



Supreme Court of Illinois

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CHIEF JUSTICE KILBRIDE ANNOUNCES SUPREME COURT APPOINTMENT TO FILL 10TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT VACANCY

Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride announced on Friday that the Illinois Supreme Court has appointed Thomas Keith to fill a judicial vacancy for the Stark County Resident Circuit Court Judge in the 10th Judicial Circuit.

Mr. Keith brings an uncommonly rich and diverse background to the judiciary. He began law school when he was in his forties. Prior to law school, he worked as a journeyman electrician and as a grain and livestock farmer on his family's stead in Stark County. Since 1994, he has served as an assistant U.S. Attorney. Most of his service has been with the U.S. Attorney's office for the Central District of Illinois in Peoria, but he also served in Washington, D.C. as national coordinator for cybercrime for the Department of Justice.

"Mr. Keith brings to the bench a vast wealth of experiences, not just as a lawyer, but as a farmer, an electrician and an active community volunteer," said Chief Justice Kilbride who recommended his nomination to the Illinois Supreme Court. "He has a strong legal resume, with extensive federal trial and appellate experience.

"He also has significant ties to Stark County, having lived and farmed there for 17 years before he decided to pursue a career in law."

Mr. Keith will fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Stuart P. Borden. His appointment is effective April 5, 2013.

"I'm honored that the Chief Justice and the Illinois Supreme Court selected me from the distinguished applicants for this position," Mr. Keith said. "To come home to Stark County as a judge, 25 years after leaving my farm, is a humbling completion of the journey I began in the law.

"I am excited to start my new journey as Stark County's resident circuit judge."

Under the Illinois Constitution, the Supreme Court is given the authority to fill judicial vacancies. Chief Justice Kilbride uses an extensive application, evaluation and interview process to make recommendations to the Illinois Supreme Court for judicial vacancies in the Third Judicial District.

MORE

10th Judicial Circuit Vacancy Filled Add One

In this instance, the Chief Justice named 19 residents of the 10th Circuit to a special screening committee charged with reviewing the credentials of the five applicants for the vacancy. The committee was chaired by Timothy Bertschy, a partner at Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen in Peoria and former president of the Illinois State Bar Association.

"Tom Keith has an impressive life story which will serve him well as a judge," said Mr. Bertschy. "His experiences as a farmer, electrician, lay minister and lawyer give him a broad understanding of people from urban and rural communities and with varied occupations and backgrounds. This is particularly important in the 10th Judicial Circuit, which covers many different types of communities and people. In addition, his work with the federal government at both a local and national level has brought him deserved recognition."

Mr. Keith graduated from Limestone Community High School in Bartonville in 1968 and began working as an electrician with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 34. He moved to Stark County and, in 1974, started farming while continuing his work as an electrician. After a decade as a farmer and electrician, he decided to seek a college degree. He earned his Associate of Arts degree from Carl Sandburg College in 1987; he continued his education at the University of Illinois where he graduated in 1989 with a Bachelor of Arts in rhetoric and English literature, earning a 4.9 grade point average out of a 5.0 maximum and membership in the Phi Beta Kappa academic honor society.

He attended the Valparaiso University School of Law, earning his *juris doctor* degree *cum laude* in 1992.

Following law school, Mr. Keith served as a law clerk to then Chief U.S. District Judge Michael M. Mihm of the Central District of Illinois. After his clerkship he started with the U.S. attorney's office in Peoria.

"Tom was an excellent law clerk and an excellent lawyer practicing in my court," said Judge Mihm.

U.S. District Court Chief Judge James E. Shadid of the Peoria Division of the Central District also had words of praise for Mr. Keith.

"He has appeared before me a number of times," said Judge Shadid. "He is knowledgeable of the law and respectful of the legal process and those are very good characteristics for a judge."

Among his many impressive accomplishments, Mr. Keith created the Central Illinois Cybercrime unit. The unit was organized for investigation and prosecution of high-tech, Internet, and digital crimes. Based on this work, the U.S. Department of Justice called him to Washington, D.C. to serve as National Coordinator for Cybercrime, Intellectual Property, and Child Exploitation from 2010 to 2011. Mr. Keith was also the Branch Chief for the Central District of Illinois from 2005 to 2010 and the Central District's Project Safe Childhood Coordinator from 2006 to 2010.

Mr. Keith has served as an instructor for seminars sponsored by the U.S. attorney's office on subjects including the Fourth Amendment, victims' rights and forensic and digital evidence. He has engaged in volunteer service with Peoria Rescue Ministries, the Central Illinois Radio Fellowship, the Tremont Turkey Festival, and the Boy Scouts of America. Mr. Keith has also served as a Tremont Village Trustee.

MORE

10th Judicial Circuit Vacancy Filled Add Two

Chief Justice Kilbride's special screening committee consisted of community representatives and members of the legal profession.

The community representatives were:

Frank Abdnour, owner of The Spotted Cow Inc.; Dr. Rita Ali, Vice President of Diversity, International & Adult Education, Illinois Central College; Jonathan Burklund, president, owner and chief operating officer of Burklund Distributors, Inc; Tamara Butler, school social worker, at PPS 150 and adjunct professor Illinois Central College; Carole Gibbs, retired registered nurse; Dr. Kimberly Johnston, president, Methodist College; Margaret Jones, personal banker, State Bank of Toulon and Goshen Township supervisor; Andrea Pendleton, administrative assistant, Richwoods Township; Debra Rochford, office manager, Rochford & Associates; John Stenson, retired Chief of Police Peoria; and Stanley Valentine, retired of Caterpillar.

In addition to Mr. Bertschy, the names of the lawyers and judges on the committee are: Chief Judge Michael Brandt of the 10th Judicial Circuit; Timothy Howard, Howard & Howard Attorneys, PLLC; Donald Jackson, attorney at law; Elizabeth Jensen, Hodges, Loizzi, Eisenhammer, Rodick & Kohn, LLP; Circuit Judge Stephen Korui of the 10th Judicial Circuit; John Nicoara, Nicoara & Steagall; and Laura Petersen, partner, Quinn, Johnston, Henderson, Pretorius & Cerulo.

The Chief Justice also sought written comments about the candidates from the community. The evaluation process included background checks by police authorities and with the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission. The Illinois State Bar Association conducted a survey of all attorneys residing in the 10th Circuit. The attorneys were asked their opinions of the applicants' integrity, temperament, legal ability, management skills and other professional qualifications.

Mr. Keith will serve until December 1, 2014, when the position will be filled by the 2014 General Election.

The 10th Judicial Circuit consists of Marshall, Peoria, Putnam, Stark and Tazewell counties.

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