

**Hon. J. Overton Harris and Hon. Shannon D. Hoehl
Courts of the County of Hanover**

In its continued effort to promote the administration of justice in the Richmond area and to facilitate cooperation between the bench and the bar, the Bar's Administration of Justice Committee recently concluded its annual interviews with the Honorable Judges of the Courts of the County of Hanover. As in years past, the Judges were gracious with their time and spoke with candor to Committee members regarding the Court's work and the performance of the bar in their courtrooms.

The Honorable J. Overton Harris, presiding Judge of the Hanover Circuit Court

Like the Judges in the General District and Juvenile Courts, Judge J. Overton Harris, presiding Judge of the Hanover Circuit Court is looking forward to the completion of the new courts building which will house all three courts as well as Clerk's offices and the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office. The completion date is scheduled for January 2017.

Also of note is that the Court is moving to a praecipe system for setting civil trials, hopefully to be in place by July 1, 2016. The prior practice in Hanover has been that either party can just show up on term day and ask that the matter be set for trial. Under the praecipe system an attorney wanting to set a case for trial will need to file a praecipe on a form which is available in the Clerk's Office. Notice to the other party would be required. As before, civil cases can still be set for trial by calling the Judges' secretary, Sue Bowen, at (804) 365-6161. The reason for the change to a praecipe is to make setting cases more efficient. The Clerk needs to know how many cases are going to be set on term day. Judge Harris points out that Hanover, in line with national and state trends, is experiencing an increase in the filing of civil suits, an increase in the percentage of cases being settled, but an increase in the actual number of hearings and trials being conducted. Judge Harris stated that "we are going to emphasize that when counsel set a case for trial they are certifying to the Court that they are ready to have the case tried." The Court will make more use of a uniform scheduling order and will be less tolerant of last minute requests for continuances on the basis that discovery has not been completed. To put it another way, the Court will continue to require that counsel demonstrate a good faith basis for a continuance when requesting one within thirty days of trial. If a request is made more than thirty days prior to trial, it can be done by agreement of counsel, but if the request is made within thirty days, then a continuance will be granted only for good cause. For this reason, Judge Harris again reminds the Bar that civil cases are set on an allotted-time basis, and he encourages attorneys to provide careful and realistic estimates of the time that will be required.

Judge Harris sits every day in Hanover, Judge Sarah L. Deneke sits one day a week in Hanover, and Judge Patricia Kelly sits two days per week.

The Honorable Shannon D. Hoehl, Hanover County Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court

With two new positions in the 15th Judicial District, the make-up of the Hanover County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court has changed. Judge Shannon Hoehl is now sitting in

Caroline County three days a week (Monday, Tuesday, and Friday) and in Hanover on Wednesdays and Thursdays, where she only conducts contested hearings. Newly-appointed Judge Frank Uvanni is now the regular fulltime judge in Hanover, sitting five days a week and handling the regular and the contested dockets.

In an interview with both Judges, they state that they are pleased with docket management and with the smooth handling of the caseload. They credit a good Clerk's Office and cooperative and competent lawyers. Judge Hoehl cautions that lawyers should use their time wisely since courts will not normally permit lawyers to exceed the time limited which they have estimated for the trial of their case.

Judge Uvanni suggests that lawyers discuss their cases thoroughly with the *guardian ad litem* where a guardian has been appointed and that they be aware of the guardian's recommendation before trial. The Judges point out that they have a good process for screening prospective guardians, and that they rely heavily on the factual matters reported by these attorneys.

Both Judges commend the attorneys practicing before them and are pleased with the conduct of court appointed counsel. They recommend these three pointers for attorneys:

- (1) Show up on time,
- (2) Be prepared, and
- (3) If there is a pertinent case that you wish to cite, bring a copy of the case with you.

As before, contested matters are normally set for a maximum of three hours, and on rare occasions when it is necessary to conduct a hearing beyond three hours the Court is willing to go over the allotted time rather than cut litigants off. Also, the Court asks that attorneys returning for pre-trial matters let the Deputy know when they are present so that their cases can be called without undo delay.