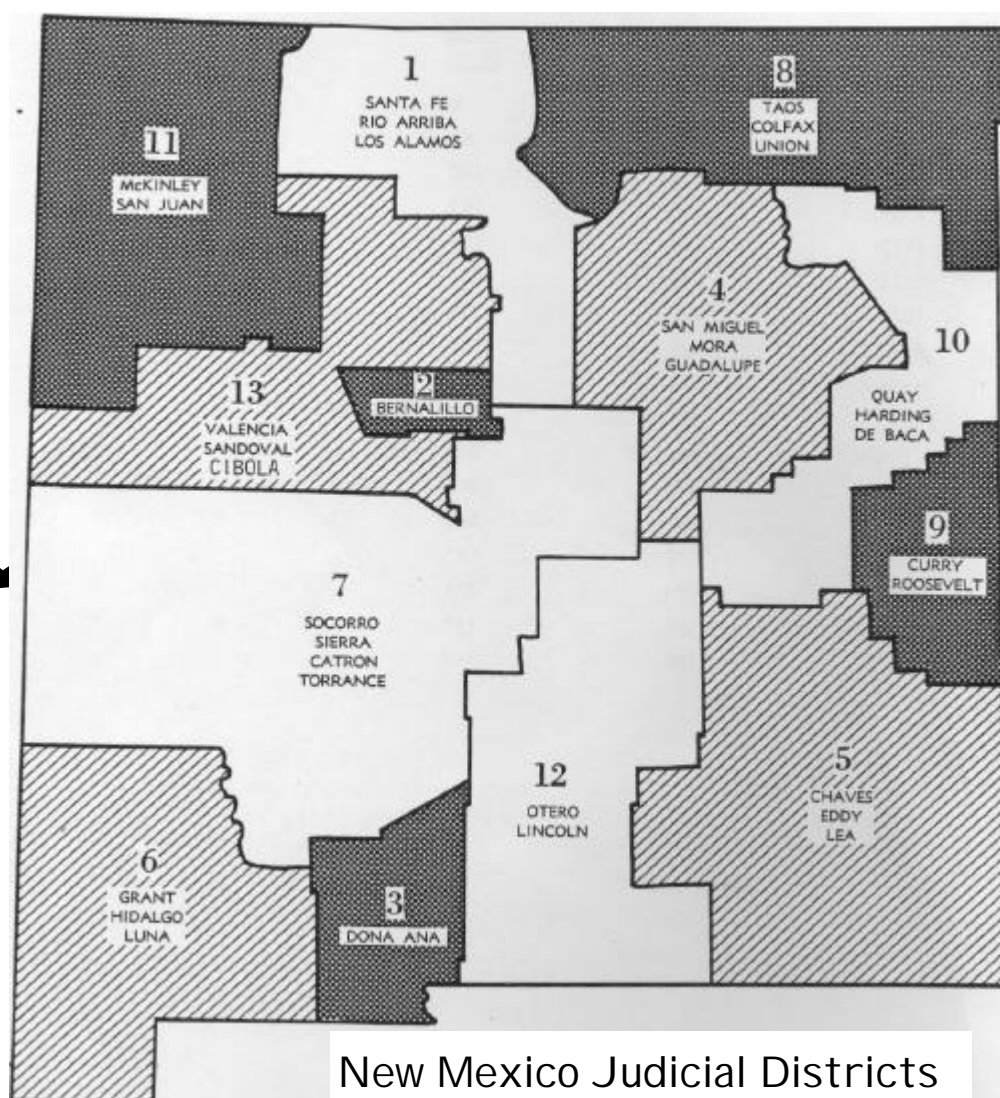


New Mexico State Courts 1999 Annual Report



July 1, 1998—June 30, 1999

Message from Chief Justice Pamela B. Minzner

New Mexicans, like all Americans, are experiencing a time of unprecedented change. The international economy and events throughout the world increasingly affect our economic well-being. Technological innovations change the way we lead our daily lives. The Internet has become an integral part of the way we communicate, providing widespread access to information that was once a luxury and changing the very pace of our lives. These accelerating changes present new challenges and opportunities to improve our world while maintaining our most treasured values and institutions.

New Mexico's courts play a critical role in our changing world. Citizens look to the courts and to the law as sources of stability and enduring values in the midst of the uncertainty that change brings. At the same time, they have the right to expect the courts to develop new ways to work more efficiently and to solve the persistent problems that face our families and institutions. The judiciary is rising to the challenge.

Innovative programs such as our drug courts and local pro se initiatives seek to provide new ways of providing fair and impartial justice while treating every person with dignity, respect, and courtesy. Our commitment to change also is evident in our courts' efforts at statewide automation. Though much remains to be done, we have made great progress in creating courts that operate with the speed, affordability, and convenience expected by our society.

As we anticipate and prepare for change, I want to reassure New Mexico citizens that the judges and staff of the judiciary are committed to fulfilling our responsibilities in the next century. But beyond our willingness to improve the ways in which we serve the public, our fundamental promise to New Mexico is unchanged: New Mexico's judiciary remains dedicated to providing fair and equal justice for all.

New Mexico Receives National Recognition

- Supreme Court Justice Petra Jimenez Maes received the Hispanic National Bar Association's Latina Lawyer of the Year Award in November 1999, recognizing Justice Maes "as an accomplished and groundbreaking Latina in the judiciary."
- Supreme Court Justice Patricio M. Serna served as a faculty advisor for the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada, and Judge Thomas Fitch of the Seventh Judicial District Court served as a facilitator.
- The National Association for Court Management presented the 1999 Award of Merit, their most prestigious award, to John M. Greacen, Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. The award is presented annually to an individual working in the field of court administration who has demonstrated leadership and excellence in the advancement of the ideals and principles of modern judicial management and professional court management.
- John Greacen was inducted into the Warren E. Burger Society of the National Center for State Courts for sustained contributions to the work of the National Center.
- *INFOWORLD*, a weekly technology publication, named the New Mexico Judiciary one of "10 Innovators Leveraging Technology." The award is presented to forward-thinking companies and information technology decision makers. In presenting the honor, *INFOWORLD* stated, "The United States court systems are not generally known as technological innovators, relying on reams of paper for every case and grinding through processes as old and arcane as the language of the law. Bucking tradition, the Judicial Information Division of New Mexico's Judiciary is using the Internet to overhaul that state's court system—and showing the other 49 states how Web technology can breathe new life into the legal process."
- *Application Development Trends*, a technology journal, published an article in its December 1998 issue about the "State of New Mexico's Judicial Information Division...moving its courts into the 21st Century by opening up its internal information systems to the public via the Internet."
- The Eleventh Judicial District received recognition from the National Association for Court Management for its grade court.
- The U.S. Department of Justice designated the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court DWI/Drug Court Program a Mentor Court, the only such court in the U.S. to receive that honor.
- The AOC gave presentations, upon invitation, on its electronic filing project at the Sixth National Conference on Court Technology; the annual meeting of the National Association for Court Management; and the IT Forum, the association of state court information technology.

Strategic Objectives of the New Mexico Judiciary

The 1999 Annual Report of the New Mexico Judiciary is presented within the context of the following strategic objectives:

1. Meet the needs of court users
2. Improve case management
3. Provide alternative dispute resolution
4. Enhance public perception of the courts
5. Make more efficient use of existing resources
6. Make maximum use of automation to improve court services and efficiency
7. Obtain adequate resources for court operations
8. Recruit and retain high quality staff
9. Enhance the skills of judges and court staff
10. Improve teamwork within and among the courts



Meeting the Needs of Court Users

Court of Appeals Chief Judge Lynn Pickard made several presentations to local bar associations advising the bar about the court's programs, answering questions, and receiving feedback. A written survey has been designed and used to solicit feedback. The court changed the format of its calendar notices in response to comments from appellate practitioners to improve procedural and substantive clarity. For faster service, the court now allows filing of opinions in its Albuquerque satellite office and e-mails opinions to litigants and counsel upon request. Summaries of **Court of Appeals** and **Supreme Court** opinions are available through the Internet within a few days of the filing of the opinion, in cooperation with the Judicial Education Center, whose website is <http://jec.unm.edu/cases>.

The **Administrative Office of the Courts** (AOC) has been working with the State Court Language Interpreters Certification Consortium in a multi-state collaborative effort to share language skill tests for certification of court interpreters. That collaboration has resulted in the following foreign language certification tests being available in New Mexico: Russian, Laotian, Hmong, Korean, Cambodian, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Spanish. During the past year, orientation and skill-building workshops and certification exams were offered throughout the state, resulting in 11 new certified interpreters of the Spanish language. In addition, New Mexico administered the Russian language certification exam using CD-ROM, the first time this technology has been used in the U.S.

The New Mexico State Court Improvement Project, with the goal of improving outcomes for abused or neglected children, piloted a program in the **First Judicial District** to mediate child abuse and neglect cases before they reach the courtroom. The project distributed 4,000 parent handbooks describing the judicial process and expectations to parents and guardians involved in abuse and neglect cases. In addition, the project prepared a second handbook for professional experts which explains the purpose and use of psychological evaluations in those cases.

Working with an Advisory Board of judges, lawyers, legal aid representatives, court staff, and librarians, the Pro Se Forms Project coordinators created ten separate form packets for use in uncontested divorce and paternity cases. The **First, Second, Third, Fifth, and Eleventh Judicial Districts** are piloting the project. Other projects include a cover sheet for domestic relations cases, automated calculation of child support, and standard probate forms.

The **Supreme Court Law Library** has many forms available for pro se litigants. The forms may also be accessed on the library's website, www.fscll.org. **Court of Appeals** Chief Judge Lynn Pickard has developed and revised three appeals manuals: *How to Process an Appeal in the New Mexico Court of Appeals*, *How to Appeal a Civil Case from Metropolitan Court to District Court*, and *How to Take a De Novo Appeal from Metropolitan Court to District Court*.

The **First Judicial District** offers a courthouse booth where volunteer lawyers help litigants process cases and a divorce clinic where self-represented litigants can receive free advice. The Family Court Services office has a legal assistant on staff who helps complete legal forms and refers litigants to classes conducted by volunteers. The **Second, Third, and Eighth** operate pro se clinics which provide assistance with domestic relations, name changes, civil restraining orders, and driver's license restoration proceedings. Volunteer lawyers with the Albuquerque Bar Association operate a similar program at **Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court**. At the request of judges in the **Fifth**, the County Bar Association administers a Pro Se Divorce Clinic.

The **Eleventh District Court's** Pro Se Clinic provides the multiple services of many agencies in one place for litigants seeking comprehensive solutions to their legal needs. The clinics provide child support hearing officers, victim's advocates, mediators, the county clerk, and the Motor Vehicle Division in a "one-stop-shopping" venue where litigants can receive help on many problems at one time. With this approach, litigants can communicate with the judge on a more equal level and save time in the courtroom. As a result, the court has seen a decline in the number of reopened cases.

In just over five years, New Mexico drug courts have grown significantly while becoming an integral part of the criminal justice system for the populations they serve. There are now six adult drug courts (**First, Second, Third, Eighth, and Eleventh Judicial Districts, and Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court**); and three juvenile drug courts (**Second, Third, and Thirteenth**). Since the inception of drug courts in 1995, there have been a total of 525 adult graduates and 55 juvenile graduates.

The U.S. Department of Justice awarded continuation grants to the **First Judicial District and Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court** to further implement their drug courts. This funding will allow the **First** to open a satellite office in Rio Arriba County for services two or three days per week in addition to providing services in Santa Fe and Los Alamos counties. The **Third** received an implementation grant to expand its juvenile drug court. The **Sixth, Eleventh, and Twelfth** are planning new juvenile drug courts through the use of Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant Funds.

The **Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court** DWI/Drug Court Program was implemented in July 1997 and has focused on providing intensive supervision for defendants convicted of a third or subsequent DWI offense. The program, which focuses on serious adult DWI offenders, is the only such court in the U.S. designated by the Department of Justice as a Mentor Court.

The **Fifth Judicial District** replaced the sound systems in three courtrooms. The new systems provide listening devices for hearing-impaired litigants. The **Sixth** revised local court rules and drafted forms for use by self-represented litigants. To provide professional legal research assistance to the judges, attorneys, and the public, the district added a law clerk and purchased several computers for on-line research.

The **First, Second, Third, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Judicial Districts** continue to support Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs. The mission of the more than 600 volunteers of the New Mexico CASA Network is to support effective volunteer advocacy for the best interests of children caught up in the court system and to en-

sure that every child has a safe, supportive, and permanent home. The number of children served by CASA volunteers increased 28 percent from FY 98 to FY 99.

The **Fifth** and **Tenth Judicial Districts** support Teen Court programs to reduce juvenile felony cases. The **Tenth** is also involved in pre-prosecution diversion programs and a community corrections program offered by Team Builders of Tucumcari, New Mexico, which includes intensive monitoring and outpatient counseling for juvenile defendants.

The **Seventh Judicial District** established safety committees comprised of representatives from the court, the Sheriff's Department, the jails, the District Attorney's office, the local Bench/Bar Association, and the County Commissioners. The goal of the committee is to devise a manual that will enhance safety for all court users.

The **Eighth** and **Tenth Judicial Districts** implemented new jury management software systems to facilitate more effective jury proceedings. The **Fourth** implemented new jury procedures to reasonably accommodate juror time and services, and the **Sixth** placed greater emphasis on improving the jury system by focusing on juror comfort, treatment, and payment. The **Tenth** remodeled their jury deliberation room to make the accommodations more comfortable and accessible. The **Eleventh** shortened jury service by 80 percent by shortening its term of service from six months to one month in San Juan County and to two months in McKinley County. The shortened term of service is more expensive for the court; however, the response by jurors has been overwhelmingly positive. More citizens see the inner workings of the court, and jurors' opinion of the court system is rising.

The **Sixth Judicial District** contracts with two attorneys who serve as special masters and hear a wide variety of cases, improving the time it takes to process cases through the court. Through a joint powers agreement, the **Fourth, Ninth, and Tenth** work together to accelerate cases through the system by employing the services of a Special Commissioner for domestic violence hearings. These same districts also share a Child Support Hearing Officer to facilitate the increasing number of child support cases. The **Ninth** provides Family and Children's Court

services, a Friends for Life Mentorship program, and public access to the Law Library.

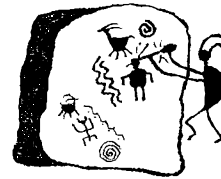
The **Eleventh Judicial District** received recognition from the National Association for Court Management for its grade court, a specialized court set up to encourage juveniles to focus on their education and complete their work. Chief Judge Paul Onuska has commented that "if children are allowed to turn their backs on their education...they become a drag on the prosperity of the entire community." An anonymous benefactor has established a scholarship fund at San Juan Community College for grade court graduates; presently 22 students are enrolled through this program. The **Thirteenth** obtained state funding to implement a grade court in Sandoval County which includes the active involvement of local high school authorities.

The **Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court** provided court interpreter services to over 7,000 individuals, and the court's information brochure was translated from English into Spanish. The Educational/Community Services Division tracked over 7,000 cases of community service which contributed 123,411 hours, or \$524,488.39, to state and local agencies. The court also provides Saturday arraignments.

The **Magistrate Court Division** distributed customer comment boxes to all magistrate courts to be placed in the courts' lobbies for public and staff comments. The **Grant County Magistrate Court** in Silver City reports they have received "numerous compliments and some positive criticism" and "this is a good tool to get feedback on the court's performance."

In a joint project with the District Attorney's office and Western New Mexico University, the **Grant County Magistrate Court** in Silver City implemented a court-supervised probation program. A student intern from the university tracks defendants to ensure compliance with the court's sentence. If a defendant is not in compliance, the intern reports the findings to the judge and the District Attorney's office; and appropriate action is then taken. The **Clovis** and **Farmington Magistrate Courts** also have misdemeanor probation programs.

Improving Case Management



The **Second, Fourth, Eighth, and Twelfth Judicial Districts** implemented proactive and differentiated case management in criminal and/or juvenile cases. Proactive case management places the judge, instead of the attorneys and parties, in control of the litigation process. Cases are resolved more quickly, resources are used more efficiently, and each case is resolved through procedures appropriate to its own complexity.

The **First Judicial District** regularly generates reports from the judicial information system to assess judge progress on cases and to distribute case workload. The court focuses on reducing the time between filing and disposition, and all divisions use multiple jury starts. The **Ninth** added a second courtroom in Curry County to facilitate faster disposal of cases going to trial.

Providing Alternative Dispute Resolution



In September 1998, the **Court of Appeals** instituted an appellate mediation pilot program to conserve judicial resources by reducing the number of cases that are decided by opinion and to provide an additional resource to litigants. The program, which was made permanent in 1999, has achieved a settlement rate 17 percent higher than the court's natural settlement rate of such eligible cases. Feedback reports from litigants have been extremely positive.

Through its Family Court Services, the **First Judicial District** offers mediation services, priority consultations, and advisory consultations in domestic relations cases involving parents in custodial disputes. The court continues to refer civil cases to settlement conferences. The **Fourth** once again entered into a Joint Powers Agreement with the **First** to utilize its Family Court Services Program. Family and Children's Court Services in the **Ninth** provide custody evaluations, a

mandatory custody workshop for all domestic relations litigants with children, and mediation services for custodial disputes.

To improve alternative dispute resolution (ADR) within the district, the **Eighth Judicial District** is using the ADR surcharge in civil cases to train attorneys in mediation techniques. The **Thirteenth** continues to improve on mediation and arbitration programs which focus on providing alternative methods to domestic mediation cases without major legal costs and delays for full hearings. Civil Division judges in **Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court** employ mediators and facilitators in its cases.

Enhancing Public Perception of the Courts



The **Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission** evaluates the performance of appellate, district, and metropolitan court judges standing for retention.

The Commission is focusing on midterm evaluations for all district and metropolitan court judges standing for retention in November 2002 and preparing for final evaluations of appellate court judges standing for retention in 2000, 2002, and 2004. The midterm evaluation results are conducted for the purpose of improving the judge's performance; the results are not released. Forty-five days before the general election, the Commission releases the final recommendations to the media and the public.

In conducting the evaluations, the Commission obtains information on a judge's performance from lawyers, jurors, court staff (not including court staff who serve at the will of a judge), and resource personnel (including but not limited to law enforcement, probation officers, social workers, court interpreters, and CASA volunteers). The Commission evaluates on integrity, legal knowledge, decision-making abilities, communication skills and preparation, attentiveness, and ability to maintain control over court proceedings. Over the past four years, the project has increased from a pilot of eight judges to a statewide program covering 103 judges.

For the past two years, the **Thirteenth Judicial District** has supported career workshops for the University of New Mexico-Valencia campus to inform college students about prospects for employment with the New Mexico judiciary. District personnel participate as board members on the Business Occupation and Judicial Studies Curriculum committees of UNM-Valencia and TVI-Albuquerque.

Making More Efficient Use of Existing Resources



The **Court of Appeals** has reduced the time necessary to circulate opinions to a panel of three judges by e-mailing draft opinions between court offices for review.

The **Warrant Enforcement Program** increased its total collection of fines and fees and bench warrant fees from \$1,109,896 in FY 98 to \$2,917,713 in FY 99. The percentage return on investment increased from 129 percent to 418 percent, the rate of response to collection letters more than doubled from 17 percent to 37 percent, and the number of cases through which the integrity of court judgment was upheld through the collection of funds increased 251 percent. In calendar year 1998, 10 courts participated in the Tax Refund Intercept Program, and 38 courts participated in 1999.

The **Magistrate Court Division** began a realignment of court clerks statewide by moving half-FTE vacancies from overstaffed courts to understaffed courts. The **Warrant Enforcement Program** also realigned clerk assignments statewide for more effective performance.

The **First Judicial District** participated in the Institute for Court Management program, "Re-engineering Court Procedures." As a result, the court has changed work processes in the Clerk's Office to "work smarter, not harder."

The **Ninth Judicial District** uses contractual services to provide a less costly means to accomplish certain tasks and services. During the past year, the court has engaged in contracts for assisting the clerks' office in case file preparation for microfilming, providing the child

support office a hard copy record of payments from a non-Y2K-compliant computer system, and hiring additional bailiff services. The court also participated in the JTPA Summer Youth Program to provide, at no cost, labor services in several departments of the court and job training for participants.

The **Thirteenth Judicial District** recently acquired approximately \$8,000 in surplus furniture from the Supreme Court for its new Domestic Relations hearing room. This transfer demonstrates how communication between the courts prevented a significant expenditure of funds.

Making Maximum Use Of Automation to Improve Court Services and Efficiency



The **Supreme Court** and the **Court of Appeals** have contracted for a case management information system which will allow both courts to generate more detailed statistics on demand. The courts hope to go online and begin capturing statistical information beginning July 1, 2000. The docketing system will integrate with an existing imaging system used to archive closed case information. The public will have enhanced access to all appellate case information.

The **Judicial Information Division** began its rollout of upgraded computer equipment and the GUI and NT version of FACTS™ to all of the New Mexico state courts. The new software will contain many of the enhancements requested by court staff to ease case processing. JID also enhanced access to legal research for judges and implemented data transfer for child support cases to the Child Support Enforcement Division to comply with federal requirements.

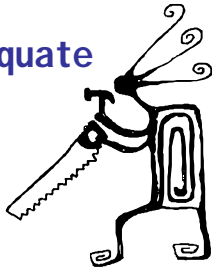
The judiciary-wide newsletter, formerly *The Magistrate Court News*, is now the *New Mexico Court Link* and is published on the New Mexico judiciary website (<http://www.nmcourts.com>) for court and public access.

The **Fifth Judicial District** continues to maintain and update its Internet website and court information webpage. With the help of one of its special masters, the **Sixth** continues to improve its information capabilities.

The **Eleventh Judicial District** and the **Judicial Information Division** participated in a joint pilot project to place criminal and juvenile caseloads on the Electronic Filing System (EFS). EFS accepts electronic documents in .pdf format for filing from the District Attorney, Public Defenders, and private counsel, who file the documents from their offices. Court clerks review the documents and then file them into the FACTS™ case management system where the documents are accessible through the case lookup function on the judiciary's website. Since March 1999, the court has opened in excess of 900 cases, and 14,000 documents have been filed electronically.

All cash-handling windows in **Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court** were equipped with PCs, and the court implemented a file-scanning system that allows any court employee to scan a file and immediately access the file's location.

Obtaining Adequate Resources for Court Operations



The judiciary completed a statewide assessment of court security needs with recommendations for a long-term strategic plan for court security at all levels of the judiciary. Recommendations include training on court security for judges and court staff; security manuals tailored to each court facility; and installation of video arraignment technology, including studio equipment and transmission systems.

The **First Judicial District** judges, court administrator, and a task force of community leaders are working with Santa Fe County to identify and purchase property for a new courthouse. The groundbreaking ceremony for the **Second's** new courthouse took place in December 1998, and the scheduled completion date is January 2001.

The **Fourth Judicial District** has been meeting with the San Miguel County Commission to discuss improving the court's facilities. Proceeds from a county bond issue will enable the **Seventh** to make improvements, and an architectural firm has been selected to design plans for the Socorro County Courthouse. With grant money provided by Curry County, the **Ninth** is nearing the completion of an extensive remodeling project which will enable all court offices to be on the same floor.

In 1999, the **Chama, Las Vegas, Raton, Santa Rosa, and Truth or Consequences Magistrate Courts** received new facilities which meet or exceed national recommendations for security and safety. Panic alarms were installed in all 54 magistrate courts.

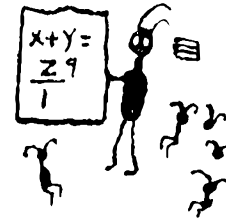
Recruiting and Retaining High Quality Staff



All courts in New Mexico have been improving staff salaries with the support of the legislature. As a result, they have been able to recruit and retain high quality staff. The staff turnover rate has been reduced, and the experience and educational levels of the employees has increased.

The **Thirteenth Judicial District** has initiated a work study project with Los Lunas High School to provide court clerk experience for a highly qualified student.

The **Supreme Court** formed a committee to assist in the selection of court employees of the year. All judges and court staff are given the opportunity to submit a nomination form to the committee which makes a recommendation. District Court Employee of the Year is Holly Reynolds, **Thirteenth Judicial District** Court Clerk. Magistrate Court Employee of the Year is Janice Sandison, **Torrance County Magistrate Court** Chief Clerk. **Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court** Employee of the Year is Maria Romero, Clerk IV in the Criminal Division.



Enhancing the Skills of Judges and Court Staff

The **Court of Appeals** is providing eight employees with one year of comprehensive computer training in a variety of software packages used by the court, including word processing, spreadsheets, database, and report generation.

The **Rozier E. Sanchez Judicial Education Center (JEC)** at the Institute of Public Law of the UNM School of Law continues to support efforts by the courts to meet all of their strategic objectives through education and training. JEC provides annual conferences and seminars for virtually every group of judges and staff within the New Mexico judiciary and offers special seminars in high-impact topics like domestic violence and DWI for limited jurisdiction courts.

JEC's program is now online with an extensive and nationally admired website. Judges and staff can access interactive training on numerous subjects, some presented in text and graphics and some in video format. Judges can check the minimum and maximum sentences within their authority for any misdemeanor DWI, pull up a script for arraigning a defendant, or answer questions about hearsay evidence, tort law, or campaign ethics. They can also read summaries of appellate decisions shortly after they are issued, access and search any of JEC's growing collection of benchbooks, or conduct protected online discussions.

In May 1999, New Mexico sent a team to the Leadership Institute in Judicial Education. This team formulated goals that included having judges and staff take greater ownership of their educational programming and develop a more comprehensive approach to program planning. Further goals were subsequently developed by another team sent to the National Symposium on the Future of Judicial Branch Education in October. These teams will share their findings with their colleagues during a December in-state leadership institute and develop judicial education plans for the years ahead.

In October 1999, the judicial employees listed below earned the title of

"Fellow of the Institute for Court Management," completing the Institute of Court Management's Court Executive Development Program which provides training in leadership and judicial administration. To complete the program and qualify as Fellows, applicants must complete six core courses dealing with court operations, a three-week residential seminar, an independent court study project and report, and a three-day concluding seminar.

Julie Baca, **Second District**

Louise Baca, **AOC**

Leanne Campbell, **Second District**

Bee J. Clem, **Fifth District**

Nadine Sanchez, **Third District**

Joanne Vigil Quintana, **First District**

Linda Worley, **Fifth District**

Several employees of the **First, Seventh, Ninth, and Thirteenth Judicial Districts** have completed the Judicial Studies 101 course at TVI. The course covers basic court and litigation procedures, legal issues, legal terminology, and forms. The **First, Ninth, and Thirteenth** send staff to job-related training and provide educational leave for staff to take college courses, seminars, and workshops which increase the knowledge and value of the employee to the court and its users.

Six magistrate judges attended the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. **Catron County** Judge James Blancq and **Doña Ana County** Judge Oscar Fietze completed the *Special Court Jurisdiction Advanced Course*; **McKinley County** Judge Rhoda Hunt, **Eddy County** Judge Monte Lyons, **Roosevelt County** Judge Jane Martin, and **Harding County** Judge Karen Mitchell completed the *Special Court Jurisdiction Course*. **Supreme Court** Justice Patrio M. Serna served as faculty advisor, and Judge Thomas Fitch of the **Seventh Judicial District** served as a facilitator.

The **Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court** DWI/Drug Court Program provides on-site training to other courts locally and nationally who are interested in developing a similar program.

The New Mexico Association of Drug Court Professionals held its second annual statewide conference on New Mexico drug courts in November 1999. The conference theme, *The Drug Court Revolution In New Mexico*, addressed the

considerable activity and change to the New Mexico criminal justice system as a result of the drug court movement. Jeff Tauber, President of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, delivered the keynote address. The 150 participants included judges, court staff, law enforcement personnel, public officials, district attorneys, public defenders, and treatment providers.

Eighteen representatives from the New Mexico judiciary attended the 1999 CTC6 Conference. The Court Technology Conference, held every two years, is a international event with over 3,000 attendees. It features educational sessions and vendor displays of court technology.

Improving Teamwork Within and Among the Courts



Quality New Mexico recognized both the **Court of Appeals** and the **AOC** with the Piñon level of recognition for their commitment to quality management. As part of its quality initiative, the **Court of Appeals** instituted process action teams to address various areas of operation, including staff and judge training, production of staff attorney work product, submission of cases to judges for decision, and staff input into court processes. These teams have successfully initiated training for a new judge and computer training for staff, and they have made changes in various court processes that make the court more efficient.

The **AOC** continued implementing its Total Quality Service program with training on tools for process improvement. Twelve process improvement teams were formed to address both urgent and long-term issues. All employees joined a team, and many improvements became apparent within a relatively short period of time. The most significant changes were made in days to ship supplies to the courts, payroll processing, and warrant enforcement procedures. The teams meet on a regular basis to work on improving internal and external customer service.

The **First Judicial District** continues to sponsor the annual Judges' Summit where district, magistrate, and municipal

judges from the counties of Santa Fe, Los Alamos, and Ria Arriba meet to discuss items of mutual concern. The court's district judges and court administrator conduct an annual off-site retreat to discuss long-range planning and teamwork issues.

The **Seventh Judicial District** worked in conjunction with the local Bench/Bar Association to host the annual Bench/Bar Conference in Socorro. Many attorneys throughout the district and members of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, and district and magistrate courts attended the conference.

The **Ninth Judicial District** participates in joint powers agreements with other courts and agencies and encourages staff to interact with other agencies through committees and training sessions. The court promotes fellowship among employees through staff meetings, secret pals, monthly birthday and holiday parties, and a monthly newsletter containing a variety of humorous, educational, and inspirational news items as well as court safety tips. The **Thirteenth** supports formal court employee committees which develop recommendations on changes that can move the New Mexico judiciary to become the "employer of choice." The court conducts exit interviews with terminating employees for ideas to improve work environment and personnel policy.

Through elections and governor appointments, 15 new magistrate judges came on board in 1999. In January, the **Magistrate Court Division** invited the new judges to an all-day session for briefing on policies and procedures, training, and networking. Several veteran magistrate judges assisted in the training, and the Supreme Court justices met with the new judges and emphasized the importance of "doing the right thing."

Magistrate court judges with lighter caseloads traveled extensively to assist the busier courts or courts with special needs due to emergencies or illness, and court clerks from a majority of the magistrate courts also traveled to assist other courts with training, docketing, and filing.

Volunteers continue to play an important part in the daily operations of several New Mexico courts. The **Grant County Magistrate Court** in Silver City and the **San Juan Magistrate Court** in Farmington have exceptionally strong volunteer programs.