

Full Court Press

“A GREAT PLACE TO WORK, SURVEY SAYS...”

By: Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

The results of the 2009 Human Capital Survey are in, and all signs indicate that the D.C. Courts are well on their way to “Building a Great Place to Work.” An amazing 78% of employees responded to the survey, offering their opinions on topics ranging from personal job satisfaction to the condition of courthouse facilities. The survey, as it remained completely anonymous, allowed respondents an opportunity to give a candid assessment of employee satisfaction here at the D.C. Courts, both the strong areas and the areas that could stand some improvement. Louis Kelly, from the Center for Education & Training, who is working closely with court management on this new initiative, said “I am extremely grateful to all the employees who participated and completed the survey. This will give us a lot more information about how court employees feel about the work environment; it was a great opportunity for them to provide their input.”

The Priority Initiatives:

- Internal Communication
- Performance Management

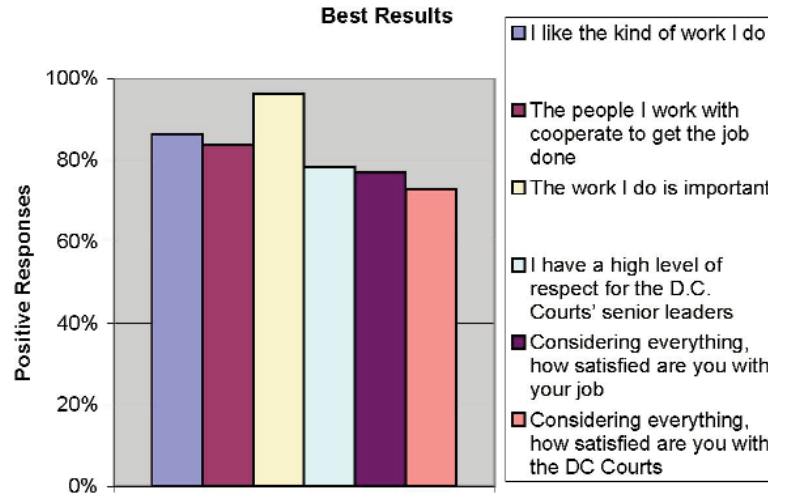
Two Team Projects:

- Health & Wellness
- Work/Life Balance

So, what are our strongest areas at the D.C. Courts? According to the survey, most people here at the Courts have a great deal of satisfaction with their jobs and with their co-workers. The survey items “I like the kind of work I do,” “The people I work with cooper-

Included in this issue:

- 2 Black History Month
- 3 Poem: *Diamond Life* by Jonathan Hopkins
- 4 D.C. Courts Celebrate Heart Health Month
- 5 Second Fathering Court Graduation
- 6 New Employees
- 7-8 Rave Reviews



ate to get the job done,” and “The work I do is important” were all highly rated by employees; respectively, 87, 84, and 96 percent of participants responded favorably. Satisfaction with court leadership and with the integration of technology also received high marks. When presented with the survey item “I have a high level of respect for the D.C. Courts’ senior leaders” (i.e. Judicial Officers, Clerks of Court, Division Directors, etc.), 78% of participants responded favorably. In addition, 83% of participants believe that information technology is effectively integrated into their jobs.

These were some of the areas that gained more positive responses than negative responses. In some instances, however, the reverse was true. When it

A Great Place to Work, continued on page 7.



THE SNOW MUST GO ON: BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2010

By Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

Two winter storms were not enough to bury the D.C. Courts' 2010 Black History Month celebrations. Even though the Black History Month committee had to reschedule two events because of the snow, there were still three great events to give the D.C. Courts community a fair share of black history.

Greek Step Show: The Black History Month celebration kicked off (stepped off, rather) with a Greek step show, "Stomping into Black History Month." The aim of this program was to acknowledge and to honor the significant role that black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities have played in retaining and promoting African American culture. The event featured members of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, members of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, and a "Sigma Baby." The sorority, fraternity, and young sigma baby dazzled the crowd with their high energy and great stepping. The living museum feature, which was a part of every event this year, made its debut at the step show. Thanks to the wonderful volunteers, attendees were able to meet and learn about prominent figures in black history. The step show was a great kickoff event for the Black History Month celebration. If you missed it, you surely missed a treat.

Jesse Holland Lecture: The second Black History Month event featured Jesse J. Holland, journalist and author of *Black Men Built the Capitol: Discovering African American History In and Around D.C.* This event led off with a showcase of courthouse talent. The audience sang a choral rendition of "Lift



Jesse Holland answers questions after his presentation.

Every Voice and Sing." Jonathan Hopkins of Family Court Operations Division played an instrumental and recited a work of poetry (see page 3). Renard Rinehart of the Domestic Violence Unit offered his powerful rendition of the spiritual "I'm Building Me a Home."

The main feature of the event, however, was Jesse Holland and his lecture on African American achievements in and around Washington, D.C. He spoke for less than an hour, but gave the crowd a wealth of information that many in attendance, even native Washingtonians, were likely hearing for the first time. Holland pointed out that there are only two statues of African Americans (full body statues of real people) on public lands in the entire city. He also spoke

of a free black settlement in the 1800s called Freedmen's Village, which sat where Arlington National Cemetery now sits.

Holland wrote the book because of his interest in black history, the importance he places on knowing the history of whatever city he's living in, and a desire to highlight Blacks' contributions in those cities. "When I moved here, I knew that I was moving to a city with the 'mother lode' of black history, but when I took a tour of the mall, I did not see any of it. From the mall it seemed as if no African Americans had ever lived here." His book is the result of his quest to find black history on the National Mall, which turned into a quest to find black history in the city and, eventually, the surrounding area as well.

After the presentation, many in attendance formed a line reaching well into the hallway to get an autographed copy of Holland's book. For more information on Jesse Holland and his book, go to www.jesseholland.com.

Excellence Through Adversity: The Black History Month celebration culminated with a talk by Senior Judge Arthur L. Burnett and with a soul food feast. Like the pre-

Black History Month, continued on page 7.



Zeta Phi Beta sorors with Sigma Baby Amani Kamara.

Photos by Gerond Lawrence

The Full Court Press is published by the District of Columbia Courts. Inquiries should be submitted to Room 1500.

*Leah Guowitz, Editor
Dennis Shipley, Creative Director*

Diamond Life

by Jonathan C. Hopkins, Family Court

If we could take a trip in time back when, black men
were stripped and tied
to whipping posts
where their masters whipped their hide.
Often trying to run and hide
from their young getting hung outside.
The black race cried
over the flood of blood that dyed
the mud from those who died
trying to find a way
to stay alive another day.
They hoped freedom would arrive another way.
Every prayer a mother prayed
over a late son's grave, she'd say
she knows that they are slaves today,
but these trying times will pave the way
for our people to brave the rain
of the oppressors we meet.
One day we'll have rest for our weak
if we can just withstand the pressure and heat.
Pressure and heat.
Sometimes life likes dressing your wheat
in the husk of a tough chaff.
It can get rough
when you're up against a tough task.
You gotta try to dunk
even if you can't touch glass.
Life's a tough class
and if you wanna score a touchdown,
you gotta weather a tough blast
and not care whether you touch last.
Try and fly high
even if you just crashed
and have the passion
to kiss the sky
like Slash and
Jimi, two guys who were adored
cuz when they touched a chord,
they could touch a chord!
Years of hardship, pain and such they poured
in their craft 'til they mastered it.
Sometimes life fastens
trials you can't see,
plants these
'til they grow like plant leaves
and vines that climb
leavin' you blind
'til all you're reduced to
is grieving and crying.
But through believing and trying
we can start seeing the way.
"Carpe' your diem",
start seizing your day,
even if you can't see 'em,
like Stevie and Ray.
Most people live an easier way,
so for them, it would have been easy to say
life was unkind in hindsight:

both robbed blind of their eyesight.
In the midst of that bind, you or I might lose it.
But these two men changed their plight
to music!
They made life their muse,
stitched their light and they fused
gospel nights wit' the blues
and were rewarded with grooves
that live recorded in grooves
of LPs, CDs, MP3s,
musical MVPs
who unlocked the world
with 88 keys.
Their stories shocked the world,
their music rocked the world
and to his day their following
is like Kirk and Spock. The world
from here to Venus
can hear their genius;
the epitome of musicianship
without peer, at its zenith.
Their music still sells out arenas
and always will.
It's impossible to number
all the folks that they've thrilled,
but all their skill couldn't be stilled
by being blind.
They both personify
a human being's climb
from carrying misfortune
to marrying Miss Fortune.
They almost missed fortune,
now, they kiss fortune!
Riches from rags,
all riches ain't cash,
cuz when their life
seemed burned on the pyre,
they've risen from ash.
Their life isn't their past;
they're livin' their mission
with a keen vision through trash.
Life can imprison you fast,
but if you pay close attention,
you'll find divine wisdom attached to it.
Tough times may hurt,
but we're meant to pass through it.
Adversity comes to pass;
we come to pass through it!
We should not succumb to our past, view it
like a piece of raw coal:
we go through life
with peace as our goal,
but we feel pressure and heat
can take a piece of our soul.
But if we press on and see
not the piece, but the whole,
we'll live a diamond life
worth more than a piece of pure gold!

D.C. COURTS CELEBRATE WOMEN'S HEARTH HEALTH MONTH

By Aleta Waters, JAA to J. Puig-Lugo

In Honor of Women's Hearth Health Month, the D.C. Courts' Association of Judicial Administrative Assistants (AJAA) asked women in the Courts to wear red on Friday, February 5, 2010. This effort was part of a national movement to educate women about heart disease, the number one killer of women in this country. The photo collage of D.C. Courts women in red is indicative of our support for women's health. To learn more about women's heart health, and to support the health of women in your life, please visit <http://www.womenheart.org>.



Photo collage by Aleta Waters

COURTHOUSE GRADUATION CELEBRATES MEN WHO HAVE TAKEN NEW SHOT AT FATHERHOOD

By: Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

Five men in black robes worthy of being called honorable—in a courthouse setting, many would think that these words only apply to judges. However, on January 29, 2010, this description was a bit more inclusive as Anthony Owens, Reginald Sutton, Irvin Thorn, Michael Turner, and John Williams received their certificates for completion of the year-long Fathering Court program.

Fathering Court, now in its second year at the D.C. Superior Court, equips men and women who have recently been released from prison with “tools to become emotionally and financially responsible parents.” The program was started to combat a distressing reality here in the District of Columbia: one in four D.C. prisoners owes court-ordered child support.

Thankfully, the men of the 2010 class of Fathering Court are no longer in that number. Having successfully completed the program, each of the graduates has gained employment, stayed out of trouble, and become role models for their children and other men in their community. Most importantly, they have become active parents in their children’s lives, both emotionally and financially.

This year’s ceremony was opened with remarks from Fathering Court Presiding Judge Milton Lee who highlighted just how far the program has come since its inception. Starting with a pilot program at a townhall meeting in 2006, the Fathering Court program has moved from having just two graduates in its first class to having five graduates in this year’s class, with dozens more parents successfully participating in the program.

Judge Lee’s remarks were followed with sound advice from Judge Zoe Bush who reminded the graduates and audience members that there is “nothing more important than parenting a child.” Following some acknowledgements and an excellent musical selection “My Father Was; My Father Is” by Paternity and Support Branch Supervisor Mike Chamberlain, the audience was treated to a short film presentation and insightful words by guest speaker Tonia Grady, producer of the documentary *Man Up: the Exploration of a Fatherless Nation*.

Grady made the film in response to her young daughter’s question, “Where’s my daddy?” She wanted to “get people talking” about the problem of fatherlessness in America which, according to the film, now affects more than 24 million children nationwide, often leading them to low self-esteem, rebellion, and delinquency. Grady spoke about the issue of fatherlessness as it relates to both fathers and mothers saying that “men must ‘man up,’ and

women must ‘woman up’ and stop hindering men from having relationships with their children.” Grady was surely preaching to the choir with her message as all of the graduates had certainly stepped up to the plate and taken an active role in their children’s lives.

After Grady concluded her remarks, the program wrapped up with the presentation of certificates to the graduates. Each graduate was introduced by his caseworker and was cheered by his family members and the crowd as he came forward to accept his certificate. Seeing these fathers recommit to fatherhood was an absolute delight. But, as one observer remarked, there seemed to be some people missing from the program—their children. In a true testament to the success of the Fathering Court program, the fathers did not want their kids to miss a day of school.



The graduates, (left to right) Reginald Sutton, Michael Turner, John Williams, Anthony Owens, and Irvin Thorne, with Mr. Thabiti Boone - author, co-founder of the Hip-Hop Convention and fatherhood activist from New York - and Magistrate Judge Lee (front).

Photos by Gerond Lawrence



Ms. YuVette Russell, case manager from Healthy Families Thriving Communities collaborative, with graduate Michael Turner and Magistrate Judge Lee.

NEW EMPLOYEES

By Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

Tamira Roberson

Meet Tamira Roberson, an Assistant Clerk in Judge-in-Chambers. Tamira hails from Brooklyn, New York, and has been in the D.C. area since last summer when she joined the D.C. Courts. Tamira holds bachelor's degrees in foreign affairs and psychology from the University of Virginia, and she has aspirations of becoming a family court judge.



Photos by Gerond Lawrence

Before taking up her current position, Tamira interned here with the LOTS unit in the Family Court Social Services Division. She enjoyed the internship, and is glad to have moved on to a permanent position. "I enjoy my experience here at the Courts. I have gained a better perspective on what I need to do in order to get to where I want to go." In her spare time, Tamira enjoys hiking, playing sports, and creative writing. We are glad to welcome Tamira to the D.C. Courts family.

Spring Ann Hatfield

Introducing Spring Ann Hatfield, a new Deputy Clerk in Criminal Information and Finance. A native of Annapolis, Maryland, Spring Ann started working at the D.C. Courts last August after completing an internship here. She graduated from Marymount University in 2009 with a degree in criminal justice, and she plans to obtain a master's degree in forensic psychology—a field she became interested in as a result of her current position. Spring Ann came to the courts for a better understanding of the criminal justice system, and so far she really enjoys her job. "The people here are fun to work with." Outside of work, Spring Ann likes to unwind by reading a good book. We are glad to have Spring Ann on board.



A Great Place to Work, cont. from page 1.

came to issues of recognition, many employees indicated that their division could use some improvement. The survey items "Differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way" and "Promotions in my division are based on merit" received 30 and 31 percent favorable responses, respectively. Employees' opinions of complaint resolution and opportunities for advancement also scored lower, with respective 34 and 43 percent favorable responses.

Overall, however, the survey results indicate that most people are personally satisfied with their jobs and with the D.C. Courts in general, with these two survey items receiving favorable responses well over 70 percent. The Partnership for Public Service, which publishes the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government ratings, analyzed the results of the D.C. Courts survey. The D.C. Courts' Best Places to Work index score, which measures overall employee satisfaction and commitment, compares favorably with the Federal government average.

The question for the Courts is: now that the numbers are in, what will follow? Based on the survey findings, court authorities have identified and prioritized four areas to address over the next year to enhance employee satisfaction and build an even greater place to work: internal communication; performance management; work-life balance; and health and wellness. Executive Officer Anne Wicks explained where things will go from here: "Work is underway to identify and implement ways to improve internal communication and the performance management process. We have also established two project teams to study and develop comprehensive programs in the areas of Work/Life Balance and Health and Wellness." As the teams move forward, employees' input and participation will be critical to the successful implementation of the projects. These are just the first steps that the D.C. Courts are taking to improve employee satisfaction, enhance employee performance, and, ultimately, make the Courts a great place to work.

Kabe Reviews

Mr. Roy Wynn, Jr.
Director of Special Operations
District of Columbia Superior Court

Re: Ms. Natalie Byrd Letter of commendation

Dear Mr. Wynn:

I write this letter to commend Ms. **Natalie Byrd** on the phenomenal job she does managing the Judge-in-Chambers courtroom. I have worked with Ms. Byrd for the past approximately 3 years as it relates to cases my section regularly prosecutes when attempting to get either administrative search warrants or temporary restraining orders. Accordingly, I have a clear familiarity of what she must juggle on a daily basis, and she does so consistently with professionalism and poise. I have seen on repeated occasions individuals from the community become very upset because of the types of matters they seek to administrate in the Judge-in-Chambers, and Ms. Byrd always takes the time to assist them. Additionally, she has been a major help in orchestrating the complications of a busy calendar and ensuring continuity for cases that I have handled or attorneys within my section have prosecuted.

I would be remiss to not acknowledge the professionalism and hard work that Ms. Byrd has exhibited in chambers. I also know that she works very hard because I have seen Ms. Byrd on my way home from work very late, and she is just leaving the courthouse.

Thank you for your attention, and I hope that this letter has been of assistance to let you know how your employees are doing.

Sincerely,
Jeannette L. Manning



Probate Division
March 4, 2010
Washington, D.C. 20001

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to commend Ms. **[Charlotte] Oliver** on her excellent Customer Service. I am a Courtroom Clerk in Superior Court.



On March 4, 2010, I called to inquire about an ADM case from 2003. [Because of the year,] there was [limited] information scanned into Courtview and we were not in full understanding of the docket entries. We were in the middle of a hearing and Ms. Oliver took the time to locate the actual jacket for us and scanned in all the necessary paperwork we needed to complete our hearing in a timely manner.

Ms. Oliver was very patient, informative and took the time to explain everything to me. It was a pleasure to come in contact with Ms. Oliver and I would like to extend my wholehearted appreciation for her professionalism, friendly demeanor and timely assistance with this case.

Please help me in thanking Ms. Oliver and encourage her to keep up the good work. She made my stressful day a little less stressful.

Kudos Ms. Oliver!!! I look forward to working with you again

Black History Month *cont. from page 2.*

vious event, this one led off with an audience rendition of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and another showcase of our talented employees. Renard Rinehart gave another great performance with the musical selection "I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned." The audience was also treated to songs by Marion Swingler of the Criminal Division, a duet by Catherine Papachristou of the Probate Division and Michael Chamberlain of Family Court Operations, and a poem recitation by Peter Mullings of the Family Court Social Services Division.

The guest speaker for this final event, Judge Burnett, gave a fascinating account of his life and the role that he played in helping civil rights leaders like Thurgood Marshall and James Nabrit in bringing about equal education opportunities for African Americans. Judge Burnett's story displayed a great example of the day's theme "Excellence Through Adversity." It was

inspirational to say the least.

After closing remarks from Senior Court Manager Willard Stephens, who took special time to recognize the Black History Month committee for their great work, the Black History Month program and celebrations ended with a soul food feast. Fried chicken, ham, collard greens, string beans, potatoes, corn bread, and peach cobbler were just some of the items on the menu. People ate and enjoyed the characters from the living museum, from statesmen like Frederick Douglass and Thurgood Marshall, to entertainers like Stevie Wonder and Redd Foxx, to name a few.

This year's Black History Month celebration, despite being delayed, was definitely one to remember. The Black History Month committee thanks all of the event participants and attendees, and looks forward to seeing everyone next year.

Ms. Cooper
Criminal Division
Superior Court of the District

March 2, 2010



Dear Ms. Cooper:

I contacted several local attorneys regarding getting certified copies of documents in criminal files or D.C. Superior Court. None knew the answer.

One day I called the main criminal number and Ms. **Benita Winfield** answered.

I would like to commend and thank Ms. Winfield for the most professional, pleasant and courteous responses she has provided me. On two occasions when I didn't even leave messages for her, she spotted my telephone number on her voice mailbox and called me to ask if she could help.

Too often we are quick to complain, but we never compliment a good job done. Ms. Winfield has certainly been a godsend and kudos to her for her help.

Sincerely,

Michael Weiser



Don't forget ...



to
RECYCLE!

From: Mitchell, Derek
Sent: Monday, March 08, 2010
Subject: **Customer Service - Outstanding** - Comments Received about Ruth Gantt

Today, I listened to a voicemail from a relative of an appellant. She called to acknowledge the outstanding customer service provided by our own **Ruth Gantt**. The caller just wanted us to know something that we all know about Ruth – her willingness to go the extra mile, knowledge of the appeal process and caring patience in explaining the steps. [The caller] was very pleased with the services Ruth rendered and just wanted us to know it. I just wanted to pass this on to you, and to thank Ruth for her outstanding customer service.

From: Lu, Lan (OAG)
To: Reed, Laura Banks
Subject: Ms. Washington

Dear Ms. Reed,

I am writing to comment on one of your staffs, Ms. **[Laverne] Washington** at the reception desk. She is my "go to" person when I need assistance with the application. I really appreciate her professional, friendly and prompt help and think she deserves some praise.

Thanks.
Lu Lan