



**MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL
BRANCH**

First Judicial District

Mission: To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

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The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle nearly 200,000 cases annually in the counties of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley.

The First Edition

A Newsletter about the First Judicial District of the State of Minnesota

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Minnesota Chief Justice Visits First Judicial District

By Brian E. Jones, Assistant District Administrator



continue to strive for “adequate funding for the entire justice system”. He was thankful that the Legislature recognized the critical importance of the justice system to all Minnesotans. However, the Chief thinks the courts must continue with ongoing efforts to evaluate how to further streamline its work without degrading further the services that we provide. Technological advances such as echarging, e-filing, e-citations, as well as a centralized court

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Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice, Eric Magnuson, was in the First Judicial District in March 2010 to talk with local judges and court staff. He visited courthouses in Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, McLeod, and Scott Counties over the course of two days.

Chief Justice Magnuson did not come to make a speech or promote some new initiative, but rather to meet with and listen to the people who do the day-to-day work of the Judicial Branch. He was genuinely interested in learning firsthand about the concerns and challenges judicial branch employees have in this difficult economic environment and he took this opportunity to thank them for their hard work and dedication.

Chief Justice Magnuson noted that the courts will

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payment center are tools that must be implemented to keep up with shrinking resources and meet the needs of citizens.

The Chief has visited all of the judicial districts during his tenure and they are well received by judges and court staff. After two years as Minnesota's Supreme Court Chief Justice, Eric Magnuson recently announced that he will be leaving the bench on June 30, 2010 to return to private practice.



Chief Justice Magnuson visited with Goodhue County court staff



First District Administrator Involved in Business End of Judicial System

When Jerry Winter enrolled at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, he strongly considered becoming a lawyer. He changed his mind about that career, but remained closely connected to the judicial field.

For the past 25 years, Winter, 60, a Hastings resident, has been First Judicial District Administrator. The main offices are in the Dakota County Judicial Center in Hastings. The



Jerry Winter

First District includes the counties of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott, and Sibley. There are 36 judges in the district. Minnesota has 10 judicial districts, ranging in size from one county – Ramsey or Hennepin – to 17 in the Ninth Judicial District.

As First Judicial District Administrator, Winter handles the business management of court operations across the seven counties and supervises county court administrators.

“My duties run the whole gamut from management of personnel, budgets, case flow management, to scheduling, facilities, and security,” he said. “I get involved in new legislation when it is proposed and presented to the Legislature, and when it is implemented.”

Winter grew up in Wausau, Wisconsin and graduated from high school there. He graduated from Luther College with degrees in psychology and political science and came to the Twin Cities, where he worked for two years.

In the 1974, he attended graduate school at the Denver University College of Law and

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The First Out Front In DWI Breath Test Litigation

Each year in Minnesota over 40,000 people are charged with driving while impaired. The reliability of the breath testing machine used by most law enforcement agencies in Minnesota to measure whether individuals are driving while impaired has been subject to litigation since 2006 based upon possible defects in the computer code that operates the machine. This litigation included complicated issues related to whether the manufacturer of the breath testing machine must allow the examination of the computer code by persons charged with driving while impaired so they can determine whether there are any errors in the computer code that affected the reliability of their breath test results. There have been two appeals to the Minnesota Supreme Court and a



Judge Jerome Abrams

federal district court case that decided that the computer code must be made available for examination by experts to determine whether the computer code is defective.

Now that the examination of the computer code has been ordered, many people charged with driving while impaired or facing revocation of their driver's license for failing a breath test have requested the opportunity to have experts examine the code and are entitled to a hearing to have a judge decide whether any defects in the computer code affected the reliability of their test result. Over 500 hearings have been requested in the First District alone. Because of the number of hearings, the complexity of the technology involved in the hearing, the cost to the litigants of hiring experts to appear at multiple hearings and the strain on judicial resources to hear

all these cases, the First District consolidated all of these cases and assigned them to be heard by First District Judge Jerome Abrams.

Judge Abrams has issued orders to control and manage this litigation so the disputed facts and the expert testimony can be presented at one hearing that would decide the issues for all the people challenging the test results. This consolidation will save litigants hundreds of thousands of dollars in litigation expenses and will save the court thousands of hours of judge and staff time to hear these cases.

The consolidation of these cases in the First District and Judge Abrams' management of these cases received such favorable reception from litigants and judges in other judicial districts that on January 11, 2010 the Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court issued an order consolidating all similar cases throughout Minnesota for hearing before Judge Abrams.

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earned a master's degree in judicial administration. He was employed by the Supreme Court in Salem, Oregon for five years. In 1980, he came back to Minnesota and became administrator for the Fifth Judicial District in the southwest part of the state.

"At one time, I wanted to be a lawyer," Winter said. "There were several reasons why I

didn't enter the field. One, there were a whole lot of people going into law. Plus, one of my professors at Luther College mentioned a new alternative program that was beginning – judicial administration; I liked the idea," he said.

"Funding the courts has been, and will continue to be, challenging as the State of Minnesota faces another expected budget short-

fall. The district is running efficiently – some management positions have been combined and others might be in the future", noted Winter.

Winter enjoys coming to work each day. "Every day is different. It is never boring here with the issues and personalities you encounter," he said.



eCharging Provides Important Link

By Jen Cullen—Red Wing Republican Eagle

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Goodhue County prosecutors, law enforcement and court officials began operating last week on a pilot program that will electronically connect the agencies and save them time and money.

The eCharging system, created and paid for by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, helps link each agency's records-storing systems so charging and DWI data, messages, approvals and attachments can be passed between law enforcement, prosecutors, state agencies and the courts.

Officials say the link will save time and money because data won't have to be entered multiple times and files and information will not be hand-delivered, faxed or sent through the mail.

"We should be able to do this with criminal justice information because Target can do it with socks," Goodhue County Attorney Stephen Betcher said.

Goodhue County is one of about 10 currently using the eCharging system.

Goodhue County Court Administrator Yvonne Black said the new system will be especially helpful in her department, where clerks had to manually enter information already created electronically by law enforcement officers and the attorney's office.

Because each agency's electronic records-keeping systems weren't linked, paper copies were printed off and either hand-delivered or faxed between depart-

ments so officials could enter the information in their own system.

State and local officials say the inefficient system meant a lot of unnecessary travel, paper, legwork and duplicate data entry that left room for error or even information getting lost.

"It seems like pretty basic stuff but there's a lot of paper that moves through the system with a person," Betcher said.

Betcher said each agency's records-keeping system works well but there was one piece missing — a common interface, a link between all the systems.

"eCharging should give us more bang for our buck in investments we've already made," Betcher said. "It's a real enhancement to what we already have."

The electronic system allows officials to see who has a document, what action is pending and what items they must work on.

People connected to the system receive electronic notifications when a step has been completed.

"It's exciting for us," said Gail Jungclaus, senior deputy clerk.

Court and law enforcement officials will also be transitioning to eCitations in the next few months.

The system allows an officer to swipe a driver's license on an in-car unit so the person's name and other information is automatically populated. Officers can print

out a ticket, which is electronically sent to the courts so clerks do not have to manually enter the information from a paper ticket.

On average, between 10,000 and 12,000 tickets each year have been manually entered by Goodhue County court staff, Jungclaus said.

"We're working on all these efficiencies because everyone is low on money now," Black said. "We're trying to be more efficient. All these things will help."

Oral Arguments Scheduled at New Prague High School

The Minnesota Supreme Court has announced that it will hear oral arguments at New Prague High School in New Prague, MN, on Tuesday, May 11, 2010. More than 600 New Prague area students will fill the school auditorium to watch oral arguments. The visit is part of a biannual program that seeks to teach students about the work of the state's highest court while building the public's trust and confidence in the Judicial Branch.

Since the Supreme Court convened oral arguments in Rochester, MN in 1995, the school visits have taken center stage in the Court's efforts to improve public understanding of the judiciary's work. The New Prague High School visit marks the 31st in-school oral argument for the Court.



Jury System Improvements

By Kathie LaCosse, Court Operations Analyst

In July 2008, the Minnesota Judicial Branch undertook three major jury management technology projects to reduce operating costs, and make improvements for jurors and to the statewide jury management system

- **Consolidate 89 disparate jury management databases into a single statewide database;**
- **Implement a Web Solution service that allows prospective jurors to complete and return their qualification questionnaires on-line; and**
- **Automate and outsource juror summons printing, processing and mailing.**

The overall objectives of the projects were to:

- **Implement more efficient means to maintain and update the statewide jury system for court staff;**
- **Standardize jury processes and practices statewide, including juror summons/qualification questionnaires, notices and forms;**
- **Reduce labor intensity and costs to accomplish technical maintenance and system updates for district and state IT staff and jury system vendor;**
- **Improve statewide access to jury data and statistical reporting capabilities on county, district and statewide levels;**
- **Reduce staff time by improving/automating end-of-day, jury payroll and juror summoning processes;**
- **Improve access and juror experience by making completion of an on-line qualification questionnaire easy and convenient to use;**
- **Reduce manual data entry for court staff by automating juror responses to on-line qualification questionnaire to qualify jurors for eligibility and prompt notices; and**
- **Improve on-line information for jurors by launching a new website for the on-line qualification questionnaire and a 'clickable' map to each court location.**

These three projects entailed a statewide implementation effort, but their success can primarily be attributed to the efforts of State Court

Administration staff (Court Services and Information Technology Divisions) and the Jury Management Resources Team (JMRT) (a workgroup of jury representatives from each of the State's ten Judicial Districts formed in 1999 to address issues related to the jury management system and operations). They drove project timelines and worked together to achieve all of the objectives listed above and more.

The work on these technology projects entailed coordinating project details with three outside vendors, jury representatives from 89 court locations, court management team leaders at the state, district, and county levels, state funding sources, state and district IT staff, and legal staff under a very aggressive timeline (October 2008 – June 2009). In addition, the implementation of a single statewide database meant that much of the business process of jury management had to change to support the uniform methods of data processing that would be available in the system. The JMRT provided extraordinary leadership in working through these business process issues and obtaining from the county-level jury managers buy in and agreement to the proposed changes. Due to the efforts of all involved, all three projects were delivered on time and within budget.

As a result of these projects, jury management within the Minnesota Judicial Branch are more efficient and user friendly for prospective jurors. For example, jurors now have the ability to answer their questionnaires online if desired. Presently, approximately 60 percent of the jury responses in Hennepin County are now being completed online.

These projects have also positioned the Branch to make other innovations, such as centralizing jury management at the district level so that one jury manager can perform work for multiple counties.

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