

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 20, 2002

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT FILLS MERCER COUNTY VACANCY

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Supreme Court appointed on Monday James G. Conway, an accomplished attorney of more than 20 years with broad experience, to fill the vacancy in the 14th Judicial Circuit created by the retirement of Circuit Judge Martin Conway.

The appointment of Mr. Conway, 55, who is a second cousin of retired Judge Conway, was recommended to the Supreme Court by Justice Thomas L. Kilbride after an extensive application, evaluation and interview process.

That process included the review and recommendation by an independent 15-person Judicial Advisory Screening Committee which consisted of attorneys, the chief judge of the Circuit, community and labor representatives; a poll of attorneys by the Illinois State Bar Association; and background checks by the Illinois State Police, with the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission, with the candidates' personal references and by interviews of the six candidates by Justice Kilbride.

Mr. Conway will sit as the resident judge in Mercer County.

Mr. Conway, who grew up on a working farm in rural northeastern Mercer County, has handled several thousand cases in California ranging from landlord-tenant to criminal matters.

After Justice Kilbride began serving on the Supreme Court in December 2000, Mr. Conway joined Justice Kilbride's staff and served as his chief assistant and senior law clerk. In that capacity, his duties included researching, reviewing and drafting opinions. During that time, the Supreme Court has issued 155 opinions disposing of 177 cases. Mr. Conway also participated in the review of more than 2,700 legal briefs from parties requesting that the Supreme Court hear their cases; and also reviewed several hundred procedural and substantive motions before making recommendations to Justice Kilbride.

"Mr. Conway is a seasoned practitioner who has all manner of experience from handling and reviewing thousands of cases in California and Illinois," said retired Illinois Appellate Court

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Judge Tobias Barry, who is co-chair of the screening committee. “Much of his experience was gained in California. He has now moved back to Mercer County and because he practiced outside of Illinois for a number of years, he would have few, if any, conflicts serving as the Circuit Judge there.

“He is an intelligent and compassionate person who totally impressed me.”

Timothy L. Bertschy, former president of the Illinois State Bar Association and the second co-chair of the committee, also complimented the choice.

“We reviewed the applications of a number of very qualified candidates and Jim Conway brings an impressive background to the position of resident judge in three ways,” Mr. Bertschy said. “First is his family background in Mercer County. Second is his experience in both civil and criminal matters; and third is his experience at the appellate level in work as a clerk in researching and drafting opinions in civil and criminal cases.”

Mr. Conway is a product of Community Unit District #201 schools and ranked fourth of 104 graduates in his class at Aledo High School.

He graduated *magna cum laude* with a B.A. degree in philosophy from St. Ambrose College and received his law degree from the University of San Diego School of Law in 1980. Before going to law school, he served in the Peace Corps in India.

He has practiced law for more than 21 years, working with the Legal Aid Society of Orange County (California) from 1981 through 1984, then in private practice and as a solo practitioner in California from 1988 to 2000. He has extensive experience in criminal defense, personal injury and family law.

“I am both proud and very humbled to be selected by the Illinois Supreme Court,” said Mr. Conway. “I will utilize the important lessons of my more than 20 total years of practice.

“In my public and private practice of law, I have learned that trial court judges are the front line of the judicial systems and I am keenly aware that a judge must be neutral and impartial. A judge must remember that each person must have the chance to feel that he or she has been heard fairly. A judge must strive to maintain control of the process and keeping the court’s calendars moving while being ever watchful of a litigant’s rights.

“That is what I will try to do.”

Mr. Conway’s appointment is effective on June 3, 2002 and terminates December 6, 2004.

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Under the Illinois Constitution, the Supreme Court is given authority to fill judicial vacancies during the interim between elections. Justice Kilbride was elected to the Supreme Court from the Third Judicial District which is made up of 21 counties in north central Illinois.

Justice Kilbride was born in LaSalle, raised in Kankakee and practiced law for 20 years in the Rock Island area. He has used an independent committee and an extensive review process in evaluating candidates for judicial vacancies in the Third Judicial District since he was sworn into office Dec. 4, 2000.