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DAILY BRIEFS

Wayne Law hosts Nov. 29 panel discussion on new bridge between Detroit and Canada

Experts from business, government and academia will meet at Wayne Law to examine the debate surrounding the proposal to build a second bridge from Detroit to Canada. Bridging the Issue: A Panel Discussion on the New International Trade Crossing will be held from 4-5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 29, in Spencer M. Parrich Auditorium.

The event is presented by the International Trade Committee of the State Bar of Michigan's (SBM) International Law Section, in conjunction with Wayne Law's Program for International Legal Studies.

"The new bridge proposal is one of the most important international questions facing the Michigan business and legal communities," said Professor Gregory H. Fox, director of the Program for International Legal Studies at Wayne Law. "We are thrilled to host this debate as part of our continuing program of public discussions on critical issues of international law."

Featured speakers include: Professor Robert Sedler, Wayne Law; Sam Danou, president, World Trade Center Detroit/Windsor Association; Brad Williams, vice president of government relations, Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce; State Representative Rashida Tlaib (D-Detroit); Scott Hagerstrom, director, Americans for Prosperity-Michigan; and Dan Stamper, president, Detroit International Bridge Company. The moderator is John Gallagher of the Detroit Free Press.

"The event will provide both U.S. and Canadian trade organizations, government officials, members of the legal and business communities, and concerned citizens with an opportunity to discuss this topic in a neutral forum," said Aaron Ogletree, chair of the SBM's Committee on International Trade. "We have organized a diverse group of panelists that will provide knowledge and clarity regarding the opposing perspectives surrounding the proposed New International Trade Crossing."

The event is free and open to the public, but space is limited. Refreshments will be served at a reception following the event. Please RSVP to Sonia A. Salah at sonia.a.salah@gmail.com.

Parking is available for \$5 in Structure #1 across from the Law School on West Palmer Street in Detroit. For directions to the Law School and a campus map, visit www.campusmap.wayne.edu/location/LAW.

For more information about the event or the Program for International Legal Studies, visit <http://www.law.wayne.edu/international-studies> or contact Fox gfox@wayne.edu.

Holiday Hours

The 36th District Court will be closed except for felony arraignments today for the Thanksgiving holiday.

The Third Circuit Court Civil, Criminal and Family Divisions will be closed today in observance of Thanksgiving. The court will reopen on Monday, Nov. 28.

All offices of the United States District Court and the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Michigan will be closed today for the Thanksgiving holiday. In case of emergency, call (313) 234-5656.

The Michigan Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, and the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) will be closed today for the Thanksgiving holiday.

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Down Time



Volunteers with "The 313 Project," Bobby Riggs Jr. (left) and Drew Mast were among the eager beavers who took part in a clean-up effort at the Belle Isle Nature Zoo last Saturday, helping chop down dead trees and removing invasive shrubs from the site. More photos from the work day, which is part of The 313 Project's "Motion to Makeover Detroit" monthly series, appear on the back page of today's issue.

Photo by Robert Chase

Snyder names three to 36th District Court

Gov. Rick Snyder on Wednesday announced the appointments of Michael Wagner, Shannon Holmes and Prentis Edwards Jr. to the 36th District Court in Detroit. The appointments fill the vacancies created by the resignations of Judges Nancy Farmer and Noceeba Southern and the passing of Judge George Chatman.

"I am very impressed by the legal skills, extensive experience and community involvement demonstrated by Michael Wagner, Shannon Holmes and Prentis Edwards Jr.," Snyder said. "All three are highly successful attorneys and I am confident all three will make excellent judges."

Wagner has worked in the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office since 1992 and has held a number of highly responsible positions, including deputy chief prosecutor for the General Trial Division and principal attorney for the office's Major Drug Unit. He also served 30 years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve retiring as a colonel, and had a successful career with General Motors before attending law school. Wagner is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Wayne State University Law School. He will take the seat vacated by Judge George Chatman. Wagner will stand for election in 2012 to complete the last two years of the judicial term, which expires in 2014.

Holmes is currently in private practice and has had a distinguished career in public service, where she has worked as chief of staff to Mayor Dave Bing, human resource director for previous Mayor Ken Cockrel, and as an assistant corporation counsel and administrative hearings officer for the city of Detroit. Holmes is a graduate of Dillard University and the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, and is now working on her doctorate in theology from the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. She is also a former Judge Advocate General officer in the Michigan National Guard. Holmes will take the seat vacated by Judge Noceeba Southern. She will stand for election in 2012 to complete the last two years of the judicial term, which expires in 2014.

Edwards Jr. is an assistant prosecuting attorney for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office where he's served for several years, most recently in the Community Prosecution Unit. He also serves as a community liaison for Sen. Virgil Smith. Edwards is a graduate of Detroit Renaissance High School, Michigan State University and Thomas M. Cooley Law School. He will take the seat vacated by Judge Nancy Farmer. Edwards will stand for election in 2012 for a full term.



Photo by Lynn Monson

Daniel Wright accepts congratulations prior to an award presentation Tuesday at the Michigan Hall of Justice. Wright was presented with a new award named in his honor to recognize his work helping Michigan families and children.

Doing the Wright thing Architect of 'Michigan Miracle' honored by state Supreme Court

By LYNN MONSON
Legal News

Washington could use a few Dan Wrights these days.

At a time when making public policy seems more about arguing and less about solving problems, a former Michigan state court administrator was honored Tuesday, Nov. 22 in Lansing for not only what he accomplished but how he did it.

The Michigan Supreme Court and the state Department of Human Services presented attorney Daniel J. Wright with a new award created in his honor. The Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award "recognizes an outstanding advocate for Michigan children and families," said Chief Justice Robert P. Young Jr.

Gov. Rick Snyder presented the award to Wright as part of a Michigan Adoption Day program at the Hall of Justice in Lansing.

Several of the speakers offering high praise of Wright on Tuesday mentioned that federal officials called one of his achievements "The Michigan Miracle."

That's a reference to the two years he spent solving a major problem — converting all of the state's circuit courts and their Friend of the Court offices to the federally mandated Child Support Enforcement System. A Michigan Supreme Court Commissioner for 11 years, Wright was picked for the job by then-Chief Justice Maura Corrigan in 2001. He traveled extensively throughout the state to understand the problems and views of the many court constituencies, then set about finding the most efficient way to a solution. Corrigan noted that it was vastly important work because the state was facing a deadline for losing tens of millions of dollars in federal aid. More importantly, she said, the old system was hurting Michigan families because of inefficiencies and lack of oversight in dealing with missed child support payments.

Wright was later head of the Friend of the Court Bureau, a division of the State Court Administrative Office, the administrative agency of the Michigan Supreme Court. He also directed the office's Child Welfare Services Division.

That division's current director, Kelly Howard, said Wright's successful revision of the child support system saved the state more than \$147 million it would have lost in federal funds.

"Dan's genius and his greatest legacy here is his ability to build relationships — across professional disciplines, across branches of government, across political parties — to unite everyone for a common purpose. He has vision and the gift to share it," Howard said during the presentation.

Corrigan, now the head of the Michigan Department of Human Services, called Wright "a prince with the heart of a poet and the brains of a diplomat."

"He could be trusted to resolve conflicts without wounding egos and to identify and lead us to much-needed reforms," Corrigan said.

Wright's other work at the state level included starting Adoption Forums for the

Supreme Court in 2008 to address barriers that were stranding children in foster care. He served on a "permanency options" legislative work group to find ways to move children out of foster care and into permanent homes. Part of his work led to legislation requiring courts to consult with the child's wishes when making decisions about the child's future. Wright also was part of the Michigan Underground Economy Task Force that recommended solutions to the problem of parents hiding assets and income to avoid paying child support.

A native of Detroit, Wright graduated from Marquette University with a degree in journalism, then received his law degree in 1973 from the University of Detroit School of Law. Before joining the Supreme Court staff in 1989, he worked in private practice, including six years with the State Appellate Defender Office in Detroit, where he represented indigent defendants. He was a partner in the Detroit firm of Gromek, Bedure and Thomas, where he specialized in appellate work.

Wright, who lives in Grand Ledge with his wife Lynne after retiring in 2009, said in an interview after the award presentation that he tried to bring honesty, compromise, and accountability to the process of policy-making. That formula isn't being used much in public policy lately, he said, noting that the day before, the Congressional "Super Committee" announced that it had failed to agree on a plan to reduce the burgeoning national debt.

"I think there is way too much posturing, way too much hypocrisy in government," Wright said. "This failure of the debt committee, that's just an example of it, that people just won't compromise. You have to compromise in order to get results."

"All I did is speak the truth. In other words, if there was something bad that had to be swallowed, I would say so. I'd say this has got to be done, there isn't going to be any give on this, it's essential, it's what we're here for. Then I would go from one side to the other, first alone, then I'd bring them together."

Not everyone embraces change equally well, Wright said, so sometimes the greater good required replacing people who were roadblocks.

"The one key thing that I did was holding accountable some people (who) just weren't trying. They were saying, my way or the highway. And that was it. They were not cooperating with the idea of compromise. And so we had to get rid of them and we did."

That seemingly tough-guy approach belies what those who worked with Wright say are his strengths. The long list of compliments presented Tuesday included integrity, honesty, loyalty, the ability to make people feel at ease, recognizing the contributions of others, the "rare ability to do great work under great pressure," and "generosity with his time, his knowledge and his jokes." Several noted his love — and frequent quoting — of the poet William Butler Yeats.

"It may sound like a movie, with Dan coming in as the superhero, but it's true," Howard said. "And that's how he was able to achieve so much. Just Dan being Dan. Direct and honest and positive and collaborative."

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Friday Feature

Submit news & views to
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THE 313 PROJECT

Volunteers turn out for Belle Isle spruce up

BY TOM KIRVAN
Legal News

The 313 Project, a legal community based program dedicated to the revitalization of Detroit through volunteer service and pro bono work, was in full view at the Belle Isle Nature Zoo on November 19.

A host of young attorneys, law school students, and other community volunteers teamed up last Saturday for the nonprofit group's monthly "Motion to Makeover Detroit" series, cleaning up the nature site by cutting dead trees, pruning invasive plants, and hauling away unsightly litter and debris.

Created in 1845, Belle Isle is the largest island city park in the U.S., and features hiking trails, historic conservatories, fishing and boating sites, and a nature center. It also has been home to the Detroit Grand Prix, an event that is scheduled to get a new lease on life next summer.

"The 313 Project is dedicated to fostering connections between the legal community and Detroit by creating pro bono and community service opportunities," said Erika Riggs, a founder and vice president of the organization. "Through these efforts, we hope to inspire the legal community to get active, get involved, and get invested in Detroit's revitalization."

The group will host its first fund-raiser on Thursday, Dec. 15 at the recently opened Colors-Detroit restaurant in Harmonie Park. The event, titled "313 Reasons to Revitalize," will run from 6:30-8:30 p.m., and will feature a night of music, strolling appetizers, a silent auction, and a brief program, according to Riggs.

"With your kind support and attendance, we will raise money for our pro bono clinics and legal education seminars that will address the legal needs of Detroit residents, as well as other incredible opportunities for Detroit," Riggs said.

Tickets cost \$40 in advance and \$50 at the door. The cost of admission is \$20 for students, \$25 the night of the event. Tickets can be purchased online at the313project.ticketleap.com.



Daniela Walters, a law student at Wayne State, surveys bags of debris that she and others removed from the greenhouses at Belle Isle.



Kathleen Beson, a member of the Wayne State Environmental Law Society, put her pruning shears to good use on Saturday.



A towering ash, a victim of the Emerald Ash Borer infestation, was among scores of trees removed by volunteers.



Aisa Villarosa Berg (left), president and founding director of The 313 Project, and Erika Riggs, a founder and vice president of the nonprofit group, teamed up to carry away a dead limb.



Clark Hill attorneys Drew Mast (center) and Kristin Polanski (right) along with 313 member Nick Rickert pitched in to remove an ash tree during the November 19 work day at Belle Isle.



Retired Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Mary Waterstone (left) and Cathy Snygg, both members of the Friends of Belle Isle, were well armed for the fall project.

Volunteer
with the 313 Project

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the313project.org

Photos by Robert Chase