

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 Administration of Justice Committee recently concluded its annual interviews with the **Honorable Judges for the County Chesterfield**. As in years past, the Judges were gracious with their time and spoke with candor to Committee members regarding hearings, new judges and technology.

**The Honorable David A. Johnson**  
*Chesterfield Circuit Court*

Judge Johnson continues to be pleased with the practitioners in his Court. He says he has seen no problems over the past year and a half with the collegiality or professionalism of the Richmond Bar and is pleased with the level of preparedness and demeanor of the majority of the Bar that he sees in his courtroom.

He encourages members of the bar to remain committed to Court decorum at all points in litigation and to remain collegial even when it may be difficult to do so. Additionally, he advised that his office and the clerk's office are open for all questions as it pertains to court procedures and calendaring. If any questions arise, he encourages members of the bar to ask. Both are more than willing to assist in these needs, within the bounds of ethics.

He recommends that newer members of the Bar consult with and seek advice from tenured members of the bar regarding courtroom policies and procedures. He states that this will help them develop as they continue to gain experience.

The Court's docketing procedures are posted on their website and the Richmond Bar website, and he advises attorneys and their staff to review those before filing and setting motions.

Judge Johnson stated that the Court has returned to normal procedures as it was prior to Covid and has been for over a year, with safety measures still in place for Covid. Jury trials are proceeding as they normally would, and all of the courtrooms are open to hold juries. Over the past year the docket in Chesterfield has remained consistent in the number of cases filed, with a slight upward trend in criminal matters.

He encouraged counsel to come to the Courthouse or inquire with the Clerk about Chesterfield's AV improvements. All of the courtrooms are outfitted with advanced audio-visual equipment, and the Court is more than willing to allow attorneys to come and test their equipment out on their systems prior to a hearing or trial. In fact, Chesterfield has a room with the equipment in an attorney workroom at the Courthouse which is open to any member of the bar when the Court is open.

Last, and certainly not least, Judge Johnson was very pleased to welcome Judge Jayne Pemberton to the bench, who is an outstanding addition to the Chesterfield judiciary.

**The Honorable Matthew D. Nelson**  
*Chesterfield General District Court*

Judge Nelson continues to appreciate the candor, patience, resilience and understanding from the local bar in working with the General District Court throughout this process. He realizes

the financial strain that members of the bar have had to endure during this pandemic and the Judges are doing everything they can, within the parameters set by the Supreme Court, to remain operational. At this point everyone's safety is paramount, but they have a keen eye towards the citizens having continued access to justice and to attorneys having continued access to make a living. He wants to extend his deepest thanks as well to his staff members who have truly been phenomenal during the pandemic.

He also commended Judge Hurley, who was Chief Judge until July 1, 2020, for the yeoman's work on making some very difficult and tough decisions in the early stages of the pandemic to make sure things continued to move along.

What they have done in Chesterfield, because the volume of cases is so high, is reduce the number of cases on any given docket, so there are 100-125 case caps on civil dockets and same for traffic cases. He wants to commend the bar on helping the Court by not setting cases on dates that are capped. The list can be provided by the clerk. Judge Nelson reports that the dockets never were backlogged in Colonial Heights and is seeing the Chesterfield docket backlog easing with the addition of Friday afternoon dockets, two Fridays a month. Regardless of docket issues, Judge Nelson wants to reiterate that the safety of the public, staff and the attorneys is paramount and will not be disregarded to speed through dockets.

He also wants to continue to let members of the bar know that the Court is all ears when it comes to ideas, problems, concerns or anything else that need to be brought to the attention of the Court in these times. He says to simply call chambers with these types of issues or questions.

To the future, Judge Nelson sees continued use of technology for witnesses in civil cases and having certain hearings via video as well.

**The Honorable Vanessa L. Jones**  
*Chesterfield Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court*

Judge Jones reports that Court is doing extremely well. Like so many other courts throughout Virginia, the Court was forced to suspend all dockets in mid-March of 2020 as a result of the COVID pandemic. The Court did not resume with a sense of normalcy or pace until July of 2020. Faced with a backlog of 5,000+ cases, the Court then set up a "triage" docket in an effort to bring all of those matters into the courthouse. Everyone jumped in to set up new policies and procedures to ensure an environment that is in compliance with the guidelines of the Supreme Court of Virginia and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and safe for all citizens, litigants and staff. This effort was a tremendous success, with a great deal of credit going to former Chief Judge Scott D. Landry, Clerk of Court Laura G. Griffin, the sheriff's office and the clerk's office who have worked "extremely hard." With the new measures in place, the Court began hearing cases in three courtrooms from May through June, ultimately allowing the Court to get back to "normal" in July.

Judge Jones noted that the Court is fortunate to have such a high caliber of attorneys who appear before the Court. The attorneys have been very compliant with the new policies and procedures implemented by the Court. She commended the attorneys for their hard work and professionalism,

and for their patience and understanding while everyone has worked through these challenging times over the past year. While the situation remains “fluid” in light of the continuing pandemic, Judge Jones encourages all counsel to ask questions and to continue to maintain open communications with the Court.

During the past year the Court and the lawyers have been able to make good use of the state-of-the-art technology that is now available in all of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court courtrooms. In particular, the Court has been able to conduct a number of hearings remotely using the Court’s Cisco Webex videoconferencing capabilities which has assisted the Court in keeping up with its docket. Judge Jones urges the attorneys to continue to make good use of these technological upgrades, and to request that hearings be conducted remotely when appropriate.

The Court understands that many of the attorneys appearing before the Court are handling multiple cases, sometimes resulting in overbooking. In the event an attorney is going to be late for a court appearance, Judge Jones wants to remind the attorneys that they should communicate with the clerk’s office as soon as possible. Also, if any litigant wants to request a continuance, attorneys should complete and submit a “continuance request form” which is available online at <https://www.chesterfield.gov/1129/Juvenile-Domestic-Relations-District-Cou>. The webpage also contains other forms and additional information that might be helpful to counsel.