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THE FAMILY COURT'S MARRIAGE BUREAU TAKES ON HISTORY-MAKING LEGISLATION

By Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

April 28, 2010, another day in the Marriage Bureau—two months have passed since the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009 (the Act) took effect; couples are sitting eagerly in the waiting room for their turn to finalize their nuptials; and the incredible Domestic Relations Branch staff is working hard to make it all happen. Just imagine going from 12 marriage applications a day to over 75, literally overnight. For the Marriage Bureau, this was the reality when the Act took effect on March 3, 2010, making it lawful for same-sex couples to apply for marriage licenses in the District of Columbia—more than 150 couples applied on March 3rd alone, over 2,000 in the first two months after the law was passed.

The Family Court researched other jurisdictions where similar legislation had been implemented (Iowa, Vermont, and Massachusetts), so the increase was not a total surprise to them. Geneva Murphy, Acting Domestic Relations Branch Chief, explains, “Applications for weddings that will be performed in Washington, D.C. have to come through the Marriage Bureau, whether the wedding ceremony will be at the courthouse or elsewhere. D.C. residency is not required to marry in the city, so couples come from anywhere in the country to get married here.” With these facts, and the change in the law, it



The Marriage Bureau team: First Row: Mansitan Sow, Geneva Murphy, Dilma Fuentes. Second Row: Andrew Bean, Grace Sandoval, Tylishia Rich, Tameisha Hutton, Keisha Campbell. Third Row: Denise Johnson, Thomas Whittaker, Deena Whittington, Lorey Smith-Weaver, and Rasheeda Wright. Missing from photo: Mohammed Kabbany

Photos by Gerond Lawrence

is easy to see why the number of marriage applications increased exponentially.

Since the Act took effect, the Marriage Bureau has served couples from as far away as Florida, Texas, and California. On April 28th, Kelly Huber and Crystal Sandoval came from not-too-distant Maryland to have their wedding in Washington, D.C. “We have been together for four years and are just excited to be granted the same rights as everyone else,” Kelly explains. Their story is reflective of many couples that can now make their way to the District to have their

relationships legally recognized.

Stories like this one make it easier to see why the Superior Court has seen such an increase in marriage applications. What is not so easy to see, however, is how the Marriage Bureau was able to function with such an increase. For this answer, we need to look no further than Family Court Director Dianne King, Geneva Murphy, and the incredible staff of the Marriage Bureau, led by Supervisor Thomas Whittaker. “This really was a team effort,” says Ms. King. “The Domestic Relations Branch and Marriage Bureau did an outstanding job. Everyone knew what was required of them and acted accordingly. They have been very professional and hard working—coming in early, staying late, and even coming in on Saturdays.” Such dedication from staff would be any manager’s dream.

The reverse could also be said from the staff’s perspective of their supervisors. Deena Whittington, a veteran in the Domestic Relations Bureau, was very impressed with Ms. Murphy’s leadership during this time. “[Ms. Murphy] handled the situation very well. All of our targets were put up on boards, and we met all of

Marriage Bureau, continued on Page 5.

Included in this issue:

- 2 Historic Courthouse Awards
- 3 Courtroom 201
- 4-5 Town Hall Meeting
- 6 New Employees
- 7-8 Rave Reviews

HISTORIC COURTHOUSE RENOVATION WINS 13 AWARDS

By Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

The Historic Courthouse has won 13 awards for the renovation and restoration project completed last spring. They include the 2009 District of Columbia Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation; the 2009 Downtown BID Momentum Award for Landmark Development Project; the 2009 Washington Chapter AIA Award of Merit in Historic Resources; the 2009 Associated General Contractors Mid-Atlantic Construction Project of the Year Award in the Government/Public category; the 2009 McGraw-Hill Construction's Best of the Best Award (Mid-Atlantic); the 2009 McGraw-Hill Construction's Best of the Best Award (National); the 2010 Washington Building Congress Craftsmanship Award (Lighting System); and the 2010 Associated General Contractors of America National Merit Award. Two of the most recent awards include the Structural Engineering Association of Metropolitan Washington's "Outstanding Project



On the cover: The Historic Courthouse's grand foyer made the cover of Traditional Building, which includes an article on the restoration.

in Structural Engineering Awards gala, this year held at the Willard Intercontinental Hotel. Michael Goss of Rathgeber Goss Associates chaired the awards committee, and the Judging Committee was comprised of five individuals from Atlanta-based firms and universities—judges were selected from outside the Washington metropolitan area to avoid conflicts of interest during the judging process. The restoration project was a *tour de force*, no doubt.

The Courts' Capital Projects and Facilities Management Division skillfully managed the restoration project, which merges the old and new. Historic preservation and urban design group Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Planners, designed the building as a contemporary interpretation of George

Hadfield's original design. The courthouse has a new north-facing entrance reorienting the building so that it faces north to Judiciary Square. The former main entrance is now a refreshed south façade with grand steps leading to a colonnaded portico. The original statue of Abraham Lincoln, who is said to have signed the D.C. Emancipation Act in the building, still stands at the base of the south entrance steps. This statue was the first of the slain President after his assassination and was funded through private donations from the residents of D.C., aggrieved that the President was slain in their city. The renovation's central feature, however, is the glass atrium that frames the newly positioned entrance. It gives the building a fresh and modern uplift while preserving the essence of the original design.

Originally constructed in the 1820s, the building has



Award of the Year" in the renovations over \$50 million category and the American Institute of Architects' Academy of Architecture for Justice's "Facilities Review Awards Program Citation."

The Structural Engineering Association's award was announced at the association's annual Excellence

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Historic Courthouse, continued on Page 3.

C-10, SEE YOU IN 2011

By Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

Courtroom C-10, the former and future home of the arraignment court, is temporarily out of commission as the D.C. Courts complete a year-long, million-dollar overhaul of the courtroom. The latest improvement project here at the Courts, the renovation of courtroom C-10 will significantly improve the efficiency of the arraignment process. Work is being performed round the clock to meet the scheduled early first quarter 2011 completion date.

While courtroom C-10 is out of service, all arraignments are being conducted in courtroom 201, virtually a world away. Without the convenience of having an arraignment courtroom on the same level as the cellblock (as C-10 is), the various agencies and offices that are involved in the arraignment process had to make a major transition. "This is a big move for all of the agencies. The old courtroom was on the same level as the cellblock. Now defendants have to be transferred across the courthouse and up three floors to be arraigned or presented," said Dan Cipullo, Director of the Criminal Division. "In addition to this, arraignments must be finished by 6:30 every day, or it will throw off the construction schedule in the cell block." Talk about a balancing act!

The year of inconvenience will surely be worth it, however, once courtroom C-10 is transformed into the cutting-edge arraignment courtroom that is planned. Some of the features will be a listening room for those family and friends with children awaiting the presence of their loved ones; in-court monitors so that the public can view the pro-



The Arraignment Court team: Matthew Hodgman, Graciela "Gigi" Garaycochea-Scott, Carla Cipolari, and Supervisor James Ellis.

ceedings in the audience by way of flat screen monitors, an information monitor that will be able to show cases called and waiting to be called; improved workspace for court staff and attorneys; and better access for attorneys and members of the public with disabilities, to name just a few.

The arraignment courtroom is open Mondays through Saturdays and handles the arraignments and presentments of between 50 and 150 defendants per day. After arrest, an arraignment is the initial

appearance in a misdemeanor case, and a presentment is the initial appearance in a felony case. At these hearings, the judge, prosecutor and defense attorneys are present, as well as the defendant, an interpreter if needed, and security personnel. These initial hearings are crucial: defendants are informed of the charges against them and judges make decisions about probable cause and whether to release or to detain the defendant prior to their preliminary hearing. Lastly, the case is assigned to a specific judge's calendar, and an initial hearing before that judge is set, as well as a preventive detention hearing if needed.

The arraignment courtroom is a busy one, with prosecutors, police, the Pretrial Services Agency, deputy U.S. Marshals, defense attorneys, courtroom clerks, interpreters and others all trying to process a high volume of cases while ensuring that all defendants receive due process. The new courtroom will allow for a smoother, more accessible process, and we are looking forward to that!

Historic Courthouse, continued from Page 2.

served as a courthouse and city hall, and has housed several federal offices. Historic figures like Frederick Douglass, Daniel Webster, Francis Scott Key, and Theodore Roosevelt have worked in the building. Famous trials were heard in the building's courtrooms, including Congressman Sam Houston's trial for assault on a fellow Member of Congress, Daniel Drayton's trial for attempting to help 76 slaves escape on the schooner *Pearl*, John Surratt's trial for his alleged role in the plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln, and several of the trials that arose out of the Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s.

The D.C. Courts are extremely proud of the awards and express appreciation to the Capital Projects and Facilities Management Division for their coordination of this project and to Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Planners for their fantastic job designing a renovation that maintained the historical accuracy, integrity and beauty of the building. We look forward to preserving and living up to the history of this great building.

COMMUNITY COURTS HOST 3RD ANNUAL WARD 7 TOWN HALL MEETING

By Morgan Block, Executive Office Intern

On Thursday May 20, 2010, the Kelly Miller Middle School played host to the 3rd annual Ward 7 Town Hall Meeting/Crime Summit. The event was co-hosted by D.C. Superior Court's Community Court program, Councilmember Yvette Alexander, the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the Sixth District Citizen's Advisory Council (6DCAC).

Over one hundred and fifty people attended the event, which began with a reception and refreshments. The smell of macaroni and fried chicken was provocative, but it was clear that the hunger for community justice brought over 150 concerned Ward 7 residents to the middle school. Michael Francis, the Criminal Division's Community Court Coordinator, opened the meeting by reminding the audience of the common theme that had brought them all together, "Improving Public Safety and Delivering Justice." He then turned the podium over to Superior Court Chief Judge Lee Satterfield who spoke about the true purpose of the town hall meeting, "community support." Improving public safety and delivering justice is impossible without the support of the community, cooperation and communication is essential to achieving this common goal.

Linda Joe Smith, Chairperson of 6DCAC and moderator for the evening, introduced the 15 panelists who represent the full spectrum of the criminal justice system in D.C. Police Chief Cathy Lanier led off with some encouraging statistics. Crime in the Sixth District was down 10% and the homicide rate was down by 23% in 2010. The Chief emphasized what would soon become a noticeable theme amongst the panelists, community involvement. She said that there are three priorities that she has as head of MPD: making sure officers work with their partners, work with the community, and progress individually. The Chief was pleased to report that crime was down in the Sixth District, but said that there is much work still to be done. Her plan for the future was focused on targeting the youth -- creating more programs and finding alternatives to crime.

Judge Robert Rigsby of the East of the River Community Court spoke about the importance of



The audience responds to the panel during the Community Court town hall meeting.

community involvement in the court process. Judge Rigsby said, "We [the judges] are here to make the community court a better functioning court." Judge Rigsby said that the best way to do that was to make sure the community is involved.

Magistrate Judge Richard Ringell,

who presides over the DC Traffic/Misdemeanor Community Court, reemphasized this point, stating that it is the individuals who are determined to take charge in the community who will inevitably make the difference.

Councilmember Yvette Alexander captured the sentiment of the panel when she said, "We are out for the community." She addressed some common issues from the constituency saying that the Council needs to be careful not to "over-legislate" and that her goal is to promote the betterment of the community and individual lifestyles.

Marc Schindler, Interim Director of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), spoke about the state of the agency and some of the new programs that are being instituted at the New Beginnings detention center. Mr. Schindler emphasized the department's ability to change behavior in troubled youth and touted some of its recent accomplishments, including 16 DYRS youth who are currently in college.

After the panelists presented, the audience was given the opportunity to ask them questions directly or write them down to be read by a moderator. MPD was the focal point for many of the questions. Several of the inquiries were of a personal nature, about specific crimes in specific blocks in the Sixth District and MPD officers spoke with those community residents individually, promising to get back with answers to their inquiries.

Some audience members had issues that required input from multiple government agency representatives. One concerned resident was curious

Town Hall, continued on Page 5.

about how the government plans to increase employment opportunities for juveniles committed to DYRS. Mr. Schindler said he believes the key is better preparation, with a focus on high school diplomas. Councilmember Mendelson said more vocational training had to be provided. Councilmember Alexander suggested improvements in the educational system.

The final question of the night was directed at the courts concerning the necessity of mandatory minimum sentencing for violent offenders. A Superior Court representative responded, saying that when properly implemented mandatory minimums are beneficial in helping to ensure the safety of the community.

Due to an eager and energetic audience, Community Court Coordinator Michael Francis allowed the Q and A to go on past the 9PM scheduled closing. At 9:15 Mr. Francis thanked the audience and panelists for an engaging and productive town hall meeting.

The Community Court team would like to thank the event co-hosts – MPD’s Sixth District and the Sixth District Citizen’s Advisory Council, and Councilmember Yvette Alexander. In addition they would like to thank the panelists: Community Court Judges Robert Rigsby and Richard Ringell, Family Court Deputy Presiding Judge Zoe Bush, D.C. U.S. Attorney Ron Machen, Public Defender Service Deputy Director Peter Krauthammer, Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) Associate Director Jasper Ormond, Pretrial Services Agency Director Susan Schaeffer, D.C. Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services Interim Director Marc Schindler, Deputy Attorney General Rob Hildum of the D.C. Office of Attorney General, Office of Unified Communications Director Janice Quintana and D.C. Councilmember and Public Safety Committee chair Phil Mendelson. Last, but by no means least, they would like to thank Alvin Milton from Central Recording, Lou Shack from the Center on Education and Training, Criminal Division Director Dan Cipullo, Community Court Assistant Edward Rhodes, and the numerous Family Court Social Services Division juvenile probation officers who attended, and helped make the event a success.



Audience participants asking questions of the panel members during the town hall meeting.

Marriage Bureau, continued from Page 1.

our deadlines.” Ms. Murphy, who views the Domestic Relations Bureau staff as a team, had this to say: “I am very proud to work with a distinguished group of team members in the Family Court, under Ms. King’s leadership.”

Ms. King shared: “As Director, I am extremely proud of staff and the way that they worked together to achieve our objectives. Without teamwork, we would not have been able to accomplish this nor all that we have accomplished over the years. Managers and staff from other branches of the Family Court eagerly assisted Ms. Murphy and her staff in making sure that we were ready to receive our new customers. Sherry Coppet, Branch Chief of Paternity and Support Branch and her staff were extremely helpful with the cashiering functions and customer service calls. At the suggestion of Clerk of Court Duane Delaney, David Braveboy of the Courtroom Support Branch did a fantastic job of designing and creating elegant number cards for our customers which ensured an orderly line. We also got help from our colleagues in the Administrative Services Division’s Telecommunications Office and the Information and Technology Division, who were instrumental in helping us to make implementation of the new legislation a success.”



Kelly Huber and Crystal Sandoval, a couple from Maryland, were married at the courthouse in April.

NEW EMPLOYEES

By Gerond Lawrence, Executive Office Intern

Christina Wong

Meet Christina Wong, a new deputy clerk in the Special Proceedings Branch of the Criminal Division. Hailing from Silver Spring, Christina is proud to call the Washington area home. She attended Wheaton High School, and she obtained her bachelor's degree in legal communications from Howard University. Christina started her new position here at the D.C. Courts last fall after completing an internship with the Criminal Division that summer. Christina came to the D.C. Courts because she believes that it is a great place for her to start to work toward her future career goals. "This is my first professional job. I felt like this would be a good place to start as far as getting into the legal field." When not at work, Christina devotes her time to an organization she founded late last year, LLADIES (ladies literary association diligently inspiring and encouraging sisterhood). We are happy to welcome Christina to the D.C. Courts family.



Tyesha Kornegay

Tyesha Kornegay is a deputy clerk in the Domestic Relations Branch of the Family Court. A native of Washington, D.C., Tyesha graduated from M.M. Washington Career Senior High School and holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Temple University. She is currently pursuing her master's degree. Before joining the D.C. Courts, Tyesha was a correctional officer with the D.C. Department of Corrections at D.C. Jail. One would think that moving from the jail to the Domestic Relations Branch would be a difficult transition, but Tyesha has handled it well. "It was an easy transition from the jail to here. The jail was a hectic and unsafe environment. Here is more relaxed. And my experience here so far has been good." Part of the reason why Tyesha left the jail was because of the impending birth of her son Amari. In her downtime, Tyesha enjoys spending time with her friends and family, and she loves spending time with Amari. We know that Tyesha will do great things here.



Photos by Gerond Lawrence

Kate Reviews

From: Plunkett, James W.
Tuesday, May 11, 2010
To: **Butts, Janice N.**
Subject: RE: Payments made

Ms. Butts,

I really appreciate your diligence in finding all of the payment history and processing the payments for the Department of State, dating back to 2005. Again, many, many thanks for your efficiency!

James Plunkett

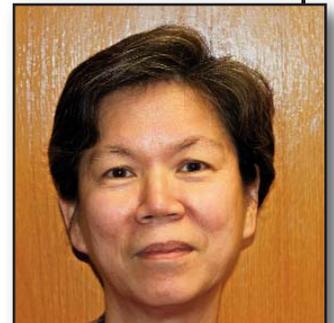


From: David Churchill
Sent: Thursday, April 08, 2010
To: Whittaker, Thomas E.
Subject: Grace Sandoval

Mr. Whittaker,

I wanted to take this opportunity to commend **Ms. Grace Sandoval** for handling my request for documentation of my marriage in an extremely pleasant and professional manner several weeks ago. I was facing a very tight deadline to produce official evidence of our marriage in order to stay on my wife's health insurance. I called the Marriage Bureau expecting a bit of a bureaucratic hassle, but encountered, quite to my surprise, a delightful voice on the other end of the line. She reassured me that she would turn my request around promptly if I simply sent a letter that day. To my surprise, she said she would locate the document immediately and set it aside to be sure of its availability when my letter arrived.

It is rare that I encounter people who manifest this level of professionalism and genuine concern. Ms. Sandoval is a true professional in every sense of the word.



Rabe Reviews, continued ...



From: Dantzler, Tracey B. (OAG)
Sent: Monday, March 01, 2010
To: Holder, Rosamund (OAG)
Subject: RE: Ms. Sebrina D. Williams

Hello Rosamund,

I would like to acknowledge Ms. **Sebrina D. Williams** and her supervisor Ms. **Erica Payne-Santiago**; their assistance this morning was **instrumental** in the emergency pleadings being timely filed. When I approached “the Agency Only Station” it was clear that Ms. Williams was in the midst of handling other assigned duties. However, when I asked that she begin processing the emergency pleadings and explained that we only had a few minutes left to **timely** file; Ms. Williams stopped what she was doing and immediately began to stamp our emergency pleadings. Moreover, when she completed that task, I explained to her that I was more than willing to have one of our interns make copies of each of the original emergency pleadings; Ms. Williams declined my offer and communicated to me “that she would make the copies.” Under time sensitive circumstances, it is judicial staff like Ms. Sebrina D. Williams and her supervisor Ms. Erica Payne-Santiago that are **very much appreciated** and Ms. Williams going the extra mile today, made a **noticeable** difference to the Mental Health Section.

Regards,
Tracey Ballard-Dantzler

Ms. Karen Cooper
Superior Court

April 21, 2010

Dear Ms. Cooper:

I am writing this letter to inform your office about the outstanding service that I received from your office personnel **Ms. [Connie] Brown**.

Firstly, it is so refreshing to talk with a person in this day and age. This is because everyone has gone technology wild, not thinking about the customer at all.

Secondly, on the above-stated date Ms. Brown came into my life, Ms. Brown is an accomplished professional in her field, she is capable of handling a wide range of functions. Ms. Brown has excellent interpersonal skills, initiative, attention to detail and works effectively in a fast-paced environment.

Ms. Brown is customer-oriented. She handled my situation with zeal, and her professionalism was impeccable, she gave me precise and correct information.

Finally, I would just like to thank you for Ms. Brown and she should be commended for her outstanding work.

Photos by Morgan Block and Gerond Lawrence

From: Shirley M. Williams, AARP
Sent: Wednesday, May 12, 2010
1:36 PM
To: WebMaster
Subject: first rate **Probate webpage**

I am finding this website, at least for Probate information, first rate..... I did a lot of research today helping a couple of colleagues prepare documents for filing and found everything I needed on the Probate webpage.



The Probate webpage team: P. Allen Butler, Jed Miller, Karla Saguil (seated at left), Dung Nguyen; and to the right, Nana Perry, Mary Simon-Ford (seated), Jeremie Johnson, and Cassandra Signifis. Team members not pictured are Anne Meister (Register of Wills) Jonathan Motley, and Elaine Kennell.

Ms. Yuan Burns

May 3, 2010

Dear Ms. Burns:

I have been meaning for some time to write you regarding the excellent work done by the webmaster, **Jed Miller**. Over the past two years, the Probate Division has been working on a special project to update our website and this effort could not have been accomplished without the generous and knowledgeable assistance of Mr. Miller.



For this project, Jed Miller has assisted in the update of over 150 forms, created multiple links within and without the website, and helped us to add a Live Chat pilot program. Throughout our dealings with Mr. Miller, he has been extremely helpful, making important suggestions for improvement and more workable designs. He has always maintained his professionalism and has dealt admirably with all of the competing demands made upon him. The work is done right, done timely and done with an appreciation of the needs of the public as the end user of the website. He is a credit to the Court and has done a simply marvelous job.

On behalf of the Probate Division, I would like to thank Mr. Miller and your division for his excellent service.

Sincerely, Anne Meister

From: Mobley, Shelia
To: **Delaney, Duane B.**
Subject: Thank you

Good afternoon:

“Understanding the Courts” training was awesome. I will never forget the Supreme Court learning experience. I’ve attended higher institutions of learning, Georgetown University, American University and Central Michigan University, but I never experienced the history lessons that you’ve taught us during the past two days. Although my memory is not as good as it used to be, there was so much material that was never presented to us in detail in any of the history books I had to purchase as a student.



I am extremely proud to be a member of the Court family. Thank you for taking your personal time to invest in our education. I appreciate your personal commitment and investment in each one of us. I’m sure you’ve heard this before but you should write a book or make a video of “Understanding the Courts” and put it on the Court’s website! Take care.

Review of the **Moultrie Courthouse and Jury Duty** on Yelp.com:

About a month ago, I got this sinking feeling when I opened my mailbox and found a jury summons inside. It was my first. After reading it, filling it in and mailing it back, I looked at the address and thought... where ... is Indiana Ave? Makes perfect sense that it’s right off the Judiciary Square metro station.

...The Courthouse itself is quite nice; clean, fairly easy to navigate, friendly people to point you in the right direction should you get lost, vending machines, Firehook in the basement, etc. The security to get in the building didn’t take forever even as a plebe. I think they had a separate line for employees.

So once we stood in line, we all checked in, got our badge and then sat in the juror lounge. The juror lounge was a long room with lots of chairs and several TVs. The TVs were used for the Juror Orientation video (which I watched twice) and they also played movies while we waited to see if a judge wanted to call a panel. There was excellent communication with the [Jurors Office staff] and jurors; they provided frequent updates and were very receptive to questions. We also got one hour for lunch (I went to Proof) which was nice.

I have to say, the waiting area for potential jurors is alright. They do their best to accommodate those who still need to get work done by offering free wi-fi, a business lounge where there were desks, a fax, printer and what-not. Had I known this, I’d have brought my laptop



Jurors’ Office staff -- Front Row: Antoinette Sweeney, Doris Dew, Tawanda Williams-Warren, Donna Little. Back Row: Tina Sandvik, Francine Harmon-Diallo, Takisha Bland, Bryan Thomas, Suzanne Bailey-Jones.