

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 30, 2001

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT APPOINTS ROCK ISLAND ATTORNEY TO CIRCUIT COURT

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Supreme Court announced Thursday the appointment of Walter D. Braud, a longtime Rock Island attorney, as a Circuit Court judge in the 14th Judicial Circuit.

Mr. Braud, 62, will fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Ronald C. Taber. Mr. Braud's appointment will become effective Sept. 24 and terminate when the seat is filled by the November 2002 election. He said he will be a candidate to seek election to the full six-year, Circuit Court term.

Mr. Braud has been practicing law in Rock Island since 1969 when he joined the Rock Island County state's attorney's office as an assistant. He recalls winning 21 straight jury verdicts while he served in that role until 1971.

He has been with his own firm, now named Braud Westensee & VanDerGinst Ltd., since that time.

Before being admitted to the practice of law in Illinois in 1968, Mr. Braud was a school teacher in the inner city of Chicago. He taught sixth grade pupils at the Skinner Elementary School on the near West Side.

It was a neighborhood that long ago was known as Skid Row. In the 1960s it was dotted with old tenement apartments and small frame houses. The people who lived there were primarily new arrivals to the city, African-Americans from Mississippi, whites from Appalachia and Hispanics from Puerto Rico and Mexico.

Mr. Braud taught himself Spanish by making a compact with some of his pupils. As many as half of them were non-English speaking.

"I made a bargain with them that if I would teach them English, they would teach me Spanish," Mr. Braud said. "It took me about six weeks before I could communicate somewhat with them and after that, it went rapidly.

“They would laugh when I didn’t say things correctly, ‘Oh, Mr. Braud, that was very funny,’ they would say. I liked teaching and I liked the kids, and I still have a real affection for both.”

Mr. Braud had received his B.A. degree with a major in education from Roosevelt University in Chicago. He went to night classes at the Chicago Kent College of Law while teaching in the Chicago public school system.

“My mother wanted me to be a teacher, my father wanted me to be a lawyer;” he said, “but I think I always knew I was headed for a career in law.”

Mr. Braud’s private practice included criminal defense and civil litigation with an emphasis on civil rights and employment law.

“I will miss my partners and the private practice of law,” Mr. Braud said of his new appointment. “I am grateful to the Supreme Court for considering me and for the support of my family and partners over the years to allow me to reach this point.

“I look forward to fulfilling as best I can the new challenge of serving Illinois citizens in my role as a Circuit Court judge.”

Mr. Braud has been active in professional and community organizations and activities, including membership on the Advisory Committee for the Civil Justice Reform Act and on the Illinois State Bar Association Minority and Women Participating Committee. He also served as a teacher of constitutional and criminal law at Black Hawk College in Moline.

Mr. Braud has been married to his wife, Gertrude, for 39 years. The couple has two adult children.

The 14th Judicial Circuit is made up of Rock Island, Whiteside, Henry and Mercer counties.

Mr. Braud was appointed to the judicial seat following an extensive application and evaluation process which included review by an independent committee established by Supreme Court Justice Thomas L. Kilbride, and a poll of attorneys in the Circuit by the Illinois State Bar Association.

The evaluation committee was composed of lawyers and non-lawyers, and included residents of the Circuit.

“The screening process was very thorough, and Mr. Braud was head and shoulders above everyone else because of his tenure and experience,” said Stanley Coin, chairman of the American Bank & Trust Co., in Rock Island, who was a member of the evaluation committee.

“There were several very capable candidates, but they could not compare to Mr. Braud with his experience and track record.

Mr. Coin was one of 15 members of the evaluation committee.

The others were:

John Ahern, a trustee of Black Hawk College; Jeff Allen, a Joliet attorney; Tobias Barry, retired justice of the Illinois Appellate Court from the Third Judicial District, who serves as co-chair of the committee; Timothy L. Bertschy, a Peoria attorney and former president of the Illinois State Bar Association, also co-chair of the committee; Karl Bradberg, an attorney in Aledo;

Joan Clark, a Rock Island community representative; Joseph Dailing, executive director of Prairie State Legal Services which provides legal aid to low income persons across northern Illinois; Sara Darrow, an attorney with the Henry County state’s attorneys’ office; Paul Delcourt, a Rock Island labor representative; Rose Hernandez, a community representative from Black Hawk College; Rick Keyes, a Rock Island attorney;

Chief Judge Jeffrey O’Connor of the 14th Judicial Circuit; Jodi Plagenz, a Moline attorney; and Lester Weinstine, an attorney from Morrison.

Justice Kilbride recommended Mr. Braud for the judgeship after a thorough application and evaluation process. The process included a poll of all attorneys in the Circuit, conducted by the Illinois State Bar Association, surveying lawyers on the candidates’ integrity, temperament, legal ability and management skills.

Under the Illinois Constitution and state law, the Supreme Court is given the authority to fill judicial vacancies that occur in 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 before being sworn into the state’s highest judicial office Dec. 4, 2000.

When he is not in the Courthouse in the Supreme Court Building in Springfield, Justice Kilbride uses offices in Rock Island.