



ILLINOIS STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION

THE CHALLENGE

The newsletter of the ISBA's Standing Committee on Minority and Women Participation

From the Editor

By Susan M. Brazas

In this issue we feature an article about newly appointed Magistrate Judge Donald Wilkerson, the first minority to serve on the Southern District of Illinois judiciary. The article is authored by Jennifer Claire Sprague, who is a law student in the Class of 2006 at Southern Illinois University School of Law.

Outreach to the law student community is an important goal of the Minority and Women Participation Committee. As the ISBA looks to

expand and diversify its membership base, so does our Committee. There are many opportunities for involvement within the ISBA, at the Committee level and otherwise. We who are by now "seasoned" attorneys have much to offer to law students who are approaching personal and professional crossroads. One such way is to provide them a forum in The Challenge, to let their voices be heard on law-related issues.

Whether you are a law student or

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know of one, please pass along our invitation to submit an article, short or lengthy, for publication in The Challenge. It is rewarding to see one's writing in print, and there is no end to the range of subjects of interest to our readers. We encourage you to submit articles directly via email to smbrazas@barrettandgilbert.com.

Profile of Judge Donald Wilkerson

By Jennifer Claire Sprague; Class of 2006; Southern Illinois University School of Law

Donald Wilkerson assumed his duties as magistrate judge for the United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois on January 4, bringing with him a wealth of experience from the classroom, the courtroom, and the local community.

A native of East St. Louis where the courthouse is located, Judge Wilkerson, 53, is the first African American to serve on the Southern District bench. In fact, he is the first minority of any sort among the district's judiciary; prior

to his appointment, every judge in the district was a white male.

That fact did not escape the attention of Chief District Judge Patrick Murphy. Although he stressed that the district was not specifically looking for an African American or a female judge to fill the position, Judge Murphy recognized that it is "important for the bench to reflect the makeup of the entire community."

Judge Wilkerson agrees, though he goes further, saying that *all public institutions* should reflect the makeup of the entire community. "It gives the community at large more confidence in the institution," he said. "Without confidence, the institution cannot exist."

Judge Wilkerson was one of 33 applicants for the position, which was vacated by the retirement of Magistrate Judge Gerald Cohn. Peter Alexander, dean of Southern Illinois University School of Law, was chair of



Judge Donald Wilkerson

the "clean" search committee—clean in the sense that no judges participated in the screening and no members of the committee were from any of the applicants' law offices. The 11-person committee reviewed the résumés over a three-month period, interviewed nine of the applicants, and recommended five to the judges of the Southern District. Judge Wilkerson was the unanimous choice.

Judge Wilkerson describes East St. Louis as a great place to grow up in the 1950s and 1960s, a city of hard-working individuals. While East St. Louis influenced his childhood, his parents had greater influence. He laughs as he reminisces, "They made me toe the line."

In 1973, Judge Wilkerson returned to East St. Louis after graduating from Illinois State University with a political science degree. He quickly became a favorite teacher at Clark Junior High School. Melissa Brooks, who is now a second-year law student at Southern Illinois University, was in Judge Wilkerson's pre-algebra class and remembers that he was a teacher all the students wanted to have. She says

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Judge Wilkerson left behind a legacy in East St. Louis schools. Brooks and her classmates were all disappointed when he left to pursue his legal career.

While always interested in law, Judge Wilkerson realized his dream of attending law school only after St. Louis University started its night program. He enrolled in SLU's second night class and graduated in 1993.

With a background in math, Judge Wilkerson initially thought he would be a tax attorney. After taking a real estate class, he thought he would pursue a career in real estate. While clerking one summer, he discovered that he enjoyed litigation. It was only after he began working in a civil litigation firm, however, that he got his first taste of white collar crime. There he found his niche. When the U.S. Attorney's Office in St. Louis expressed an interest in having him join their team, he quickly accepted.

At the U.S. Attorney's Office, Judge Wilkerson began prosecuting drug and gun cases and was the lead attorney in at least one carjacking trial. The last seven years of his nine-and-a-half-year career at the U.S. Attorney's Office were focused on white collar crimes, criminal civil rights violations, and child exploitation via the Internet.

Judge Murphy praised Judge Wilkerson as being "streetwise" and able to relate to people from all walks of life in his courtroom. In fact, Judge Murphy looked beyond Judge Wilkerson's résumé in search of recommendations. Coincidentally, a courthouse security officer was the former principal of an East St. Louis

school where Judge Wilkerson taught. His greatest compliment was that he could trust then-Coach Wilkerson with "his volleyball girls." When told of the story, Judge Wilkerson smiled and mentioned that some of those same athletes still contact him.

Judge Wilkerson has never focused on the hurdles facing him as a minority. "Everyone faces obstacles that they must overcome," he said. "Being a minority has just given me a different perspective." Keeping his qualities and skills in mind, he always believed his abilities would carry him far.

From his teaching and coaching experiences, Judge Wilkerson has dealt with "thousands of people [and] thousands of personalities." The invaluable understanding gained from teaching directly relates to his new career as a judge. "I have managed classrooms of 30, 35 people; I think I can manage a courtroom of five or 10," he said. "And I intend to manage my courtroom."

In an interview with the *Belleville News-Democrat*, Judge Wilkerson said that he wants "to bring competence, professionalism, and decorum to the bench." He plans to act as a role model by exhibiting those traits himself and insisting that those in his courtroom do so as well. "Everybody takes their lead from the judge," he explained.

JENNIFER CLAIRE SPRAGUE is a student in the Class of 2006 at Southern Illinois University School of Law in Carbondale. Law students are encouraged to submit articles to be considered for publication in this newsletter. Send them via e-mail to Susan Brazas, Editor, at smbrazas@barrettandgilbert.com.

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Office

Illinois Bar Center
424 S. 2nd Street
Springfield, IL 62701
Phones: (217) 525-1760 OR 800-252-8908

Web site: www.isba.org

Co-Editors

Vickie A. Gillio
Lowden Hall 305
DeKalb, IL 60115

Susan M. Brazas
P.O. Box 21
Rock City 61070

Managing Editor/Production

Katie Underwood
kunderwood@isba.org

Standing Committee on Minority & Women Participation

Jorge L. Montes, *Chair*
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Inspiring Women—Women Everywhere: Partners in Service gears up for 2005!

We are proud to announce that the Women Everywhere: Partners in Service Project, Inc. ("WE") is officially its own not-for-profit corporation effective this year! WE's initial Board of Directors includes Kimberly Anderson, Christine Athanasoulis, Honorable Jacqueline P. Cox, Sharon Eiseman (Founder), Michele Jochner, Margot Klein (Chair 2001-2004), Honorable Bertina Lampkin, Honorable Diane Larson, Gail H. Morse, Fox News Reporter

Nancy Pender, Pamela Schneider, Woon-Wah Siu, and Neera Walsh. Officers for 2004-2005 are Jeanne M. Reynolds, President (Co-Chair 2003-2005), Ellen M. Girard, Vice President (Co-Chair 2004-2006), and Mary Minella, Treasurer.

WE is a volunteer collective aimed at soliciting and coordinating volunteer activities on behalf of women and children in need. WE celebrates its sixth anniversary with our theme "Inspiring Women." Due to popular

demand, WE has expanded to two days: May 12, 2005 for presentation of its Educational Program for girls and young women in the Chicago area, and May 26, 2005 for our day of community service and outreach to local agencies helping women and children in need.

WE has an extensive Planning Committee of volunteers from its nine women's bar group partners, including the Black Women Lawyers Association of Greater Chicago, Inc.; Chicago Bar

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Association Alliance for Women; Chicago Bar Association Young Lawyers Section Women in the Law Committee; DuPage Association of Women Lawyers; Hadassah Attorneys Council; Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois' Latina Lawyers Committee; Illinois State Bar Association Minority and Women Participation Committee; Illinois State Bar Association Women and the Law Committee; and the Women's Bar Association of Illinois. The Chicago Bar Foundation serves as our fiscal partner. WE is grateful for the generosity, support and donations given each year by the numerous law firms in the area. The Planning Committee, Board of Directors, Officers and all of our volunteers are dedicated to improving

the community and inspiring women!

Through the various activities of the Women Everywhere: Partners in Service Project, approximately 400 volunteers participate in activities at community agencies or educational projects benefiting young women and girls. Nearly 30 community service agencies in several Illinois counties receive volunteer services through the project. Service activities are varied, ranging from direct service activities such as painting, gardening or spring cleaning projects, to tutoring and legal service activities, such as discussions on domestic violence and seminars on small business basics. The thrill of helping coordinate a successful clothing drive or a children's book collection for those who do not have those

luxuries, as well as appreciating the simple joy of a young child's smile or the many gifts women of all different walks of life have to offer, indeed feed the soul of the overworked and under-appreciated women attorneys who long to make a difference!

For all of those interested in building bridges or shaping young minds, please feel free to sign up for a few hours or the whole day. All who participate agree TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE! For more information or to sign-up to volunteer, contact Volunteer Committee Chair, Courtney A. Stevens of Jenner & Block LLP at cstevens@jenner.com or (312) 840-8621 or visit www.women-everywhere.org.

Join us for a tax day diversion! Lawyer's Workshop makes Downstate debut April 15

By Alice Noble-Allgire, Associate Professor, Southern Illinois University School of Law

A distinguished slate of Metro East lawyers and judges has been assembled for this year's Lawyer's Workshop, which is making its debut in downstate Illinois with a mix of "nuts and bolts" and "cutting edge" presentations on Family Law, Civil Discovery, Attorney Ethics and Federal Practice.

The Lawyer's Workshop will run from 8:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Friday, April 15, at the Collinsville Holiday Inn. The registration fee is \$25 for ISBA members who register by April 8 and \$30 after April 8. New admittees may attend for a reduced price of \$15 and all law students and legal services attorneys may attend for free. The registration includes all conference materials and a continental breakfast.

"This event offers participants an opportunity to learn from the most experienced and respected members of the bench and bar in southern Illinois," said Jorge Montes, chair of the Standing Committee on Minority and Women Participation. "We are very pleased to sponsor an event of this caliber at a fraction of the price of other CLE programs."

The Lawyer's Workshop has long been a staple of the ISBA's continuing legal education offerings in the Chicago area. The ISBA's Standing Committee on Minority and Women

Participation decided to move the event to Collinsville this year, however, as a way to build stronger connections with downstate lawyers.

Highlights of the program include:

Family Law (9 a.m. to 10 a.m.) – Two Madison County judges headline this panel. Associate Judge Janet R. Heflin will speak on "Preserving Your Right to Collect Attorney Fees" and Associate Judge Ellar Duff will discuss "Emergency Protection Orders and Crisis Assistance." Michael D. Shag of Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen in Edwardsville will give a timely presentation on "Proceeding Under the Soldiers' and Sailors' Relief Act."

Civil Discovery (10 a.m. to 11 a.m.) – Dennis Orsey, who has his own law offices in Granite City and serves on the ISBA's Board of Governors, will talk about "Discovery Violations and Contempt Actions – How to Deal with Delays in Discovery Compliance." Two other prominent area attorneys – Veronica Armouti of Sandberg, Phoenix, and von Gontard in St. Louis and Richard K. Hunsaker of Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen in Edwardsville – will present "A Basic Approach to Understanding Medical Discovery and HIPAA Regulations in Personal Injury and Health Care."

Ethics and Law (11:15 a.m. to

noon) – Peter L. Rotskoff, senior counselor with the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission in Springfield, will discuss four topical issues: Attorney-Client Relations; Avoiding the Pitfalls of Practice; Attorney Trust Funds – Managing Your Trust Account; and Incivility Can Cost You Your License.

Federal Court Practice – The newest member of the federal bench in southern Illinois will be joined by a veteran criminal defense attorney to discuss "The Basics of How to Practice in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois." Magistrate Judge Donald G. Wilkerson, who assumed his duties on the court on January 3, 2005, will talk about federal civil practice while John D. Stobbs II of the Stobbs Law Offices in East Alton addresses his specialty, criminal practice.

Missouri Bar MCLE credits will be available, including .9 hour of professionalism credit for the Ethics and Law program.

Space for the event is limited, so ISBA members are urged to register early. Registration forms are available on the ISBA's Web site (<http://www.isba.org/lawed/schedule.asp>) or by contacting Janet Sosin or Phyllis Lester at the ISBA's office at 312-726-8775 or 800-678-4009.

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