

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT FILLS VACANCY IN LASALLE COUNTY

The Illinois Supreme Court announced Thursday the appointment of LaSalle County State's Attorney Joseph P. Hettel to fill the vacancy for LaSalle County resident Circuit Court judge created by the appellate assignment of former Chief Judge Robert L. Carter.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas L. Kilbride of the Third Judicial District recommended the appointment of Mr. Hettel after an extensive application, evaluation and interview process that included review and recommendation by an independent 12-person advisory screening committee made up of representatives from the community and the legal profession.

Mr. Hettel was elected to serve as LaSalle County state's attorney in 2000 and was re-elected in 2004. In 2004, he also was elected by the state's attorneys of the Third District of the Illinois Appellate Court to the Board of Governors of the State's Attorneys Appellate Prosecutors. He has twice been re-elected to the 10-member board that oversees the state agency responsible for Appellate Court prosecutions.

Mr. Hettel was appointed after Justice Kilbride and the special committee reviewed applications and background materials from five candidates.

"I am pleased that the Supreme Court has filled this vacancy from the outstanding field of candidates," said Chief Judge James A. Lanuti of the 13th Judicial Circuit. "Mr. Hettel has the legal experience, temperament and integrity to be an excellent Circuit Judge. The judges of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit welcome him and look forward to working with him."

"Joe Hettel has been a dedicated public servant for a number of years and has had to make a lot of tough decisions in his position as state's attorney," said former Chief Judge Carter, who was assigned to the Third Judicial District Appellate Court August 9.

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“He was a well qualified applicant among many qualified applicants, and I know he will continue to work hard as a trial judge in the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit and continue to live up to the high standards he has always set for himself in continuing to serve the people of LaSalle County.”

Mr. Hettel, 39, was born and raised in Ottawa. He received a bachelor’s degree in finance from Illinois State University in 1989 and a Masters in Business Administration from ISU in 1991. He graduated from Chicago-Kent College of Law with his Juris Doctorate degree in 1994, when he began serving as an assistant state’s attorney in LaSalle County. He joined the law firm of Armstrong & Surin, later known as Armstrong Surin & Hettel, in 1996, where he engaged in the general practice of law until December 2000.

He is the chairman of the LaSalle County Children’s Advocacy Center and chairman of the LaSalle County Juvenile Justice Council.

“Joe Hettel has been an outstanding state’s attorney who has demonstrated by his re-election that the public has great confidence in his abilities,” said Timothy Bertschy, a Peoria attorney and former president of the Illinois State Bar Association, who served as co-chairman of the special screening committee appointed by Justice Kilbride. “He has shown that he has commendable administrative abilities by the manner in which his office has been run. He has a great deal of experience in handling civil as well as criminal cases, which will be reflected in the cases he’ll be handling as a judge,” Mr. Bertschy added.

“I am humbled and grateful by the confidence the Supreme Court and Justice Kilbride place in me. I look forward to continue to serve the people of LaSalle County in a new role as Circuit judge,” Mr. Hettel said.

Justice Kilbride uses an extensive application, evaluation and interview process to make recommendations for judicial vacancies in the Third Judicial District. In addition to the screening committee, the appointment process used by Justice Kilbride consisted of a written survey of registered attorneys in Grundy, LaSalle and Bureau counties conducted by the Illinois State Bar Association; background security checks with police authorities and with the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission.

Justice Kilbride also sought written comments from the public about the candidates.

Serving with Mr. Bertschy as co-chairman of the screening committee was retired Appellate Justice Tobias G. Barry.

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The non-lawyer representatives of the committee were: Ann Kidonakis, business owner and operator of the Green Mill Restaurant in Ottawa; Tom Kramarsic, retired LaSalle police chief; Mary Beth Morelli, an Ottawa resident who is a speech pathologist in Streator elementary schools; Joyce Reinmann, retired special education teacher in Streator; and Wilma June Wilcoxon, recording secretary and office manager of Laborers Local 393, in Marseilles.

Other committee members from the legal community included Appellate Justice Carter, George Black, an attorney in Morris; C.J. Hollerich, assistant Bureau County state's attorney; Rebecca Leynaud, an attorney in Peru; and Michelle A. Vescogni, an attorney in Ottawa and president of the LaSalle County Bar Association.

Mr. Hettel's appointment is effective December 14 and terminates December 1, 2008 when the position will be filled by the election in November 2008.

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION, Contact: Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312-793-2323)