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FROM THE OFFICE OF
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County Eye Newsletter



Kerr County Court at Law Judge, Spencer Brown

As the end of 2014 approaches Kerr County will see longtime, Kerr County Court at Law Judge, Spencer Brown, spend his last weeks on the bench doing what he has done for the past 24 years...administering justice with fairness and compassion.

"It almost seems like I've lived a charmed life because I've always had the best coaches, teachers, mentors that a person could hope for in whatever I've done in my life," Brown said.

Brown will retire at the end of December and turn the court over to newly elected Susan Harris on January 1. Harris has over 20 years of experience as an associate judge.

"I am happy Susan is succeeding me on the bench on January 1," Brown said. "She has the personal skills and training to keep this court moving forward in a positive manner for many years to come."

The County Court at Law was created in Kerr County in 1985 by legislative action to relieve the overcrowded district court dockets. The County Court at Law has jurisdiction over Class A and B criminal misdemeanor cases and has appellate jurisdiction in cases appealed from justice of the peace courts. Additionally the court handles 1/3 of all the divorces filed in Kerr County, protective order hearings and a variety of other family law cases. The court has concurrent jurisdiction on juvenile, probate and mental health cases.

When Brown assumed office in 1990 there was a backlog of over 2200 cases on the docket. Today the closure rate on cases is over 100% and each year ends with few unresolved cases. As of the end of September this year, Brown's court had disposed of 51,258 cases since he took the bench on Jan. 1, 1990.

A third generation native of Kerr County and a graduate of Tivy High School, Brown graduated from Rice University and then received his Doctor of Jurisprudence from South Texas College of Law in Houston in 1968.

He returned to Kerr County and went into private practice with local attorney Joe Burkett for 9 years and then had a solo practice for the next 13 years before being elected as judge for the Kerr County Court at Law in 1990. During those years he also served as a municipal judge, justice of the peace, county attorney and assistant district attorney. Brown also served six years in the Army National Guard.

"It has been an honor and privilege for me to be able to live and work in Kerr County where I grew up," Brown said, "and to serve the citizens of Kerr County for the past four decades."

During his tenure in the County Court at Law, Judge Brown was instrumental in the implementation of several improvements to the local judicial process including the creation of a county collections department which handles setting up payment arrangements with defendants to collect fines and court costs assessed in both the county and district courts.

"I am proudest of the court collections program," Brown said, "because we now collect in excess of 90 percent of the fines and court costs assessed in our adjudications. Before we began this program Kerr County was only collecting about 25% of these revenues."

The Kerr County court collections program has become a model for several other counties around the state of Texas.

Another innovation Brown brought to the courts was the use of video-conferencing to process jail inmates which eliminates the need to transport inmates between the jail and the courthouse. Video-conferencing also reduces security risks and reduces the manpower and costs needed to efficiently handle the cases.

Brown hopes after retirement to serve as a visiting judge for the 26-county Sixth Administrative Region under Judge Stephen Ables. The presiding judge of an administrative judicial region can assign a senior, retired or former judge who resides in the region to handle a case or docket of an active judge in the region who is unable to preside due to recusal, illness, vacation, etc. or who needs assistance with a heavy docket or docket backlog.

Only three other retired county court at law judges currently takes assignments from Judge Ables.

Few at the courthouse would disagree that Brown's contribution to the history of Kerr County and its judiciary is significant and that his legacy will remain intact for many years to come. We will miss him and we wish him a long and happy retirement.