

**MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT JUDGE RIDGELY  
FISCAL YEAR 1996**

**The Court converted its case management process from a master calendar system to an individual calendar assignment system for all civil cases. All civil cases, including appeals, are assigned to a specific judge on the day they are filed.**

**The assigned judge is responsible thereafter for conducting all proceedings and for resolving all case management issues up to the time of disposition. The individual assignment system will ensure continuity within cases, whereas previously several judges may have been involved, at different times, in the same case. This change is supported by members of the Bar and was a recommendation of the Commission on Delaware Courts 2000. The long-term expectation is that individual assignment will result in increased compliance with disposition standards for civil cases.**

**Delaware became the first state with a statewide Drug Court operation. With support from a federal grant, the Drug Court program established in New Castle County in 1994 was expanded to Kent and Sussex Counties. U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno visited Delaware in September 1995 to announce the grant and to showcase Superior Court's innovative Drug Court program. The downstate Drug Court program will increase compliance with the Chief Justice's Speedy Trial standard.**

**Final plea offers, another feature of the Drug Court program in New Castle County, were incorporated into the management of criminal cases in Kent and Sussex Counties. Deadlines for plea agreements are set prior to the trial date in all cases to reduce the cost to the public, to keep police officers on the street and to minimize inconvenience to jurors and witnesses.**

**The Court began to apply some of the case management techniques developed in the Drug Court to non-drug cases with the formation of a property offenders diversion program. This program, also supported by federal funds, promotes victim-offender reconciliation and focuses on the repayment of restitution to the victim.**

**The Court initiated Excellence in Court Service, a Total Quality Management (TQM) program. A TQM Advisory Team representing all departments and counties was formed, and training sessions were conducted for all Court employees. From these training sessions, a list of more than 120 ideas for**

**improvements to court operations was developed. Several projects have already been completed. They include: promoting increased communication among departments by providing E-mail access to all employees; issuing a dress code to stress the importance of presenting a professional appearance to our customers; and developing a directory of court employees with a description of each employee's job duties to help all employees direct inquiries and telephone calls to the appropriate person without unnecessary confusion and delay. The Team also facilitated the selection of a new mission statement of the Court.**

**The Court now conducts involuntary commitment hearings on the grounds of the Delaware State Hospital. Previously, they were held in the Herrmann Courthouse. The benefits include elimination of expenses related to transporting patients to the courthouse, increased security and convenience and the ability to have hearings conducted in a familiar, non-threatening environment. Also, follow-up status hearings related to involuntary commitments are now conducted in all counties. Formerly, Kent and Sussex County patients and medical personnel were required to travel to New Castle County for these hearings.**

**The Court reduced the term of service for jury duty in Kent and Sussex counties from one month to two weeks. A shorter term reduces the burden of jury duty on Delaware citizens and increases the number of citizens who participate in the judicial process.**