

Dougherty Circuit Bar Association

Dougherty Bar Bulletin

James H. Moore, III, President
Nancy S. Stephenson, President-Elect
Kimberly Reid, Secretary-Treasurer
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Judge Debra Bernes Speaks at Bar's Annual Meeting



The Honorable Debra Bernes of the Georgia Court of Appeals said that as a former trial lawyer oral argument is important in deciding cases that come before the Court. Speaking at the June 29, Annual Meeting of the Dougherty Circuit Bar, Judge Bernes urged lawyers to keep their briefs simple, concise, and accurate, and to make sure they include citations to the record.

As the newest Judge elected to the Court of Appeals she expects to be personally responsible for

drafting up to 350 opinions each year for her three member panel. Draft opinions and the record of each case on appeal pass among the members of the Court's judicial panels in small wheeled carts. Panel judges review the record and draft opinion and indicate their agreement, concurrence, or dissent. In the event of a dissent, the case passes to another panel plus a fourth judge for their review of the draft opinion.

Judge Bernes told bar members she appreciated getting to know her colleague Judge Herb Phipps of Albany, whose office adjoins hers.

Judge Nancy S. Stephenson, and Tom Langstaff are 2005-2006 President and President-Elect

Dougherty County Probate Judge Nancy S. Stephenson will succeed Jim Moore as President of the Dougherty Circuit Bar Association, when the new bar year begins September 1st. The Annual Meeting elections saw Tom Langstaff elected to the position of President-Elect. Kimberly Reid was re-elected as Secretary-Treasurer. A possible Dougherty Bar Lawyer Referral Service, and rejuvenation of the local High School Mock Trial are just some of

the matters the Dougherty Circuit Bar's officers and members will be working on in the upcoming year. Tom Langstaff will chair the bar's Law Day 2006 program. Our association provides many opportunities to give back to the community and the profession. Please contact Judge Stephenson and let her know of your willingness to serve on one of the Dougherty Circuit Bar's committees this year.

Newest Supreme Court Justice to Address Dougherty Bar on August 31st

Justice Harold Melton will be our speaker on Wednesday, August 31, 2005. Don't miss this chance to meet and hear from Georgia's newest Supreme Court Justice at noon at Merry Acres.

Mark Your Calendars

Wednesday, October 26, 2005 at noon - Dougherty Circuit Bar meeting at Merry Acres.

Friday, December 9, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. - Dougherty Circuit Bar Christmas Party at the Shakelford House.

Getting To Know Your Dougherty Bar Officers - The Hon. Nancy S. Stephen- son, President

Nancy Smith Stephenson has been judge of the probate court since 1993. A native of Tifton who obtained ABJ and JD degrees at the University of Georgia, she has been living in Albany since 1983. She practiced law in two local firms after first working as a staff attorney for Georgia Legal Services and then serving as an assistant district attorney under Hobart Hind. She is married to John Stephenson, a partner at Watson, Spence, Lowe and Chambliss, and they have two teen-aged sons.

Stephenson is a member of the First United Methodist Church and serves on the boards of directors for the Albany Community Hospice and the S.O.W.E.G.A. Council on Aging. She is also a member of the Georgia Probate Judges Training Council, and serves on the Commission for Court Interpreters.

Married to a litigator and living with two members of the high school debate team, Stephenson says she sometimes becomes fatigued with argumentative attorneys, but endeavors to maintain a calm demeanor. Also, since many attorneys are infrequently involved in probate work, she has no problem with answering questions about procedure.

Probate Court Of- fers New Guardian- ship Forms

Judge Stephenson is making copies of the new guardianship forms available, including those needed to compromise disputed claims of minors pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 29-3-3. There have been several important changes in this area, including a modification in the minimum amount of a claim requiring court approval. To oversimplify, if the gross amount of the settlement is more than \$15,000.00 but the net amount is less than \$15,000.00, a petition seeking approval by the natural guardian will be required. If both gross and net settlement amounts exceed \$15,000.00, a petition for the appointment of a conservator will be needed. Where the gross settlement amount is less than \$15,000.00, no court approval will be necessary.

Forms for both minor and adult guardianships and conservatorships will be available either at the probate court or on-line, at www.gaprobate.org.

Mock Trial Scholar- ship Proposal

To encourage participation in the High School Mock Trial program, the Executive Committee of the Dougherty Circuit Bar proposes awarding a \$1,000.00 scholarship to the winner of the Best Attorney award at the 2006 Mock Trial Regional Competition in Albany. A vote on this proposal will be held at our October 26th meeting.

Positions Wanted

Brent Dorner, 265 Brenda Ln, Albany, GA, 31707, (229-347-3547), bdorner13@yahoo.com, August 2005 graduate of Troy University in Political Science is seeking workplace experience and knowledge in a political or legal setting before beginning his pursuit of a degree in law in August 2006.

A friend has called and wants to find a part time job for a college junior at ASU as a runner or clerical worker. If anyone has an interest let me know and I'll put you in touch with them. Ken Hodges 431-3233

Mock Trial Coaches and Committee Members Needed

Local schools have expressed their interest in fielding High School Mock Trial teams this year. They need local attorneys to serve as coaches. Volunteer lawyer-coaches and those who would like to be on the committee coordinating this important community project should contact Judge Nancy Stephenson (431-2102 or email nssprobate@netscape.net).