

Dodge County bids fond farewell to longtime court reporter

On June 1, 1936, as the world moved closer to war, Norbert J. "Coley" Griffin began a career in court reporting that would span eight decades and cover many Wisconsin counties. Fifty-two years later, in 1988, Virginia A. Wolfe became a judge in Sauk County Circuit Court, where she served until 2000.

Wolfe and Griffin crossed paths after both had retired, when they began working together to handle petitions from prisoners in Dodge County. The assignment wrapped up in June (law clerk Steve Seim has been appointed as a ¼-time court commissioner to handle the inmate petitions, and will do his own typing; Wolfe is returning to "regular" reserve judge status) and their co-workers threw them a party befitting two much beloved, longtime public servants. The gifts include framed photographs of Griffin and Wolfe with Chief Deputy Clerk of Courts Lindy Miller, one of Griffin's especially close friends at the courthouse.

Griffin is a walking encyclopedia of court history who first served as a court reporter in 1936-41 in the 12th Circuit, which was comprised of Green, Jefferson, and Rock counties. In 1941, he moved over to the 13th Circuit, which then consisted of Dodge, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha counties, at the behest of Judge Edward J. Gehl, who went on to serve on the Wisconsin Supreme Court from 1950 until his death in 1956.

Griffin stayed on in the 13th Circuit until 1960, with four years off to serve in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Although his allergies had given him a draft deferral, he

could not stand to remain a civilian after the attack on Pearl Harbor. As it turned out, the military urgently needed court reporters and Griffin was not only welcomed, but asked to skip boot camp and begin reporting court martial cases immediately. During his service, he worked in Africa and Italy.

Back in Wisconsin, Griffin soon found himself working for Gehl's successor, Judge Milton L. Meister, and then for Judge William C. O'Connell who defeated Meister in the four-county circuit. Because of Wisconsin's rapid growth in those years, the Legislature split up the circuit, establishing Dodge and Jefferson as the 13th Circuit, and Ozaukee and Washington as the 21st. Meister was elected judge in the new 21st Circuit, and again asked Griffin to work for him. Griffin stayed with Meister until Meister's retirement, and then continued with Judge Tom Merriam, who succeeded Meister. He retired from this post in 1983, but immediately began doing pretrial deposition work and

serving as a substitute court reporter in eastern Wisconsin.

In 1989, Griffin returned to the court in Dodge County at the request of then-Reserve Judge Thomas Wells, who needed help handling the prisoner litigation. "It was like returning home to come back to Dodge County and I was treated like family by the court personnel," Griffin wrote, "even though because of their tender years none of them realized that I had been a Dodge County Circuit Court reporter previously." ■



Judges, lawyers, and court staff in Dodge County gave a farewell party for longtime court reporter Coley Griffin on June 27. Here, from left, are Judges Daniel W. Klossner and Andrew P. Bissonnette; Reserve Judge Virginia A. Wolfe; Griffin; and Atty. Robert E. Storck and his son, Judge John R. Storck.

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Three weeks before Owens stepped down, Deputy Clerk Adrienne M. Thomas left the office – and Wisconsin – for Asheville, N.C. Thomas and her husband fell in love with the city, which sits between the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, and moved there without jobs. Thomas had worked in the Clerk's Office for nearly 11 years.

Thomas' resignation gave Clark an opportunity to promote two employees and move two others into new roles. Rita E. Lord, who began her court career in 1987 with the former Board of Attorneys Professional Responsibility and moved to the Clerk's Office in 1999, was promoted into

Thomas' position as deputy clerk for the District I Court of Appeals, and Roberta J. Bushey took Lord's position as assistant deputy clerk for District I. Assistant Deputy Clerk Melinda A. Zarth assumed responsibility for attorney admissions, formerly handled by Bushey, and Sheelah J. Fox, who had worked at the front counter since 1999, was promoted into Zarth's job as assistant deputy clerk for the District III Court of Appeals. Clark is now hiring for a new employee to fill the front-counter vacancy. ■