

Solo And Small Practice Update

-Nancy L. Taylor



The first 2004 breakfast meeting of the Solo and Small Practice Section of the Bucks County Bar Association was held at Goodnoe's on Friday, January 9. Our guest speaker was Thomas Wiley, Bucks County Court Administrator.

Tom briefed us about the new "boutique" courtroom #10, now open on the third floor of DRS and courtroom #11 soon to open in the Commissioners' Room near the law library.

Bucks County is busy at work on the Common Pleas Criminal Case Management System (CPCCMS), a Supreme Court Statewide Automation project that will automate criminal case processing from initiation of a case to completion, including collections and appeals.

Two pilot counties, Westmoreland and Cumberland, have successfully completed installation. Bucks is scheduled for implementation in late May. This will create some major changes in processing cases for the courtroom staff and especially for the Clerk of Courts.

The Supreme Court announced plans to review all local county rules for the purpose of standardization. One of the major tasks is to standardize the numbering of criminal and civil rules statewide.

Tom told us about the Justice Network, JNET, where all criminal justice users (police, courts, and corrections) connect to share information. For example, sheriffs will have a list of statewide DRS and criminal bench warrants. Information is transmitted between and among Law Enforcement Agencies over JNET with a connecting line between Harrisburg to a secure site in the Bucks County DA's Office. Privacy and confidentiality are issues being addressed during its development. Sitting on the JNET steering committee are Judges Biehn, Rufe and Thomas.

Bucks County is not yet on board for e-filing, only Philadelphia and the Feds are doing it so far, but this too shall come to pass.

Bucks continues to have three senior judges, Judges Biester, Clark and as of January 1, McAndrews. Judge Garb is sitting regularly in Northampton County and is also assigned to a statewide grand jury one week a month in Harrisburg. Judge Biester has been made a Major General so he can hear cases regarding the detainees at Guantanamo Bay.

Discussion ensued regarding the new Justice Center. Tom indicated that there has been little discussion, since they are awaiting the recommendation on site selection from the architect, HOK. Tom expressed concerns regarding obtaining sufficient space to house the court operation in a growing county and satisfactory non-courtroom space, flexible enough to accommodate court operations and programs.

The court, Tom stated, is an institution for which the general public sometimes has difficulty understanding its space and operation needs. Tom expressed a willingness to work with the Bar Association's *ad hoc* courthouse committee. He tells us that the powers-that-be are open to suggestions and that topics being discussed are a cafeteria, as well as a day care center for county employees.

Tom feels it is an exciting time to be in court administration in Bucks County with the planning of a new Justice Center, the increase in statewide automation, better access to record and information and the modernization of offices, to name a few current issues. We invited Tom back next year to keep us updated on courthouse news.