

## JUDICIAL BRANCH UPDATES



COTS is a Judicial Branch-wide initiative to create a computerized civil, criminal and financial case management system for all courts. The system will also interface with the computer systems used by many of the courts' justice partner agencies such as the police and the Department of Corrections. Judicial officers and court employees from all of the courts are closely involved in working with a commercial software vendor, Affiliated Computer Services, Inc. (ACS), to ensure that the system meets the needs of the Judicial Branch and that court employees will be well trained to use the new system. The COTS project will be implemented in several phases, with the first phase being the introduction of the civil case management system in the Justice of the Peace Court in Sussex County.

There are several highlights to report for FY 2005. The year began with the Core Team, comprised of representatives of all the courts and the Judicial Information Center, having ten weeks of intensive training in the ACS system. As a part of their training, they were tasked with identifying potential gaps in the system and with determining which of those gaps were critical to court operations. In many cases, it was determined that the gap could be filled by changing court processes. Such change can be difficult, but the courts worked together in an unprecedented way to do what is best for the Judiciary and for the citizens of Delaware. Both the Executive Steering Committee and the Operational Policy Committee became actively involved in reviewing the gaps and making the critical decisions needed to move the project forward.

A number of recommendations to streamline court processes and encourage uniformity across courts were put forward by the COTS

Working Committee and endorsed by the Executive Steering Committee and Operational Policy Committee. Many more recommendations are in the pipeline. All of these changes will make it easier for the courts to do business and for our justice partners and the public to do business with us.

Achievements this year have also included installation and configuration of COTS hardware and software; adoption of a new change management approach designed to increase users' comfort level; extensive training on the ACS system for the COTS training team; and completion of data conversion activities for Phase I (data conversion provides for the transfer of data from the old system to the new). In addition, work on critical project interfaces has continued, with the interface strategy document nearing completion.

During this year, a decision was made to implement the COTS project on the newest version of the ACS software – Contexte 5.0, which provides significant additional functionality and benefits. Although this will delay implementation of Phase I for approximately three months, it will allow us to implement all eight phases of the project on the same software version. Phase I is expected to be implemented at the end of September 2006.

The Judicial Branch is grateful to the General Assembly, which has agreed to provide the balance of the funding for the COTS project. This was accomplished by a \$5 million bond bill appropriation in FY 2006. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, there should not be a need to request additional funds.

The mission of the COTS project is to deliver an information system that will enable the Delaware Judiciary to fulfill its mission of providing a fair, efficient, effective, and prompt forum for the resolution of both criminal and civil matters brought before our courts. Much

work toward that goal remains, but with the continued commitment and support of many participants, the courts will be able to use their information system to help improve the quality of justice in Delaware and better serve its citizens.



## COURT EMPLOYEES HONORED

Two court employees received system-wide honors in FY 2005. Sarah “Jeannie” Jones

received the Judicial Employee of the Year award from Chief Justice on May 9, 2005. She was nominated for this award after being selected as the Justice of the Peace Court Employee of the Year for her success in running the DUI Court since it began in 2001. In his remarks, Chief Justice Steele praised Jeannie for “providing a valuable service to the Court maintaining the Sussex DUI caseload, developing innovative shortcuts and techniques to help with timely case processing, and being ready, willing and able to assist other courts as well as working well with others”. Chief Justice Steele also told Jeannie that “of equal importance is the exceptional public service you provide at all times, remaining cool and calm while dealing with difficult situations. This commitment to service is a tremendous asset to the Court and promotes a positive image of the judiciary to the citizens of Delaware.”



*Chief Justice Myron T. Steele presents Justice of the Peace Court Employee of the Year award to Jeannie Jones.*

In addition, Mary Katherine (Kris) Pritchett

received the Myrna Lomish Rubenstein Professional Support Recognition Award from the Delaware State Bar Association in a Law Day ceremony at the Hotel DuPont. Kris received the award for her work as a judicial secretary to Justice Randy J. Holland. In recognizing Kris’ achievement, Justice Holland stated: “Through her dedicated work, Kris has provided many years of service assisting me in managing my workload and chambers, as well as assisting in completing significant assignments outside of my usual case work such as helping me with numerous books and articles and work related to my service as President of the American Inns of Court Foundation. Through her indefatigable efforts, she has been an instrumental participant in my work both in private practice and during my service on the Supreme Court. Kris’ award is well-deserved and I, as well as the other members of the Supreme Court, are pleased that Kris’ contributions are being recognized by the Bar Association.”



*Kris Pritchett pictured with Justice Randy J. Holland after receiving the Myrna Lomish Rubenstein Professional Support Recognition Award*



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The judiciary's legislative team brings together representatives of the courts and the AOC to enhance the effectiveness of the Judicial Branch's relationship with the Legislature by serving as the main contact with them and by monitoring and analyzing legislation for impact on the Judicial Branch. The team also ensures that courts have current information during legislative sessions on the status of legislation affecting them. Members of the team for 2005 included: Justice Henry duPont Ridgely (Chair), President Judge James T. Vaughn, Jr., Judge William J. Walls, Jr., Judge Kenneth S. Clark, Jr., Judge Alan Davis (Chief Magistrate), Judge Edward Davis, Patricia W. Griffin (State Court Administrator), Mitzi Boddy, Franny M. Haney, Eleanor B. Torres, Esq. Michael McLaughlin, Deputy Director for Legislative Affairs at the Administrative Office of the Courts retired at the end of the last session. His extensive knowledge of the legislature and his contacts were invaluable.

The following legislation affecting the judicial branch was passed during FY 2005 by the 143<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly and has been enacted into law:

SB 61 - An Act Concurring in a proposed amendment to Article IV of the Delaware Constitution of 1897 to include the Family Court and Court of Common Pleas as courts established by the Constitution of the State of Delaware and Articles III and IV of the State of Delaware to delete references to the Orphan's Court.

SB 52 - An Act to amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code relating to Expungement of Truancy Records.

SB 63 - An Act to amend Title 21 of the Delaware Code relating to Civil Penalties.

SB 82 - An Act to amend Title 11 of the Delaware Code concerning the Sequestration of Alternate Jurors in Capitol Punishment Cases.

SB 84 - An Act to amend Title 11 and Title 16 of the Delaware Code to bring Periods of Probation for First Offenders into conformity with Senate Bill 50. (Senate Bill 50- implemented on 5/31/2003)

SB 142 -An Act to amend Title 11 of the Delaware Code relating to the use of Force in Law Enforcement.

SB 150 - An Act amending Title 12 of the Delaware Code relating to Wills and Trusts.

SB 152 - An Act to amend Title 13 of the Delaware Code relating to Child Support Enforcement.

SB 200 - An Act to amend Title 10 of the Delaware Code relating to the Crime of Robbery.

SB 217 -An Act to amend Title 29 of the Delaware Code relating to Real Property Acquisition and the Exercise of Eminent Domain.

HB 63 - An Act to amend Title 21 of the Delaware Code relating to Learner's Permits.

HB 86 - An Act to amend Title 11 of the Delaware Code relating to a Pilot Program for Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitoring.

HB 92 - An Act to amend Chapter 23, Title 11 of the Delaware Code relating to Seizures and Forfeitures in Criminal Cases.

HB 100- An Act to amend Title 10 of the Delaware Code relating to Jurisdiction over certain Criminal matters.

# ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

## Authorization and Functions

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) was established in 1971 pursuant to 10 *Del.C.* § 128. The function of the office is to assist the Chief Justice in carrying out the responsibilities as administrative head of the Delaware courts.

The AOC provides a wide variety of support services to the courts, ranging from assisting in policy development, to offering technology assistance to providing day-to-day support services. Among its services are:

- **Judicial education and staff training** - works with individual courts and the Judicial Conference as a whole, sponsors educational programs for all Delaware judges and commissioners. The AOC also provides training for court employees on a variety of topics including technology-related training.
- **Budget and accounting assistance** - coordinates the development of the Judicial Branch budget, monitors spending, and works with the Office of Management and Budget to resolve problems. The AOC also provides accounting services to the Supreme Court and judicial branch agencies.
- **Support services for the New Castle County Courthouse.** The AOC is responsible for operating the information desk, the filing and payments center and the mail room for the Courthouse. In addition, the AOC provides coordination services relating to the Courthouse such as staffing the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee, the Security Operations Committee, and the New Castle County Courthouse Art Committee. Another related function is working with Facilities Management to resolve ongoing issues.
- **Management of the New Castle County Courthouse Self Help Center** - operates the self-help center located in the New Castle County Courthouse which assists unrepresented litigants. This includes recruiting and training attorney and law student volunteers who assist in the Center. Over 16,000 persons were assisted by the Center in FY 2005.
- **Administration of the statewide court interpreter program** provides interpreters in all languages, as well as for hearing impaired persons.
- **Court security and safety coordination** - is coordinating with the U.S. Marshal's Service for security reviews of courthouses statewide and follow-up planning, and is developing and implementing safety plan for New Castle County Courthouse.
- **Human resources assistance** - assists with a variety of human resources issues including coordinating career ladder applications, position reclassifications and establishments, as well as policy issues.
- **Research and analysis** - coordinates the production of the annual report of the Judicial Branch and maintains statistics relating to the courts and their caseloads.
- **Policy coordination/development and staffing of committees concerning issues affecting the courts** - for example, works on bail issues in conjunction with courts and the Department of Insurance, coordinates revisions to records retention schedules
- **Legislative coordination** - serves on the Judicial Branch's legislative team, provides legislative session updates on activities of the Legislature, and prepares legislative summaries of signed legislation relating to the courts.
- **Technology coordination** - assists in the coordination of technology-related projects, including the COTS integrated case management program that is currently under development.
- **Technology problem solving** - administers the Helpdesk function for technology problems experienced by court users.
- **Web site assistance** - supports development and maintenance of websites for courts and judicial branch agencies.
- **Business analysis, program development, and data integration/administration for technology-related initiatives.**
- **Statewide collections enforcement** - using a variety of State and private sector sanctions, collects court-ordered financial assess-

ments including restitution, statutory surcharges, fines, and court costs.

While the primary focus of the AOC is on service to the courts, it also provides fiscal and administrative services to several non-judicial agencies, many of whom receive policy direction and oversight from boards and governing bodies outside the judicial branch. These agencies are: the Office of the Public Guardian; the Violent Crimes Compensation Board; Child Placement Review Board; Educational Surrogate Parent Program; Office of the Child Advocate; Child Death, Near Death and Still Birth Commission; and the Delaware Nursing Home Residents Quality Assurance Commission.

## STRUCTURE

To fulfill its responsibilities, the AOC is divided into three components: the Office of the State Court Administrator, the Judicial Information Center (JIC) and the Office of State Court Collections Enforcement (OSCCE).

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In February 2005, former Chief Magistrate Patricia W. Griffin became State Court Administrator. Under her leadership, the Administrative Office of the Courts has initiated a strategic planning process to identify ways in which it can better serve the Courts and the public. The three offices which comprise the Administrative Office of the Courts are working together to

continue improving existing services efforts and to implement new initiatives.

With heightened concern nationwide regarding security in court facilities, the Office of the State Court Administrator has focused particular attention on this critical issue. It has worked with the U.S. Marshal's Service to arrange for security reviews of State courthouses and has begun the process of working with the courts to address the recommendations resulting from these reviews. In addition, the AOC has worked with the U.S. Marshal's Service to provide security awareness education for judicial officers.

The COTS case management system has been a major focus of the Judicial Information Center, which has provided extensive staff support to the COTS initiative. In addition to the demands of the COTS project, the JIC has continued to support the technology needs of the courts, including providing webcasting and audiovisual capabilities for the high-profile, nationally viewed Disney trial in the Court of Chancery in Sussex County.

Last, but not least, the Office of State Court Collections Enforcement has been focusing efforts on becoming a one-stop judicial financial center and continuing its growth in collections. Since Fiscal Year 2000 the initiatives undertaken by OSCCE have led to a 97.5% growth in collections on behalf of the courts with collections flowing through OSCCE in FY 2005 exceeding \$3.6 million.



New Castle County Courthouse—Goodnough artwork, installed in November 2005