

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SUPREME COURT APPOINTS FOUR NEW JUDGES IN WILL COUNTY

The Illinois Supreme Court announced the appointments of four attorneys Thursday to fill newly created Circuit Court judicial vacancies in Will County.

Those appointed to the four judgeships are Jeff Allen, program director and managing attorney of the Will County Legal Assistance Program for 25 years; Paula A. Gomora, an attorney for 14 years, the past 12 in Will County; Roman Okrei, an attorney since 1977 who has handled personal injury cases for both defendants and plaintiffs; and Thomas A. Thanas, city attorney for Naperville and former corporation counsel for the City of Joliet.

The four new judgeships in the Twelfth Circuit are mandated by state statute based on population growth in Will County as measured by the 2000 census. The appointments are effective Nov. 16 and will terminate the first Monday in December 2002 when they will be filled by winners in the November 2002 election.

The Twelfth Circuit is made up entirely of Will County.

The four were appointed following an extensive application and evaluation process which included review by an independent, bipartisan committee appointed by Justice Thomas L. Kilbride of the Third Judicial District .

“It is a tremendous evaluation process that Justice Kilbride uses in recommending judicial appointments to the Supreme Court,” said Tobias Barry, retired Illinois Appellate Court judge who is chairman of the evaluation committee. “The committee is made up of a cross-section of people in the Circuit who will be served by the judge. There are lawyers and nonlawyers, community representatives from various walks of life.

“I am particularly pleased that the Supreme Court chose to appoint a woman to the bench in Will County, where one woman already sits.”

Mr. Allen has been associated with the Will County Legal Assistance Program since 1976, and he has been program director and managing attorney since December 1977. In that capacity, he has been responsible for the operation of a legal services program which provides advice, assistance and representation in civil matters to low income and indigent residents of Will County.

Mr. Allen also serves as the managing attorney of the agency's Senior Citizens Legal Project of Will County, which deals with matters in the area of elder abuse, health care, probate, disability, consumer and nursing home rights law.

Throughout his legal career, Mr. Allen has been active in the legal community on both the county and state levels. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court appointed him a commissioner of the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission, which handles complaints of attorney misconduct and ethical violations in Illinois.

He is a past president of the Will County Bar Association (1992-93), and served as a member of the Illinois State Bar Association General Assembly from 1994-2001. He also is a member and the immediate past chair of the ISBA Committee on Judicial Advisory Polls and has sat on other bar association committees as well.

Mr. Allen received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northwestern University in 1972 and received his law degree in 1976 from DePaul University College of Law.

Ms. Gomora has concentrated her solo law practice in the area of workers' compensation and also has experience in personal injury, social security, traffic and domestic relations law.

She serves on the executive committee of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association and was a founding member of the Will County Women's Bar Association and a former vice president of that group. She also is a member of the Illinois State Bar Association and Will County Bar Association.

Ms. Gomora was raised in Joliet and received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Knox College in 1984 in economics and business administration. She received her law degree from the John Marshall Law School in 1987.

Ms. Gomora is active in community affairs and has served on the board of directors and as president of Big Brother/Big Sisters of Will and Grundy counties.

Mr. Okrei, who graduated from the John Marshall Law School in 1977, has concentrated his practice in personal injury work, both on the defense and plaintiffs sides. He currently is a partner in Stefanich, McGarry, Wols & Okrei Ltd., of Joliet.

He has a bachelor and masters degree from Northeastern Illinois University, and is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, having served in Turkey and Taiwan. He is a member of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, and the Illinois State Bar Association; and is co-chair of the civil litigation committee of the Will County Bar Association.

He is active in community affairs, serving on the advisory board of the Salvation Army of Joliet; was past president of the Kiwanis Club of Joliet, and is active in youth soccer leagues.

Mr. Thanas has focused a good part of his 20-year legal career on serving municipalities involving litigation and consultation on land use matters, annexation and zoning and water and sewer service issues.

He has been city attorney of Naperville since August 1999 and, before that, served as corporation counsel of Joliet from 1986. In that capacity, he has been the lead attorney in litigation and negotiation of thousands of acres of land in the growth corridors of Joliet and aiding in its economic development.

Mr. Thanas was the lead attorney in negotiating with gaming companies to bring riverboats to Joliet and millions of dollars per year in gaming taxes to the city. He also was lead attorney in the negotiation, annexation and development of two auto race tracks in the Joliet area.

Mr. Thanas received his undergraduate degree from the University of Notre Dame in 1977 and his law degree from Valparaiso University School of Law in 1980.

He is a member of the Illinois Municipal League Home Rule Attorneys Committee, the Illinois Institute for Local Government Law, the International Municipal Lawyers Association and a past president of the Will County Bar Association.

Under the Illinois Constitution, the Supreme Court is granted authority to fill judicial vacancies during the interim between elections. Justice Kilbride has used an independent committee to aid him in making recommendations for judicial vacancies in the Third Judicial District since being sworn into office Dec. 4, 2000.

In addition to retired Justice Barry, other members of the committee were:

George Black, an attorney from Morris; Edward L. Breen, president of the Will County Federation of Labor; James E. Egan, president of the Will County Bar Association, Lynn Fieldman, president of the Will County Building Trades Council; Crystel L. Gavlin, Will County assistant state's attorney; the Rev. Richard House pastor of the Shiloh Baptist Church in Lockport.

Chief Judge Rodney B. Lechwar of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit; Carmen Morales, community relations director of the Northern Illinois Light and Gas Company; George E. Sangmeister, former U.S. congressman and former Will County state's attorney; Dorothy Seaborg, past president of the Will County Bar Association; Russ Slinkard, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Joliet; and Eveleyna Y. Washington, a community representative from Lockport.

The Third Judicial District, from which Justice Kilbride was elected, 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 before being elected to the Supreme Court in November, 2000.