stakeholders to develop applicable risk management plans; and was responsible for providing Configuration Management guidelines, as well as formulating the Systems Engineering Life Cycle for all assigned systems. Mr. Berry serves as a member of the DC Courts' Web Council Committee, and the Information Technology Steering Committee.

Additionally, Mr. Berry was instrumental in the implementation of the DC Courts' IT Division reorganization; whereby IT resources are being deployed in a more effective and efficient way – for the benefit/support of the entire DC Courts' enterprise. Mr. Berry earned his Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems Management from the University of Maryland, and his Associates Degree in Administrative Management from the Community College of the Air Force.

Another congratulations is in order for **Nelly Montenegro** who has been appointed as the Deputy Director of the Domestic Violence Division. Prior to joining the Court as an Attorney Negotiator in 2016, Ms. Montenegro served as a national technical expert on domestic violence matters for the American Bar Association. Previously, she served as managing attorney at AYUDA and represented petitioners in Civil Protection Order, Family Law, and Immigration Law cases. As an Attorney Negotiator, Ms. Montenegro contributed to the effective resolution of thousands of Civil Protection Order cases. Since joining the Courts, she has served on several court-wide committees such as the Mental Health Committee, and the Training & Onboarding Committee, as well as city-wide committees such as the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board. Ms. Montenegro also supported the DVD management team in overseeing court operations and implementing business procedures surrounding the enactment of legislation creating Extreme Risk Protection Orders in DC. Since the Covid-19 pandemic emergency, she has been instrumental in the implementation of remote operations and managing staff through over 2,000 remote hearings.

Ms. Montenegro holds a law degree from the University of Illinois College of Law, and a Bachelors in Sociology and Political Science from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.



# INNOVATION

## *The 2020 Management Training Program*

### Creating a Culture of Innovation

*By Dormowa Sherman*



The Management Training Program (MTP) was established to ensure leadership continuity at the D.C. Courts by preparing employees to be optimal leaders and agents of organizational change. Two hundred and nine D.C. Courts employees have graduated from the Management Training Program since its inception in 2007. Today, MTP alumni hold leadership roles at every level across the Courts including supervisory, senior management, and executive. In fact, a notable percentage of MTP graduates have been promoted within the D.C. Courts after completing the program. So, what makes the Management Training Program so effective?

The Management Training Program is a year-long, rigorous endeavor. Its curriculum is designed around a range of topics that are pertinent to court operations and includes courses such as Strategic Management and Performance Management, Leadership and Personal Effectiveness, Emotional Intelligence, Court Administration, Effective Meetings and Presentations, Case Flow Management and Operational Efficiencies, and more. The courses are led by renowned court professionals, educators, internal senior court leadership, and subject matter experts.

Just as critical as the in-class instruction are the team projects that MTP participants develop throughout the course of the year. Class members are divided into teams, and each team collaborates to conceptualize and execute an idea that demonstrates ingenuity and a commitment to supporting the mission of the D.C. Courts as well as serving the public. In the culminating event of the program, each team presents their project before an audience consisting of the Chief Judges, Executive Team, MTP team mentors, senior managers MTP alumni, and peers. To date, nearly forty percent of the MTP team projects have been adapted and implemented in operations throughout the Courts.

Candidates are selected through an application process and must meet three core eligibility requirements: three or more years of employment with the D.C. Courts, a score of three or higher on their latest performance evaluation, and a serious commitment to participate fully in the program. The Management Training Program runs on a biennial basis to continue to strengthen our workforce and develop our leaders of today and tomorrow.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, MTP administrators and participants persevered while upholding the integrity and strength of the program through virtual instruction, mentorship, and teamwork; and on September 25th a virtual celebration was held for the graduating Class of 2020.

On Wednesday, September 9th the Management Training Program Class of 2020 presented their team projects to a live virtual audience of over 150 viewers including Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby, Chief Judge Morin, the Executive team, MTP team mentors, Senior Managers, MTP alumni, and fellow colleagues. Not only has the MTP Class of 2020 risen to the extraordinary challenges presented by these unprecedented times, but they have done so in a way that embodies our Courts' value of Excellence. Each of the five teams presented an idea that demonstrates ingenuity and a commitment to supporting the mission of the D.C. Courts. In the end, Team 2 won with their idea for a year-long mentoring program called "Level Up". Team Two's members included, Gwinetta Brandon, Shavon Brooks, Demitrious Brown, Shirley Descopin and Michael Simms. Congratulations to all MTP Class of 2020 for a job well done!

# A MESSAGE FROM HUMAN RESOURCES

OPEN SEASON IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER, ARE YOU READY?



## 2020 Health Benefits Open Enrollment –Save the Date!

The 2020 Health Benefits Open Enrollment (Open Season) will begin **November 9, 2020 and continue through December 14, 2020**. The following programs will be participating (click the program you wish to view):

- Federal Employees' Health Benefits (FEHB) Program;
- Federal Employees' Dental & Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP);
- Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) Program;
- Ameritas Dental & Vision Insurance Plan; and
- Hartford DisabilityFlex.

You will be able to visit the Open Season Home Page on November 9th for the latest premiums, virtual health fairs, and plan information at <http://intranet/content/21887/2020-hr-open-season-home-page>.

**Note: You will not be able to make any open season changes until Monday, November 9, 2020.**