



**MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL
BRANCH**

First Judicial District

Mission: To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

Hon. Edward Lynch
Chief Judge
(651) 438-4352

Gerald J. Winter
Judicial District
Administrator
(651) 438-4330
jerry.winter@courts.state.mn.us

<http://www.mncourts.gov/district/1/>

The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle nearly 200,000 cases annually in the counties of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley.

The First Edition

A Newsletter about the First Judicial District of the State of Minnesota

VOLUME 1—ISSUE 4

OCTOBER 2010

Expanded Self-Help Legal Information Services for Unrepresented Litigants and Others

By Brian E. Jones, Assistant District Administrator

Simplifying access to the courts for the tens of thousands of people who go to court without legal representation (pro se) and to improve the operational efficiency of handling pro se cases, the Minnesota Judicial Branch continues to expand the self-help legal information services that are available.

An extensive Web-based statewide Self-Help Center (www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp)

was created over the past four years and is now one of the most visited sections on the Judicial Branch website, with more than 440,000 visits in 2009. The public can use this virtual Self-Help Center from any place with Internet access, including public Self-Help computer workstations with direct-dial telephone connections located in each district courthouse. The “virtual” Self-Help Center provides access to general legal information, one-on-one help to learn court procedures, online tools for filling out forms, videos on how to represent yourself in court, one-on-one review of completed court forms, and referrals to community resources and legal services.

To supplement the virtual Self-Help Center website, a statewide telephone call-center was launched in 2008, offering one-on-one legal education to self-represented parties. Court staff attorneys cannot give

(Continued on page 2)



Sibley County Self-Help Workstation

Inside

1-2 Expanded Self-Help Services

3 Criminal Defense Panel of Dakota County

4 New Minnesota Conservator Reporting System

5-6 A Conversation With Judge Philip T. Kanning

7 Web and Phone Fine Payment Options Offered

Self-Help Center (Continued from page 1)

legal advice, but will help educate people on court forms and procedures for all Minnesota District Courts. The Self-Help Center staff worked with more than 11,000 people in 2009 via telephone and email, which almost tripled the number of customers helped in 2008. Litigants can reach the staff attorneys through the Self-Help phones in the courthouses or using personal phones from their homes, offices, or libraries as well. Staff assistance is available by phone Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.—3:00 p.m., through email, and using the aforementioned workstations. The statewide Self-Help Center team is located in Minneapolis, but assists pro se litigants with cases in any Minnesota District Court. Self-Help call-center staff speak English and Spanish.

Most court interactions require litigants to complete, serve and file one or more court forms. In 2008, many common [court forms and brochures](#) were developed in languages other than English to assist non-English speakers. Many forms are now available in Hmong, Somali, Spanish, Cambodian, Lao, Oromo, Russian, and Vietnamese.

Litigants seeking assistance with common court matters can now view several helpful [videos](#) through the Judicial Branch Website. Many of the videos have been captioned for use by viewers with hearing disabilities. A tutorial on how to file a case in conciliation

The Self-Help Center continues to leverage technology in delivering statewide services, including:

- *Developing online document assembly tools ([I-CAN! Divorce and Fee Waiver forms](#), [A2J Harassment Petition forms](#), and [fillable PDF court forms](#));*
- *Presenting child support workshops for the public via court ITV equipment;*
- *Conducting trainings for staff and justice partners via WebEx; and*
- *Screening completed court forms using co-browsing technology.*

court (civil disputes under \$7,500) is available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

Beyond the workstations in the courthouses, [law libraries](#) are often the first-stop for people who need legal information. Computer workstations with telephones that connect to the Self-Help Center website and call-center staff have been installed in several local libraries including the [Dakota County Law Libraries](#) in Hastings and Apple Valley. The Dakota County Law Libraries, in partnership with the Fourth Judicial District Self-Help Center, also received a grant under the Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LTSA) to install workstations in the Burnhaven and Wentworth [public library branch locations](#). Self-Help Center and law library staff are training public librarians on the services available, so that they can better “triage” the legal information needs of library patrons and make appropriate

referrals to the workstations or other legal resources.

To more efficiently deliver legal information to court users, the Minnesota Judicial Branch made it a strategic priority in 2006 to provide a baseline level of self-help services on a statewide basis by using web technology and centralized staff assistance. The recent downturn in the economy has contributed to an even greater increase in pro se cases across the country, and providing easy access online to more court-related information and forms reduces the amount of one-on-one staff time with unrepresented litigants and others seeking legal information. Additionally, it helps ensure that court documents are drafted correctly and people are more prepared when they step into a courtroom thereby saving valuable time for litigants, judges, and staff.



Criminal Defense Panel of Dakota County

By Liz Reppe, Dakota County Law Library Manager

Every year in Dakota County over 13,000 people are charged with criminal offenses that could result in a jail or prison sentence. Many of these people do not qualify for a public defender, but cannot realistically pay for a private attorney. Legal services can be cost prohibitive even for people with modest incomes above the poverty line. Some of these defendants will attempt to represent themselves, but without the aid of an attorney they often do not understand the offenses with which they have been charged or the collateral consequences of them. They are generally not aware of court procedure, rules of evidence, or decorum.

In February 2009 a group of private attorneys met to discuss the possibility of offering criminal defense assistance to low income Dakota County defendants who do not qualify for a public defender. Services like this are available in Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington Counties. The Hennepin and Ramsey County programs have been in place for many years. The service in Washington County has been successfully operating for the last couple of years.

The group met many times for over a year to discuss the programs currently in place

and to evaluate what was needed in Dakota County in particular. They spoke with the Public Defender's Office, the Dakota County bench and Dakota County Court Administration to gather input and solicit concerns. After taking into consideration the feedback received and getting approval from the Board of Judicial Standards, the Criminal Defense Panel of Dakota County (CDP) was started in May 2010.

The CDP program consists of 2 services. First, a panel attorney is present to meet with any person who appears for the first time on a criminal offense in Dakota County Court. Panel attorneys are available to explain court procedure, counsel defendants as to their rights, provide advice, and assist in negotiations with the prosecution. This service is provided without charge.

The other service that can be provided by the CDP is reduced fee legal representation. If people are unable to resolve their cases at their first court appearance and want to hire a panel attorney, they can do so at a reduced fee provided they qualify as low income based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines. All CDP attorneys agree to charge only the predetermined reduced

rates. The rate charged is based on the level of offense.

The current panel consists of 21 attorneys. Panel attorneys are required to have experience in criminal defense, and to have completed criminal law continuing legal education courses. The group is administered by 3 volunteers. Their role is to select the attorneys, facilitate the scheduling and to act as contacts for questions about the program.

The CDP has been successfully operating for over four months. Panel attorneys, judges and court staff have reported favorably on the service. The assistance the program provides to people who would otherwise have to represent themselves in serious criminal matters also assists the judges, court staff, and the overall administration of justice.



New Minnesota Conservator Reporting System First in Nation

Conservators appointed by courts to make financial decisions for adults found unable to manage their financial affairs can now complete their reports online. The new reporting and monitoring system, which was developed and piloted by the Ramsey County Probate Court, is being rolled out statewide as part of a Judicial Branch effort to improve conservatorship oversight and reduce administrative costs.

Letters are being sent to 4,200 conservators statewide urging them to begin using the new reporting system, which can be accessed through the Judicial Branch website. Use of the new system will become mandatory January 1, 2011.

The Minnesota system, called CAMPERS (Conservator Account Monitoring Preparation and Electronic Reporting System) will provide a number of benefits to courts and conservators, including

Minnesota is the first state to develop a statewide conservatorship reporting and monitoring system and is being looked to as an example for other states. "The CAMPER system represents one of the most innovative practices in the conservatorship field nationwide," said Dr. Brenda Uekert, Director of the Center for Elders and the Courts at the National Center for State Courts. "For conservators, it offers checks and balances through an automated system. For the courts, CAMPER has the potential to improve the oversight and management of cases. Many states will be looking to Minnesota as a national model of how to improve the conservatorship process."

The Judicial Council has made improved oversight of conservatorships a Branch priority which can be achieved by centralizing and automating account processing and monitoring and assigning monitoring responsibility to

specialized staff. The number of conservatorships is expected to grow as Minnesota's population continues to age.

Information about and access to the CAMPERS system can be found at www.mncourts.gov/conservators. An instruction manual and tutorials are provided to assist conservators in registering on the new system and completing their reports.

In conjunction with rollout of the electronic filing system, the Judicial Branch will be conducting periodic standardized audits with an emphasis on deterring inappropriate or fraudulent conduct by conservators. Conservators may be required to submit documentation supporting their reports, including but not limited to bank statements, vouchers, cancelled checks, verification of funds on deposit, tax returns, and other documentation needed to verify deposits of income and receipt of payments.

- Deter errors and possible exploitation
- Save conservator and court staff time and reduce paperwork
- Allow ready identification of overdue and incomplete reports
- Allow ready access to expense and receipt details
- Allow analysis across all or selected groups of conservators and conservatorships
- Improve court ability to audit accounts



A Conversation with Judge Philip T. Kanning



Appointed/Elected:

Appointed: May, 1984, Elected 1986, 1992, 1998, 2004. Current term expires January 2011, Assistant Chief Judge (1998-2002).

Education:

Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (M.P.A. 1996); Wm. Mitchell college of Law (J.D. 1974); Valparaiso University (B.S. 1968).

Employment Background:

Krass, Meyer and Kanning (1977-0 1984); Jerome Jaspers P.A. (1975-77); Jardine, Logan and O'Brien (1974-75).

Bar Admissions:

Minnesota Supreme Court (1974); Federal District Court, District of Minnesota (1974).

Professional and Community Activities:

International Director, Kosovo Judicial Institute, Pristina, Kosovo (May-November 2003). Bush Leadership Fellowship (1995-96). Founding Member Shakopee Educational Endowment Foundation and Shakopee Rotary Foundation.

Judge Philip Kanning was appointed to the bench on May 5, 1984 and has served the people of the First Judicial District longer than any other current judge in the district. Judge Kanning is chambered in Carver County and has been active in local, district and state wide initiatives to improve the administration of justice. His experience and leadership abilities were recognized internationally when he was selected as the International Director of the Kosovo Judicial Institute where he served a six month assignment teaching Kosovo justice system officials about the Rule of Law and judicial administration. Judge Kanning recently agreed to respond to some questions about his judicial career.

Why did you want to become a judge? After practicing law for 10 years, I had a good deal of trial and prosecution experience. I had run unsuccessfully for Scott County attorney in 1982 because I was concerned about how the Jordan sex crime cases were being handled. When the wheels came off of those cases in 1984 and the Attorney General dismissed them, Governor Rudy Perpich asked Senator Bob Schmitz of Jordan about me and the Governor then appointed me to the Scott-Carver County Court vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Fahey (the father of current First District Judge Michael Fahey).

What three characteristics/or personality traits would you identify as helpful in order to be successful in your position? My sense of humor helps me through each day. It gives me a grounded perspective on the human condition and the issues that I must resolve. I am also an extrovert and try to make people feel comfortable in my courtroom, but I also have a trigger point if I believe people are wasting my time and the limited judicial system resources available. Getting the work done each day sometimes means I have to say "enough". I also trust the people I work with to do the right thing. It makes my job so much more enjoyable—and productive.

What keeps you interested in the work you do? I have been blessed to work in the greatest judicial district in the State for more than a quarter of a century. Although the majority of the time has been in Carver County, where I am chambered, I also have served in the other counties of the First District. With few exceptions, even on the toughest days, court staff, reporters, bailiffs, administrators and others do things for me that makes this the greatest job in the world. Although I know I sometimes fail to thank them, each day I try to make their jobs easier—and this keeps me interested in my work.

What leadership roles have you taken on in the judiciary? Some time ago I, along with Judge (now Court of Appeals Chief Judge) Edward Toussaint and Judge (now Federal Magistrate) Art Boylan were selected to bring the principles of Total Quality Management to

(Continued on page 6)



A Conversation with Judge Philip T. Kanning (continued)

(Continued from page 5)

the Courts. That opportunity made me realize that I didn't know much about public administration issues, so in 1995, after being awarded a Bush Leadership Fellowship, I took an unpaid sabbatical and got a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. After that I served on the Supreme Court's Technology Planning Committee with First District Judge Tom McCarthy. I was also selected to be the First District's lead judge in the Children's Justice Initiative championed by Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz (I think she was looking for someone with ideas on how to streamline the process through the maze of state and federal rules that hampered positive child protection outcomes). I have also served as Assistant Chief Judge with Chief Judges Metzen and Spicer. In 2003, I spent 6 months in Kosovo as the International Director of the Kosovo Judicial Institute teaching judges and prosecutors about the Rule of Law—at least from a Midwesterner's prospective.

How do you enrich the profession that you are a part of? One of the contributions that I have been a part of—primarily in Carver County—is encouraging and supporting an environment in which all the players get along. Even if we don't always agree, we don't have to be disagreeable. Other judges who come to work here often comment on this. I expect attorneys to be civil to one another and to work together to get the job done. I also try to find some common ground upon which to build reasonable outcomes. But I am only a small part in any success we may enjoy in this regard. I am a cheerleader—everyone plays an indispensable and critical role.

What is the hardest part about being a judge? I admit that I am spoiled by the people that I work with in Carver County. Going to work in another part of the District that does not have that same ethic of professional courtesy among lawyers or a sharing and caring respect between departments can be frustrating. Bureaucratic BS drives me crazy. Petty differences that frustrate everyone and impede the case flow brings out the worst in me. With the tremendous amount of work

that the judicial system must do each day, cooperation is the only way we can achieve any real success in what we do.

What is most rewarding and concerning about being a judge? It is rare to hear in the media about any success that results from the work we do but occasionally I receive letters commending me for something I have done. The ones that I appreciate most are those that come from victims, or their families. Often they may disagree with a sentence I have imposed, but they write to say they understand why I made that decision. Even when they are painful to read, they remind me that every case is important to the people involved. What concerns me is that when McJustice becomes the norm, this type of self-appraisal will be impossible and justice and judging will no longer be a human endeavor.

What do you do in your spare time? I am a Gear Head. I enjoy building/rebuilding cars and trucks. Nothing really exotic, I call them “special interest” vehicles—ones that I liked when I was a kid. I am very patient in this regard. I first lusted over a Jaguar XK 140 when I was in California at the age of 10. I found one (in pieces) 14 years later. It took me 13 years to put it all back together—and then when I saw an original—I learned where all those extra parts went, so I took it all apart and started over. The total “age” of my 6 car collection is 272 years and my “Cylinder Index” is 85 (only a Gear Head knows what that is). I do all the work myself and in my last car, a 59 Triumph TR3, I even sewed the interior. I like to say that all my cars are 50/50 daily drivers. They look good at 50 feet or 50 MPH.



See Judge Philip T. Kanning's bio at:
http://www.mncourts.gov/?page=JudgeBio_v2&ID=30176

First District Courts Now Offer Web and Phone Payment Options for Fines

Recipients of payable citations due to District Court in Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott, and Sibley Counties can now pay their fines via an automated phone system or online using a credit card 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The payment service is available only for citations that do not require a court appearance.

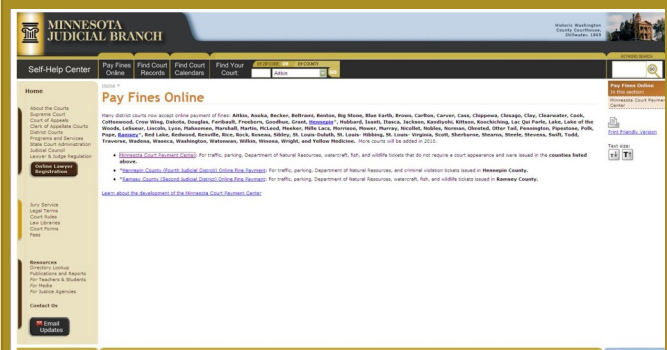
The service is being rolled out statewide over a two year period as part of a Judicial Branch effort to reduce costs and improve service to the public. Under the project, the processing of about 1 million payable citations each year is being transitioned from local courthouses to a centralized Court Payment Center. The project also includes creation of a statewide call center to answer questions and direct callers to the appropriate location if a court appearance or other action is required.

When complete, the project will reduce manual data entry, freeing up court staff for other case processing duties. It will also include the electronic filing of citations by many law enforcement departments directly into the court computer system, automated distribution of fine revenue to local governments and the state treasury, and automated referral of overdue fines to the Judicial Branch's debt collection service.

"This is an example of the Judicial Branch taking advantage of technology to better utilize staff resources, establish a more efficient way for people to pay court fines and enhance collection of revenue for cities, counties and the state," said First District Chief Judge Edward Lynch. "This initiative provides people with convenient payment op-

tions that can be used during non-business hours and it also greatly reduces the number of staff required to process these transactions. This innovation combines efficiency and effectiveness that benefits the court, court customers and the public generally."

Payments can be made by calling:
651-281-3219 in the Twin Cities metropolitan area or
1-800-657-3611 toll-free
Payment can also be made through the
Judicial Branch website: www.mncourts.gov



A convenience fee will be charged for each payment made by phone or web. Payments may still be made in person at the courthouse or by mail.

The First Edition Editorial Team:
Brian E. Jones & Rita Miest

Comments and story ideas may be submitted to:

Rita Miest at 651/438-4639
Email: rita.miest@courts.state.mn.us

