

E-SJI NEWS

Senate Confirms New Member to SJI Board of Directors

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On August 2, 2011, the Senate confirmed Chief Judge David Brewer as a new member of the SJI Board of Directors.

He is currently the Chief Judge of the Oregon Court of Appeals. Judge Brewer was elected to the court in 1999, and has served as chief judge since 2004. Prior to joining the Court of Appeals, he served as a state court trial judge and presided over criminal and civil matters. Previously, Judge Brewer was a Partner at the law firm Lombard, Gardner, Honsowetz & Brewer.

He is the immediate past President of the Council of Chief Judges of the State Courts of Appeals (CCJSCA), where he serves on the Council's Executive Committee. In 2008, Judge Brewer received the National Center for State Court's Distinguished Service Award for his contributions to the development of performance measures for the nation's state appellate courts.

He holds a B.A. in economics from California State University at Sonoma and a J.D. from the University of Oregon, School of Law.

Superior Court of Sonoma County, CA Updates Strategic Plan

In December 2009, the Superior Court of Sonoma County, California submitted an application to SJI requesting assistance to support an update to their strategic plan that included the provision of services to a sizeable population of litigants who are not U.S. residents, but work in, or reside part-time within the County (SJI-10-T-088). The challenge to the Court was to provide culturally competent services that ensured litigant access to justice through process improvements that enhance the Court's capacity to meet the changing population's needs.

The Court worked closely with Dr. John Martin from the Center for Effective Public Policy (CEPP), first to identify issues and clarify what types of assistance or improvements were needed, and then to convene as a leadership team to review recommendations and begin implementation. The result of CEPP's technical assistance to the court was a three-part product

including: 1) 2011-2013 strategic plan update; 2) litigant assistance plan; and 3) materials on leadership, change, team building and conflict transformation.

The second part of the plan stresses essential elements for any court in assessing the effectiveness of current operations and policies for providing litigant access services. Sonoma County has a litigant assistance network of providers with extensive experience in working with culturally diverse populations. Recommendations to improve this infrastructure included the following three action items: establishing a uniform assistance triage process, enhancing the network's governance, and increasing access to culturally appropriate services through enhanced understanding of the litigant's values and alternative approaches. A full copy of the report can be accessed through [NCSC's Digital Archive](#).

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Council for Court Excellence Concludes D.C. Bench-Bar-Media Dialogue Project



In FY 2009, Council for Court Excellence (CCE) received an SJI grant to address current D.C. (and national) issues through the D.C. Bench-Bar-Media Dialogue project (SJI-09-E-163).

This project was initiated after CCE completed an SJI grant in 2007, titled *The Journalist's Handbook*, which was designed to familiarize the media with how the D.C. courts operate (SJI-07-N-059). During the drafting of the *Handbook*, CCE discovered that a major source of tension between the courts and media was confusion about each other's roles.

Organized as a quarterly installment of panel presentations and meetings, the educational series recently concluded its first year of programming. Designed to foster discussion and enhanced understanding between the bench, bar, and media, the Dialogue project convened local and national leaders in their respective fields to address high profile issues impacting how the court interacts with journalists. A paramount focus for all parties involved was how transparency can benefit both the judicial branch and media.

CCE approached the topic of courts and the media at a time when there was growing interest nationally in coverage of individual cases and judges by the press. All parties were interested in establishing better cooperative relationships to interact more effectively. A significant focus was on improving public trust and confidence in the courts.

Pictures from each of the three public events include, clockwise from left to right: 1) *Press on Trial: The Libby Case* panelists at the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse on December 9, 2010; 2) *Confidentiality vs. Open Access in DC Juvenile Cases* presenters at the DC Court of Appeals, on May 23, 2011; and 3) *Social Networks, Computer Technology and the Courts* panelists and moderator at the Newseum on June 15, 2011.



The four-part series included the following seminars: 1) *Sharing Perspectives*, a closed door session designed to allow judges, attorneys, and journalists to candidly discuss issues of common complaint; 2) *Press on Trial: The Libby Case*; 3) *Confidentiality vs. Open Access in D.C. Juvenile Cases*; and 4) *Social Networks, Computer Technology and the Courts*. CCE worked to attract a wide range of speakers from their disciplines, and established relationships with the Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Courts and the Media, and the University of Nevada, Reno, to present content for the final seminar in the series.

A complete project report, including committee findings and appendices containing information about each of the four events is available through [NCSC's Digital Archive](#). Also, each state supreme court received a copy of the DVD produced by CCE titled, *Social Networks, Computer Technology, and the Courts*. CCE will be posting the content from the DVD on their [website](#) for those who are not able to access it through their state court law library.



Arizona Uses Stakeholder-Driven Approach to Improve Judicial Oversight in Probate Cases

In response to an aging population, the observable increase in probate case filings across the state, and growing interest in the protection of vulnerable adults, the Arizona Supreme Court established the Committee on Improving Judicial Oversight and Processing of Probate Matters. The Committee included judges, court administrators, fiduciaries, state agencies, members of the public, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and several other key stakeholders committed to fair, efficient, and cost-effective handling of probate matters.

The Committee issued its final report in June 2011, and presented the findings and recommendations to the Arizona Judicial Council. The full report and appendices are currently available on the Arizona Judicial Branch [website](#). Included in the report are a set of recom-

mendations and sub-recommendations for the Judicial Council to consider as it reviews and revises the current statutes, rules, proce-

dures, and training regimens impacting probate court proceedings and operations. The Committee has already worked with the Arizona Legislature to make statutory changes, and has suggested new rules and procedures which are currently being vetted by the Supreme Court and state bar.

Recommendation #5 in the report (pg. 21) recommended that the Supreme Court identify resources to conduct training and audits. This recommendation led the Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)



to apply for and receive an SJI grant in FY 2011, titled, *Strengthening the Operation of Arizona Probate Courts through Statewide Education* (SJI-11-E-088). This grant will assist the AOC in its design, development, and delivery of three online video-based probate court training programs for non-licensed fiduciaries, attorneys, and superior court investigators. The AOC, in collaboration with its stakeholders, will also author a bench book for judicial officers, and expand the on-line self-help resources available on the *Seniors and Probate Court website*. As a special condition of this grant award, the Supreme Court and AOC will share the results and products of this project with each of the 50 state chief justices and state court administrators, as well as other national court support and elder issue organizations.

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