

# Anniversary Issue

## Rooker Report

February 15, 1996

Published by the Davidson County Circuit Court Clerk's Office

Vol.4, No. 1

### THREE YEARS OLD AND 'COUNTING'

When the Rooker Report made its debut in February 1993, the man who authorized its publication would live only long enough to see the inaugural issue. The second edition would be devoted exclusively to his obituary.

Now, with three years of uninterrupted monthly issues on the shelves, we can only wonder if George L. Rooker would have been pleased with the quality of his creation.

Our objective is to offer a concise overview of the business activities associated with the circuit court clerk's operations and the people who make them tick.

Through words, statistics, pictures and graphics those functions are regularly documented for the scrutiny of those who care to know.

We trust that our readers find the reports both entertaining and informative while providing a window to the daily operations of one important phase of the local judiciary.

And as we usher in our fourth year of publication, we do so in tribute to the man who gave us our start with an admonition to make every issue count. Today, we are three years old and still counting.

--Richard R. Rooker

*...that's nice, sir...  
but we can't  
guarantee the fish  
will bite*

### VESTER RETIRES, CARTWRIGHT NEW WARRANTS CHIEF



Richard Vester

After 20 years of tracking down truant traffic offenders, Richard Vester bid adieu to his warrant office staff last month and looked ahead to a retirement that will include fishing and massaging his alter ego, "Shaky" the Shrine clown.

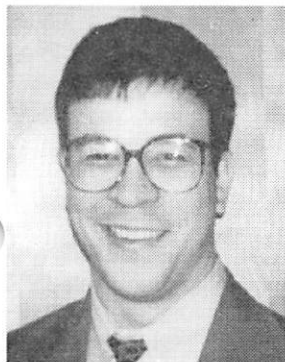
Bill Cartwright, an understudy for almost four years, was named to replace Vester as supervisor of the 23-person warrant office, which is responsible for collecting unpaid traffic tickets.

The transition was effective Feb. 1, two days after fellow workers toasted Vester with a luncheon in tribute to his years of dedicated service.

Vester joined the traffic violations team on April Fools Day in 1976 -- a date he credited with exemplifying his personality. He enjoyed teasing fellow workers and spiced up his work days with an endless repertoire of practical jokes. It was his way of coping with the stress of a job he did quite well.

Over the years, Vester rode a roller coaster of changes in traffic enforcement rules -- from the early days of arresting non-com-

(See VESTER, Page 2)



BILL CARTWRIGHT

### Savings of 40-50 Percent Announced

## Dial-A-Case Rates Slashed As Subscription List Grows

An increase in the number of subscribers has enabled the circuit court clerk's office to dramatically slash subscription rates for its electronic case access program known as Dial-A-Case.

Circuit Court Clerk Richard Rooker said across-the-board rate reductions of between 40-50 percent went into effect Feb. 1 for both existing and new subscribers.

"These rate reductions will make the program more appealing to many law firms and private companies that have held up their subscriptions because of the cost factor," Rooker said. "We are pleased that response to the program has enabled us to drop the rates to the benefit of all subscribers."

Dial-A-Case was introduced three years ago as a nonprofit service, initially providing computer modem access to general sessions civil division case files. The program was later expanded to include access to circuit and probate files at no additional expense to subscribers.

### **Convenience, Low Rates Attractive Incentives**

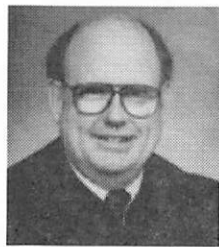
Among the advantages of the program is the convenience of not having to make trips to the courthouse, finding parking space and waiting for a clerk to produce requested case information. That entire scenario is avoided through computer query from the subscriber's office, resulting in a tremendous saving of time and hassle.

Affordability now becomes an attractive incentive, regardless of which program option selected. The new rate for basic party line service (eight or more subscribers) is now only \$50 per month -- down from the previous \$100 monthly fee. The deluxe party line for three or more subscribers dropped from \$252 to \$150 and the premium, or private, line rate has been reduced from \$680 to just \$400 per month.

Brochures reflecting the new rates and other pertinent information are now available to each of the participating clerks' offices.

**PROFILE**

## Judge John Brown: Putting Justice On Line



**BROWN**

Years from now, when computer technology has assumed its prominence in the judicial community and those who have pioneered its inception are given just recognition, John P. Brown's name should be near the top of the list.

The veteran General Sessions Court judge has played a key leadership role in the development of an integrated system that, once completed, will provide a communications link between the courts and the related components of the cases before them.

Called the Justice Information System, the brainchild of Brown and other progressive-minded jurists has slowly developed from a formative ad hoc committee project into one that is now entering its sixth year as an independent agency with government endorsement.

At full complement, the information network will be shared by at least 14 agencies covering the entire local justice system spectrum. The sharing of records will benefit a total of 24 judges and five court clerks through linkups with the Metro Police Department, the Sheriff's Office and one another.

A decade ago, such a sophisticated project might have been considered a science fiction figment from the advanced imagination of a dreamer. Despite the fact that man had walked on the moon and great strides were being made in the development of high-tech equipment, the "old school" mentality proved to be a barrier to progressive ideals.

But Brown, a computer buff with foresight and a stubborn streak, recognized the technological direction in which all areas of society was headed. He refused to be discouraged by critics, forging ahead in a determined mission to replace archaic methods with state-of-the-art technology fit for the times.

With the help of a handful of other visionaries, Brown's persistence began to pay dividends and his leadership role was punctuated by overlapping chairmanships of key committees within the system. While serving a three-year stint as chairman of the Justice Information Policy Committee, he was called upon by fellow members to head up the system's operating committee, a position he still holds two years later.

Brown's involvement with the program continues to be as diverse as the man himself, educated in both law and pharmacy with a passion for traditional country music, barbecued goat, politics and, of course, computers.

Two years following his graduation from the University of Tennessee,

he put his bachelor's degree in pharmacy to work as a partner in the family's J. P. Brown Drug Store chain. Even though the franchise was sold in 1994, he continues to be a member of the board of directors of another chain, Moon Drug Company. He earned his law degree from the Nashville School of Law in 1969 and is now serving his second eight-year term on the General Sessions Court bench.

In private life, Brown finds time for wife Anne, four children and membership in the Calvary United Methodist Church.

His versatility as a player in the justice information game extends to yet another level. As a vital team captain, he is instrumental in overseeing planning, design, purchasing, installation and implementation of the system's broad operational base. He likens the complexity of his job to that of presiding over the business functions of the nine-division General Sessions court, a role he experienced five years ago. As presiding judge, he was responsible for managing approximately 75 employees while at the same time maintaining limited jurisdiction over civil, misdemeanor, criminal, preliminary felony hearings, municipal, mental health and traffic cases.

**Brown's knowledge of computers and his convincing argument for government networking have been recognized beyond the boundaries of Davidson County. In 1990, he was appointed to a select committee for statewide automation, a position that allowed him to work with the Tennessee Supreme Court, state legislators and executives in defining needs for statewide judicial automation. The first fruits of that effort will be reaped later this year when the state's court clerks link up for a statewide child support network that will serve as a model system for the nation.**

At the local level, progress is becoming more noticeable as a staff of 10 employees -- headed by director Dick Ashby -- continues a feverish pace to accommodate on-line requests from participating departments. And some of the system's earlier opponents appear to be softening, much to the credit of a newsletter instituted last year to keep all parties apprised of the program's progress.

Following Brown's lead, Metro Public Defender Karl Dean is taking an aggressive approach as new chairman of the JIS policy committee and Davidson County Chancellor Bob Brandt -- whom Brown credits for much of the program's accomplishments -- continues to provide expert guidance as a key policy consultant.

Brown will seek a third term as General Sessions judge in 1998. He hopes to be able to use the system he helped design.

## Vester Retires (From Page 1)

pliers to the more civilized remedies of today. He was the only warrants clerk on the evening shift when he started. His job duties were to monitor the police radio, answer the telephone and issue warrants, often on the basis of the information he garnered from those two sources. At that time, nonpayment of tickets -- both parking and moving -- was a jailable offense. Those jailed were credited for \$5 a day until their fines were satisfied.

That all changed in 1984 when the Supreme Court declared traffic offenses to be civil debts and exempt from criminal prosecution. By that time, Vester had transferred from the warrant office and was business manager of the Traffic Violations Bureau's general operations.

Following that assignment, he returned to the warrant office, this time as supervisor of an operation totally unlike the one he had left five years earlier. Handcuffs and pistols had been replaced by pencil and paper and computers would soon add yet another dimension of sophistication to the collection of fines.

During his 10-year tenure as chief of the warrant office, Vester promoted technological advancement and was instrumental in the development of computer-generated garnishment levies and other vital documents.



**VESTER AS 'SHAKY'**

In his retirement, Vester has designs on a number of fishing holes and, of course, will continue to serve the Al Menah Shrine Temple as a member of the clown unit. For more than 30 years, he has donned paint and garb to entertain children of all ages as the clown "Shaky" in Shrine functions.

His constant companion throughout those years has been wife Ruth, whom he met and wed in 1959. "She had heard about me and she came with a friend to an American Legion dance to meet me," Vester brags. "We danced and it went from there."

Cartwright, 28, is a 1985 graduate of Goodpasture Christian School. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration at David Lipscomb University where he was graduated in 1989. Before joining the traffic warrant office in 1992, he was employed by the Metro Property Assessor and held other positions as a financial planner.

Cartwright and wife Tracy are the parents of two daughters, Kelsey, 5, and Mikayla, 8 months.

# Badges & Bar Codes

## A Computerized Approach to **JUROR** Management

With a new unified jury system ticking like clockwork, state trial court officials are now ready to introduce the next level of ongoing improvements to the judicial process.

This one will be of greatest benefit to internal operations, but will prove to be a bonus to jurors as well through more efficient processing and less paperwork.

Simply put, it is an automated jury management system -- a computer package that does everything previously done by human beings, but with greater speed, accuracy, depth and record-recall capability.

It will be put to use for the first time on April 15 when citizens randomly selected for jury duty at that time respond to summonses generated by the system.

They will be the first to receive a new single-page document testing their qualifications to serve, instructing them on the procedures, assigning their period of service and -- most significantly -- containing a bar coded badge that will become their personal identification and record their jury service history.

That all-inclusive instrument will be mailed on March 4 to prospective jurors randomly selected from the county's voter registration and drivers license rolls.

Those receiving the new summons must complete a simple questionnaire and mail it back to the courts within ten days. The form need only be folded, sealed and stamped, together with a return address. "They don't even have to bother with an envelope," said State Trial Court Administrator George Prentice, who is excited over both the convenience and efficiency features of the new system.

The top half of the document, Prentice noted, will be retained by the prospective juror and will be presented at the time he or she reports for jury service. That is the portion of the summons that contains the bar coded identification badge.

"All the juror has to do," Prentice explained, "is show the badge to the sign-in clerk. A scanner similar to the ones used by super markets will read the bar code and automatically record that person as being present and accounted for. The computer then will track that person's activity throughout the process and retain a permanent record for future reference."

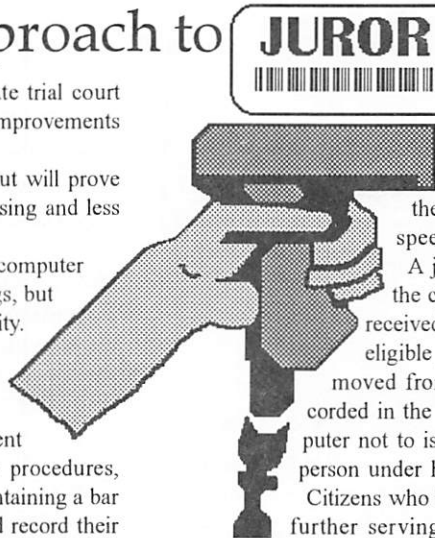
The new system, including both hardware and software, was furnished by the Justice Information System at a cost of \$50,000. Because it can generate its own eligible juror list and summonses, the estimated savings to taxpayers will be \$25,000 per year, Prentice said, noting that the courts have been paying an outside vendor for the services that can now be generated in house.

The computer has memory capacity to easily accommodate the county's current 400,000 eligible jurors, plus any growth rate factor, Prentice added.

When all of the trial courts -- Circuit, Criminal and Chancery -- are in session at the same time, up to 700 prospective jurors are required for the jury pool. "One of the key features of the system is that when names are selected from the jury pool for a particular case, the computer makes those selections at random," Prentice said.

"When a particular court calls for a voir dire," Prentice explained, "the computer will randomly select names from those in attendance and record it so that all prospective jurors are selected without duplication. A person will not be selected twice until all names have been exhausted."

That same result is being achieved under the current system, Prentice pointed out, but the computer will do it faster while reducing the amount of manual labor for the jury coordinator. "Our objective is to make sure that



everyone has an equal opportunity of being selected," he said. "Automation doesn't change that...it just reduces the amount of manpower necessary to achieve the end result and, of course, at a higher rate of speed."

A juror's entire service history will be stored in the computer, including the amount of payments received and updates of residential status. "When an eligible juror notifies the courts that he or she has moved from the county, that information will be recorded in the system," Prentice said. "That tells the computer not to issue any more summonses to that particular person under his or her present status."

Citizens who fulfill their call to jury duty are exempt from further serving for a three-year period. The only other grounds for being excused are extreme hardship and serious medical situations. These conditions are spelled out in the qualifying form, Prentice pointed out.

Prentice said that, including himself, five persons have been trained to operate the various functions of the computer system. The others are Sandy Smith, administrative assistant to Prentice; Lisa Smith, jury coordinator; Vicki Bailey, deputy Chancery Court clerk; and Andy Hinkle, project leader for the Justice Information System.

Prentice said the system has an unlimited license, so any number of trained personnel can be added as needed.

The new management system complements other recent efforts by the courts to take the sting out of serving on juries. Changes implemented since Prentice was brought on board two years ago have proven extremely effective and public friendly.

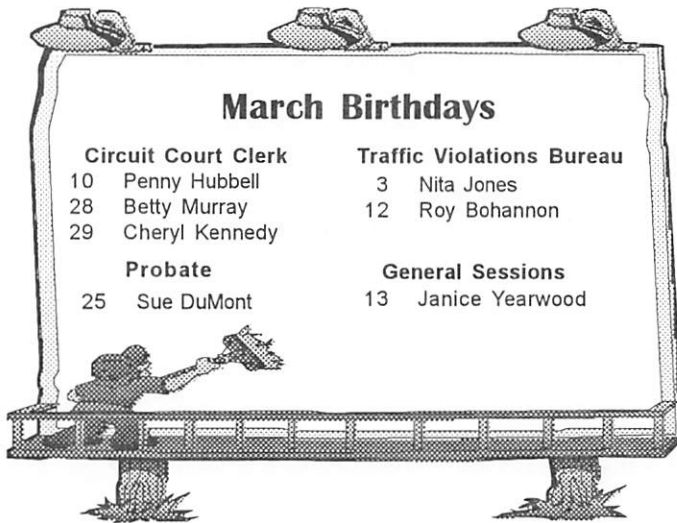
- *One-week service terms have replaced unpopular three-week schedules, eliminating a high influx of requests to be excused from serving.*
- *A telephone call-in system allows jurors in many instances to check in advance to determine if their services will be needed the next day. If not, they can resume normal daily functions without the previous hassles associated with jury service, such as loss of time on the job, paying parking fees and sitting all day without being selected on a jury panel.*

The next scheduled improvement is the construction of a general assembly room on the ground floor of the courthouse that will accommodate all prospective jurors collectively and offer entertainment and refreshments. The facility has been designed and funding has been allocated, but the project is currently being held up by remodeling of courtroom facilities elsewhere in the building. For example, the third floor courtroom and offices of Circuit Court Judge Barbara Haynes are getting facelifts. So, she and her staff have assumed temporary quarters in a ground floor area that eventually will be the new home of the Delinquent Tax office.

The tax office is now located where the jury assembly room will be. Once the planned exchange is effected, work can begin on the new jury quarters, probably in June.

No target date has been set for completion of the new assembly room, but until then jurors will continue to convene in the criminal court jury room on the sixth floor. That is the last thread of a judicial fabric that finally has caught up with the style of the times.





## March Birthdays

<b>Circuit Court Clerk</b>	<b>Traffic Violations Bureau</b>
10 Penny Hubbell	3 Nita Jones
28 Betty Murray	12 Roy Bohannon
29 Cheryl Kennedy	
<b>Probate</b>	<b>General Sessions</b>
25 Sue DuMont	13 Janice Yearwood

## Cheers...

Okay, we admit it...there's not a whole lot to cheer about this month. The weather was lousy, the groundhog saw his shadow and the bottom line of our tax return was written in red ink. But, hey! Things could have been worse. We could have been on the same jetliner as **Bob Bradshaw** when turbulent weather forced the pilot to suddenly drop altitude by some 25,000 feet. The plunge made Bradshaw, our probate master, wish he had not taken that Colorado skiing vacation. At least, that's the report from chief circuit court clerk **Karen Rooker**, who was on the same plane with hubby **Jimmy Rooker**. "We went from 35,000 feet to 10,000 feet in the blink of an eye," Karen reported. Bradshaw wasn't impressed with the pilot's skill at controlling the jet and probably won't be in the market for a discount airline ticket anytime soon...**Holly Russell**, a member of our circuit court clerking staff, underwent surgery this month and is recovering at home. She hopes to return to work in a few weeks...Also having surgery this month was **Beverly Estes**, a clerk in our Traffic Violations Bureau. We wish her a speedy recovery...And traffic information clerk **Lee Millsap** is back at her rotunda post following a brief illness.

## ...Tears

Deepest sympathy to three members of our staff who said good-bye to close family members since our last report.

**Pat McNaney**, husband of deputy traffic clerk **Eva McNaney**, passed away on Feb. 1 at Summitt Hospital after suffering a heart attack. He was a licensing inspector with the County Court clerk's office.

**Oscar Burnett York**, father of Traffic Violations Bureau Business Manager **Phil York**, succumbed to an extended illness on Feb. 4 at Memorial Hospital. He was 85 years of age and is survived by wife **Minnie York**.

**Lorine Drake**, mother of Chief Probate Court Clerk **Ruth Lester**, passed away on Feb. 8 at a hospital in Kenton, TN, following a brief illness. She was 87.

## Rooker Report

Published by the Davidson County Circuit Court Clerk's Office  
506 Metro Courthouse, Nashville, TN 37201

Established by **George L. Rooker (1929-1993)**,  
(Circuit Court Clerk, 1968-1993)

**Richard R. Rooker** ..... Circuit Court Clerk  
**Gene Baker** ..... Editor



Statistics compiled for the month of January

### Case Information

#### Circuit Court

New Civil Cases Filed ..... 330  
Civil Cases Concluded ..... 381  
New Divorce Cases Filed ..... 278  
Divorce Cases Closed ..... 313

#### General Sessions Civil

New Cases Filed ..... 3,116  
Executions Issued ..... 3,169  
Judgments Collected ..... \$515,906  
Orders of Protection Petitions ..... 181

#### Probate Court

New Cases Filed ..... 172  
Cases Closed ..... 101  
Cases Retired ..... 1

#### Traffic Violations

Moving Citations ..... 15,127  
Parking Violations ..... 9,040  
Total Fines Collected ..... \$277,465  
Nullifications ..... 1,591  
Nullification Fees Collected ..... \$14,319

### Circuit Court Jury Trial Verdicts

#### Week of January 8

Case	Type	Court	Verdict
93C-2832	Blasting	5th	Defendant
93C-1056	Auto Accident	6th (P)	\$57,432
94C-489/1775	Contract	2nd (P)	\$991,900

#### Week of January 16

Case	Type	Court	Verdict
94C-3134	Auto Accident	5th (P)	\$17,500
95C-1882/1883	Auto Accident	1st (P)	\$6,320

#### Week of January 22

Case	Type	Court	Verdict
95C-2220	Auto Accident	1st (P)	\$3,000
94C-4276	Slip/Fall	5th	Defendant
94C-3675	Auto Accident	1st (P)	\$9,990
94C-1000	Auto Accident	6th (P)	\$950

### Federal Employee Garnishment Information

Here are the routing instructions now required on executions of garnishment against U. S. Postal Service workers and civilian employees of the U. S. Department of Defense:

U. S. POSTAL SERVICE  
Manager, Payroll Processing Branch  
1 Federal Drive  
Ft. Snelling, MN 55111-9650.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
Defense Finance and Accounting Service  
Cleveland Center, Office of General Counsel  
Code L, P. O. Box 998002  
Cleveland, OH 44199-8002

Advance postage payment of \$8.19 must accompany filing of process.