

L a w y e r

Winter 2020

A Publication of the Mercer County Bar Association

Volume 39, Issue 1

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Save the date:

Upcoming Events

Xtreme CLE is scheduled for October 15, 2020



From the President's Desk.....

I am honored to serve the Mercer County Bar Association as its 81st president this year. We are already off to a fantastic start in the first month and there's plenty more to come. Together with the dedicated group of attorneys making up your bar leadership, President-Elect Tanya Phillips, Vice President Michael Kahme, Treasurer Margaret Chipowsky and Secretary Jennifer Zoschak, we are invested in the future of this association.

Speaking of the future, we installed a talented group of trustees this year, in Ayesha K. Hamilton, Katie Mae Magee, Bryan M. Roberts, Frank P. Spada and Sam C. Toma and I look forward to working with them all this year and seeing where they take the MCBA in the years to come.

I want to thank Executive Director Samantha Iraca and the staff of the Mercer County Bar Association for organizing an Installation Dinner that my family, my partners, and I will never forget. The Trenton Country Club, as always, put together an excellent event, the food was delicious and the Guinness on tap was a crowd pleaser!

I know I speak for all of the officers and trustees when I say it was a true distinction to have the Hon. Kay Walcott-Henderson, J.S.C., administer the oath of office and swearing in to the 2020 officers and trustees. The Mercer County Bar Association remains fortunate to have the support of our Judiciary – together with many talented lawyers from both the public and private sector, spanning a wide array of practices and firm sizes, this is a special organization to be a part of.

Rob Bratman's gracious introduction was a highlight of the evening for my family, my firm and me, Rob truly demonstrated what it means when I tell people that my friends, colleagues and mentors at Stark & Stark are like family – thank you Rob! I would also like to thank my good friend Nick Travisano for emceeding the event, it's no easy task but Nick



James L. Creegan, Esq.

handled it with aplomb and kept all in attendance entertained.

Thank you to our sponsors. Your support is greatly appreciated and vital to the MCBA. Likewise, it is equally important that our members consider utilizing the services of the companies, professionals and friends that support the MCBA.

I am excited for the coming year, as we will focus our efforts toward Diversity & Inclusion. This is a vital long-term initiative that involves member outreach, education, social events and building lasting ties with statewide Affinity Bar Associations with a presence in Mercer County and Central Jersey. An Association that is representative of the diverse members of our legal community in both its makeup and mindset will thrive for years to come.

First up, the 20th Annual Bench Bar Luncheon, on March 19, 2020 at the Trenton Country Club. An important aspect of our growth as an Association is to listen to and learn from our members' and colleagues' experience, only by remaining engaged can we continue to improve. MCBA Trustee Ayesha Hamilton has agreed to moderate a CLE

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Lawyer

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program that will feature a distinguished and diverse panel of Judges and lawyers, discussing their career experiences, including obstacles, their path to success and how we as attorneys can act as upstanders. Ayesha moderated the State Bar's Bias and Micro-Aggression CLE that President-Elect Tanya Phillips and I attended on January 15, 2020. We are thrilled to have such a talented attorney and educator moderate the panel featuring: Hon. Janetta Marbrey, J.S.C., Hon. Rodney Thompson, J.S.C., Hon. Kay Walcott-Henderson and NJSBA President –Elect Kimberly A. Yonta, Esq. Ayesha and our CLE Committee Chair, Joe Paravecchia, are putting together a great program! The program is also open to our Affinity Bar partners and their members.

Along these lines, our November General Membership and Annual Awards presentation will have an international theme and feature food, drink and experiences from diverse cultures. We will also continue the time honored M.C.B.A. programs like our annual Golf Outing, the Opening Ceremony and Memorial Service, the Judges and Law Clerks Dinner, and our signature CLE event, XTreme CLE in October.

In addition to our focus on Diversity and Inclusion, I am asking our members to continue to engage in the many opportunities to give back and serve our community. This year, I am asking our members to participate in a County Wide Dress Down Day fundraiser in which employees will be able to dress casually in exchange for a small donation. This initiative will support the #WHATSMYNAME Foundation, which was founded by a Robbinsville, NJ, family who suffered the tragic loss of their daughter in 2019 and is dedicated to educating others on Ride Share safety (www.whatsmyname.org). Look for more information on all of the above programs, including specifics about the Dress Down Day, in the coming weeks and months.

Our Community Projects committee continues to provide meaningful service opportunities for our members to volunteer with TASK, Meals on Wheels and contribute to the annual book drive, just to name a few. Please take the opportunity to

volunteer and support these efforts to help less fortunate citizens of Mercer County this year.

One of the highlights of my first month included attending the NJSBA James J. McLaughlin Awards dinner on February 20, 2020, at which Judge Anne Thompson, U.S.D.J., received the McLaughlin Award. The McLaughlin award is given to individuals demonstrating civility, legal competence and professionalism in the practice of civil law - Mercer County is very fortunate to have been graced by a lawyer and judge as accomplished as Judge Thompson. Mercer County was well represented, with 7 MCBA past-presidents – John Sakson, Scott Krasny, Jeff Posta, Craig Hubert, Denise Mariani, Michael Paglione and Bob Lytle, along with many others in attendance at the Palace in Somerset, NJ.

Scott Krasny kicked off our in-house CLE program to a capacity crowd at the MCBA office in Hamilton on February 21, 2020. It was an informative and extremely well received seminar. In addition to the many rave reviews on the content, presenter and facility, my favorite responses to “What did you like most about this seminar?”, were: “the food was great, especially the Chicken salad sandwich and the seminar was good too” and “Scott Krasny’s Suit”. Sam has a great lineup of affordable CLE programs on tap for this year, so keep an eye out for what’s to come. If you have any suggestions regarding the MCBA, please contact Executive Director Sam Iraca or me, at siraca@mercerbar.com or jcreegan@stark-stark.com, respectively.

Wrapping up, I owe countless thanks to my wife, Megan, who is the foundation of any success I achieve, my sons, Jack, Cole, Hugh and Luke (2 out of 4 made it to the installation dinner), my mother and father, Kathleen and Michael Creegan, and of course my firm, for all of their support – having my friends and family there for the installation dinner was a career and life highlight.

Thank you!

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Update From the Bench
By: Hon. Mary C. Jacobson, A.J.S.C.

The Honorable Paul Innes retired effective February 1, 2020 after serving almost exactly 25 years as a Superior Court Judge. He was assigned to every division throughout his service, and was a Drug Court Judge, Complex Business Track Judge, Presiding Judge of the Civil Division, Acting Assignment Judge in Judge Jacobson's absence, and former chair of the statewide Chancery Conference, which gave him a place on the Judicial Council. He will be sorely missed by bench and bar alike.

The Chief Justice has designated the Honorable Robert Lougy as the new Chancery Judge for the Mercer Vicinage, and the Honorable Douglas Hurd as Mercer's Complex Business Track Judge and Acting Assignment Judge. They both have big shoes to fill, but we anticipate a seamless transition of responsibilities to these talented jurists.

By order of the Chief Justice, the Honorable Patrick Bartels has been transferred to the Mercer Vicinage from Essex County, and the Honorable Wayne Forrest will return to Essex County. Both judges will remain assigned to the Family Division, although Judge Bartels will oversee the FD docket in Mercer County, with the Honorable Thomas Walls moving from that docket to the Children in Court docket being vacated by Judge Forrest. We anticipate that these transitions will also go smoothly in the weeks ahead and look forward to members of the Bar Association welcoming Judge Bartels to Mercer County.



Hon. Mary C. Jacobson, A.J.S.C.



Hon. Paul Innes, P.J.Ch. (ret.)

Welcome Judge Bartels

By: David Smolowitz, Team Leader Mercer County Family Division

The Family Division has a new friendly face behind the bench in Courtroom 4B – The Honorable Patrick J. Bartels. Since coming to the Mercer Vicinage from Essex in January, Judge Bartels has taken over the Non-Dissolution caseload, helping families seeking resolution in custody, parenting time and child support issues.

Though he has been in law for nearly 40 years, his start occurred purely by happenstance. While attending the University of Dayton, aspiring to be a teacher, Judge Bartels was encouraged by a friend to take the LSAT. After graduating from Dayton, Judge Bartels remained at the University for Law School, where he earned his Law Degree.

Judge Bartels spent a short time at Denver University, working in Residence Life, while studying for and passing the Bar Exam in 1982. That December, he went into the Air Force Judge Advocate Program (JAG) Corps., the legal branch of the Air Force. Stationed at McGuire Air Force Base, Judge Bartels was an Assistant to the JAG, working in corporate counsel and serving on both the Prosecutorial and Defense sides of Court-Martial matters. During his tenure, Judge Bartels tried approximately 50 Courts-Martial cases and argued an appellate matter before the Court of Military Appeals.

In 1987, Judge Bartels received an Honorable Discharge from the Air Force as a Captain and entered private practice with a Philadelphia-based Law Firm. In 1989, he joined the Middlesex County Prosecutors Office, serving as an Assistant Prosecutor for the next three years. During his tenure representing the state, Judge Bartels tried approximately 30 criminal cases and had three published appellate matters, including two having to do with illegal search and seizure. It was after that, that he again returned to private practice, specializing in Toxic Tort and Asbestos litigation. He remained in private practice for the next 25 years, sitting before the Senate Sub-Committee on Judicial Confirmations in December 2016 and being sworn in as a Judge the following month. Judge Bartels believes it was his long history of trying cases in the Air Force, criminal matters and civil matters, that gave him the experience and confidence to be nominated for Judgeship.

After being sworn in, Judge Bartels was assigned to the Essex Vicinage, specifically in the Special Civil Part. In April 2019, Judge Bartels was re-assigned to the Family Division, first hearing Domestic Violence Cases before taking over the Non-Dissolution caseload that September. That non-dissolution experience, albeit for only four months, allowed him to have a foundation to work from when he came to Mercer Family in January. He looks to continue to show litigants that he is fair and does not pre-judge before he hears the facts.

Outside of the courtroom, Judge Bartels is big fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers and enjoys spending time with family and traveling. All of us in the Mercer Vicinage look forward to working with him and are happy to welcome him aboard!





Mercer County Bar Association and the Mercer County Judiciary announce the

20th Annual Bench Bar Luncheon

and 2.0 Ethics CLE Seminar

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Thursday, March 19, 2020

12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

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Moderated by: Ayesha K. Hamilton, Esq.

Panelists:

Hon. Janetta D. Marbrey, J.S.C.,

Hon. Rodney Thompson, J.S.C.,

Hon. Kay Walcott-Henderson, J.S.C.,

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Bench Bar Luncheon Seminar **March 19, 2020**

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NJ Law Makes It Illegal To Ask For Salary History *By: Ayesha Hamilton, Esq., Hamilton Law Firm*

A new law effective January 1, 2020, makes it illegal for employers to ask job applicants about their past salary history. This law, arising from the passage of Assembly Bill 1094 (the “Law”), amends the NJ Law Against Discrimination and is another step towards NJ’s efforts to promote equality in the workplace along with the Diane B. Allen Equal Pay Act.

Historically, asking for an applicant’s prior salary, wage, benefit history has resulted in lower wages for women and minorities as their new salary is likely to be based on their history rather than their current abilities. In 2019, statistics show that on average, women still earn less than men, receiving \$0.79 for every \$1.0 earned by men with women of color earning \$0.74 cents for every \$1.0 earned by Caucasian men. www.payscale.com/data/gender-pay-gap. The preclusion of salary history in hiring and wage decisions levels the playing field, allowing the applicant to stand or fall on the basis of their accomplishments and credentials and seeks to lessen the gap between male and female wages. Nothing in the Law precludes an applicant from offering the information voluntarily. Further, the employer is not limited in looking at salary information for internal moves.

It is imperative that you guide your clients on this new law to ensure their compliance. The Law provides stiff penalties, with \$1,000 per violation for a first offense, \$5,000 for second offense, and \$10,000 per violation for subsequent offenses. As an amendment to the NJ Law Against Discrimination, this may also open the employer to LAD claims of disparate treatment in pay based on gender, race, age, disability etc.

Top 3 Quick Fixes

1. Counsel your clients to review their employment applications and forms to remove requests for salary history. You can leave a request for salary sought but cannot ask about prior salaries. For multi-state clients, you can include the request for salary history but make sure to include clear and distinct language about NJ’s exemption.
2. Your clients must immediately implement workplace training with their hiring managers to ensure that they are aware of these obligations and to ensure that no one asks for salary history during interviews.
3. Make sure the temp and staffing agencies you use are also complying with this law. The staffing agencies routinely take salary history in their intake processes but are now precluded from sharing that history with prospective NJ employers unless they have express written consent from the employee.





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The Honorable Anne E. Thompson, U.S.D.J. Receives Mclaughlin Award

By: Samantha Iraca

On February 20, 2020, the New Jersey State Bar Association honored Mercer County's own, the Hon. Anne E. Thompson, U.S.D.J. with the James J. McLaughlin Award. This award is presented each year to individuals demonstrating civility, legal competence and professionalism in the practice of civil law. The well-attended event took place at The Palace at Somerset Hills in Somerset, NJ.

Judge Thompson received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Howard University and a Master of Arts from Temple University. She went on to receive her Bachelor of Laws from Howard University School of Law.

Judge Thompson's career in the law includes serving as an Assistant Deputy Public Defender for the State of New Jersey and as a Municipal Court Judge for the City of Trenton. In 1975 she was appointed by Governor Brendan T. Byrne to the position of Prosecutor of Mercer County and in 1979 was appointed Judge of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey by President Jimmy Carter.

Judge Thompson has been a guest lecturer at the Widener Law School Trial Advocacy Seminar and she presently serves as a member of the Criminal Law Drafting Committee for the National Conference of Bar Examiners.

Judge Thompson served as Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey from 1994 to 2001 and presently sits as a full-time Senior U.S. District Judge.

Congratulations Judge Thompson on this well-deserved honor.



Hon. Anne E. Thompson, U.S.D.J.



Fruqan Mouzon, Judge Anne E. Thompson, U.S.D.J. and NJSBA Civil Chair Michael Donahue.



Tanya L. Phillips, Judge Anne E. Thompson, U.S.D.J., and James L. Creegan

Navigating the FD Docket and News from the Family Bench

By: Kimberly Gandy Jinks, Esq., The Jinks Law Firm

On January 16, 2020, members of the Family bar met with members and staff of the Family bench at the jury assembly room for a one (1) hour refresher course on navigating the FD Docket. Members in good standing (those who had paid their dues for 2020 before then) received one (1.0) credit towards their continuing legal education requirements. The fundamentals of filings, deadlines, and scheduling were all discussed and handouts were provided. The forms can be found on-line at the self-help center within the judiciary website at: www.njcourts.gov. The panel was led by the Honorable Thomas J. Walls, Jr., J.S.C., who was then sitting as one of our FD Judges and was able to give insightful information to the audience, along with assistance from Gina Goldstein, Assistant Family Division Manager.

When the Honorable Catherine M. Fitzpatrick, P.J.F.P., first introduced Judge Walls as a panelist, the attendees learned that Judge Walls would be re-assigned to the Children in Courts docket effective immediately and that the Honorable Patrick J. Bartels, J.S.C. would be taking over Judge Walls' matters in the FD, FV and post-judgment FM dockets. If you have an FD case previously assigned to Judge Walls, you can contact Lida Perez, FM Team Leader, at 609-571-4200 ext. 74423 or Danielle Vitella, FD Team Leader, at ext. 74397 to find out which Judge has been assigned to your case. Judge Bartels comes to us from Essex County where he has been sitting in the Family Division since April, 2019.

In other news, initial appearances for DV cases will be handled a little differently going forward. All litigants will initially be present in the courtroom (Plaintiffs on one side and Defendants on the other) to receive a speech from the Judge regarding next steps in their cases. Litigants will then advise the Court how they intend to proceed that day such that matters in which adjournments are being requested, whether a litigant needs time to obtain an attorney or counsel needs time to obtain evidence, for example, can be swiftly re-scheduled and cases in which the plaintiff seeks to amend his/her complaint can be handled appropriately, thereby allowing the Judge to move forward to tending to the trials going forward that day.

Our next Family Bench-Bar meetings will be held on Thursdays in Judge Fitzpatrick's courtroom on the following dates:

March 26, 2020
May 21, 2020
July 23, 2020
September 17, 2020
November 19, 2020

We look forward to seeing you there!





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How Well Do You Know The New Jersey Constitution?

By: Judge Kay Walcott-Henderson and John Lowenberg

1. What year was the current New Jersey Constitution drafted and agreed upon?

- A. 1947
- B. 400 B.C.
- C. 1796
- D. 1911

2. How many prior Constitution have there been in New Jersey?

- A. One.
- B. Two.
- C. Four
- D. Ten

3. Article I provides for the rights and privileges for citizens of New Jersey. What right is not expressly stated in Article I?

- A. Right to trial by jury
- B. Freedom of speech
- C. Right to bear arms
- D. Prevention of quartering of soldiers.

4. Article VI (Judicial), provides that the State is required to pay for certain judicial and probation costs, does this include judges robes and gavels?

- A. Yes.
- B. No.

5. Before the Lieutenant Governor, who would fill a vacancy left by the Governor?

- A. The Chief Justice
- B. President of the New Jersey Senate
- C. Attorney General
- D. The Mayor of Trenton

6. Including the Chief Justice, how many Justices are on the New Jersey Supreme Court?

- A. 9
- B. 7
- C. 5
- D. 11

7. At what age can a citizen become a New Jersey Senator?

- A. 30 years old
- B. 35 years old
- C. 40 years old
- D. The Constitution does not specify.

8. How many total members are in the New Jersey Legislature?

- A. 100 (60 in General Assembly and 40 Senators)
- B. 120 (80 in the General Assembly and 40 Senators)
- C. 120 (40 in the General Assembly and 80 Senators)
- D. 120 (90 in the General Assembly and 30 Senators)
- E.

9. How many amendments are there to the New Jersey Constitution?

- A. 12
- B. 54
- C. 27
- D. None. It was written perfectly.

10. True or false, every State officer, must take an oath or affirmation to support the Constitution of this State and the United States before serving in their positions.

- A. True
- B. False

Answer key below.

Answer Key

1. A is correct. Though we are confident that the essence of the New Jersey Constitution was present in 400 B.C., New Jersey was not a state at that time.
2. This is the third Constitution, so there were two prior Constitutions before the Convention of 1947.
3. C is correct. The New Jersey Constitution does not expressly state that citizens can acquire or bear arms of any kind. Including, but not limited to, grizzly, black, or polar bear arms.
4. No. Absolutely not.
5. B is correct. Now we have Sheila Oliver, so the Stephen Sweeney is off the hook.
6. B is correct.
7. A is correct.
8. B is correct.
9. B is correct. The last Amendment was in 2017 and this year, 2020, there is at least one other that will be scheduled for a vote and likely to be on the ballot: legalization of recreational Marijuana
10. True. Pursuant to Article VII, Section 1

Mercer County Bar Association Installation Dinner January 23, 2020 Trenton Country Club

On January 23, 2020, the Mercer County Bar Association, installed James L. Creegan, of Stark & Stark, as its 81st President. The Hon. Kay Walcott-Henderson, J.S.C. performed the swearing in of the incoming officers and trustees. President Creegan announced in his installation speech that the MCBA will strengthen its focus on Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, through educational programs, social engagement, community outreach and building relationships with statewide Affinity Bar Associations with a presence in Mercer County. Tanya Phillips was installed as President-Elect, Michael Kahme was installed as Vice President, Margaret Chipowsky was installed as Treasurer and Jennifer Zoschak was installed as Secretary. 2022 Trustees were also installed: Ayesha K. Hamilton; Katie Mae Magee, Bryan M. Roberts, Frank P. Spada and Sam C. Toma.



Mercer County Bar Association Installation Dinner January 23, 2020 Trenton Country Club



Mercer County Bar Association Installation Dinner January 23, 2020 Trenton Country Club



Mercer County Bar Association Installation Dinner January 23, 2020 Trenton Country Club



**Mercer County Bar Association Installation Dinner
January 23, 2020
Trenton Country Club**



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GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING *and* INSTALLATION DINNER

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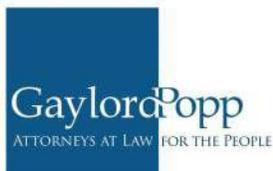
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**Mercer County Bar Association Installation Dinner
January 23, 2020
Trenton Country Club**



Mercer County Bar Association Installation Dinner January 23, 2020 Trenton Country Club



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MCBA Community Projects Events 2020

March

Collect children's new and used books for summer distribution.

March 26- Serve lunch at **TASK** – 10:30am – 1:00pm

April

Collect children's new and used books for summer distribution.

April 14- Deliver lunch for **Meals on Wheels** - 10:30am - 12:00pm

May

Collect children's new and used books for summer distribution.

May 14- Serve lunch at **TASK** – 10:30am – 1:00pm

June

Collect children's new and used books for summer distribution.

June 1- Deliver lunch for **Meals on Wheels** – 10:30am- 12:00pm

July

Collect children's new and used books for summer distribution.

Summer Fun with Ice Cream for children

July 15- Serve lunch at **TASK** – 10:30am to 1:00pm

August

August 7- Deliver lunch for **Meals on Wheels** – 10:30am – 12:00pm

September

September 22- Serve lunch at **TASK** – 10:30 am - 1pm

October

Collect new and used coats

Senior's bingo event - Halloween Party

October 22- Deliver lunch for **Meals on Wheels**- 10:30am to 12:00pm

November

Collect new and used coats

November 16- Serve lunch for **TASK** – 10:30 am – 1:00pm

December

December 18– Serve lunch at **TASK** - 10:30am - 1:00pm

Frank P. Spada, Jr., Esquire

SETTLE IT!

If you need the services of a mediator, Frank P. Spada, Jr. is a R.1:40 Qualified Mediator on the roster of the NJ Superior Court and is on the Mediation and Arbitration Rosters of the American Arbitration Association. He helps you and your clients resolve lawsuits before trial.

In addition to mediation and arbitration, Frank represents clients in all areas of employment law/labor relations including the following areas of law:

- Discipline, hiring, firing and better productivity through employee relations
- The application of the various federal and state employment laws, including the FMLA, FLSA, ADA, ADEA, WARN, ERISA, PHRA, and the NJ LAD and related litigation
- Development, enforcement or defense of non-competition/non-solicitation/non-disclosure and trade secrets clauses in many states, including New Jersey and Pennsylvania.



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Mock Trial

By: Jessica A. Wilson, Esq., KMH&L

On January 18, 2020, the annual Mercer County Tournament for the New Jersey State Bar Foundation Mock Trial Competition was held at the Civil Courthouse. We had twelve schools from the county compete in three rounds of competition. Competing this year were Hightstown High School, Nottingham High School, Notre Dame High School, Peddie School, Princeton Day School, Princeton High School, Princeton International School of Math and Science, Steinert High School, Stuart Country Day School, The Lawrenceville School, and West Windsor-Plainsboro High School South.

Students were coached by a combination of teachers from their respective schools and attorney volunteers serving as legal advisors to the teams. The Mercer County Bar Association would like to recognize the following attorneys that volunteered their time to serve as coaches: Kathy Flicker, Michael Rosenberg, Scott Rosenberg, Lisa Warren, Brian Duff, Ralph Gerstein, Brian Quigley Deborah Hay, Ed Gore, Al Garcia, Robert Lagay, Jodie Bouer, Lydia Fabbro Keephart, Christopher DeAngelo and Christopher Mehno. All of these attorneys took time and worked with the various schools for several months on the case in preparation for the tournament.

The morning rounds were highly impressive and very competitive. The four teams that moved on to the semi-finals in the afternoon of the 20th were: Stuart Country Day School, Princeton Day School, Princeton Highschool and Notre Dame High School. Princeton Day School and Princeton High School were the victors of the semi-finals who moved onto the final round. On January 22, 2019 the County final round was held at the Criminal Courthouse where the Honorable William Anklowitz, J.S.C. and the Honorable Peter E. Warshaw, P.J.C.P. volunteered to serve as judges. After an extremely close trial Princeton High School was victorious and moved on to represent Mercer County in the Regional Competition which was held at the Law Center in New Brunswick on February 4, 2020. Unfortunately, Princeton High School was defeated at the regional level by Bordentown High School from Burlington County.

The Mercer County Bar Association and my co-chair Joe Paravecchia and I would like to personally thank the following attorneys for serving as volunteer judges for the competition: The Honorable Ronald Susswein, J.S.C., The Honorable William Anklowitz, J.S.C., The Honorable Peter E. Warshaw, P.J.C.P., Tony Apicelli, Narline Casimir, Jaime Epstein, Ed Kahn, Sam Toma, Mary Lou Delahanty, Jim Scott, Brian McCauley, Curt Cox, Christian Fisher, Grant Wright, Laura Yaede, Mary Sue Henifin, Joseph Bevis, Timothy McCann, and Caitlyn Kelly. The competition would not have been a success without you and I appreciate you coming out early on a Saturday morning to volunteer for the Mercer County Bar Association. Many thanks also to the Mercer County Sheriff, Mercer County Judiciary General Operations Division, especially Jay Meehan and Letita Davis, Mercer County court staff volunteers and the Honorable Mary Jacobson, A.J.S.C., for letting us utilize the various courthouses and assisting us on the competition days!



Office of the Mercer County Clerk

For Immediate Release
Contact- 609-278-7161



County Clerk Offers Property Alert Service to Protect Against Fraud

Mercer County Clerk Paula Sollami Covello reminds residents to register for the County Clerk's Property Alert Service to provide property owners with important alerts concerning their properties.

The Property Alert Service is completely free and alerts Mercer County property owners when a document affecting a specific property is recorded by the Mercer County Clerk's Office. Residents can sign up for the alert system by going to <http://propertyalert.mercercounty.org/PropertyAlert> and registering.

"It's as simple as registering your name or business name and your email address and you will be automatically notified if a document is recorded with your name," said Mercer County Clerk Paula Sollami Covello.

It should be noted that the Property Alert Service does not prevent fraudulent activity from occurring; it helps monitor activity and transactions on properties. Anyone who suspects fraudulent activity should contact authorities. Additionally, the County Clerk's Office offers a hotline number for residents to call if they feel they have been victimized by property fraud. That number is 609-989-6470.

The Property Alert Service, which was implemented in 2016, has been praised by many officials in Mercer County, including Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes, who called it an "important service that can be accessed by our homeowners," and Trenton Mayor W. Reed Gusciora, who stated, "This is an added security measure for homeowners to ensure title to their property remains unencumbered. An unscrupulous person who rents out another's property to a third-party can cause legal headaches and costly repairs to the actual owner."

Property is one of the most valuable assets people can own. Property fraud can be committed by anyone attempting to convince lenders, solicitors or other officials that they own property when in reality they do not. Typically, this fraud is committed by forging documents or using identity theft to obtain them.

To further address these issues, County Clerk Sollami Covello, along with Mayor Gusciora and Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo Onofri and others, are members of a task force to address squatting on local properties and other types of property fraud. The task force works to identify those who would victimize homeowners through various schemes. For example, in Trenton and other municipalities across Mercer County, fraudsters have been using vacant bank-owned and privately owned residential properties to mislead tenants, often posing as the property owner or as an agent to extract cash from them. They have been known to move into vacant or bank-owned properties for free housing.

The Fraudulent Housing Occupancy Task Force is working with local, county and state officials to protect residents from this fraud. They want the public to know that impersonating property owners and squatting in a vacant property are illegal activities that will be investigated and prosecuted.

Again, if you are a victim of property fraud or suspect possible squatting activity, you can call 609-989-6470, or your contact your local law-enforcement authorities. The Property Alert System will also assist you by notifying you if someone is taking unauthorized action on your property.

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