

ROOKER REPORT

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WITH THANKS, WE PREPARE FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The holiday season is upon us again. That means plenty of food, family bonding, celebrations of faith and, of course, time off from our jobs.

It's a joyous time for people, but a bad time for turkeys; a yummy time for appetites, but a crummy time for waistlines.

Who cares? Let the feasting begin.

It's our last opportunity this century to pig out, ravage our savings and finally rid ourselves of that dreadful Y2K enigma.

With few exceptions, the privilege will avail itself to all Americans, from the homeless to the opulent. The "haves" will share with the "have nots" and the spirit of the season will consume us all.

As dictated by tradition, all levels of government will pause operations during the holiday triad, as will most private businesses.



The local court system (including all offices under the auspices of Circuit Court Clerk Richard Rooker) will observe the following holiday schedule:

Thanksgiving--Closed on Thursday, Nov. 25 and Friday, Nov. 26. Re-open Monday, Nov. 29.

Christmas--Closed on Friday, Dec. 24 and Monday, Dec. 27. Re-open Tuesday, Dec. 28.

New Year's--Closed on Friday, Dec. 31. Re-open Monday, Jan. 3.

In case you're wondering, yes, all filing and payment deadlines falling on dates when offices are closed are automatically extended to the next regular day of business. That includes all business conducted with the circuit court clerk's office, the general sessions civil division, probate court and traffic violations.

Child Support Checks Still Not Reaching All

(SECOND IN A SERIES)

Six weeks after taking over the collection and disbursement of most (but not all) child support payments to satisfy a federal mandate for a centralized collection system, the Department of Human Services has created a bureaucratic snafu at the expense of dependent children.

A large portion of monies paid into the system through wage assignment is being withheld from custodial parents because of an inadequate verification process or because of misleading mailing instructions to employers.

Jeff Parkinson, who heads up the child support division of the Circuit Court Clerk's office, said he has identified more than 100 payments totaling over \$20,000 that should have been paid through the courts but have been sent to the state by mistake.

The checks are not being returned, he said.

"The state says they can't identify the payments, even though we sent them documentation," Parkinson said, adding that the funds are being deposited in a special account and drawing interest for the state.

Because many employers make support payments for several of their workers, it has become common practice for them to mail in the payments in a single posting. And, since not all accounts were transferred from the courts to the state, some payments are reaching the whole venue.

Parkinson said a large number of checks received by the clerk's office by mistake have been forwarded immediately to the state for disbursement. But the state has not been that efficient in returning misguided checks to the clerk's office, he added.

*'We are being flooded by calls every day...
But, since we no longer handle their accounts,
there is little we can do to help them'*

--CIRCUIT COURT CLERK'S JEFF PARKINSON

Apologizing for the inconvenience to those adversely affected by the problems, the state has finally fulfilled its promise to offer an emergency relief fund as a band-aid solution. But critics see the gesture as one that could add to the growing accountability enigma by inserting yet another step in the bookkeeping process.

Some frustrated parents have questioned the rationale of the relief fund, saying that if the state can send out piecemeal payments, it should be able to process the real payments.

Besides, many complain, it is almost impossible to make phone connections with the state department because of the large number of calls being placed throughout each day.

Out of frustration, custodial parents are continuing to phone the Circuit Court Clerk's office for advice and assistance.

"We are still being flooded by calls every day," Parkinson said. "But, since our office no longer handles their cases, there is little we can do to help them."

In recognition of the crisis, Nashville Electric Service has been extending billing periods for affected parents to pay their utility bills. Charitable agencies have pitched in as well in an effort to provide short-term relief.

Parkinson said the whole mess could have been avoided had the state of Tennessee followed the lead of other states and assumed responsibility for "all" wage assignment and state assistance child support cases. Instead, he said, Tennessee exercised an option to take only those cases eligible for federal matching funds.

SEE CHILD SUPPORT, PAGE 2

Do my baby - [Signature]

Cheers...

For years, Fate Thomas Jr. was a permanent fixture at the courthouse, from a schoolboy employee of the sheriff's office ran by his father to a court officer's position in the criminal courts.

He served the late Judge Thomas H. Shriver throughout his 10 years on the bench and was retained by new judge Steve Dozier after Shriver's death in 1997.

So, it must have been a tough decision when he announced his resignation last month to devote fulltime to the barbecue business.

Admittedly, however, his departure was not that surprising for the many courthouse workers who have sampled his famous pit cuisine at political functions and other events catered by Thomas in his spare time over the years.

Thomas, known as "Punkin" to his closest pals, inherited the knack for cooking from his dad, who was famous for his barbecue feedings during his many years as sheriff. But the younger Thomas will be on his own, with the exception of two business partners, when he opens Fate's Pig & Pie restaurant at 7108 Charlotte Avenue sometime this month.

We're betting that he won't have to be lonesome for his courthouse friends.

◆ Meanwhile, a familiar face at the Ben West Building has left the scene with the Nov. 12 retirement of **Beverly Estes**, who served for more than 21 years as a deputy clerk in the Traffic Violations Bureau.

Estes joined the bureau staff on May 23, 1978. Her many years of service drew commendation from bossman Circuit Court Clerk **Richard Rooker**, who joined General Sessions judges and co-workers at a retirement luncheon in her honor.

◆ In August, Chief Administrative Clerk **Carole Garrett** didn't have a single daughter-in-law. Now, two months later, she has two of them.

You may recall that her son, chief computer technician **Mike Garrett**, tied the knot with the former **Cathy Cook** of our circuit court clerk's office in September.

Well, in October, a second son, **Philip Garrett**, took a trip down the aisle with the former **Vicki Vowell**.

Could there be a third addition to the Garrett family in the wings? All eyes now are on **Chris**, the only remaining son with bachelor status.

◆ Hats off to retired Deputy General Sessions Court Clerk (Criminal division) **Geraldine Searcy** for her continuing volunteer work in bringing Thanksgiving to county shut-ins.

Searcy plans on feeding 1,000 people for the 13th straight year in a program she started in 1987 for Assumption Catholic Church. The holiday dinner program this year will be named in honor of Searcy's late son **Keith Searcy**, a cerebral palsy victim who passed away in 1997.

But Searcy says in order to accommodate a record 1,000 people, she will need a little help from her friends. She is asking for donations of both money and food. She can be reached at 868-2443.

...Tears

Sympathy to General Sessions Court Officer **Ronnie Crow** in the Oct. 27 death of his mother, **Rosie Lee Crow**, who passed away in Talladega, Alabama at the age of 76. Mrs. Crow was the grandmother of **Kim Smith** of the Traffic Violations Bureau.

Attie Eugenia Shriver, 97, mother of the late Criminal Court Judge **Thomas H. Shriver** and widow of the late Tennessee Court of Appeals Judge **Thomas A. Shriver**, died Nov. 1 from complications from a stroke at her home in Green Hills. Survivors include two sons, **Don** and **Richard Shriver**.

December Birthdays

Circuit Court Clerk

- 1 Kelly Baltz
- 4 Becky Dye

General Sessions

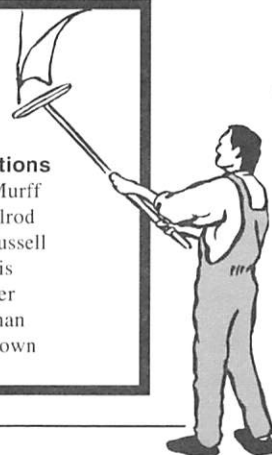
- 2 Denise Dill
- 25 Marie Anderson
- 27 Brenda Osborne
- 31 Jackie Knight

Probate

- 29 Tom Brown

Traffic Violations

- 11 Connie Murff
- 12 Wayne Elrod
- 27 Monty Russell
- 29 Lori Davis
- Pat Baxter
- 31 Don Clunan
- Mitch Brown



Fishburn Increases

Sessions Committees

General Sessions Court Judge Mark Fishburn has increased to 11 the number of committees to oversee operations of the court during his first year as presiding judge.

The additional committees provide chairmanship roles for each of the court's 11 divisional judges.

The new committees will focus on matters relating to community relations, the trial courts and affiliated programs.

Following is a listing of the committee members with chairmen noted in bold, capital letters:

Traffic Court--**MIKE MONDELLI**, John Brown, Gloria Dumas, Bill Higgins.
Criminal Court--**LEON RUBEN**, Mike Mondelli, William Faimon, Gale Robinson.
Civil Court--**BILL HIGGINS**, Sue McKnight Evans, John Aaron Holt, Casey Moreland.

Commissioners--**WILLIAM FAIMON**, Sue McKnight Evans, Gale Robinson, Mike Mondelli.

Probation Pre-Trial--**JOHN BROWN**, William Faimon, Casey Moreland, John Aaron Holt.

Legislative/Executive--**JOHN AARON HOLT** John Brown, Leon Ruben, bill Higgins.

Bar Liaison--**MARK FISHBURN**, Casey Moreland, Gloria Dumas, Sue McKnight Evans.

Administrative/Personnel--**GLORIA DUMAS**, John Brown, Mike Mondelli, Leon Ruben.

Program Review--**CASEY MORELAND**, Bill Higgins, Gale Robinson, William Faimon.

Domestic Violence--**GALE ROBINSON**, Gloria Dumas, Casey Moreland.

Community Relations--**SUE MCKNIGHT EVANS**, Mark Fishburn, Gloria Dumas, John Aaron Holt.

Trial Court Liaison--**MIKE MONDELLI**, John Brown, Mark Fishburn, Leon Ruben.

CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS STILL NOT REACHING ALL

(FROM PAGE 1)

As it stands, the Circuit Court Clerk's office was required to retain all wage assignment cases where the original support order was issued prior to Jan. 1, 1994.

"The state could have taken those cases as well and the system would have gone smoothly," Parkinson exclaimed. "Now, it's just one huge mess for everybody."

And, as always, the children are caught in the middle.

CASE ANALYSES

AUTO ACCIDENTS

PLAINTIFFS 78
DEFENDANTS 14

RATIO: PLAINTIFFS 6.6-1

MONTH-BY-MONTH

MONTH	TOTALS	JURY	NON-JURY	PLAINTIFF	DEFENDANT	NONE
JANUARY-JUNE	64	49	15	48	11	5
JULY-SEPTEMBER	33	24	6	26	3	4
OCTOBER	5	4	1	4	0	1
YEAR-TO-DATE	102	77	22	78	14	10

JURY AWARDS

MONTH	\$TOTALS	DOLLAR RANGE	\$MEAN
JANUARY	31,763	681-18,000	13,082
FEBRUARY	48,554	1,000-15,000	8,126
MARCH	66,130	0-44,000	5,532
APRIL	41,266	180-15,000	5,217
MAY	295,961	2,800-198,000	23,990
JUNE	27,122	0-10,000	5,707
JULY	17,343	785-10,000	3,279
AUGUST	90,562	0-27,495	7,882
SEPTEMBER	13,251	1,800-5,789	2,830
OCTOBER	147,771	10,000-120,597	17,1174

NON-JURY AWARDS

MONTH	\$TOTALS	DOLLAR RANGE	\$MEAN
JANUARY	3,724	N/A	N/A
FEBRUARY	830	N/A	N/A
MARCH	120,286	500-85,000	5,797
APRIL	N/A	N/A	N/A
MAY	28,019	3,634-18,000	6,385
JUNE	N/A	N/A	N/A
JULY	N/A	N/A	N/A
AUGUST	3,200	N/A	N/A
SEPTEMBER	45,489	1,489-23,000	10,500
OCTOBER	650	N/A	N/A

SOFT TISSUE CASES

MONTH	\$TOTALS	DOLLAR RANGE	\$MEAN
JANUARY	31,763	681-18,000	13,082
FEBRUARY	31,404	1,000-15,000	7,707
MARCH	47,952	452-44,000	3,500
APRIL	25,133	0-8,000	5,711
MAY	228,161	4,000-198,000	13,080
JUNE	13,800	0-10,000	6,900
JULY	6,558	1,500-5058	3,279
AUGUST	75,567	500-15,000	8,581
SEPTEMBER	7,462	1,800-3,200	2,462
OCTOBER	27,174	10,000-17,174	N/A

*GENERAL SESSIONS APPEALS

MONTH	TOTALS	PLAINTIFF	DEFENDANT	NONE
JANUARY-JUNE	17	15	1	1
JULY-SEPTEMBER	9	7	0	2
OCTOBER	1	1	0	0
YEAR-TO-DATE	29	23	1	3

*INCLUDED IN ABOVE TRIAL TOTALS



CONTRACTS YTD PLAINTIFFS 54 DEFENDANTS 9 NO VERDICT 6
RATIO: PLAINTIFFS 8-1 TOTAL AWARDS TO DATE: \$1,671,920
OCTOBER AWARDS: \$12,548



MISCELLANEOUS
82
PLAINTIFFS 51
DEFENDANTS 15
NO VERDICT 16

MALPRACTICE
12
PLAINTIFFS 4
DEFENDANTS 5
NO VERDICT 3



Civil Trials by Classification

Auto Accidents 38%

Miscellaneous 31%

Contracts 26%

Malpractice 5%



DATA BANK

Statistics compiled for the month of October

CASE INFORMATION

Circuit Court

NEW CIVIL CASES FILED	244
CIVIL CASES CONCLUDED	246
NEW DIVORCE CASES FILED	253
DIVORCE CASES CONCLUDED	231

General Sessions Civil

NEW CASES FILED	3,262
EXECUTIONS ISSUED	2,718
GARNISHMENT PAYMENTS	3,554
JUDGMENTS COLLECTED	\$565,030
ORDER OF PROTECTION PETITIONS	188

Probate Court

NEW CASES FILED	154
CASES CLOSED	181

Traffic Violations

MOVING CITATIONS	20,767
PARKING VIOLATIONS	9,146
TOTAL FINES COLLECTED	\$362,346
NULLIFICATIONS	2,020
NULLIFICATION FEES COLLECTED	\$23,895

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