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Justice of the Peace Court Marks 60th Anniversary with Gala Dinner

Celebration held for employees and guests in Dover

Capping off a year of events, the Delaware Justice of the Peace Court closed out its 60th year celebrations with a gala dinner and reception for court employees and invited guests on Monday evening at King Cole Farm Dover.

Nearly 200 employees, judicial officers and guests attended. Justice of the Peace Court Administrator Liz Petrick acted as emcee and the program featured remarks by Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr., Governor Matt Meyer, State Sen. Darius J. Brown and Justice of the Peace Court Chief Magistrate Alan Davis. “The Justice of the Peace Court is the bedrock of Delaware’s criminal and civil justice systems,” said Chief Magistrate Davis. “No other state has a true entry-level court that has as meaningful jurisdiction or plays such an integral part within the state court system. We are proud of our heritage but always have our eyes on the future.”

Following dinner and speakers, the evening concluded with music, photos and sitting around fire pits.

While the Justice of the Peace Court can trace its roots back to England and America’s colonial past in the 1600s, the modern court marked its start in 1965-66, when it joined the Delaware State Court system by an act of the Delaware Legislature. Prior to joining the state court system, Justice of the Peace Court magistrates were paid entirely through the fines they imposed and courtrooms were not standard, with proceedings sometimes held in a kitchen, garage or on a porch. The legislation to bring the court into the state system was signed in March 1965, and the court began operations in January 1966 with new, more professional standards, policies and courtrooms. The court’s first official case was a guilty plea to a traffic charge – running a stop sign – resulting in a \$17 penalty.

The Justice of the Peace Court currently has the largest number of court locations of any of Delaware’s six courts – 12 – the largest number of judicial officers – 62 – and the largest number of filings and dispositions – 242,876 filings and 259,294 dispositions in Fiscal Year 2026. In keeping with the court’s roots and tradition of acting as “a middle ground” between the citizens and the courts, judicial officers (with the exception of the Chief Magistrate) do not have to be attorneys, but rather citizens with “good sense and integrity.” The modern court, however, does train its magistrates on the law and legal procedures. The court is also the only state court that keeps a court open 24/7, 365 days a year.