

## **Courts of the City of Richmond**

### **Hon. Beverly W. Snukals**

*Richmond Circuit Court*

In a meeting with Chief Judge Beverly W. Snukals, committee members inquired as to how the case assignment method, which was instituted at the end of 2008, was working. Judge Snukals said that it is working well. She said that there is now a master calendar that divides the docket into criminal days and civil days for each judge. There are two teams, the red team and the blue team, each containing four judges. When the red team is hearing criminal cases, the blue team is hearing civil matters and vice versa. The goal is that each judge will have the same number of criminal and civil days over the course of a year. Once a case is assigned to a judge, that judge hears all motions and other matters related to the case. Richmond has more multi-day trials than the other surrounding jurisdictions, so the system of having a judge with eight or nine civil days in a row works well for scheduling these types of trials.

Docket calls have been eliminated except for a very few cases that are not pre-set by the attorneys. Attorneys are encouraged to pre-set all cases prior to docket call to eliminate the inefficient use of court personnel time and eliminate the need for attorneys to appear in court and wait for each secretary to set each judge's docket. All trials/hearings set for over two hours are scheduled by Donna Lythgoe and all trials/hearings under two hours are scheduled by the individual judge's secretary. There is now a computerized docketing system to which all court personnel and essential agencies have access which helps with the scheduling of cases. While judges can always handle civil matters on criminal days, the reverse is not true due to the fact that not every courtroom has a lockup, clerk or deputies.

Judge Snukals commented on the filings for substantive hearings (such as demurrers, motions for summary judgment, etc.) She noted that when briefs or motions are filed with the Clerk's Office close to the hearing date, those documents do not always make it to the judge in sufficient time for the judge to review the material. She suggested that when making such a filing, a courtesy copy should be sent directly to the judge so that the judge has all the necessary information prior to the hearing.

### **Hon. Barbara J. Gaden**

*Richmond General District Court*

Judge Barbara J. Gaden, Chief Judge of Richmond General District Court, began by reiterating the necessity for attorneys to communicate with the Court if there is going to be a continuance or if the attorney will be late to Court. There are too many instances where the Court, witnesses and other attorneys are kept waiting when one attorney appears late or fails to appear. The Court is taking these actions seriously which may result in a show cause being issued. Also, attorneys should try to let the Court know as soon as possible if a case has been settled so that the trial time can be released for other matters.

By Order entered by the Court on November 12, 2009, members of the Bar will be permitted to bring cell phones, electronic calendaring devices, laptops and tape recorders into the John Marshall Courts Building. Only devices used for docketing calendars may be used in the courtrooms. Cell phones may only be used in the witness rooms off the main hall with closed doors or in the restroom. No cameras are allowed.

Judge Gaden also discussed the new Manchester Courthouse. Historically, those General District Court criminal cases originating north of the James River were heard by the criminal courts in the Public Safety Building and those cases south of the James were heard in the Manchester Courthouse. As of the beginning of the 2010, all of the General District Court criminal cases will be heard in the Manchester Courthouse. Although all of the cases will be heard under the same roof, there will still be a distinction between the Northside and Southside sections. There will be two separate clerk's offices.

Judge Gaden also wanted to caution attorneys about the potential parking issues at the new Manchester Courthouse. Parking has previously been a problem at the Manchester Courthouse. Due to the increased number of cases being heard at the location and increased staff, the parking issues will probably worsen. Attorneys and their clients need to be mindful of this problem to avoid late appearances in Court.

**Hon. Angela E. Roberts**

*Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court*

A committee member met with the Honorable Angela E. Roberts, Chief Judge of the Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. Overall, the Court is pleased with the attorneys' performance and professionalism. It is the consensus among the judges that the attorneys who regularly practice in their Court are doing an excellent job. Judge Roberts would like to thank the attorneys for their services rendered to the Court. She emphasized how grateful the judges have been for the professionalism of the attorneys who have come into their courtrooms. Judge Roberts made the following suggestions:

1. All lawyers should dress appropriately for Court at all times. The proper attire is business, and not business casual. There is no excuse for an attorney appearing in Court without professional attire. Judge Roberts suggests that attorneys review an article that was written in the December issue of *Virginia Lawyer*, the official publication of the Virginia State Bar. The article was entitled "Ad-Dress-ing Counsel: Roanoke City Circuit Judge Describes Sartorial Standard." The article summarizes the proper dress code for attorneys in Court. The suggestion is made to encourage attorneys to present a professional image, not only to the Courts but also to their clients.
2. Court-appointed attorneys should timely file their vouchers with the Clerk's office at the end of a case. If vouchers are submitted promptly after cases are ended, the proper costs are assessed at that time, thus avoiding the need for any reimbursement by the Commonwealth of Virginia.
3. All matters are set on the civil docket for initial hearings of 15-20 minutes. If your case requires more than the allotted time, you may request a continuance. Attorneys may use the continuance request form which must be submitted in advance of the docket call. Counsel may also continue

a case without the status hearing if the continuance request is filed with the Court and approved by a Judge in advance of the actual date.

4. The Court meets regularly to discuss concerns about lawyers, among other things. The specific issues are discussed in meetings and, if necessary, the Judge who has an issue with a particular attorney will request a meeting with that attorney. If the issue continues to be unresolved, the Judge will discuss further action.
5. The Court has added several video display dockets in the waiting area. The video display docket provides information regarding the cases, including the courtroom numbers, times, and the status of the hearings. The video will flash when a case is in progress. There are also video screens in the courtrooms for presentation purposes only. There is only one portable video monitor for arraignments in the Courthouse.

Judge Roberts emphasized that the attorneys practicing before the Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court generally know what they are doing, and the Bench is generally pleased with their overall performance. The above suggestions are made merely to improve performance.