

Supreme Court of Missouri

News Release

Judges, lawyers, legislators honored for
advancing administration of justice in Missouri

15 September 2022

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – At an annual ceremony honoring service to Missouri and the state’s judiciary, five judges, two lawyers and eight legislators were honored for their contributions to protecting and improving the effective administration of justice in Missouri. The ceremony was held Thursday morning, September 15, 2022, as part of the annual meeting of the Judicial Conference of Missouri, the organization of all the state’s judges, in Springfield.

Chief Justice Paul Wilson presented five chief justice awards to recognize individuals “who serve the judiciary diligently and with integrity, who lead by example, and who help to provide the citizens of Missouri with the quality of justice they demand and deserve.”

Receiving the civic education award was Judge Jason Brown, a circuit judge in the 31st Judicial Circuit (Greene County) and former chair of the Supreme Court of Missouri’s civic education committee. Wilson praised Brown’s “tireless” work, “energetic leadership and valuable new insight ... in his passionate pursuit” to “enhance the public’s understanding of the role Missouri’s courts play and the fair and impartial justice we seek to provide.”

Wilson awarded the Honorable Clifford Ahrens Excellence in Technical Advancements Award to Judge Joel Fahnestock, a circuit judge in the 16th Judicial Circuit (Jackson County) who chairs the Missouri Court Automation Committee’s implementation task team. He praised her “unique blend of gentle persuasion and steely resolve” to lead the rollout of new technology features of the statewide case management system and noting “she is universally admired and respected by the judges, lawyers and clerks on [the committee] and around the state – very simply, we’d be sunk without her.”

Receiving the award for outstanding service as an associate circuit judge or commissioner was Judge Leslie Schneider, a longtime associate circuit judge in Boone County (in the 13th Judicial Circuit). Wilson described “how knowledgeable she is, the sophisticated manner in which she presides over the courtroom, and the honesty and integrity she brings to her work on family law cases” and singled out for praise “her deep commitment to the work and the deep compassion she has for those who find themselves before her, especially children.”

Wilson presented the next award – honoring judicial excellence by a circuit judge – to Judge Steven Ohmer, a longtime circuit judge in the 21st Judicial Circuit (St. Louis County) and longtime chair of the state’s circuit court budget committee. Wilson said, “Judge Ohmer is quite

simply an outstanding judge. He possesses – and displays – all the traits one could ask for in a jurist. He has a keen intellect, a deep commitment to the work, and compassion for those who appear in front of him.” Wilson also praised Ohmer’s willingness to take on extraordinarily difficult yet important committee assignments, in not only his long service to the circuit court budget committee but also his more recent service on the circuit realignment task force.

Wilson presented the award for judicial excellence on an appellate court to Judge Karen King Mitchell, a judge on the Missouri Court of Appeals, Western District. Noting her “entire legal career has been an expression of her deep commitment to public service,” Wilson praised her as “a brilliant jurist,” her leadership roles on the judicial education committee and civil rules committee, and her “bottomless” depth of patience.

Wilson also presented an award for demonstrated excellence in increasing access to justice to retired Judge Joe Dandurand, who, as its executive director, guided Legal Services of Western Missouri through the worst of the pandemic while increasing the scope of its work and “mentored another generation of lawyers in the right way to practice law.” During his prior judicial career, Dandurand served as presiding judge of the 17th Judicial Circuit (Cass and Johnson counties) and as a judge of the Western District appeals court.

Finally, Wilson presented Cape Girardeau attorney John William Grimm, outgoing president of The Missouri Bar, with the newly renamed Maurice B. Graham Award.

“The Court named the award after St Louis attorney Maurice Graham in recognition of his exemplary service to the Bar and Judiciary,” Wilson explained. He praised Grimm’s leadership in renewing the focus on mental health and wellness and in reenergizing the Bar’s commitment to civic education. He noted Grimm was a circuit judge in the 32nd Judicial Circuit (Bollinger, Cape Girardeau and Perry counties) before returning the private practice of law.

Grimm then presented, on behalf of The Missouri Bar, its Theodore McMillian Judicial Excellence Award to Judge Joseph L. Hensley, an associate circuit judge and the presiding juvenile judge in Jasper County (in the 29th Judicial Circuit). The award recognizes jurists who, by virtue of their integrity, leadership and diligence in the pursuit of the efficient administration of justice, inspire other members of the judiciary to similar noble purpose.

The Judicial Conference also recognized eight legislators for their efforts to protect and promote a fair, efficient and independent judiciary:

- Senator Sandy Crawford, R-Buffalo;
- Senator Dan Hegeman, R-Cosby;
- Senator Lincoln Hough, R- Springfield;
- Senator Barbara Washington, D-Kansas City;
- Representative Bruce DeGroot, R-Ellisville;
- Representative Curtis Trent, R-Springfield; and
- Representative Rudy Veit, R-Wardsville.

In addition, Supreme Court of Missouri Judge Zel M. Fischer – president of the National Courts and Sciences Institute – recognized the six Missouri judges who were part of a group of 64 judges nationally who have been certified as science and technology resource judges with a specialization in health care outcomes research evidence related to the case management and evidence adjudication of issues emanating from the COVID pandemic. Those certified from Missouri are:

- Judge Robin Ransom, a judge on the Supreme Court of Missouri;
- Judge Cory L. Atkins, a circuit judge in the 16th Judicial Circuit (Jackson County);
- Judge Michael J. Cordonnier, presiding judge of the 31st Judicial Circuit (Greene County);
- Senior Judge Deborah Daniels, a retired associate circuit judge from Boone County (in the 13th Judicial Circuit);
- Judge Timothy J. Flook, a circuit judge in the 7th Judicial Circuit (Clay County); and
- Judge Ryan W. Horsman, presiding judge of the 43rd Judicial Circuit (Caldwell, Clinton, Daviess, DeKalb and Livingston counties).

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