



**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.

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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

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Governor Dayton Appoints Thomas Pugh to Fill First Judicial District Vacancy



Thomas W. Pugh

On November 21, 2011 Governor Mark Dayton announced the appointment of Thomas W. Pugh as District Court Judge in Minnesota's First Judicial District. Mr. Pugh replaced the Honorable Thomas B. Poch, who retired earlier in 2011.

About the appointment, Governor Dayton said, "Mr. Pugh has demonstrated a high level of professionalism and diverse legal experience, which will serve him well on the bench. His strong connection to the community and commitment to public service made him the ideal candidate for this appointment.

Mr. Pugh has been an attorney with Rogosheske, Sieben, Atkins & Pugh, Ltd. Mr. Pugh served as House Minority Leader in the Minnesota House of Representatives and is a former commissioner on the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. Mr. Pugh has a broad range of legal experience in civil, criminal, family law, regulatory and probate matters. He received a B.A., with honors, from Dartmouth College; and a J.D., cum laude, from the University of Minnesota Law School.

Additionally, Mr. Pugh has continued to provide service to his local community. He serves on the Luther Memorial church council. Mr. Pugh has been a volunteer attorney for Legal Assistance of Dakota County and was a recipient of the state bar association's Pro Bono Publico Award. He has been active within the South St. Paul branch of Beyond the Yellow Ribbon.

Mr. Pugh resides with his family in South St. Paul. Minnesota's First Judicial District covers Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley Counties.

More information on Governor Dayton's Judicial Selection Committee, as well as vacancies it is currently considering, can be found at: <http://mn.gov/governor/appointments/judicial-appointments/>

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Dakota County Pilots Document Imaging of Court Files

By Carol Renn, Dakota County Court Administrator

As technologies advance, the Judicial Branch is challenged to find new and innovative ways to keep up with the world around us. In 2009, Dakota County was selected as a pilot site to test and implement document imaging. Document imaging is an application that provides the capability to scan documents to the courts' case management system (MNCIS), creating an electronic copy of the document. Maintaining electronic documents is the first step toward moving to a paperless or paper-on-demand environment.

Tyler Technologies, the vendor for the MNCIS, was on site in early 2009 to provide demonstrations and limited training for court staff. Additionally, Tyler worked closely with Dakota County managers and supervisors and State Court Administration staff to develop strategies for implementation and procedures governing how each document would be handled when imaged into MNCIS.

The implementation of the pilot project in Dakota County involved two phases. Phase one began in September, 2009 with the West St. Paul office and phase two began in January, 2010 with the implementation of

the Apple Valley and Hastings offices.

Dakota County opted to take a 'day-forward' approach to imaging: documents were imaged from the implementation day forward; active cases with documents filed prior to implementation were not scanned into the system, only new documents were imaged.

Once the project was underway, court staff began imaging all case-related documents into MNCIS. During the imaging process, clerks identify each document as a public document or a confidential document before it is scanned into the system. Once the document is scanned, clerks must perform a quality assurance (QA) check on each page of the document to ensure that only the highest quality image is retained in the electronic file.

Document imaging has increased the time court clerks spend filing documents; however, the benefits far outweigh the extra effort. For instance, if a file is in the possession of a Judge or at the Court of Appeals, court administration staff no longer need to attempt to locate the physical file. They are

now able to view documents at their desk and make any necessary copies from the electronic images.

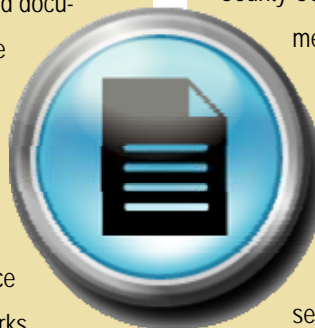
In the past, customers wishing to view documents in a file located in the Hastings office had to make the trip to Hastings to view the file. With electronic documents, they can now visit any of the three Dakota

County Court locations to look at the documents or purchase copies of documents.

Another benefit to our justice partners is that imaging enables Court Administration staff to e-mail documents to other departments rather than sending them through interoffice mail.

Beginning in April 2011 the public was given access to non-confidential documents through the courts' on-site public access computers. Staff no longer needs to pull physical files for customers to review.

Because the benefits of imaging have been significant for Dakota County, the First Judicial District is making plans to expand the use of document imaging to the other counties within the district sometime in 2012.



A Conversation with Scott County Court Administrator Greg Ess

Why did you want to become a Court Administrator?



Greg Ess

I started working as a Deputy Clerk in the Scott County Probate/County Court in 1971, which was the beginning of the court unification initiative in the State of Minnesota, shortly after I graduated from the University of Minnesota. Initially, my plan was to enter law school and use my position with the Courts as a learning tool

for the practical side of the legal field. In other words, learn the things they don't teach you in law school. As time went on my growing family got a little larger, and with the realization that the \$600.00 per month that I was making was not going to cover raising a family and pay for law school, my dream of becoming a lawyer was put to rest but my love for working in the legal field remained. As a Court Administrator, I have been lucky enough to not only be able to work in the field that I love, but to also use the administrative skills and knowledge associated with my training and degree.

What is the hardest part about being a Court Administrator?

I think the answer to this question is very dependent upon how long a person has been a Court Administrator. The authority and duties of a Court Administrator have changed drastically since 1971. The position has slowly evolved from a totally autonomous County Department Head where the incumbent was responsible for all of the department's personnel, budget, policies and initiatives to more of a manager who is responsible to implement and oversee the policies and initiatives derived by someone else. Do I miss the autonomy and the opportunity to completely use the knowledge and skills that I have developed over the years? Yes, for me that is the hardest part about being a Court Administrator at this stage in my career. How-

ever, putting aside my personal feelings and without going into the many reasons why, I do feel that many of the changes that have been made and many of the changes that are coming in the future are in the best interests of the Minnesota Judicial System.

What is a major obstacle you have faced during your career development?

Well, since my typing skills are described by the words "hunt and peck" I've never had to worry about carpal tunnel, but in 1971 we did have to guard against writer's cramp. I never had to enforce a personal hygiene policy because you couldn't smell anything over the mixed odors from cigarettes and the mimeograph machine. I was involved in many discussions and decisions regarding the number of carbon copies we should be making because some of the IBM Selectric's we had wouldn't hold more than 2 sheets of carbon paper. But putting all those obstacles aside I think the biggest obstacle I have faced is trying to convince people that change was not only good, but in many cases even if it was going to cost money, necessary. Won some arguments and lost some.

What has been your greatest success as a Court Administrator?

For some who have known me for a long time, they would probably guess that it was being involved with the design and implementation of the software making Scott County the first fully automated Court system in the United States. True, that may have been one of my greatest accomplishments, but my greatest successes have been any role I may have played in the personal or professional growth of those who have worked with me or for me.

What keeps you interested in the work that you do?

In a lot of respects it is probably the same answer that almost every court employee would give and that is every day is different. Each case you work on or each individual that needs your assistance has a different set of issues and factors which keeps everything fresh.

What is most rewarding about being a court administrator?

I can quickly think of two things that have been very rewarding over the course of my career. First and foremost is the personal gratification one gets in helping a person, who is usually confused and

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Conversation with Greg Ess (Continued from page 3)

sometimes frightened, through the many steps they have to take when confronted with our legal system. Secondly, it has been the opportunity to know and work with so many intelligent, caring and hard-working people. People, who have dedicated themselves to do a good job on a daily basis with an on-going lack of resources and with very little, if any, reward for their efforts.

What type of cases are the most challenging for court administration?

With all of the changes in today's society and the ever increasing number of pro se litigants, I feel that the cases we have that involve family and/or children are the hardest cases we deal with. In many instances, these cases involve distraught, confused, irrational and angry people. Combine this with the fact that they may be self-represented and have no idea how to take the steps necessary to have their case proceed through the court system, and you have a situation that can quickly drain judicial resources.

What do you think is the most pressing issue facing the Justice System?

I think at this point in time the answer to this question is fairly obvi-

ous in that without proper funding of the Judicial Branch it will become more and more difficult to provide the services that we are mandated to provide. Technological innovations that have taken place over the past years have definitely helped. Future innovations may very well help us maintain current service levels without increasing staffing levels, but technology will not solve all of the problems a lack of funding can produce. Without proper funding, how are we going to keep our most valuable resource - the one that we have spent the most time and money developing? Eventually, something will have to be done to protect and compensate our most valuable resource, the employees of the Minnesota Judicial Branch.

What do you do in your spare time?

I like to golf in the summer and bowl in the winter, with a modicum (I do crossword puzzles, too) of success. However, since I'm almost smart enough to know that I can't do these activities all the time due to increasing fragility with the onset of old age, I have developed a huge appetite for reading. I also love to fish and recently bought my first "old" fishing boat. As luck would have it, the boat hasn't helped much and most of the fish I eat come from a lake (box) named Van de Kamp's or that smelly section by the meat counter.

Federal Grant Will Fund New Order for Protection Tracking System

By John Kostouros, Director, State Court Information Office

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has been awarded a grant that will be used to replace the database that currently tracks and shares with law enforcement about orders for protection issued by Minnesota courts. The new system will provide real time transmission of orders for protection information from the courtroom to the

squad car. More than 7,800 orders for protection were issued by Minnesota courts in 2011.

"Minnesota has long been a leader in using technology to improve its court system," said Sibley County District Court Judge Thomas McCarthy, who chaired the Judi-

cial Council's Technology Planning Committee when the project was first proposed.

"One of the earliest uses was to make domestic abuse orders for protection available online 24/7—a radical idea when it was implemented. Now, thanks to the grant from the Department of Justice Violence

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Funding for OFP (Continued from page 4)

Against Women program, we have another opportunity to improve our system and make this state safer for victims of domestic abuse."

Minnesota courts currently utilize both the Order for Protection (OFP) system as well as the court case management system, the

Minnesota Case Information System (MNCIS), to record activity in domestic violence cases, requiring duplicative work by court staff. The separate OFP system was designed in the late 1990's and built on a technical platform that is no longer supportable. Its replacement was approved by the Judicial Council as part of the FY12-

13 Strategic Plan contingent on the availability of grant funds.

The project will include analysis of court business practices, forms and data integration, as well as collaboration with the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) to enable the agency's computer to receive court data.

Minnesota Court Payment Call Center Logs One Millionth Phone Call



The Minnesota Court Payment Call Center, which began operation in Oct. 2009, logged its one millionth phone call on Nov.

22, 2011. Court Payment Center employee Susan Wallace took the call, which was a request for assistance with a credit card payment for a Washington County District Court citation.

The Call Center is the gateway to the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system, the tool that permits a caller to pay a citation with their credit card, and allows callers to speak with a court representative about their citation. Callers may contact the call center at 651-281-3219 or 1-800-657-3611.

"The creation of the Call Center has enabled us to give people the assistance they need to pay their citation or get questions answered over the phone," said Sue K. Dosal, State Court Administrator.

The average length for a call handled by a Call Center clerk is 2.5 minutes. The average wait time for a call is five seconds. The average number of callers seeking to speak with a Call Center clerk each month is 11,000.

Of the almost 79,000 calls handled by a Call Center clerk in 2011 through September, 50,000 had a question regarding payment options, the amount owed, or how to contest a ticket.

In addition to handling calls, selected Call

Center clerks assist with administration of individual payment plans, processing of failure-to-appear payments, and processing of e-citations, which are submitted electronically by law enforcement.

Creation of the Call Center was part of the Judicial Branch's effort to centralize and streamline the processing of more than one million payable citations filed in Minnesota courts each year. Completion of the first phase of the effort, the conversion of 85 counties to Court Payment Center processing, was completed in 2011. Planning is underway to convert the Second Judicial District (Ramsey County) and the Fourth Judicial District (Hennepin County) to the Payment Center in 2014.

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