

# JUDICIARY TIMES

A Publication of the  New Jersey Courts

Fall 2015

## *From Ombudsman to Judge*

# Sandra Lopez's Unconventional Path to the Bench

By **Mike Mathis**  
Judiciary Times Editor

As a young child, Sandra Lopez would pretend she was a judge by banging pots and pans to bring the court to order in the family's New York City apartment.

Even at the age of 4, Lopez thought about becoming a judge, even if she had no idea what the title and job entailed. "It's always something I pictured myself doing," Lopez recalled in a recent interview.

Lopez figured that childhood roleplaying would remain a distant memory until two years ago when Lopez, then ombudsman for the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage, until two years ago, was approached and asked if she had any interest in the bench. She went through a series of meetings, was nominated by Gov Chris Christie and went through the process of vetting that all judges face when nominated.

With the consent of the senate, she was catapulted into one of the most unconventional rises of a Judiciary employee.

In May, Lopez became the first Hispanic and the first woman to sit on the bench in Superior Court in Salem County.

"I thought I was going to be blessed to serve as the ombudsman until I retired," said Lopez, 49, who lives in Salem County. "With each step, I thought if it ended here, I'm good. You never get a sense if you're going to move



Judge Sandra Lopez listens to litigants in a paternity case in the Cumberland County Courthouse in Bridgeton. Lopez's ascension to the bench is one of the most improbable rises of a Judiciary employee.

forward.

Harold U. Johnson, the vicinage's presiding family judge, met Lopez when she was an associate in his law firm in the late 1990s and worked with him on family cases and on general litigation work until he became a judge in 2002.

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## Guardianship Monitoring Program Volunteers Discuss Protecting the Vulnerable

By **Mike Mathis**  
Judiciary Times Editor

Barbara Jennings saw first-hand how those entrusted with protecting others can take advantage of them.

After her father died, Jennings moved her mother to a nursing home, where she later learned her mother had been emotionally and physically neglected.

Jennings' mother's finances were intact because she handled them herself, she said, but the experience taught her how easy it is to take advantage of the elderly.

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## A New Court Year, A Continued Emphasis on Justice Reform



By **Judge Glenn A. Grant**  
Acting Administrative  
Director of the Courts

On behalf of Chief Justice Rabner and me, it is with great pleasure that I greet the Judiciary's judges and staff and the public as we begin the traditional opening of the court year.

While summer is traditionally time to relax and recharge, the New Jersey Judiciary this summer began the long process of changing the procedure judges use to set bail and how quickly a criminal defendant is tried.

By Jan. 1, 2017, the state will shift from a system that relies principally on setting monetary bail as a condition of release

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## Sandra Lopez's Improbable Rise from Court Executive to Judge

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"There is great satisfaction in watching someone grow and develop and watching their career expand," Johnson said. "She worked very, very hard over the years to become a judge."

Lopez was born in New York after her parents immigrated from Puerto Rico. Her father worked in maintenance and her mother was a seamstress. The couple has three daughters; the family moved to Hammonton in the late 1970s.

"They keep us very humble," Lopez said of her parents. "They didn't say much. They didn't allow themselves, at least in my presence, to express any kind of exuberance until I was sworn in."

Lopez graduated from Stockton State College and earned a law degree from Widener University School of Law.

Lopez practiced bankruptcy law and handled landlord/tenant cases before she began working for the Judiciary as a court services supervisor



Sandra Lopez discusses a matter with probation officer Heather Goodwin during a hearing at the Cumberland County Courthouse in Bridgeton. Lopez, who sits in the family division, also hears cases at the Salem County Courthouse.

in the domestic violence unit in the Cumberland County Family Division in 2004.

Less than a year later, she was named the vicinage's ombudsman, a neutral staff person who answers questions, addresses concerns from the public and is responsible for enhancing customer service in the courts.

Lopez, who has been reassigned to Cumberland County but still hears cases in Salem County several times a month, said one of the most difficult adjustments she's had to make transitioning from Judiciary employee to judge is to view her fellow jurists as colleagues and not her superiors.

"I still call them judge and they have to remind me to call them by their first names," she said. "I can't wrap my brain around that."

Lopez appears to be adjusting to her new role well.

During one recent court session, Lopez, who has been assigned Children in Court and non-dissolution cases, or cases of parents who are not married or other adults seeking a court order related to a minor children,

Lopez was firm setting ground rules for the litigants, including telling them not to talk over themselves or her, and listening intently as each litigant explained their situation and answered

her questions.

"I like when I'm busy. I don't have time to be nervous," she said. "It's starting to feel comfortable."

Lopez said it's important to let parents become part of the process so "we can reach an agreement they're happy with."

However, not everyone has been happy leaving Lopez's courtroom.

She recalled one case in which a woman and her children moved to Delaware without the permission of the children's father.

When Lopez ordered that the children be returned to New Jersey, the woman began crying, but shed no tears. "She then threw herself back on the floor," Lopez recalled. "The officer asked if she was alright, and she got up and left."

Lopez also has conducted several weddings and has finalized adoptions, including those in a family of five children, one of whom was a special needs child.

She said she was moved by the answer the 16-year-old girl gave when Lopez asked her why she wanted to be adopted.

"To be part of a family that loves me," Lopez said the girl responded. "It's such a simple statement, but it brought tears

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The chief justice is Stuart Rabner. The acting administrative director of the courts is Judge Glenn A. Grant.

Please send short news articles, photos and suggestions to [Mike.Mathis@judiciary.state.nj.us](mailto:Mike.Mathis@judiciary.state.nj.us). Submissions are subject to editing, and not all can be published.

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## Former Administrative Director Edward McConnell Dies at 95

By Mike Mathis  
Judiciary Times Editor

Edward B. McConnell, the longest-serving administrative director for the New Jersey Judiciary, died Aug. 10 at the age of 95.

Mr. McConnell, who served from 1953 until 1973, was the second administrative director of the courts under the 1947 state constitution, which gave the chief justice authority over the management of the courts and directed him or her to appoint an administrative director to assist.

Mr. McConnell became administrative director just five years after the constitution became effective in 1948 and was operating on a fairly blank slate. Many of today's administrative procedures and processes emanated from what he put into place.

In 1975, he was the second person ever to be awarded the Warren E. Burger Award for Excellence in Court Administration.

"Mr. McConnell was the archetype of an administrative director. Next to Chief Justice (Arthur T.) Vanderbilt, he was the true architect of the modern New Jersey Judiciary," said Judge Glenn A. Grant, the current administrative director of the courts. "He was the nation's first professional state court administrator, a leader who brought management skills and techniques to our judiciary. Every one of us, the six



Edward B. McConnell

directors since he retired more than 30 years ago, have had his work as a blueprint to manage the administration and progress of the courts."

Mr. McConnell is recognized as a founder of judicial administration around the country and globally.

When he left the New Jersey Judiciary, McConnell took his knowledge and interest in court management to the nation when he helped found the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).

Mr. McConnell received a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska and an MBA from Harvard Business School.

During World War II, he served in Germany with the U.S. Army Combat Engineers, earning a Bronze Star Medal

and attaining the rank of major. After the war, he completed his law degree at the University of Nebraska.

In 1953, Mr. McConnell was appointed administrative director of the courts of New Jersey. He succeeded Willard G. Woelper, the first to hold the post when Chief Justice Vanderbilt appointed him in 1948.

Mr. McConnell served on many state and national organizations related to court administration and judicial training. After he helped found the NCSC, he was in great demand throughout the country as a keynote speaker and lecturer.

A memorial service was recently held at the NCSC in Williamsburg, Virginia.

### Lopez

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to my eyes. It was simple but elegant."

Lopez also recalled a 16-year-old girl who appeared before her for committing crimes to support a heroin addiction.

Her father appeared to be disengaged, so Lopez told him he had "a better chance of picking out a white coffin than picking out a white (wedding) dress." The charges against the girl were downgraded, Lopez said, and she's undergoing mental health counseling.

"I still see her face and how hard it was to stare into those vacant eyes," she said.

Lopez said she's working hard at becoming better at her job but admits that she's often her harshest critic.

"It's me wanting to do a good job (because) I have such high regard for the work."

## Judiciary Launches Municipal Court App

By Mike Mathis  
Judiciary Times Editor

The New Jersey Judiciary has developed a mobile app that connects the public and attorneys to resources in the state's municipal courts, Chief Justice Stuart Rabner announced today.

The NJMC (New Jersey Municipal Courts) app, available for Apple, Android and Windows mobile devices, presents information about the municipal courts available on the Judiciary's website, njcourts.com, in an easy-to-use mobile format.

Using convenient one-touch links, users can pay traffic tickets and access locations, hours, leadership and contact information and directions to the state's 506 municipal courts and resources, including municipal division offices and information on how the municipal courts operate.

"The development of the NJMC app is another example of how the Judiciary is working to connect the public to useful information on our website in a convenient way," said Chief Justice Rabner. "People come into contact

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**Bad Weather?  
Power Outage?  
Unscheduled Closings?  
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## Work Proceeding on Criminal Justice Reform in New Jersey

**By Mike Mathis**  
Judiciary Times Editor

The massive effort to reform the criminal justice process, including how judges set bail, how quickly defendants are tried and the establishment of a pretrial services unit are moving rapidly.

Staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts and the 15 vicinages worked diligently through the summer to design and implement many changes for the Judiciary to meet the mandatory Jan. 1, 2017 deadline.

Pilot programs in three vicinages, Camden, Morris/Sussex and Passaic, are scheduled to begin early next year.

Under the leadership of Chief Justice Rabner and Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts, the Judiciary is enhancing its information technology infrastructure to automate more fully key components of the criminal justice process; updating court rules governing applicable practice and procedure; and engaging in an extensive educational outreach and communication initiative in collaboration with judges, staff and stakeholders outside the Judiciary who will be affected by the changes.

“Criminal justice reform is one of the most ambitious and important projects the Judiciary has undertaken in its history,” Judge Grant said. “It will affect the public and everyone in the Judiciary in some way.”

By Jan. 1, 2017, the state will shift from a system that relies principally on setting monetary bail as a condition of release to a risk-based system that other states, including Kentucky and Arizona, have used with success.

Under the current system, in which judges typically set a dollar amount of bail, poor defendants who pose little risk of danger or flight are sometimes held in county jail because they can't post even modest amounts of bail.

Meanwhile, under current law, defendants with assets can post bail and be released even if they pose a serious risk of flight or danger.

After Jan. 1, 2017, the pretrial

services unit will use a public safety assessment (PSA) tool to prepare a risk assessment and release recommendation for consideration by a judge.

Many defendants will be released on their own recognizance or released on non-monetary conditions. Monetary bail that is used in the current system will be a release option only in certain circumstances.

Those defendants who are released will be monitored by the pretrial services unit the Judiciary is forming.

Upon motion by the prosecutor, judges will be able to order defendants who pose a serious risk of flight, or a serious risk of danger to the community or to witnesses, held without bail.

For certain defendants who are detained in the county jail, the speedy trial component will set limits on the amount of time from detention to indictment and from indictment to trial, with appropriate extensions of time for pretrial motions, competency hearings, plea negotiations, the consent of the parties, and other valid reasons.

Much of the work has flowed through a Judiciary-wide committee that meets frequently to discuss the status of the many facets of implementation.

The Information Technology Office is making sweeping changes to its system to accommodate several new and automated enhancements.

This technological effort includes development of the evidence-based PSA tool to determine a defendant's risk level for purposes of pretrial release and interfaces with systems that capture fingerprint identification and criminal background checks.

Meanwhile, judges and practitioners have been meeting to discuss necessary revisions to the court rules that ultimately must be approved by the Supreme Court.

The multifaceted outreach effort includes a page on the InfoNet that includes committee agendas and meeting minutes, videos, reports, a broadcast message archive and reference material.

Ongoing meetings are scheduled

through the fall with groups, composed of sheriffs, wardens, prosecutors, public defenders and private defense counsel to identify and discuss potential issues and to brainstorm solutions.

As part of this initiative, Judge Grant is guiding the development of a comprehensive toolkit that assignment judges, trial court administrators and central office staff will use to deliver a consistent message on criminal justice reform to staff and to groups, such as state, county and local officials.

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### Atlantic City Kiosks Make Ticket Payment Easier

**By Sally Hanlin**  
Assistant Municipal Division Manager  
Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage

The Atlantic City Municipal Court has made paying traffic tickets easier by installing two payment kiosks in their lobby.

The kiosks are connected to njcourts.com, through which a user can access NJMCDirect, the state's ticket paying site.

The kiosks are convenient, require no staff, and reduce wait time by eliminating long lines at payment windows.

Court Director Brian Jetter said he believes the kiosks are an efficient use of resources and a way to improve customer service.

The payment kiosks also play a role in the success of the Atlantic City Parking Authority's use of the Parking Authority Ticketing System (PATS).

PATS hand-held ticket issuing devices are provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts and produce real time parking ticket information to the municipal court. Tickets are then immediately available for payment.

## Criminal Justice Reform is Major Theme of New Court Year

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to a risk-based system that is more objective, and thus fairer to defendants because it is unrelated to their ability to pay monetary bail.

A risk-based system promotes the safety of the community, and also considers whether the defendant will appear for future court appearances and whether the defendant is likely to obstruct the criminal justice process.

A risk-based system also promotes the basic liberty interests of defendants since it will result in a significant reduction in the pretrial detainee population.

The federal courts and several other states are using this model with success. The statute also sets deadlines for the timely filing of an indictment and the disposition of criminal charges for incarcerated defendants.

This massive effort will in some way involve every judge and every Judiciary employee.

This column is designed to make you aware of why this issue is of such paramount importance to the Judiciary and society. For information on how we got to this point and the implementation steps we are taking, see below.

### How did we get here?

The move to reform the state's bail system grew from the work of the Joint Committee on Criminal Justice, a special committee of the Supreme Court established by Chief Justice Rabner to examine the issues of bail and speedy trial reform.

The committee included the attorney general, public defender, judges and representatives of the executive and legislative branches, county prosecutors, defense counsel, court administration and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Members drafted a series of recommendations that were incorporated into landmark legislation.

In addition, voters in November 2014 approved a constitutional change that becomes effective in January 2017

to permit judges to keep high-risk defendants detained without bail.

### What is the Judiciary doing to make criminal justice reform a reality?

We are engaged in work on several fronts so that bail reform is fully implemented by January 2017. Pilot programs are scheduled to begin next summer in the Camden, Morris/Sussex and Passaic vicinages.

Our work includes developing and finalizing a risk-assessment tool and creating a pretrial services function, preparing proposed rule revisions and having information technology staff work on implementing technological changes to enable bail and speedy trial reform to proceed efficiently and smoothly.

Automation represents a significant change in the way we will be processing the pre-trial release decision in criminal cases.

A comprehensive outreach plan to inform and advise staff, judges, criminal justice partners such as prosecutors, public defenders, wardens and sheriffs and the public also is being developed.

This message is the first in a series of planned outreach efforts that will include additional broadcast messages, trainings, webinars, short videos, fact sheets and other communication tools.

I will be updating you periodically as bail and speedy trial reform progress.

While these reforms represent a dramatic transformation in how our criminal justice system will operate,

I am confident that our dedicated judges and staff, working together as they do on so many other initiatives, will make bail and speedy trial reform a reality.

## Judiciary Warns of Notarios Públicos, Who Are Not Authorized to Practice Law

**By Tamara Kendig**

Administrative Office of the Courts

The Judiciary has announced a public campaign to educate litigants about non-lawyers who offer legal services to unsuspecting litigants.

In particular, Spanish-speaking court users should be aware that "notarios públicos" or notaries public, are not authorized to give legal advice or represent litigants in court.

"It is very important to educate the Spanish-speaking community about this issue," said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. "Notarios are not attorneys, they are not trained to provide legal services, and they are not authorized to prepare court documents or to represent litigants in court."

In addition to displaying posters in Superior Court locations, the Judiciary has mailed letters to hundreds of libraries, service organizations and non-profits asking them to help educate the public about this issue.

In New Jersey, a notary is authorized to serve as a witness when someone has an important document to sign, and also can administer oaths and affirmations.

By law, notaries can charge no more than \$2.50 for this service.

There is no special training required to become a notary, and no special knowledge of state or local laws is required.

"Notaries perform important functions in our communities," said Judge Grant. "But providing legal services is not one of those functions."

While some litigants might turn to notarios públicos because they believe that they will charge less for their services; that is not always the case, particularly if the notario is unscrupulous enough to offer unauthorized legal representation.

### Did You Know?

The Judiciary uses Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to communicate the work of the courts to the public and court staff. The Judiciary uses RSS feeds and SMS text alerts to inform users about court news, closings and Supreme Court decisions. To sign up for these services, go to [njcourts.com](http://njcourts.com) and look for the icons under "Here's the Latest" on the right side.

## Two Judges Elevated to Seats on the Appellate Division

By **Tamara Kendig**

Administrative Office of the Courts

Superior Court Judges Heidi Willis Currier and Robert J. Gilson have been assigned to the Appellate Division.

The Appellate Division of the Superior Court is New Jersey's intermediate appellate court. The 32 Appellate Division judges hear appeals from decisions of the trial courts, the Tax Court and state administrative agencies.

The Appellate Division generally decides between 6,000 and 6,500 appeals and about 8,500 motions each year.

Appointed to the bench by Gov. James E. McGreevey, Currier took the oath of office on Jan. 29, 2004. She served in the civil division until September 2004, and then moved to the family division. She returned to the civil division in 2008 and was named acting presiding judge of the civil division from February through May 2013. She has served on temporary assignment to the Appellate Division since April 2015.

A graduate of Smith College and of Rutgers School of Law-Camden, Currier began her legal career serving as a law clerk to Superior Court Judge Sidney H. Reiss. From 1987 to 1995 she was an associate at Connell, Foley LLP. She was named partner in 1995 and continued with the firm until her appointment to the bench.

Currier was a trustee of the New Jersey State Bar Association from 2001 to 2004. She also was chair of the Civil Trial Bar Section. She served as



Heidi Willis Currier

president of the New Jersey Defense Association from 2002 to 2004.

Currier served as a member of the Supreme Court Committee on Character from 1993 to 2000. She also served as an arbitrator in Middlesex and Union vicinages and was a member of the committee that helped oversee the implementation of best practices in the civil division. She is a member of the Supreme Court Civil Practice Committee.

"I have been privileged to serve with wonderful colleagues during my tenure in Middlesex County and will miss their wisdom and guidance. I am excited to join the Appellate Division and look forward to this challenging new role and the opportunity to continue serving the citizens of this state," Currier said.

Gilson holds a bachelor's degree from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York and a law degree from Boston College Law School. He served as a law clerk to Judge John J. Gibbons of the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. He then joined the firm of Riker, Danzig, Scherer, Hyland &



Robert J. Gilson

Perretti LLP as an associate in 1986.

He was named a partner in the firm in 1994.

In 2006, Gilson left the firm to serve as the director of the Division of Law in the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. He was appointed to the bench on Oct. 1, 2009 by Gov. Jon Corzine. He served first in the family division in the Morris/Sussex Vicinage and in 2012 moved to the criminal division.

He has served on temporary assignment to the Appellate Division since April 2015.

Gilson has served on the Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Professional Ethics. He also has served on the District X Ethics Committee and has been a trustee and chair of the New Jersey Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to join the appellate bench and to continue my service to the people of New Jersey," said Gilson. "I also want to thank the wonderful judges and staff of the Morris/Sussex Vicinage for their friendship and support."

## Baseball's a Hit With Drug Court Clients in Morris/Sussex Vicinage

By **Alton Robinson**

Morris/Sussex Vicinage

Strike one.

Strike two came instantly out of the mouth of umpire Tommy L. from Integrity House.

Other chatter included "batter, batter, batter" and "look alive" as John Paul R. signaled for the outfielders to play

deeper or shallower.

It really didn't matter where the outfielders played when Chris R. came to bat. The balls seemed to jump off his bat as if they were being hit by Hammerin Hank Aaron himself.

Fielders from both teams performed well. Both teams gave their all, but it was the elite team from Morris County that prevailed once again, this time by a

score of 17 to 6.

The weather was perfect, in the mid 80's, the sky a crisp blue with no clouds, and low humidity.

The game was part of the fifth annual Morris County Drug Court Summer Picnic, which was about more than baseball, great music or tasty food.

It was an opportunity to see recovery at

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## Federal Judge Played Major Role in Founding of Lawyers Fund

By **Mike Mathis**  
Judiciary Times Editor

Articles written about U.S. District Court Senior Judge Dickinson R. Debevoise, who died on Aug. 14 at the age of 91, detailed his long history of dedicated public service on and off the bench.

Among the judge's many accomplishments was that he was the first chairman of what is today known as the New Jersey Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection, which emerged from a fund created by the New Jersey State Bar Association in 1961 to reimburse clients of unscrupulous bar members. Because only clients of bar members were protected at the time, many victims had no recourse for their financial losses.

At the request of the bar, the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1969 established the Client Security Fund to protect clients of all New Jersey attorneys. The court appointed Judge Debevoise – then an attorney in private practice – one of the fund's first five trustees.

The trustees elected Judge Debevoise the fund's first chairman at its organizational meeting on Jan. 23, 1969. His five-year term as a trustee expired Dec. 31, 1973.

Richard Amster, a close friend of Judge Debevoise who served as a fund trustee from January 1974 until December 1978, said the two developed the idea for a fund to compensate victims of dishonest lawyers after Amster read a story about the bonding of Scottish lawyers to compensate clients from whom they had stolen money.

Amster said Judge Debevoise organized and established the administration of the fund, which became a national model. The fund, which became the New Jersey Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection in 1990, is supported by an annual fee assessed of all New Jersey attorneys who have been admitted to practice at least five years and fewer

than 49 years. The fund also receives reimbursement from restitution paid by attorneys convicted of misappropriation.

"There won't be another one like him in our lifetime. He was truly a remarkable man," said Amster, whose son Doug is a fund trustee and was a law clerk to Judge Debevoise. "He had a wonderful group of trustees I inherited."

Fund Director Daniel R. Hendi said the work the first board of trustees performed, with Judge Debevoise at the helm, established most of the rules, policies and procedures that have allowed the fund to grow and thrive.

Hendi, who has worked for the fund for 28 years, said until a few years ago, Judge Debevoise attended December meetings as a member of the advisory council of former trustees.

"It was on these occasions that I got to appreciate his never-ending passion and deep commitment for the fund when he provided insight and direction as to issues that affected its mission," Hendi said. "His devotion to the fund's principles was infectious on his colleagues and the fund staff, and he leaves a tremendous legacy of service to the organization."

President Jimmy Carter nominated Judge Debevoise to the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey on Sept. 28, 1979, and he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on Oct. 31, 1979. He assumed senior status in May 1994 but heard cases until just before his death.

Judge Debevoise was born in Orange in 1924. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II and the Korean War and graduated from Williams College in Williamstown, Mass. and Columbia Law School.

He served as a clerk to a federal judge in Trenton and entered private practice in 1953 when he joined Riker Danzig Scherer & Debevoise, now known as Riker Danzig Scherer Hyland & Perretti LLP. He became a partner in 1957 and remained with the firm until he became a judge.

Judge Debevoise was active in the

civil rights movement of the 1960s and recruited other New Jersey lawyers to help him represent civil rights workers who participated in Freedom Summer, the 1964 voter registration project in Mississippi.

New Jersey Supreme Court Chief Justice Stuart Rabner, who clerked for Judge Debevoise, called him "the best of the best" in a statement.

"As a gifted judge, he approached cases with care and insight, with extraordinary wisdom and towering intellect," Chief Justice Rabner said. "Beyond that, anyone who appeared before him in court saw that he set the tone for grace, integrity, intellectual honesty, and civility. In so many ways, he embodied the image of justice."

In its 45-year history, the fund has paid more than \$66 million in claims against a total of 727 attorneys. There are 94,561 lawyers licensed in New Jersey.

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### Municipal Court App

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Rabner. "People come into contact with the municipal court more than any other part of the court system, so we hope that this information will be extremely valuable."

The app is divided into three sections.

The first allows users to pay traffic tickets online through NJMCdirect, the second is a searchable, alphabetical listing of the state's municipal courts, and the third includes links to the publication "Your Day in Municipal Court," which answers the most-asked questions about how a typical municipal court case proceeds.

The NJMC app is the third app the Judiciary has developed. The others are the NJAttorney app, which has information attorneys use most frequently, including Notices to the Bar, directions and contact information for courthouses and the court rules and rules of evidence; and the NJJuror app, which offers jurors convenient access to information about their jury service. All three apps are available for Apple, Android and Windows mobile devices.

## Agro, Calderon and Cummings

# Three Selected to Lead Vicinages As Trial Court Administrators

By **Tamara Kendig**  
and **Mike Mathis**

Administrative Office of the Courts

Trial court administrators have been named in three vicinages.

James S. Agro has been named trial court administrator of the Union Vicinaje, Adriana M. Calderon is leading the Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Vicinaje and Carole A. Cummings is heading the Camden Vicinaje.

The trial court administrator is the highest ranking staff executive in the vicinaje in charge of all court operations, including financial management, human resources, information systems, case coordination, case flow management, probation services, jury utilization, facilities, equipment, maintenance, records management and statistical analysis.

Under New Jersey court rules, the administrative director of the courts appoints the trial court administrator in each vicinaje.

Agro works with Assignment Judge Karen M. Cassidy and vicinaje leadership to manage a court operation that includes 24 judges and more than 400 staff members.

"Jim's extensive background in several vicinages as well as with the Administrative Office of the Courts provides Union Vicinaje with invaluable management skills as we move forward," Judge Cassidy said. "We are honored to have him as part of our team, as he serves the public and Judiciary in an exemplary fashion."

Agro earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Monmouth University and a bachelor's degree in accounting from New York University Regents.

He worked in private industry for more than 25 years until 2004, when he joined the Judiciary as finance division manager for the Essex Vicinaje.

Agro also served as assistant trial court administrator in Essex



James S. Agro

Vicinaje and was assistant director of management and financial services at the Administrative Office of the Courts for five years.

He most recently served as assistant trial court administrator for the Atlantic/Cape May Vicinaje.

"I am honored to have been chosen to assume this important role, and I look forward to working with Assignment Judge Cassidy, the judges, and the team of talented managers and staff in the Union Vicinaje," Agro said. "I wish to thank Administrative Director (Judge Glenn A. ) Grant and Assignment Judge Cassidy for providing me this opportunity to assist in moving the Union Vicinaje forward."

Calderon succeeds Eugene Farkas, who retired after 42 years with the Judiciary, 32 as trial court administrator.

Calderon works with Judge Yolanda Ciccone and vicinaje leadership to manage a court operation that includes 16 judges and more than 340 staff members.

"I would like to thank Gene for his many years of dedicated service to the people of New Jersey," said Judge Ciccone. "We offer him our best wishes for his retirement, knowing that our vicinaje is stronger, more efficient and more effective because of his work."

"Adriana has served the Judiciary in a number of critical roles. Her leadership skills, legal experience, and commitment to excellence set her apart as someone uniquely qualified to fill the role that Gene has left."

A graduate of Rutgers University and Seton Hall University School of Law, Calderon also received certification through the Institute for Court Management Program, which is run by the National Center for State Courts. She began her career as a victim-witness specialist in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey in 1990. In 1995, she became a paralegal in the criminal division of the U.S. Attorney's Office. She became a deputy attorney general in the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General in 1997, working first in the corrections and state police section and, later, in the consumer affairs section.

In 2001, Calderon joined the New Jersey Judiciary as the Equal Employment/Affirmative Action officer in the Somerset/Hunterdon/Warren Vicinaje.

She was named the ombudsman for the vicinaje in 2003, assistant civil division manager in 2006, municipal division manager in 2009, and family division manager in 2013.

Calderon serves on a number of Judiciary committees, including the Municipal Court Administrators Certification Board, the Language Access Plan Working Group, the Administrative Council Human Resources Conference, and the Child Support Hearing Officer Labor and Management Conference. She has in the past lead the Municipal Division Managers Conference, and she also has served on the Interbranch Advisory Committee on Mental Health Initiatives and the Municipal Court Consolidation/Dissolution Working Group.

"The Judiciary has provided me with a number of wonderful opportunities and I am so grateful to Judge Ciccone for putting her confidence in me," said Calderon. "I also would like to express my gratitude to the judges and staff in the vicinaje, whose professionalism and dedication are second to none. As a resident of Hunterdon County, I am

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## Three Tapped for Top Administrative Jobs in Courthouses

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Adriana M. Calderon

glad to be able to work and live in this unique and beautiful community.”

Cummings, who was municipal division manager in the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage, succeeds Kelly Law, who is retiring.

Cummings works with Assignment Judge Deborah Silverman Katz and vicinage leadership to manage a court operation that includes 24 judges and 580 staff members.

“Carole brings to the position experience with the courts and a commitment to the Judiciary that will serve her well as trial court administrator in the Camden Vicinage,” Judge Silverman Katz said. “Everyone in the vicinage looks forward to working with her.”

“We also congratulate Kelly for her many years of exemplary service to the Judiciary and wish for her a long, happy and healthy retirement,” the judge said.

A graduate of St. John’s University, John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York and Widener University Law School, Cummings worked in the New York County District Attorney’s Office from 1978 until 1987 and for most of that time was responsible for court data collection and verification.

She was director of the Atlantic City Municipal Court from 1988 until



Carole A. Cummings

2000, when she became municipal division manager in the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage.

Cummings also is an adjunct instructor at the Wilmington University College of Business.

Cummings also is a graduate fellow of the National Center for State Courts’ Institute for Court Management. Cummings serves on several Judiciary committees, including the Conference of Municipal Division Managers, the Supreme Court Committee on Access and Fairness and the Supreme Court Committee on Complementary Dispute Resolution. Other committee work includes the Gloucester County Labor/Management Committee, the domestic violence working groups for Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties. Cummings also is co-coordinator of the vicinage’s Constitution Day naturalization ceremonies.

“I am humbled that Judge Silverman Katz has asked me to join the Camden Vicinage team, and I look forward to continuing the tradition of excellence there,” Cummings said.

### Editor’s Note

The deadline for the winter 2015-2016 edition of the *Judiciary Times* is Friday, Dec. 4.

### LaVecchia Administers Oath to New Citizens

Supreme Court Associate Justice Jaynee LaVecchia and Burlington Vicinage Assignment Judge Ronald E. Bookbinder presided over a naturalization ceremony and administered the Oath of Citizenship to 26 foreign-born residents of Burlington County as part of the Burlington Vicinage’s Constitution Week celebration on Sept. 18.

The ceremony was held in the historic Olde Burlington County Courthouse in Mount Holly. The applicants for citizenship came from 18 countries.

“We are honored to have Justice LaVecchia join us to celebrate this event and proud to bring to our newest ‘fellow Americans’ the benefits and honor of American citizenship,” said Bookbinder.

This year marked the 228th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. In conjunction with Constitution Day, the vicinage celebrated Juror Appreciation Week from Sept. 14 to Sept. 18. Judge Bookbinder launched the week’s activities by signing a proclamation.

### Baseball

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its best.

It was about camaraderie between groups of people on whom many had given up.

Representatives from drug courts in Morris, Sussex and Passaic counties attended to promote recovery. Among those present were Jennifer Gulden, drug court coordinator in the Morris/Sussex Vicinage, Adrien Boyd, drug court coordinator in the Passaic Vicinage, and Morris/Sussex Criminal Division Manager Michael Lasko.

Social or economic status, race and religion did not matter. A day of sun, fun, and teamwork was the perfect motivator for drug court participants on their road to recovery.

## Volunteers Speak About the Guardianship Monitoring Program

*Continued from page 1*

Her mother's treatment is one of the reasons Jennings volunteers for the Guardianship Monitoring Program (GMP), an initiative of New Jersey Chief Justice Stuart Rabner to increase volunteer and Judiciary oversight of guardianship cases. The Judiciary is working to recruit volunteers for the program.

The goal of the program is to review guardians' compliance with statutory and court-ordered requirements associated with performing their duties.

Through the use of volunteers and court staff, the purpose of the program is to monitor guardians' submissions and filing of documents and reports, and to assess their handling of the affairs of incapacitated individuals, including elderly and developmentally disabled adults.

Legal guardians of incapacitated adults in New Jersey are court appointed. Most guardians are required to report annually on the financial status and well-being of the individuals in their charge. Guardian reports are filed with the county surrogate and are subject to monitoring by the court.

Demographic trends in the state and country indicate an expected significant increase in the number of people who

will be placed in guardianships in the coming years.

"The Guardianship Monitoring Program is a volunteer initiative that grows out of the need to ensure that friends, neighbors and family members who are incapacitated are treated with the dignity and integrity they deserve," Chief Justice Rabner said when he announced the creation of the initiative in 2013. "Census data and health care experts tell us that the population of elderly and disabled Americans will grow dramatically in coming years. We must take steps now to meet the increased need for protection with an enhanced level of oversight of legal guardians," he added.

Jennings, a financial advisor, said she has discovered some discrepancies in some of the cases she's reviewed.

"Who's taking care of these people?" asked Jennings, who lives in Wenonah, Gloucester County. "They are so vulnerable. What about the people who don't have someone looking after them?"

Recent cases in New Jersey illustrate the risks to incapacitated persons when reports are not carefully examined. Attorney Barbara Lieberman was sentenced to 10 years in prison in March for defrauding 17 named elderly

victims, including several incapacitated individuals for whom she had been appointed guardian, of nearly \$3.9 million.

In two other cases, an attorney-guardian stole \$2.6 million from 56 incapacitated individuals and a minister-guardian stole more than \$200,000 from 19 incapacitated persons.

Most GMP volunteers work directly in county surrogates' offices to review guardianship files and annual reports. Volunteer monitors flag inconsistent or incomplete information in the reports, which are brought to the attention of Judiciary staff and could be referred to judges or prosecutors for appropriate action.

Before the GMP began, the review of annual reports varied from county to county, and some reviews were minimal.

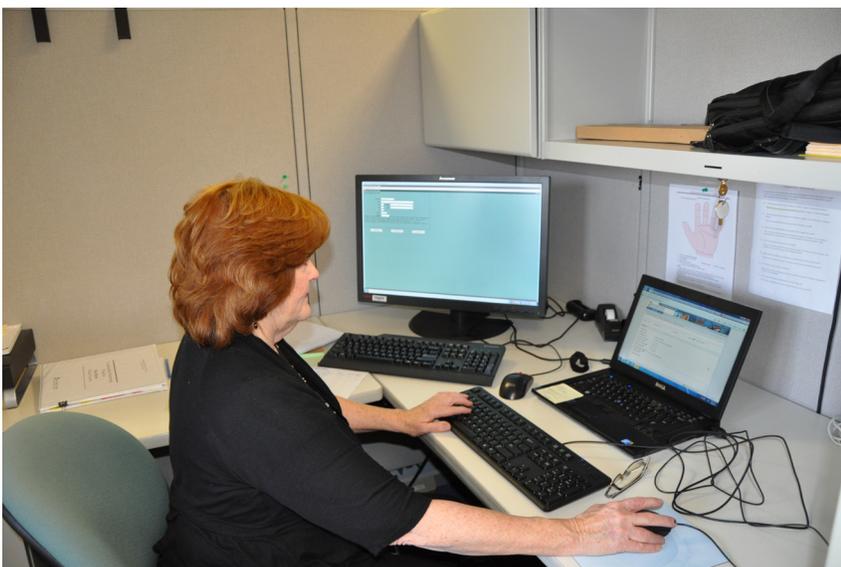
In Ocean County, which has one of the largest senior citizen populations in the state, county Surrogate Jeffrey W. Moran has been committed to guardianship oversight for several years. The office has a full time auditing department that tracks all formal and informal accountings of the guardianships it oversees. Audits are performed after the guardian files an accounting, and discrepancies are investigated, he said.

If a guardian is delinquent, a staff attorney prepares a court order to compel the guardian to appear in court and explain the non-compliance, Moran said.

The plan is to expand the cadre of volunteers to view these cases.

As part of the GMP, volunteers use a new statewide computer program to record every court-ordered legal guardianship and track the monitoring of each case.

In addition to seeing how her mother was mistreated, Jennings said she also witnessed mistreatment of some elderly residents when she visited nursing homes as a volunteer for the New Jersey Office of the Ombudsman for



Susan MacDougall, a volunteer for the Guardianship Monitoring Program, reviews files in the surrogate's office in the Ocean County Courthouse. The goal of the program is to review guardians' compliance with statutory and court-ordered compliance in guardianship cases.

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## Guardianship Monitoring Program “Very Rewarding,” Vols Say

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the Institutionalized Elderly, an agency that protects the interests of older individuals in institutions.

Melanie Adams uses her vacation time from her job at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to travel to the Monmouth County Courthouse in Freehold twice a month to volunteer for the GMP.

Adams said she learned about the program when she saw a sign about the program and the need for volunteers while she was serving on jury duty.

“It’s very rewarding,” said Adams, who lives in Monmouth County. “You read about the struggle a family goes through to improve the life and well-being of a family member, and you want to help.”

GMP volunteers must be at least 18 and must agree to comply with the Code of Conduct for Judiciary Volunteers. They are asked to commit to serve for at least one year.

Candidates are interviewed for details about their experience and background. Selected candidates are fingerprinted and must pass a criminal history background check.

One of the GMP volunteers in Essex County is retired Assignment Judge

Alvin Weiss, who began his service in December when he recognized the need for volunteers. He said he believes his background will help him perform the critical functions that are required of a GMP volunteer.

Susan MacDougall doesn’t have a background in finance or elder care; she’s a retired kindergarten teacher who decided to volunteer for the GMP after she saw a newspaper story about the program.

“I know there are elderly people who need taking care of, and there are some sad situations where people have no one,” said MacDougall, who lives in Brick Township, Ocean County. “It makes me feel good that elderly people and those with disabilities are taken care of.”

Bill Reilly, a retired investigator with the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement, witnessed elder abuse during the years he worked with the New Jersey Office of the Public Guardian for the Elderly, a division of the New Jersey Department of Human Services that serves as a surrogate decision maker for those over 60 who have been deemed incapacitated by the court and have no one available or willing to serve as guardian. Reilly gathered and reviewed financial

documents and oversaw court-ordered repairs to client’s homes.

Reilly volunteers for the GMP at the Atlantic County Criminal Courthouse in Mays Landing.

“I thought I had experience that would be valuable,” said Reilly, of Galloway Township, Atlantic County.

Raymond Klacik Jr., a retired controller from Tewksbury, Hunterdon County, said he decided to volunteer for the GMP after he saw a newspaper op-ed Chief Justice Rabner wrote about the program.

The duties fit with his skills in accounting and finance, he said. “It’s a good thing I’m helping assist the guardians and hopefully making sure no wards are mishandled,” said Klacik, who volunteers at the Hunterdon and Somerset County courthouses.

Jennings said she believes the need for GMP volunteers will expand as baby boomers grow older.

“The importance of this program is going to be more critical. It’s the hope that these people get taken care of,” Jennings said.

“When I’m 90 years old, I’m hoping someone takes care of me,” she said.

For more information about the GMP or to volunteer, go to [www.njcourts.com/guardianship](http://www.njcourts.com/guardianship).

## Passaic County Courthouse Named to State, National Historic Registers

**By June Zieder**  
Passaic Vicinage

The Passaic County Courthouse and the 1899 U.S. Custom House and Post Office, currently referred to as the Courthouse Annex, have been included on the National Register of Historic Places and the New Jersey Register of Historic Places.

Both buildings are now protected by the review process for public projects established by the New Jersey Register of Historic Places Act and are eligible for grant funding for building rehabilitation and restoration.

Exterior work that is done on the buildings will undergo a historic preservation review to ensure that the

work is historically accurate.

“Understanding and appreciating the history of our imposing Passaic Vicinage Courthouse fortifies our commitment to a reliable, independent and fair Judiciary,” Assignment Judge Ernest Caposela said.

The Passaic Vicinage Courthouse was built during the American Renaissance period in public architecture. The building and the Courthouse Annex are central to the history of Paterson and Passaic County.

The National Register is the nation’s official list of cultural resources significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture.

The New Jersey Department of

Environmental Protection’s New Jersey Historic Preservation Office announced the designations on Aug. 3.



The Passaic County Courthouse (above) and the Courthouse Annex were recently included on the National Register of Historic Places and the New Jersey Register of Historic Places. Inclusion on the registers makes the buildings eligible for grant funding for building rehabilitation and restoration.

## Burlington Vicinage Prevails at Annual Judiciary Olympics

By **Mary Flanagan**

Administrative Office of the Courts

The home team won.

For the fourth time, a team from Burlington County captured first place in the Juvenile Probation Services' Positive Interventions Committee's 28<sup>th</sup> annual Judiciary Olympics on July 30.

The competition was held at Rancocas Valley Regional High School in Mount Holly. The Juvenile Intensive Supervision Program (JISP) placed second and Monmouth County placed third.

More than 100 juvenile participants from 18 counties and JISP competed in track and field events, a basketball free-throw, football toss, obstacle course, softball toss and jump rope.

First, second and third place individual medals were awarded in each event, and first, second and third place trophies were awarded to the counties with the highest overall scores. Assignment Judge Ronald E. Bookbinder, Presiding Family Judge John L. Call Jr. and Trial Court Administrator Jude Del Preore attended the competition and greeted participants.

Bookbinder encouraged the youth to use their energy to achieve goals that will enable them to lead a productive, happy life.

Call said the Judiciary supports youth in working toward their goals, to not give up on themselves and to participate in activities that will advance their lives. He quoted his father, who as a result of his involvement in sports cautioned his son to "always finish the race."

Burlington County Probation Services hosted the event, and Burlington Positive Interventions Committee (PIC) members Shannon Burns and Norman Starks arranged the support services needed for the day.

Staff worked with Rancocas Valley Regional High School administrators, the Burlington County Sheriff's Department, the Mount Holly Police Department and the America Emergency Squad.

Jack Hvizdos, court services supervisor II in Burlington juvenile probation, believes that hosting the event had added benefits for staff:

"Our staff came together to handle all the logistics of the day," he said. "It was an opportunity for us to work as a team in a different way, to learn new skills, and also to see the underlying commitment all court staff have to helping our



Pictured outside Rancocas Valley Regional High School in Mount Holly, site of the 28th annual Judiciary Olympics, are Jenette Stiuw, Stacey Gerard, Christine Suarez, Shannon Burns, Norman Starks, Jubilee Wested, Burlington Vicinage Assignment Judge Ronald A. Bookbinder, Chief Probation Officer Greg Lambard, Malika Lowe, Presiding Family Judge John L. Call Jr. and Trial Court Administrator Jude Del Preore.

juvenile probationers succeed."

The PIC is a statewide group of juvenile probation officers who identify and implement activities to encourage the rehabilitation of their clients.

More than 28 years ago, officers began scheduling local or regional sports events, including hiking and kayaking, to teach young offenders positive social skills while involved in healthy leisure activities.

PIC has expanded these activities to include educational experiences, such as trips to museums and cultural sites, in an approach that predated the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative, which now supports probation services to achieve those goals.

"PIC brings together probation officers who are committed to providing youth what they need to achieve, and this sporting event is a very concrete example of that," said Curtis Hurff, chief probation officer in the Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem Vicinage.

"I would encourage all Judiciary employees to view the Judiciary Olympics YouTube segment on the Judiciary's YouTube site. You will hear probation officers talk about the importance of events like this that allow the probationer to see that their probation officer, judges and all court staff are rooting for them in every way, Hurff said.



### Mission Statement of the New Jersey Courts

*We are an independent branch of government constitutionally entrusted with the fair and just resolution of disputes in order to preserve the rule of law and to protect the rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States and this State.*