

Maryland State Law Library Takes on Management of People's Law Library Web site

The People's Law Library, an award-winning legal self-help Web site, has found a new home with the Maryland State Law Library. Beginning late last year, the State Law Library assumed the management of the popular online resource, www.peoples-law.info.

"This is part of the Judiciary's efforts to provide educational and legal resources to the public," said Chief Judge Robert M. Bell of the Court of Appeals. "This partnership helps improve access to justice for all citizens. Now, information on state and federal law affecting all Marylanders and their families will be housed online with the wealth of information found with the State Law Library and its Web site," Judge Bell said.

The People's Law Library was launched in 1996 and has been supported by Maryland's non-profit legal services providers. Several legal aid programs, public interest attorneys, community advocacy groups, and the Maryland Legal Assistance Network (MLAN) developed sections for the Web site.

"We wanted to continue the work of an excellent resource that provides free legal information for Maryland's citizens, including information for people who represent themselves in court," said Court of Appeals Judge Clayton Greene Jr., who chaired the Maryland Judiciary Work Group on Self-Representation in the Maryland Courts. The work group recommended that the State Law Library assume the Web site's management. "The People's Law Library Web site will benefit from the dedicated management that the State Law Library can provide, and thus will continue as a valuable public service for years to come."

Steve Anderson, director of the Maryland State Law Library, explains the importance of a consumer-oriented legal information website: "The People's Law Library helps to explain the law in 'user-friendly,' easy-to-understand terms," he said. "We're very happy to help continue such a important service. The State Law Library already provides legal information assistance to the general public via e-mail and phone, so this is a logical extension of our services."

In 2007, the State Law Library answered almost 3,000 e-mail inquiries and over 5,000 phone and in-person reference questions. During the same time period, the library welcomed more than 9,500 visitors at its location in the Robert C. Murphy Courts of Appeal Building in Annapolis, and its Web site received approximately 235,000 visits.

The first step in the transition has been to update the site, including providing new contact information and hypertext links, Anderson said. "We'll begin a more comprehensive review of what changes and updates to make as we move forward in the coming months."



Martine Jean

Molly Kaifut

Martine Jean has joined the State Law Library as full-time content coordinator to manage and update the Web site. "I am excited to be a part of the People's Law Library," Jean said. "The Web site provides an invaluable service to Maryland's self-represented litigants by increasing access to legal information."

The State Law Library intends to form an advisory committee to provide direction for the Web site's content, thus continuing partnerships

with stakeholder public interest law practices that have contributed information content in the past.

"We're hoping to recruit from these experienced organizations. These are partners who have helped in the past and can provide expertise to help steer the People's Law Library site as it moves forward," Anderson said.

"We are delighted with this new partnership, which will enhance management of the Web site and benefit the public it serves now and in the future," said Wilhelm Joseph, executive director of Maryland Legal Aid, the state's largest provider of free legal help to the poor. Maryland Legal Aid was a major partner in the development and maintenance of the People's Law Library.

While other state judiciaries provide similar online self-help legal information, Maryland is the first state to organize and maintain the site through its state law library. "It is a natural relationship," Anderson said.

NEWS FROM THE BENCH

Appointments

Hon. Emmanuel Brown was appointed to the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. Allen L. Schwait.

Hon. Oliver John Cejka, District Court for Frederick County, was appointed administrative judge for District 11 (Frederick and Washington counties) replacing Hon. W. Milnor Roberts, who is returning to the bench full-time.

Hon. Broughton M. Earnest was appointed to the Circuit Court for Talbot County, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. Sidney S. Campen, Jr.

Hon. Angela M. Eaves was appointed to the Circuit Court for Harford County, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. Maurice W. Baldwin, Jr.

Hon. Timothy J. McCrone was appointed to the Circuit Court for Howard County, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. Dennis M. Sweeney.

Hon. Crystal Dixon Mittelstaedt was appointed to the Circuit Court for Prince George's County, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. William B. Spellbring, Jr.

Hon. Nicholas E. Rattal was appointed to the Circuit Court for Prince George's County, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. E. Allen Shepherd.

Hon. Jeffrey Michael Wachs was appointed to the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. Joseph P. Manck.

Hon. Beverly J. Woodard was appointed to the Circuit Court for Prince George's County, filling a vacancy created by the retirement of Hon. Graydon S. McKee, III.

Retirements

Hon. DeLawrence Beard, Circuit Court for Montgomery County.

Hon. Graydon S. McKee, III, Circuit Court for Prince George's County.

Hon. Richard. H. Sothoron, Jr., Circuit Court for Prince George's County.

In Memoriam

Hon. James A. Perrott, Baltimore City Orphans' Court, 1962-1965; Baltimore City Supreme Bench (later Baltimore City Circuit Court), 1965-1982.

Hon. Edwin J. Wolf, Baltimore City Supreme Bench, 1967-1968.

Unsung Heroes

Judiciary employees and others working with the courts frequently go "above and beyond" to provide service or preserve safety. The following is a recent example.

Baltimore City Circuit Court

Retired Baltimore City Circuit Judge Thomas Ward made headlines in November when he tackled and held a burglary suspect near his home. According to reports in the *Baltimore Sun*, Judge Ward was walking in Bolton Hill, heard someone yell for police and saw a man trying to get out of fenced yard. "I know the people in that house," Judge Ward was quoted in the *Sun*. "It wasn't his." He ran up to the man, who was about six feet tall,

burly, and much younger than the 80-year-old judge, and after a struggle, Judge Ward brought him to the ground and held him until police officers arrived a few minutes later to arrest the suspect. Police said in their report that the suspect "took a swing at the judge with a clenched right fist," and officers found a screwdriver in the man's jacket pocket.

If you know of other Unsung Heroes, send an e-mail to cio@mdcourts.gov.



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Trust Clerks, cont. from 7

court expects me to prosecute it. That means that I prepare the Show Cause Order.

As court systems and the number of cases have grown across the state, so too have the guardianships and trusts. The filings have increased tremendously in Prince George's County. For example, about 160 new disabled adult cases are filed every year, up from 90-95 in 2004. We had about 300-500 fiduciary reports in 2007.

In Carroll County, Marlene Titus was appointed by the Circuit Court four years ago to serve as trust clerk. She reviews 150-200 filings each year. A local attorney, Titus receives the filings at the courthouse, but uses her home office to do her duties as trust clerk.

One of trust clerks' most important jobs is helping educate guardians of their responsibilities. Often, family members serve as guardians because they love their family members—but they are not necessarily attuned to what the job entails, which is why the role of the trust clerk is important, Titus said. "It's surprising how many people do not understand their ongoing obligations as guardians."

While there have been cases where family members have misused funds, by and large, people take on the responsibility as a guardian out of the love they have for their family members, said Richard R. Jones, trust clerk for Harford County since 1971. "Instead of calling their local attorney or calling a judge for help, families know they can call their local trust clerk for assistance," he said.

"I like working with people, and to me, that's one of the pleasant aspects of it," Jones said. "It's a public service thing." **Ms. Bouchard is trust clerk for the Circuit Court of Prince George's County.**



National Adoption Day

Maryland's Courts Bring New Families Together



Kaitlyn Geter

Several courts in Maryland joined in the celebration of National Adoption Day in November. Circuit Courts for Harford, Howard, Prince George's, and Baltimore counties and Baltimore City reported holding events. This was the third year Maryland courts took part. In 2005, the Circuit Court for Baltimore County became the first Maryland court to participate in National Adoption Day.

The benefits of taking part in this national observance are felt locally, explained Baltimore County Circuit Judge John O. Hennegan. "It's our way of making more people aware of the opportunity to work with us to become adoptive parents," he said. "Frankly, we want more local residents who have thought about adopting a child to take that next step and start the process of becoming an adoptive parent."

Examples of activities included:

- In Baltimore, Judge Audrey J.S. Carrion and Judge Edward R.K. Hargadon presided together over more than 40 adoptions in the Ceremonial Courtroom. Afterwards, the new families celebrated at a reception featuring face painters, a balloon artist, and arts and crafts activities.
- In Baltimore County, Judge Hennegan, himself an adoptive parent, finalized 10 adoptions. The families then welcomed new members and celebrated together in a special event at the Maryland National Guard Towson Armory
- In Prince George's County, the Circuit Court helped adoptive parents welcome nine children into their families. Judges Larnzell Martin, Jr., Graydon S. McKee, III, and Melanie Shaw Geter assisted Judge William D. Missouri, circuit and county administrative judge for the Seventh Judicial Circuit, Prince George's County, and chief judge of the Seventh Circuit, in the adoption proceedings. The adoptive children and their families then celebrated at a luncheon hosted by the county's Department of Social Services.

"Adoptions happen every day without this kind of celebration, but this shines a light on the fact that there are children around us who need our help," said Judy Woodall, a master with the Prince George's County Circuit Court and an adoptive parent who spoke at Prince George's event. "I'm single and I think I can be a kind of role model to show people that reaching out to help children is something that they can do."

In Maryland, the Committee on Public Awareness has encouraged Circuit Courts to plan events recognizing National Adoption Day, which is celebrated on the Saturday before Thanksgiving each year to raise awareness of the more than 100,000 children in foster care throughout the United States waiting to find permanent families. Last year, judges, attorneys, adoption professionals, child welfare agencies, and advocates helped to finalize the adoptions of more than 3,300 children from foster care, and events were held throughout the country to finalize adoptions and to celebrate all families who adopt.



Brownie Troop 2370, Prince George's County