

Message From the Presiding Judge



Barbara Rodriguez Mundell
Presiding Judge

A space crisis in Superior Court

Superior Court in Maricopa County is facing an unprecedented space crisis.

With its current population at 3.8 million and growing, Maricopa County is facing unbridled growth and government service demands. It is projected that 162,000 cases will be filed in Superior Court by the end of 2007 – all to be resolved with 95 judges and about 55 commissioners. It is our job to protect Maricopa County's residents and families by resolving cases justly and fairly, according to the law.

Today's reality is that every courtroom is occupied. Some judicial officers even share offices.

Without construction, in 2009 (a little over one year from now), the shortfall of facilities will result in 8 too few courtrooms to conduct trials, sentencing proceedings, motion hearings, settlement conferences and juvenile matters. And the shortage will continue to impact the court with an additional 4-courtroom shortfall each subsequent year through 2013 and beyond.

Predictions indicate that if no new courtrooms are constructed, results could be catastrophic. A slow down in all cases will occur without additional courtrooms where burgeoning cases can proceed to resolution. Delays in cases impact lawyers, children, families, crime victims, law enforcement, the jail population and staffing. Rental space for more courtrooms will be a costly alternative to budgeted and planned courtroom construction.

Superior Court has already significantly reduced case processing times, through improved procedures in order to get cases into the courtroom faster. However, without the courtrooms, the courthouse becomes the bottleneck.

The courthouse expansion program is timely. It will save money and help victims and the public. The County Board of Supervisors has made a commitment to justice and a safe community in which strong families can thrive.

The court appreciates this support and joins the county in its commitment to the community that the justice center's construction plan moves forward on schedule, without delay.

It would be very short-sighted to fail to plan now for the imminent crisis at the courthouse.

Newsmakers

Judge Mundell to be Honored by YWCA

The YWCA has selected Presiding Judge Barbara Rodriguez Mundell to receive its 2008 YWCA Tribute to Women Racial Justice Award. The award will be presented to her at the 2008 YWCA Tribute to Women Luncheon on February 21 at the Arizona Biltmore.

Judge Mundell, the first woman and first Hispanic to serve as the Presiding Judge in Maricopa County, was recognized by the YWCA for her commitment to diversity, equality, and fair and impartial justice.

As a Superior Court Judge, she established Spanish DUI Court, a program created in response to the epidemic of drunk driving arrests nationally, and specifically in Maricopa County.

Spanish DUI Court was one of the first in the United States, and, since its creation, other counties have been working to replicate the concept.

Judge Mundell has held many leadership

positions, including chairing the Arizona Supreme Court's Commission on Judicial Conduct and serving as the President of the Los Abogados Hispanic Bar Association.

In 2006, she was recognized by Arizona State University as a College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Leader (CLAS Leader) as a role model for women and Hispanic students. In the same year, she also received Maricopa County's Diversity Champion Award.

As Presiding Judge, she has appointed women and minorities on the Bench to judicial leadership positions. Judge Mundell has named nine judges to serve as departmental presiding judges. Of these nine positions, five are women; two are Hispanic and one is African American.

The YWCA recognizes women who have empowered women and worked to eliminate discrimination while achieving success in their field of work.

Legislators Visit Superior Court



Senator Linda Gray (left) meets with Judge Lisa Flores in her court chambers. Senator Gray was the first legislator scheduled for this year's program.

On November 13th, Superior Court kicked off its annual View from the Bench program. The program is designed to accomplish three important goals: To open lines of communication between individual judges and senators; to make significant strides in educating judges about the legislative process; and to educate legislators about the day-to-day tasks performed by judges and commissioners in Maricopa County.

From November to January, legislators are invited to spend time shadowing a judge on and off the bench. Legislators are given the opportunity to select the judge or court facility they desire to visit.

Beginning in January, Superior Court judges will reciprocate by visiting legislators during the legislative session. To date, 19 legislators visits are scheduled to visit the Court.

For more information, please contact Community Outreach Director Patricia Seguin.

New Judge Q & A: Samuel A. Thumma

Judges who have joined the bench during the past few months will be featured in a question-and-answer feature that will run regularly in the Judicial Branch News.

This month, we asked questions of Judge Samuel A. Thumma, who was appointed in March and is assigned to Juvenile Court at the Durango Court Center. He was in private practice specializing in commercial litigation and counseling prior to his appointment to the bench.



Q. Since your March appointment to the bench, what was the biggest, unexpected lesson you've learned?

That I can take off almost any morning or afternoon I want, provided I know 90 days in advance which morning or afternoon I want. Scheduling when compared to my private firm experience has been a big change, and a bit of a surprise, that I did not expect.

Q. Is being a judge what you expected? Why?

Yes and no. In a general way, it is what I expected. That said, I had no idea where I would be assigned and had no prior experience with Juvenile Court, so the learning curve has been steep. The people are great; Judge George Foster was terrific in letting me shadow him as I took over his calendar and it is a great place to be, particularly as a baby judge.

Q. What is the best job you had ever? Why?

The first job I recall having was pitching manure with a pitch fork growing up on my parents' farm in Iowa. That start gave me a fair bit of perspective and appreciation for every other job I've had. I have truly enjoyed the jobs I have had since and am definitely enjoying serving as a Judge.

Q. What's your favorite quote?

"Wants and needs are two different things."

Q. If you had a day to spend doing only what you want to do - how would you spend it?

With my wife and our daughter, Nicole, someplace near or on the ocean talking, walking, riding bikes, spending time together and eating good food.

Q. What goal haven't you yet reached?

There are many, most involving getting better at something, including being a better judge, husband, father, son, cook, carpenter, etc.

National Adoption Day Highlights



Court Briefs

Judge Takes Drunk Driving Sentencing Proceedings Into Local High Schools

Recently, a judge recently took a hardcore message into high school classrooms and auditoriums that drinking and driving can land motorists in jail and ordered to pay high fines for their careless behavior.

Judge C. Steven McMurry of Encanto Justice Court took his court proceedings into high schools that are located within his court's boundaries in central Phoenix. His first court-in-school session was held on Wed., Oct. 24 at North High School. The second session was held at Central High School, on November 7th.

"It's an effort to just show the students that there will be consequences that carry a high price if you drink and drive," said Judge McMurry. "Don't drink if you're underage. Don't drive when you drink. That's the message the students heard as I sentenced the defendants who were in court to face their fate for driving drunk."

Wednesdays are the days that the judge hears misdemeanor criminal cases. The cases heard during the in-school sessions were selected by the public defenders and prosecutors with concurrence by the defendants who pled guilty and were sentenced during the school programs.

"This is the first brush with the law these defendants have had," Judge McMurry said. "They are genuinely repentant. Agreeing to have their case heard in a high school setting is a way to partially redeem themselves."

This is the second time Judge McMurry has held court in a high school. In 2001, he had great success with his session that brought reality to students who saw first-hand what happens to people who break the law.

Already he has other judges looking at his program and considering taking their court proceedings to high schools in their districts.

"These cases all sound repetitive as I work my way through the docket," Judge McMurry said. "They all sound alike. Every one gets jail time. Every one gets a big fine to pay. There's no easy out. A cab is much cheaper."

Justice Court Employee Retires After 28 Years

After 28 years with Maricopa County, Diane Chesley of Justice Court Services is retiring on November 30th.

Chesley started working for the County in 1979 as a clerk in the West Mesa Justice Court with Justice of the Peace John Merrill. During her career, Chesley clerked for many years for various Justices of the Peace.

Chesley was married for 39 years to Bill Chesley, who served as the constable for the West Mesa Justice Court from 1970 to 1994. She has five children, 18 grandchildren and three great-great grandsons.

Story submitted by Steve Ramsbacher
Justice Court Services

CTS Receives Industry Recognition

Court Technology Services received an honorable mention for their eCourt - interactive forms. The award was presented from the Center for Digital Government.

The Center for Digital Government is a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government.

Research Tip of the Month

Specialized Legal Research Instruction

Let the Law Library bring its legal research expertise to you! We recently tailored a COJET course to the legal research needs of Court Reporters. It was a resounding success. Could this service benefit your department? If so, our law librarians would be happy to craft a COJET especially for you. We can meet with your department leaders to discuss your specific legal research issues and ensure the course meets your unique needs.

This is just the sort of COJET that can make your job easier. The comments received from participants reflected their positive experiences:

"Extremely useful and directly relevant to performing my duties as a court reporter."

"Exactly what I need to know."

"Make it mandatory for court reporters!"

For more information about arranging department-specific legal research instruction or any other library services, please contact the Law Library at X63461, or services@scll.maricopa.gov. Our mission is to provide the Court with timely, efficient, and reliable access to legal information! And, we welcome the opportunity to help you with your legal information needs.

Story submitted by Jennifer Murray
Law Library Assistant Director

Juvenile Probation Helping Elderly

Recently juvenile probationers, accompanied by probation employees, helped a Phoenix resident clean up his property through a community service program.

Juvenile Probation has been working with city of Phoenix Code Enforcement Officers to assist elderly and disabled people facing fines for property maintenance problems.

The work is done through a program called the Juvenile Community Offender Restitution and Public Service (JCORPS)

JCORPS aims to provide offenders with productive work experiences, meaningful public service, and education so they can complete diversion consequences or comply with the terms of probation.

Story submitted by Alexander Stojsic
Juvenile Probation

Save the Date:
Judicial Photo Day
Wednesday, February 6, 2008



Courtside

Photo Highlights

Superior Court Investitures



Top Left - Judge Joseph C. Welty (left) is sworn in by Arizona Supreme Court Justice W. Scott Bales.



Middle Left - Judge Hugh E. Hegyi (right) is sworn in by Arizona Supreme Court Chief Justice Ruth McGregor.



Bottom Left - Judge Roger E. Brodman (right) is sworn in by Arizona Supreme Court Justice Michael D. Ryan.



Bottom Right- Judge Susanna C. Pineda is robed by her children Zachary and Josefa Rodriguez.