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Acting Administrative Director of the Courts Judge Philip S. Carchman today lauded the U.S. Postal Service for issuing a new first-class postage stamp honoring jury service. The 41-cent stamp says, "Jury Duty: Serve With Pride." The stamp shows a multi-colored graphic depicting the profiles of 12 jurors.

"The right to a trial by a jury of one's peers is the cornerstone of our justice system," said Judge Carchman. "We all should be aware that it is jurors, with their widely diverse backgrounds and perspectives, who uphold our democracy by listening impartially to all of the evidence, weighing the facts as they are presented and by agreeing on the outcome. Not judges. Not politicians. Not the media. It is the finest system in the world," he added.

Jury systems have existed throughout Western history and at least as far back as ancient Greece, where a jury comprised 500 Athenian citizens, or more in capital cases. Citizen juries not only function as a check on the government's power over its people but also infuse the judicial process with the normative values of the community. Jury duty gives citizens the opportunity to participate directly in their government.

A jury trial is guaranteed in the third article of the U.S. Constitution, as well as the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments. The New Jersey Constitution further guarantees that right in Article I Section 9.

New Jersey has taken steps over the last decade to enhance the jury selection process, including combining four lists (registered voters, licensed drivers, NJ personal income tax filers, and homestead rebate applicants) into one list from which jurors are randomly selected, eliminating occupational exemptions, and specifying hardship excuses within state statutes. Additionally, jurors may reschedule their service when first summoned, participate in a call-off process (in which they telephone a recorded message the night before service to see if they still need to report), and will not have to serve again for three years after being selected.

The goals of the New Jersey Judiciary are to treat jurors well, to make service fair, and to involve more citizens as jurors. That fairness includes ensuring that those who are summoned do not ignore a juror summons -- which is a court order requiring appearance. Enforcement proceedings for those who fail to respond to a juror summons may impose a fine of \$500 or sanctions for contempt of court. Jurors receive at least 30 days notice and the juror summons includes instructions on how to respond, including how to request that the summons date be rescheduled. The Judiciary has a skilled jury manager in each county and provides the appropriate telephone number on the summons and on the Judiciary Web site.

The jury duty stamp recognizes that jurors provide an important, indispensable service when they serve as representatives of their fellow citizens when making fact determinations in civil and criminal trials, as well as in grand jury proceedings. The U.S. Postal Service joins with many organizations to honor the selfless service of those citizens who have served as jurors and encourage all those who have that opportunity to heed the words on the stamp and "Serve With Pride."