

Innovations *in the* *District of Columbia Courts*

2006 marked the fourth year of the District of Columbia Courts effort to integrate strategic planning and performance measurement into daily business operations. Guided by *Committed to Justice in the Nation's Capital, Strategic Plan of the District of Columbia Courts 2003 - 2007*, the Courts made significant improvements in the five strategic areas vital to the administration of justice:

- ◆ Enhancing the Administration of Justice
- ◆ Broadening Access to Justice and Service to the Public
- ◆ Promoting Competence, Professionalism, and Civility
- ◆ Improving Court Facilities and Technology
- ◆ Building Trust and Confidence

The accomplishments have been achieved through judicial input and action, courtwide teams and committees, and implementation of division Management Action Plans (MAPs)--which identify actions to help achieve courtwide strategic goals.

Since 2003, **all** divisions of the Courts have made significant progress in court improvement efforts. Listed below is only a small sampling (in each of the five Strategic Areas) of the achievements the Courts have begun, and are continuing. Check out the division you work in or are visiting, as well as other divisions, and celebrate the great work we have begun as we seek to achieve our Vision --

Open to All, Trusted by All, Justice for All.

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Enhancing the Administration of Justice

Fair and timely court processes and the effective and efficient use of the Courts' resources are central to our mission. From 2003 to present, the Courts worked to administer justice fairly, promptly, and efficiently.

The Courts: 1) Annually celebrate Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Native American Heritage Month (2005 addition) with a series of events designed to educate, enhance understanding, and acknowledge the contributions of these communities to the Courts and to society; 2) Updated the CJA Plan and established a list of well-qualified attorneys thereby improving legal services



Mr. Lawrence Baca, a member of the Pawnee nation and the Deputy Director of the Office of Tribal Justice, Department of Justice, speaks at the Courts' first celebration of Native American Heritage



Former Chief Judge Wagner and the Ballou Senior High Marching Band at Black History Month celebration.

available to indigent criminal defendants; 3) Developed a new Counsel for Child Abuse and Neglect (CCAN) Plan for Family Court cases, adopting attorney practice standards and requiring attorney training and screening to ensure that well-qualified attorneys are appointed in these cases; 4) Revised the Guardianship Program for probate matters involving incapacitated adults to include a training requirement for attorneys participating in the program, thereby improving legal services; 5) As a part of the Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS), the court scans all filings and reports to ensure that users have access to complete case information in a more timely manner.

Court of Appeals: 1) Implemented a summer mediation project to assess whether mediation can facilitate early case resolution with a high level of party satisfaction; the project exceeded settlement expectations and was expanded into a one-year pilot project for 2006; 2) Installed a new digital recording system in the courtroom providing enhanced sound clarity and recordings of oral arguments; 3) To reduce delays in the resolution of direct criminal appeals, the



Employee talent on display at the 2005 Hispanic Heritage celebration: James Plunkett and William Agosto.

Court revised its policy of routinely staying direct criminal appeals pending the resolution of a collateral attack on the conviction in the trial court; 4) The Court revised its plan for providing legal representation for indigent criminal appellants, and implemented a rigorous application process for attorneys seeking to be appointed to represent such appellants to enhance the quality of legal representation.

Civil Division: 1) Implemented a Landlord Tenant Mediation Program which provides litigants the opportunity to settle their cases at several critical junctures before trial, helping them to resolve cases in a way that satisfies both the tenant and the landlord and avoid unnecessary evictions; 2) Implemented E-Filing in the most complex civil cases, allowing pleadings to be filed electronically over the Internet, resulting in significant time and cost savings; 3) Improved customer service by processing cash transactions for filing fees by deputy clerks right at the customer service windows.

Crime Victims Compensation Program: For FY Years 2003 - 2005, received grants totaling \$6.7 million to supplement the amounts available to pay awards to victims; approved and paid 5,806 claims with payments totaling \$21 million to assist victims of crime.

Criminal Division: 1) Established a Prostitution Calendar to handle all prostitution arrests except those occurring in Wards 7 and 8 (which are handled by the East of the River Community Court). The purpose of the calendar is to allow a judge to understand the effects of prostitution on the quality of life in the community, and to assist

offenders who are prostituting because of drug addiction or lack of other social services to escape the prostitution lifestyle; 2) Enhanced the enforcement of bench warrants in alcohol-traffic cases by forwarding those issued for failure to appear to the Metropolitan Police Department for service.

Domestic Violence Unit: Limits the number of Civil Protection Order cases heard daily to reduce waiting time for court participants.

Family Court: 1) Implemented a Benchmark Permanency Hearing pilot program for older youth in foster care to help them make decisions and plans for their future and to coordinate a full range of services necessary for their success when they gain independence; 2) Instituted a mediation program for all child abuse and neglect cases. An independent evaluation conducted in 2004 by the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges found that mediated cases reached adjudication and disposition significantly faster than cases processed without the benefit of mediation, with high participant satisfaction; 3) In partnership with the D.C. Bar, operates a case evaluation program for domestic relations cases.



Family Treatment Court graduates are congratulated by Jo-Ella J. Brooks, Family Treatment Court Coordinator.

Experienced family lawyers provide parties and their counsel with a neutral evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of their respective positions, thereby facilitating early settlement or enhanced preparation for trial; 4) In collaboration with the Multi-Door Division, implemented same day mediation of domestic relations cases, which offers accelerated access to family mediation of child custody, visitation, child and spousal support, and property issues; 5) Established a Truancy Calendar where one judge hears all cases of elementary school truants and their parents or caretakers. The truancy rate for these children dropped 40% during its first 6 months of operation; 6) Expanded the "one family-one judge" case management model to include juvenile traffic cases papered in conjunction with delinquency matters; 7) Transferred responsibility for collection and distribution of child support payments and the wage withholding function of child support enforcement to the D.C. Office of the Attorney General providing much needed support to families receiving child support; 8) Implemented the Remedial Project to address foster care cases where the children had been in out of home placements in excess of 2 years; 9) Implemented the Family Treatment Court, a court supervised residential drug treatment facility for substance abusing females and their children, with Court Improvement Project Grant awards.

Probate Division: 1) Established procedures to limit waiting time in the Clerk's Office to 10 minutes or less in 85% of cases--actual performance exceeds this goal; 2) Enhanced fiduciaries' compliance with reporting schedules by implementing a modern automated monitoring system. As a result, delinquency notices are timely issued and hearings are timely held.

Social Services Division: 1) Implemented

the first female-only psychological educational treatment groups to target adolescent female developmental needs; 2) Initiated curfew checks for juveniles under supervision to enhance public safety.

Special Operations Division: 1) Redesigned juror qualification form; 2) Began issuing juror fees and travel subsidies on one check rather than mailing up to 10 separate juror checks during the course of one week; 3) Instituted recommendations outlined in Council for Court Excellence's report Improving Juror Response Rates in the District of Columbia, to summon potential jurors. As a result, the Superior Court achieved a 6-7% increase in its juror yield; 4) The Chief Judge implemented a juror enforcement program to increase the diversity of the juror pool by sanctioning jurors who fail to report for jury duty when summoned; 5) Increased efforts to provide deaf and hearing-impaired jurors with accommodations to enable them to serve effectively, such as improved access to interpreting services, assistive listening technology and real-time captioning; 6) To enhance services for jurors, the Courts implemented an interactive juror website that allows jurors to view their last or next scheduled date of service, complete the juror questionnaire, and defer their service for up to 90 days online; 7) Provide jurors with a Business Center featuring dial-up modem, facsimile and copier access; 8) Provide the juror telephone messages on the main information line in Spanish as well as in English, and the Juror Brochure and FAQs sheet in Braille format to blind and vision impaired jurors; 9) Premiered a Juror-Judge Dialogue between jurors who had served on trials and Superior Court jurists who had recently completed jury service themselves. This open dialogue was designed to express the Court's sincere thanks to citizens who served as jurors and to solicit ideas on how the Court can make the jury experience more meaningful in the future.

Budget and Finance Division: Continued to enhance operation of the PayIT system and to train court staff in its use, to ensure the timely processing and payment of invoices.

Court Reporting and Recording Division: 1) Implemented CourtSmart, a fully digital audio recording system, which provides much-improved audio thereby expediting transcript production; 2) Initiated a transcript tracking and reporting system providing the capability to initiate, edit, search, categorize, and browse transcript orders. Through this system and reengineered processes, the division streamlined the transcript production process, adding express (three day) and intermediate (15 day) transcript delivery options, and achieved its goal of increasing transcript production by 30% in 2005.

Human Resources Division: Recruited interns at many of the local universities, achieving a diversity (Asian, Black and Latino) rate of 53%, while giving college students a unique opportunity to gain valuable real life judicial experience.

Research and Development Division: Since FY 2003, has secured over \$10 million in grant funds for new court initiatives or to expand existing programs, such as enhancing the case processing of abused and neglected children; providing training to the judiciary on handling domestic violence cases; improving the exchange of automated information between the Courts, Federal and local criminal justice agencies; providing services and assistance to victims of

crime; improving the accountability of juveniles under the Court's supervision; and enhancing the processing of quality of life cases through the Community Court in the District of Columbia.

Broadening Access to Justice and Service to the Public

The D.C. Courts recognize the increasing diversity of the community and seek to ensure that all District residents have full access to the judicial process. The Courts continue to make improvements regarding this strategic issue.

The Courts: 1) Continued the work of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Access, a permanent committee of the D.C. Courts established by the Joint Committee on Judicial Administration in 1996, which seeks to enhance equal justice for all court participants and ensure that court processes and procedures are free of bias; 2) Initiated a program to replace and improve signage throughout the Judiciary Square complex that identifies offices and courtrooms (lighted signs now indicate whether court is in session) and important safety and security features, such as emergency exits and "areas of rescue assistance" for the disabled; 3) Divisions have completed or are in the process of revising forms and brochures to make them easier to understand, as well as translating them into Spanish; additionally, many forms are now available on the Courts' website; 4) Hired bilingual personnel to staff each Clerk's Office that serves the public to enhance access for Spanish-speaking persons; 5) Expanded public hours of



An example of the new signage at the Courts.



Family Court Intake Center.

operation in all divisions to provide increased access to court services (additionally, the Civil Division Small Claims and Landlord Tenant Clerks' Offices offer extended hours on Wednesday evenings and Saturdays); 6) Translated key pages of the Courts' website into Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese and Amharic to serve the growing number of immigrants who have court matters.

Court of Appeals: 1) Established an Access to Justice Commission to make civil legal representation more broadly available to low-income and poverty-level District residents. The commission is comprised of judges, D.C. Bar leaders, lawyers who serve low-income people, and other justice system representatives. The Commission is addressing a number of issues: funding for legal services; language access and cultural sensitivity; the legal services network and its infrastructure; ease of participation in the work of legislative and administrative bodies; and the systemic barriers including forms, scheduling practices, and rules governing filings in various courts; 2) Retrofitted argument tables to accommodate litigants in wheelchairs and installed a new

sound system to enhance the ability of the hearing-impaired public to hear court proceedings; 3) Enhanced sound clarity for litigants, judges and the public by installing a new computer-based, digital sound recording system in the courtroom, which allows compact disks of oral arguments to be made available; 4) Updated and revised instructions to litigants to reflect the new rules and to make the instructions more understandable.

Civil Division: 1) Developed informational videos in English and Spanish that are available in the public waiting areas outside Landlord Tenant Court and Small Claims Court. The videos provide customers with an overview of the Landlord Tenant and Small Claims court process, their rights, and where they can obtain further assistance; 2) In addition to Civil I cases which can now be electronically filed, in 2006 and 2007 the Civil Division will begin expanding electronic filing to all civil cases; 3) Collaborated with the D.C. Bar to open an on-site Landlord Tenant Resource Center that provides free legal information to unrepresented landlords and tenants and referrals to legal and social service providers; 4) Provides the Law Students in Court Program, through collaboration with area law schools, to assist se parties in Landlord Tenant Court with legal representation.

Criminal Division: 1) Operates an East of the River Community Court (ERCC) that seeks to improve the quality of community life by reducing nuisance crimes through community-based sanctions, treatment, and social services to solve the underlying problems leading to unlawful behavior. All defendants arrested for non-domestic violence misdemeanor crimes in Wards 7 and 8 are processed in the ERCC, which requires

defendants to perform community service to emphasize the impact of their crimes on the community; 2) Operates a D.C. Misdemeanor and Traffic Community Court (DCTCC) that seeks to provide social services, such as drug/alcohol treatment, mental health treatment, homeless services, to non-violent offenders charged with minor misdemeanor and traffic offenses; 3) Reduced waiting time for the public in Arraignment Court by changing the time court begins from 10:30 am to 1:00 pm.

Domestic Violence Unit: Opened a Domestic Violence Satellite Unit at Greater Southeast Hospital to provide an alternative location to the courthouse for victims of domestic violence. This office provides quick and easy access to the Court for victims of domestic violence that reside East of the Anacostia River. Medical treatment can also be obtained at the hospital

Family Court: 1) Opened new facilities on JM-Level which provide one location to conduct all Family Court business, thereby enhancing access to court services; 2) Offers evening and weekend hours in the Juvenile and Neglect Clerk's Office; 3) Operates a *pro se* Self Help Center, which provides information and assistance to parties in domestic relations and paternity and support cases.

Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division: Provides alternative dispute resolution (ADR) services for unrepresented litigants in civil, small claims, tax, probate, landlord tenant, domestic relations, and child abuse and neglect cases, and for any individual with a neighborhood dispute or consumer claim.

Probate Division: Provides informational videos available on loan or for viewing at the courthouse on topics related to Small

Estates, Guardianships and Conservatorships of Incapacitated Adults, and Fiduciary Record-Keeping to enhance public access to probate services.

Special Operations Division: 1) Employs a full-time Spanish language interpreter on staff to ensure access to court proceedings for Spanish-speaking litigants; additionally, approximately 80 federally certified interpreters in almost 40 languages provide interpreting services during court proceedings and other court business; 2) Child Care Center provides on-site care for the children of jurors, witnesses and other parties who are required to appear in court.

Human Resources Division: 1) Posts job announcements and the Courts' employment application on the Courts' website and other websites; 2) Implemented targeted recruiting (job fairs, etc.) to enhance employee diversity.

Information Technology Division: 1) Developed a website, named one of the top ten court websites worldwide by Justice Served, which provides information regarding the operation and business processes of the Court; division information, including required forms and instructional materials; answers to frequently asked questions; materials for self-represented litigants to enhance access to court services; Court of Appeals opinions; forms that can be printed out and filed with the court; annual reports; budget materials; and job listings. General information and phone listings are available in five foreign languages, with additional forms and materials in Spanish; 2) Added an interactive juror services webpage, enabling prospective jurors to fill out the juror questionnaire, defer their date of service, and access their last and next scheduled dates of service, all online.

Promoting Competence, Professionalism and Civility

The effective administration of justice depends upon respect for the Courts as an institution, and the competence, professionalism and civility of those who work for or conduct business with the Courts. To this end, the Courts continue to make gains to assure that all employees are well-trained and receive the support necessary to achieve excellence and meet the needs of the public.



Town Hall meeting held in Ward 5.

The Courts: 1) Implemented a new Employee Orientation Program to introduce new employees to the D.C. Courts; 2) Developed an Intranet to facilitate communication among personnel courtwide; 3) Require all division directors to ensure that at least 75% of their staff complete 10 hours of job-related training annually to promote well-trained, customer-oriented staff to serve the public; 4) Implemented a new performance management system for managers and employees linking job performance to achievement of strategic objectives and compensation; 5) Hold special events honoring Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Native American Heritage month annually to increase cultural sensitivity and understanding; 6) Held mandatory ethics awareness training for all court employees; 6) Implemented a Senior Leadership Development initiative including training on

Emotional Intelligence, 360^o Feedback and individual coaching sessions.

Criminal Division: Collaborated with the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General, the Public Defender Service and the Superior Court Trial Lawyers' Association to hold a Forum on Professionalism and Civility for judges and members of the D.C. Bar.

Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division: Drafted a set of ethical guidelines to be used by all mediators.

Probate Division: Drafted new attorney practice standards providing greater oversight of attorneys and fiduciaries to enhance service to incapacitated adults and other parties in Probate cases.

Administrative Services Division: Conducted training for Information Center staff to promote excellent customer service.

Center for Education and Training: Continuously offers classes to court employees on customer service and communication techniques.

Human Resources Division: Instituted skill based tests more broadly to ensure the hiring and promotion of competent individuals.



Chief Judge King welcomes Law Fair participants.

Improving Court Facilities and Technology

The effective administration of justice requires an appropriate physical and technological environment. Court personnel and the public deserve facilities that are safe, comfortable, secure and functional, and that meet the needs of those who use them. Technology must also support the achievement of the Courts' mission. The Courts have many achievements in these strategic areas.

The Courts: 1) Obtained final approval of a Master Plan for Judiciary Square complex from the National Capital Planning Commission on August 4, 2005; 2) Implemented numerous security upgrades and enhancements recommended in a Courthouse Security Assessment conducted by the U.S. Marshal Service; 3) Updated its Emergency Procedures and Evacuation Plan, including Shelter-in-Place procedures in the event of an emergency that requires staff and the public to remain in the courthouse; 4) Developed a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), which provides policy, responsibilities, and procedures for ensuring the ability of the D.C. Courts to continue essential functions in the event of an emergency.

Administrative Services Division: 1) Completed an upgrade of the HVAC, electrical and plumbing systems; 2) Renovated restrooms in Moultrie Courthouse; 3) Repaired and/or replaced elevators and escalators in Moultrie Courthouse; 4) Incorporated GSA building evaluation reports into a capital projects plan (Master Plan for D.C. Courts' Facilities), which continues to upgrade Court facilities as funds are appropriated by Congress. Milestones include: construction of a new garage to serve the Old Courthouse, the future home of the Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces; the Old Courthouse restoration project; renovated Family Court spaces; renovation of Crime Victims Compensation Program space in Building A; renovation of Social Services Division space in Building B; design initiation of a new juvenile holding area in the Moultrie Courthouse; infrastructure improvements and space redesign activities in Building A to house the Multi-Door and Probate Divisions, which will relocate from the Moultrie Courthouse in Fall and Winter 2006, thereby making room for Family Court consolidation.



The Old Courthouse, which is being renovated as the future home of the Court of Appeals.

Center for Education and Training: Offered a regular schedule of technical/computer classes, including IJIS training, to enhance skills.

Human Resources Division: Implemented a Public Access Defibrillator program, which provides self-directed access to an automated electronic defibrillator (AED). The Human Resources Division trained 30 employees on the proper use of the AED and CPR.

Information Technology Division: 1) Implemented the Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS) to support efficient and effective case processing, court management, and judicial decision-making; 2) Developed a new security policy and took significant steps to defend against threats to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of public and private information; 3) Established an IT governance structure and protocols/procedures to ensure implementation of disciplined processes; 4) Reached a major milestone in 2005 with certification of compliance with Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) Level II, reflecting the D.C. Courts' use of best practices in performance, governance, and control of information systems. The Government



Some of the many books collected for the Hooked on Books initiative.

Accountability Office (GAO) has asked the Courts to prepare a white paper discussing our experiences with CMMI that can be shared as a model with federal institutions; 4) Implemented, in cooperation with the Budget and Finance Division, a new web-based voucher system for CJA and CCAN, the Court of Appeals, and the Probate, Multi-Door, and Court Reporting and Recording Divisions, replacing the mainframe application; 5) Implemented a web-based Family Mediation Agreement/Consent Order application for the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division.

Building Trust and Confidence

The Courts continually strive to maintain the trust and confidence of litigants, attorneys, and other who participate in the justice system, as well as the community at large. The Strategic Plan establishes three goals in this area: to inform the community about court operations and the role of the judicial branch; to be accountable to the public; and to be responsive to the community. The Courts have made significant strides in these strategic goals.

The Courts: 1) Co-host a Youth Law Fair with the D.C. Bar, inviting area teens to spend a Saturday at the courthouse for mock trials and a discussion of legal issues.



Adoption Day at the Courts.



Criminal Division Community Court Conference

The goal of the Fair is to promote an understanding of current legal issues, enhance knowledge about the judicial system, and educate teens about careers in the law; 2) Hold Court of Appeals oral arguments in the community at area law schools to provide law students with a real knowledge of the D.C. Court system and appellate litigation; 3) Provide comprehensive information for the public on the website; 4) Established a Public Education/Community Outreach MAP Team to further inform the public about the court system and role of the Judicial Branch; 5) Adopted a set of courtwide performance measures, based on the nationally-known Trial Court Performance Standards, which will be implemented in 2006 and 2007; 6) Held a series of town hall meetings throughout D.C. in 2004-2005 to solicit community members' feedback on the Courts and enhance public understanding of the court system; 7) Continued the Outreach Forums of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Access where community groups are invited to share their perceptions and feedback on court operations and performance; 8) Installed suggestion boxes in all offices that serve the public. Hundreds of comments continue to be

received and reviewed by court administrators, leading to a variety of program and service enhancements; 9) Conduct ongoing surveys to gather public perceptions of Court operations and services in order to make improvements; 10) In 2006, piloted a Law Day program where judges (including both Chief Judges) speak at local schools to provide students with information about the role and functioning of the Courts.

Crime Victims Compensation Program: 1) Promotes public awareness of its services by providing public presentations to the Metropolitan Police Department, the Victim/Witness Assistance Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office and numerous other non-profit organizations; 2) Works extensively with other domestic violence service organizations to provide services to victims housed in hotel rooms in temporary emergency housing.

Criminal Division: 1) To promote public awareness of the Criminal Division's Community Courts and hear residents' concerns regarding quality of life crimes in their neighborhoods, judges regularly attend Citizen's Advisory Council, Police Service Area and other community meetings; 2) Operates a Drug Court to address the needs of non-violent offenders whose addiction to drugs leads to criminal behavior.

Domestic Violence Unit: 1) Conducts classes on domestic violence for high school students in conjunction with the Catholic University Law School and the Georgetown University's Street Law Program to provide information on the dynamics of domestic violence and the court process; 2) Instructs new police cadets on the civil and criminal domestic violence court process.

Family Court: 1) Holds an Annual Adoption Day ceremony to enhance community awareness about the adoption process and the large number of District children in the foster care system who are in need of permanent homes. Between 2003 and 2005, 75 families adopted 105 children on Adoption Day; 2) Provides early intervention and diversion opportunities for juveniles charged with offenses; 3) Collaborated with the Department of Health, Department of Mental Health, District of Columbia Public Schools, Department of Human Services, and Child and Family Services Agency to open a Mayor's Services Liaison Center that facilitates inter-agency coordination to enhance the level of services provided by the Courts; 4) Established a Truancy Court Diversion Program in collaboration with several D.C. government agencies. Operating at Garnett Patterson Middle School and Kramer Middle School, the program is designed to increase school attendance and improve academic performance and behavior. Family Court judges hold weekly meetings with children and administer rewards and corrective actions to promote compliance with service plans developed for each child and his or her family; 5) Created the Hooked on Books Program to promote literacy and encourage reading among the 4,000 children and their families who are referred to the Court each year; 6) Collaborated with the Metropolitan Police Department to create a Restorative Justice Supervision Program to address an increase

in unauthorized use of motor vehicle crimes by juveniles.

Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division: 1) Began the Same-Day Mediation program, offering accelerated access to family mediation for domestic relations litigants; 2) Collaborated with the Court of Appeals to launch a pilot effort in mediating appellate cases, which exceeded settlement expectations and was expanded into a one-year pilot project for 2006.

Probate Division: Participates in community programs to enhance awareness of Probate issues including wills and guardianship.

Social Services Division: 1) Implemented an initiative whereby delinquency prevention teams attend Patrol Service Area meetings with police officers to discuss community concerns and develop relationships with community residents; 2) Launched the Leaders of Today in Solidarity (LOTS) Program, a specialized supervision unit exclusively serving juvenile females under court supervision for delinquency; 3) Administers the Juvenile Drug Court Program, placing non-violent juveniles with substance abuse problems in a 8-12 month treatment program.

Budget and Finance Division: Obtained an unqualified opinion on the Courts' annual independent financial audit for the fifth year in a row.