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Civil Law Self-Help Center Provides Self-Represented Litigants With Legal Advice

By Michael Sommermeyer

The Las Vegas Township Justice Court and the Eighth Judicial District Court opened a new Civil Self-Help Center on December 7, 2009 to the public in the Regional Justice Center (RJC).

The Civil Law Self-Help Center provides self-represented litigants with the tools to effectively prepare for court. The center will provide common civil forms, education and self-help legal information to those wishing to represent themselves in civil matters in the Clark County court system.

"This Civil Law Self-Help Center allows us to respond to the needs of the community and the courts," said District Court Presiding Civil Judge Elizabeth Gonzalez. "Our civil caseload has increased this year as more individuals face foreclosure, civil lawsuits and landlord-

tenant issues. Many of those people are self-represented and require help in navigating our courts."

Legal Aid of Southern Nevada will staff the center with a lawyer and four bilingual paralegals who will provide assistance to pro per litigants. They will remain neutral and will not provide legal advice. The center will offer assistance in the following Legal Topics: Civil Actions, Landlord – Tenant and Evictions, Mediation, Protection

Orders and Small Claims. A mediator also will offer litigants the option of using no cost resolution programs to settle their matters outside of a courtroom.

The Civil Law Self-Help Center will instruct litigants in how to file legal documents, provide information about lawyer referral services, legal aid programs and other services, provide general information about court rules, procedures and practices, provide court schedules and information

on how to schedule a case, and provide litigants with court forms and instructions.

The center, located on the first floor of the RJC, will be open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each day.

A Civil Law Self-Help Center Web site will allow individuals to prepare legal documents over the Internet at <http://www.clarkcountycourts.us/self-help.html>.

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Federal Grant Expands Adult Drug Court

By Michael Sommermeyer

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has awarded the Eighth Judicial District Court an \$885,960 grant to expand residential treatment options for participants in the Adult Drug Court.

The money will improve efforts to retain participants in the Adult Drug Court program, reduce recidivism, and reduce overcrowding in the local jail. The District Court will use the three-year grant to partner with local non-profit organizations to place more individuals into residential or day treatment services..

"Southern Nevada is in desperate need of funding for residential substance abuse and mental health treatment beds. This grant will provide a much needed resource to our community for those people who are extremely addicted to illegal drugs and prescription drugs," said Judge Jackie Glass. "The court can now assist more individuals that require an intensive treatment program in order to break their cycle of drug addiction."

The three-year grant will provide \$295,320 a year to extend appropriate treatment options to participants when residential treatment beds are fully occupied, protect the community by addressing drug addiction and reduce the number of drug offenders sitting in the jail seeking treatment.

SAMHSA is a public health agency within the Department of Health and Human Services responsible for improving substance abuse prevention. Considered as a model court, the District Court's Adult Drug Court was established in 1992 to provide supervision and treatment for individuals addicted to drugs. When the Adult Drug Court was created, only four Drug Courts operated across the nation.



"Though we have made great strides in reforming the juvenile justice system over the past six years, we have not achieved significant overall decline in the number of youth committing crimes, especially among minority youth.."

Judge William O. Voy

Juvenile Judge Reaches Out To The Community

Clark County Family Court Judge William O. Voy hosted a community forum titled "Preventing Juvenile Delinquency" October 2 at the Pearson Community Center in North Las Vegas. The forum was sponsored by the Eighth Judicial District Court and the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice Services.

"We have too many minority youth appearing in the Juvenile Court compared to the rest of the population," said Juvenile Court Judge William O. Voy. "Though we have made great strides in reforming the juvenile justice system over the past six years, we have not achieved significant overall decline in the number of youth committing crimes, especially among minority youth."

"Community intervention is needed to provide services for families and youth at risk. We want to provide a network of programs and services to parents to assist them in preventing their children from committing crimes so they never end up in the juvenile justice system," said Voy.

The forum brought community groups and agencies together to identify services and programs that could be used to assist in preventing juvenile crimes in the community. Judge Voy hopes to further conversations to provide early-intervention services to families with at risk youth and work to prevent many juveniles from reaching the juvenile justice system.

District Court Moves To Mandatory E-filing

In August Eighth Judicial District Court Chief Judge T. Arthur Ritchie, Jr. issued an administrative order detailing the Court's decision to require mandatory electronic filing beginning on February 1, 2010 for Civil and Domestic cases.

This decision came after months of reviewing the District Court's paper and electronic filing practices and a review of the Nevada Supreme Court's implementation of e-filing this year.

The Executive Committee of the Eighth Judicial District Court concluded that electronic filing would eliminate the substantial time required to scan filed documents, and will make calendaring less time consuming. Also it concluded that e-filing will eliminate human error in routing filed documents to the proper files. It is the court's expectation that mandatory e-filing will substantially improve customer service and access to justice.

For the last few years, the court already has implemented mandatory e-filing for complex civil cases including construction defect cases and some medical malpractice cases. That experience allowed the District Court to develop some best practices and iron out the many wrinkles that accompany a major shift in policy and procedures.

The court's e-filing partner, WizNet, has helped the court work through many of the early problems in e-filing. A series of classes have been held since September to train approximately 2,500 attorneys and paralegals on the e-filing process. Additional on-line classes will be held throughout January 2010.

In 2010 District Court Will Build Upon 2009

By Chief Judge T. Arthur Ritchie, Jr

In 2010 the District Court will build upon plans made in 2009 to improve services and prepare for the additional of new Civil and Family judges.

Some of our accomplishments for 2009 included the creation of a Civil Law Resource Center to assist prose litigants with preparing documents for small claims, landlord tenant and other civil matters filed in the Las Vegas Justice and District Courts. The District Court also built four new courtrooms at the Family Services and Services Center campus on Pecos Avenue.

The court was very successful with the use of settlement judges in 2009. Medical Malpractice Settlement Conferences held in May and June allowed the court to resolve 37 cases, or more than half of the 73 settlement conferences held. Many of the cases settled were scheduled for trial in 2010.

A similar settlement conference marathon at Family Court resulted in the settlement of 47 family cases. These settlement programs were approved in March 2009 when the District Court and the Nevada Supreme Court met to review strategies for addressing cases pending in the court. It was a success and we are looking forward to working with senior judges to conduct additional settlement marathons in 2010.

The court understands the fiscal challenges our community faces and will continue to manage our resources in a fiscally responsible manner. The increase in Civil Filing Fees approved by the legislature will allow us to offset the costs of constructing and paying for the civil judicial departments. We will continue to hold settlements and look for ways to address the backlogs in our courts and we will continue to innovate and look for new ways to improve access to justice.

Justice Court Solves Problems In 2009

By Chief Judge Ann Zimmerman

The opening of the Civil Self-Help Center on December 7, 2009 was the culmination of many years of effort by the Eighth Judicial District Court, the Las Vegas Justice Court and our partners in the justice community. The Civil Self-Help Center will provide much needed help and information to the self-represented litigants that appear in Las Vegas Justice Court. These self-represented litigants appear in court on matters involving landlord-tenant disputes, small claims cases, civil matters and temporary protective orders. The Civil Self-Help Center also offers mediation services provided by the Neighborhood Justice Center.

In 2009, Las Vegas Justice Court also completed a successful Traffic Amnesty program, which allowed the court to collect over \$5.3 million dollars in past due traffic fines. During the months of January and February, thousands of individuals took advantage of the Traffic Amnesty program by paying their past due traffic tickets online or in person at the Traffic Department. As a result, Las Vegas Justice Court has seen an 18% increase in revenue over the previous fiscal year. Las Vegas Justice Court is proud to return additional revenue to the county general fund from the increase in collection of unpaid traffic fines. This additional revenue is vitally important to the County during this time of economic crisis. Las Vegas Justice Court will continue to demonstrate its fiscal responsibility to assist the County in meeting their obligations to the citizens of Clark County.

Looking forward to 2010, Las Vegas Justice Court will be implementing some new IT projects in order to improve service to the community as well as the exchange of information between our justice partners. We will be migrating off of Court View in our civil division to Tyler Odyssey. This will enable the Court to offer electronic filing of documents. The criminal division will also convert their case management system to Tyler Odyssey. Once these projects are completed, all divisions in Las Vegas Justice Court will utilize Tyler Odyssey as their case management system. Our ability to process documents in a faster, more efficient manner will be greatly enhanced with the new case management system. Las Vegas Justice Court is looking forward to the successful completion of these projects in 2010.

Court Prepares For Mandatory E-Filing

By CEO Steven D. Grierson

Chief Judge T. Arthur Ritchie Jr. issued an order on August 28, 2009 directing the District Court to implement mandatory e-filing on February 1, 2010.

E-Filing changes everything for the District Court; a paperless court will improve our administration of court records and speed up our system. No longer will it take time to scan documents and attach them to a paper record. It expands our vision of a virtual court and reduces our need to warehouse millions of pages of documents.

It appears the announcement of mandatory e-filing has been reasonably accepted by the legal community. On September 11, 2009, the court began offering training on subsequent Friday's through December, which have been overflowing with individuals seeking help and information.

The morning and afternoon sessions held at the Regional Justice Center and the Family Court have allowed attorneys and staff members of local law firms to learn the requirements of mandatory e-filing, such as how to attach files, serve parties and prepare documents. Court staff has explained to nearly 2,500 individuals the requirements and procedures that must be followed. More classes have been scheduled for January.

I am confident the court will be able to make an uncomplicated transition to the new system in February. I appreciate our Court Clerk employees who have found solutions to problems and helped us prepare for the new system. Already attorneys have started to use electronic filing to reply to civil actions, which tells us many will be comfortable and familiar with the system before February 1, 2010.



A total of 49 families welcomed 78 children into their homes during Clark County's Adoption Day Ceremony sponsored by the Family Court, CASA and the Clark County Department of Family Services.

Adoption Day Unites Foster Children With Families

Family Court judges conducted adoption proceedings Nov. 5, 2009 in the atrium of the Clark County Family Court at 601 N. Pecos Road in Las Vegas. A total of 49 families welcomed 78 children into their homes as permanent members of their families.

Clark County Adoption Day was a joint effort of the Clark County Department of Family Services, District Court, the Court Appointed Special Advocate program and CASA Foundation, Family Mediation, The Adoption Exchange, and Wendy's Wonderful Kids.

Clark County Commissioner Chris G. Giunchigliani delivered the keynote address during the Adoption Day Program and presented a proclamation to the Clark County Foster & Adoptive Parent Association designating November 2009 as National Adoption Awareness Month in Clark County. The association has worked with more than 200 foster homes, agencies and individuals to help families with adopted children.

Judges William E. Gonzalez, Cynthia N. Giuliani, Jennifer Elliott, Sandra L. Pomrenze and Senior Judge Terry Marren

presided over the many adoptions.

This year marked the 10th anniversary of National Adoption Day, a national day of celebration for adoptive families and an opportunity for courts to open their doors and finalize the adoptions of children who have previously resided in foster care.

According to CASA, there are currently 129,000 children in foster care available for adoption. This year approximately 3,500 children were adopted nation-

wide during National Adoption Day ceremonies.

The Family Court and Clark County have worked hard in 2009 to make a commitment to strive to make sure permanent homes are found for foster and adoptive children in the community.

Clark County's Division of Family Services (DFS) announced during the event that the county has increased the number of finalized adoptions this year, with more than 400 adoptions finalized by DFS and the Family Court in 2009.

Justice Court Welcomes New Judges to the Bench

The Las Vegas Township Justice Court hosted an investiture ceremony for new Judges Joseph S. Sciscento and Melanie Andress-Tobiasson on August 14, 2009.

Judges Sciscento and Andress-Tobiasson were joined by family and friends to formally be sworn into office. They also were presented their judicial robes. Members of the local judiciary from the Justice Court and the Eighth Judicial District court attended the ceremony. Chief Judge Zimmerman welcomed both judges to the Las Vegas Township Justice Court.

Judge Zimmerman presided over the ceremony and was joined by Supreme Court Justices Nancy M. Saitta and Ron D. Parraguirre. Speakers for the event included Madeleine Andress, Judge Nancy Oesterle, Judge Jennifer Togliatti, Justice Saitta, Thomas F. Pitaro, Esq., and Judges Andress-Tobiasson and Sciscento.

Justice of the Peace Nancy Oesterle administered the oath of office to Judge Andress-Tobiasson and Justice of the Peace Tony Abbatangelo administered the oath of office to Judge Sciscento.

Model Drug Court Helps Mother's Keep Their Children Close

By Michael Sommermeyer

Since March 2008, the Clark County Courts have participated as a model court in a new federal program that works to help mothers become drug free in a unique residential treatment program. The Dependency Mothers' Drug Court was established to assist women who have child custody issues due to their addiction to methamphetamine or other substances.

On August 14, 2009, the first graduate of this program, Marcellina Morcos, was honored by Drug Court Judge Jennifer Elliott for her successful completion of the program.

The Dependency Mothers' Drug Court is supported by a \$3.7 million, five-year federal grant to assist and rehabilitate mothers addicted to methamphetamine. The participants also are at risk of permanently losing their children. The program is a partnership with the Healthy Families Program at WestCare, a residential treatment center for women and children.

The residential treatment program is unique in that mothers and their children live together while receiving treatment. The Dependency Mothers' Drug Court provides a positive alternative to incarceration that rehabilitates and strengthens families, breaks the cycle of drug use and enhances family reunification efforts. In addition to Ms. Morcos, the Drug Court has seven additional mothers preparing for graduation. The event recognized the achievements of these mothers and introduced this important program to the community.



Drug Court Judge Jennifer Elliott and Graduate Marcellina Morcos

Clark County Courts Reach Out To Those in Need

The Clark County Courts will provide some holiday help this year to individuals in our community in need with a couple of projects. A food drive to benefit the Salvation Army has collected many boxes of food items for families in Clark County. Also this year the courts have adopted more than 75 veterans for the holiday season.



Leanne Viela places items in the Salvation Army collection boxes.

The Salvation Army program supports the Salvation Army Food Bank. Food Donations are helping to restock the nearly empty food shelves that help to feed the homeless and less fortunate in Clark County this winter.

The Adopt-A-Veteran program provides assistance to veterans living in the HELP Genesis Apartments and the HELP Las Vegas Veterans Apartments. These veterans live on limited fixed incomes and have asked for everyday items, such as socks, toiletries and warm clothing.

Employees can still contribute to both causes. Salvation Army food boxes are located by the North Information Booth. Canned goods and dried foods are accepted.

To participate in the Adopt-A-Veteran program, contact Julie Olness-Weiner at (702) 671-3408.

Holiday Decorating Contest And The Winner Is...



Many individuals and court departments participated in the 2009 Holiday Decorating contest. The overall winner this year was the Las Vegas Township Justice Court Criminal Data Entry Department (see photos above) for turning its entire work area into a winter wonderland!

Here are some other holiday scenes found in the Clark County Courts:

