

Judicial Profile:
Judge Kelly Is Using Technology to Serve the Court and the Community

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Judge William G. Kelly is a “techie” and he isn’t afraid to admit it.

“I’m one who likes to try new things,” he explained.

The court technology bug bit him in the 1990s when he visited Courtroom 21 at the National Center for State Courts in Virginia, which was equipped with video monitors for everyone to see the same exhibits at the same time.

“I wouldn’t have thought of doing that at the time, but when I saw it, it really made sense,” he said.

Fast-forward to his current court setting in the 62B District Court in Kentwood, where he employs technology for video arraignments, advice of rights (in four different languages), jury instructions, obtaining qualified interpreters, sentencing, witness testimony, evidence presentation, and more. The courtroom is equipped with video monitors on the bench, at the defense and prosecuting attorneys’ tables, in the jury box, and on the walls facing the gallery.



Judge William G. Kelly



Michigan Supreme Court Justices Bridget McCormack, Richard Bernstein and David Viviano visited Judge Kelly in October 2015 to learn more about the technology he’s using in his court.

Judge Kelly is proud of the fact that he was able to have a great deal of input on making the court building technologically-capable when it was being constructed.

“I don’t have any other judges to rein me in, so I tend to push the envelope,” remarked the Chief Judge, laughing.

In the court entrance, 62B visitors are immediately greeted by a large video monitor that displays information about the proceedings for the day. The Court’s website offers a record search, online ticket payment, court calendar, advice about procedures and rights, and links to other resources.

Judge Kelly also is looking into obtaining a document imaging system to go to a paperless environment which would be convenient for attorneys and court users.

It is definitely not his father's court.

Judge Kelly was elected in 1978 to succeed his father, Hon. Joseph Kelly, who served as Kentwood's municipal judge from 1970 to 1978.



Judge Kelly's father, Hon. Joseph Kelly (right), putting the robe on him.

"He encouraged and motivated me to run. It was a real honor to follow him," Judge Kelly shared.

He continued, "When my father was honored as a member of the state bar for 50 years, he was asked, 'What was the best moment of your career?' His answer was, 'Putting the robe on my son.' I agree with him."

Having first donned the robe a mere three years after graduating from University of Detroit Law School, Judge Kelly has spent most of his career on the bench. That is, after a two-year stint serving in the Peace Corps in Ghana.

So, how did that experience impact his career?

"I learned to be patient in the Peace Corps because there are a lot of things outside of your control, and things don't always happen quickly," Judge Kelly explained. "Also, I liked the idea of service then, and I still like it now."

One of the qualities he believes is an integral part of being a judge is the ability to work with stakeholders toward a common goal. This led him to be an early proponent of dispute resolution and mediation. He served on the board of the Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan from 2006 to 2011, and was recently honored by the Center as a "Peacemaker" in the Community Member category.

Judge Kelly's onsite mediation program for small claims is now replicated in the 63rd District Court. In addition, he teaches a class on Small Claims Court for the National Judicial College, and stresses the importance of courts establishing mediation programs.

When Judge Kelly is not working, teaching, learning about new technologies, or volunteering his time, he enjoys participating in team trivia challenges and travelling when he can.

When asked how his five children—three in Grand Rapids, one in East Lansing, and one in London, England—view his career and accomplishments, Judge Kelly admitted, “I think they’re all pretty proud of their dad.”