

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*The confirmation of Sonia Sotomayor as Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court was a remarkable event for many reasons.*

*Foremost is the fact that she is the first Hispanic and third woman to sit on this distinguished bench. Her journey to the top court also stands as a reminder of the power of determination and perseverance.*

*The road our new Justice traveled --from the Bronx projects to Ivy League universities, to the federal bench and the Supreme Court -- was lit by her legal brilliance and a native intelligence steeped in family, and the culture of her Puerto Rican community. Add the belief in education as essential to success to that winning formula.*

*Justice Sotomayor stands as a beacon of hope for all women and their families. Her forceful and knowledgeable responses to questions during grueling Senate hearings on her nomination, delivered with admirable patience, were lessons in grace under pressure.*



*At every step of the way, her mother's presence underscored the meaning of the Judicial Family Institute. Her daughter's trial, tribulation and eventual triumph were hers as well. As a mother, nurse and community leader, Celina shaped Sonia's perspective on the world and nurtured the mental stamina to forge a distinguished future.*

*Taken together, the saga of mother and daughter serves as a huge inspiration for the Judicial Family Institute, especially as we consider our path in the second decade of the 21st century. Like Sonia and Celina, we will continue to pave our avenues with achievements that benefit our communities. We will remain current and up-to-date. We will fulfill our mandate to keep our judicial community informed on available resources and advice, including how to balance our public and private lives and tackle issues of stress and security.*

*Already we are taking advantage of new technology to redesign and update our website and make it more user-friendly. JFI section chairs and state liaisons are actively taking part in this endeavor.*

*Our website chair, Claudia Fernandes, joined me in attending the 25th Court Technology Conference, Sept. 22-24, in Denver, Colorado, hosted by the National Center for State Courts. The Conference is held every two years. More than 1,500 court professionals --including judges, court administrators, and information technology experts-- from across the nation and around the world engaged in the latest technology and pondered its impact on justice through educational panels, exhibits and workshops. We approach another New Year, wrapped in the fearless spirit of Sonia and Celina. Like these two wise Latinas, we are mindful that, indeed, we have come a long way and vow to go further.*



## Table Talk

### National Court Organizations Announce 2009-10 Leadership



Utah Chief Justice Christine M. Durham and Steven C. Hollon, Administrative Director of the Supreme Court of Ohio have assumed the top leadership positions of three national court organizations, the National Center for State Courts has announced.

The organizations are the National Center for State Courts, Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators.

Chief Justice Durham will chair the National Center's Board of Directors and serve as president of the chief justices' organization. Hollon will serve as vice-chair of the National Center's Board of Directors and president of the

Conference of State Court Administrators. Both will serve in their positions for one year.

"... Chief Justice Durham and Steve Hollon bring knowledge, experience, and commitment to these leadership positions and all three organizations, which aim to improve the administration of justice. We will benefit from their guidance," said Mary C. McQueen, president of the National Center for State Courts.

Dr. George Durham, spouse of Chief Justice Durham, chairs the Health and Quality of Life Committee of JFI.

## Top priorities for the year ahead

### Officers

- Isabel Picó-Vidal (PR), Chair
- Pat Hannah (AR), Vice Chair
- Jan Grant Johnson (OK), Secretary
- Christine Alexander (WA), Treasurer, Law and Literature Chair
- Claudia Fernandes (CA) Website Committee Chair
- Jan Aikman Dickson(IN), Past Chair

### Board Members

- Sandra Chavez (NM)
- George Durham (UT)
- Deborah Gilbertson (SD)
- Susan Minton (KY)
- Mary Torres (GU)
- Linda Titus (NV)
- Sheryl Webber Washington (DC)

### Honorary Members

- Seymour Abrahamson
- Jan Aikman Dickson
- Barbara George
- Mary Moyer
- Polly Seto Richardson

*“We set aside differences in politics, geography and positions on controversial issues to attend to what we have in common as judicial families”*

Improvements to the Judicial Family Institute website and publishing four issues of our e-newsletter stand as major achievements in developing an effective communications strategy. At the annual meeting in Santa Fe, JFI Chair Isabel Picó-Vidal reported on last year’s accomplishments and projected priorities for the year ahead.

The Chair announced that the expenses for the popular Law and Literature sessions would be included as an item in the overall budget meeting of the new CCJ/COSCA Meeting Planning Guidelines, an extraordinary accomplishment.

During the past year, the JFI website added a “Members Only” option to keep voting members up-to-date on meetings, policy and other internal matters.

In pursuing JFI’s goal to update and enliven the web page, a website graphicdesigncommittee was organized to advise on a new design to make the site more stimulating and navigating more enjoyable. Puerto Rico Chief Justice, Federico Hernández Denton, has loaned JFI the court’s webmaster and information technology team to assist in website building. This talented IT group proposed a test site for board approval before going “live,” Picó-Vidal said. The JFI Chair is the spouse of Chief Justice Hernández Denton.

JFI has put all 50 states, commonwealths and U.S. territories on the site map, with links to state judicial family information and programs as well as state contacts. The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) provided a college intern to update the contact list and a staff member to post updates on the web.

The e-newsletter, Online with the Judicial Family Institute, “is a springboard to bring us closer as a community,” Picó-Vidal said. The JFI newsletter gets our message across, building our community and reinforcing our families. The newsletter is also a vehicle for updating and refreshing web content. JFI will encourage state contacts to submit articles of interest to judicial families and to stimulate members to participate. Four issues were completed last year; two issues are planned for this year.

As the website develops, JFI has set guidelines for publishing and posting articles on the site. In the coming year, guidelines will be implemented. In addition, JFI will identify processes and persons to maintain and update the newly designed website.

JFI will continue to track state adoption of revised codes of judicial conduct. Updated reports have been published in our e-newsletter.

## JFI Taps Honorary Members



The Judicial Family Institute sculpted a special moment in its history when it paid homage to its founders and other distinguished members of the Board.

For the first time in its history, honorary membership was conferred upon select members in a resolution unanimously approved by the Board.

The ceremony, which took place during the JFI summer meeting in Santa Fe, honored Mary Moyer, Barbara George, Polly Seto Richardson, Seymour Abrahamson and Jan Aikman Dickson, immediate past chair of JFI.

Read by JFI secretary George Durham, the resolution extended JFI’s “profound appreciation for distinguished service” to the five honorees, granting them honorary membership.

JFI Chair Isabel Picó gave each honoree a copy of the resolution and a special gift from the Board.



## Hampton Sides Rocks JFI



Noted historian and journalist Hampton Sides rocked our meeting in Santa Fe with thrilling tales of the West. An editor and contributor to Outside Magazine, the magazine for active people, Sides authored the international bestseller “Ghost Soldiers: The Epic Account of World War II’s Great Rescue Mission” which was the basis for the Miramax film, “The Great Raid”.

“Ghost Soldiers”, winner of the 2002 PEN USA West Award for nonfiction, narrates the daring U.S. mission in January 1945 to rescue more than 500 POWs behind enemy lines in the Philippines. Among the prisoners were survivors of the infamous Baatan Death March.

TIME Magazine selected his “Blood and Thunder: an Epic of the American West” as one of the 10 best books of 2006. If our research in cyberspace is correct, Steven

Spielberg has optioned the book for a DreamWorks film. The central character is the legendary and controversial Kit Carson.

Sides has written for The New Yorker, The Washington Post, National Geographic, Esquire, and other magazines, and has been twice nominated for National Magazine Awards for feature writing.

He has appeared on national television including CNN, the Today Show, the History Channel and NPR’s All Things Considered. Sides has lectured at Columbia, Yale and Stanford universities and the National World War II Museum.

He is a graduate of Yale University with a BA in history. Sides and his family--wife Anne and their three sons-- are longtime residents of Santa Fe. Now he can include the Judicial Family Institute on his list of lecture venues.

Hon. Margaret H. Marshall, Chief Justice of Massachusetts, opened the session while Chair Pico-Vidal introduced Sides to the gathering.



## JFI by the numbers

Traffic on the website is measured by the number of hits, visits and page views. A visit is logged each time someone views a page on the website, regardless of the number of hits made during the visit. Over the first nine months of the year there were 50,036 hits for the entire site. The JFI website “hosted” 23,510 visitors, according to the report generated by Web Trends. The average length of a visit was 4.03 minutes.

An important statistic is the number of unique visitors which assumes that these are not the same person making many visits. A total of 16,621 unique visitors accessed our website; 15,363 visited once and 1,258 were repeat visitors.

Not surprising, the vast majority of internet visitors to our site are registered in the United States, with 247 in France, 160 in Puerto Rico and 153 in Australia. Although we like to think that these statistics are precise, the internet address of 519 visitors is listed as “unknown”. According to Web Trends, the country associated with these visitors could not be determined.

A total of 4,303 files were downloaded. The top five were: (1) Raising Children in a Judicial Family, 282; (2) Health Articles/Las Muchas Caras.doc., 247 ; (3) Health Articles/H1N1 Novels Influenza.pdf., 244; (4) Informe de los Eventos/ PR Judicial Family Program, 238; (5) Security Ideas 2005, 219.

We expect our revamped website to boost traffic and provide easy-to- navigate paths to information and resources.

# JFI Races Down the Superhighway

The Judicial Family Institute is speeding around the worldwide web.

JFI is revising and updating its website to bring the nationwide judicial community closer faster.

Web design is not new to the JFI.

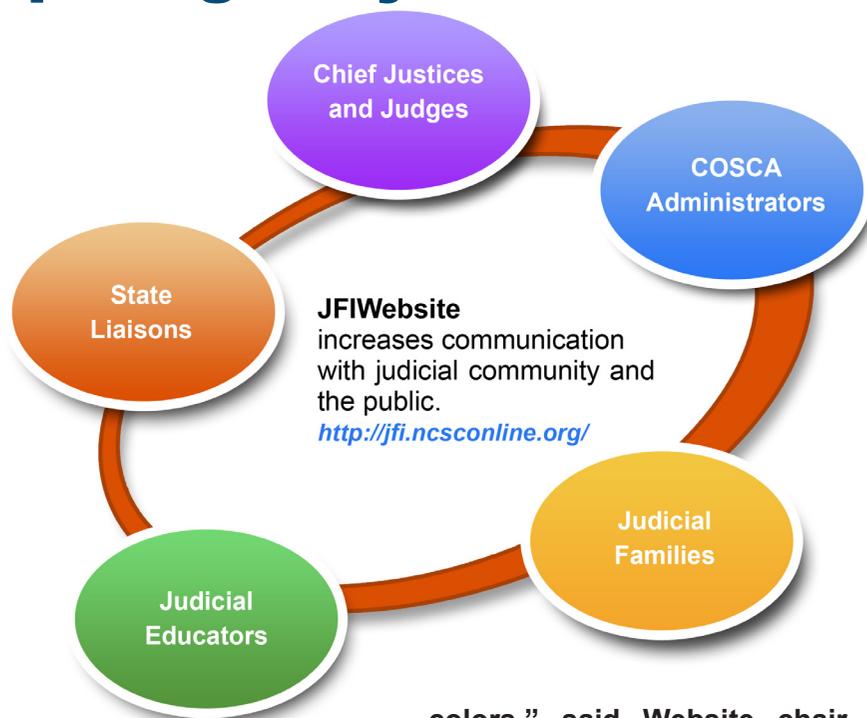
Former website chair Barbara George helped create, design and develop the JFI website, making sure states are linked to the website and state contacts are a click away.

Former JFI chairs Seymour Abrahamson and Jan Aikman Dickson were also instrumental in keeping the website up and running.

In recent months, current JFI chair, Isabel Pico, and Website chair, Claudia Fernandes, have taken up the cause of web design and revision. They have been involved in making the JFI website easy to navigate and a source of valuable information for members of the judicial family.

Both attended the technology conference in Denver that dealt with court technology in the 21st century. Both also talked with technology experts from the California and Puerto Rico courts.

The process, which is continuing, took the following into consideration, according to Pico. Developers had to



determine and understand the purpose of the website and the JFI audience, and then, gather the necessary content to make the website more attractive to the judicial community.

“We want the website to be more user-friendly,” said JFI chair Isabel Pico.

Some of the changes, approved at the JFI meeting in Santa Fe, can be seen in this issue of Online with the Judicial Family Institute.

“Check out our new logo and

colors,” said Website chair Claudia Fernandes.

A “Test Site” of the new JFI website will be presented at JFI’s mid-year meeting in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In other web initiatives, section chairs will update the content of their sections including health, security, children of judges and ethics. State contacts have also been asked to revise and update their websites and file articles of interest for the JFI community.



## Q & A with Jesse Rutledge

The Judicial Family Institute has the good fortune to count on the expertise of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) for help in redesigning and bringing our web site up to date. Jesse Rutledge, NCSC Vice President of External Affairs, played an important role in guiding us through this time-consuming process. We asked him a few questions about the redesign of the NCSC Website.

**1. A new design of the NCSC website was presented at the recent Court Technology Conference. How did court professionals receive the design? What was the common reaction or consensus?**

For starters, most people seemed surprised! One of the weaknesses of the old NCSC Web site was that it was built around our organization’s structure, but not around what users in the courts needed. The new site is much more intuitive for most people and doesn’t require an understanding of how the NCSC is structured. Users seem to really appreciate this. It was the number one complaint we received during our evaluation phase before we started the redesign process, so we knew we had to get it right. So far, so good!

**2. Briefly describe the process of web building and its success.**

It’s complicated, especially when redesigning an existing site.

The first major change we made was to hire a full time Web content editor, who was designated as the point person and assumed the role of project manager. This was a change for NCSC, where historically information and communications have been decentralized across our various divisions. Centralizing decisions about the Web site made things run much smoother overall. Design and technical consultants were hired to do the work that was beyond our staff’s capacity, and we met weekly by telephone with the consultants and nearly daily internally to make sure we were on track. The hardest part about redesigning any Web site is that it requires extra work—and most of us already have overloaded full time jobs.

**3. What factors are taken into account in redesigning a website?**

One of the challenges we faced from the start was a lack of information about how our constituents in the

courts felt about the existing site. We actually didn’t know what factors to take into account! So we conducted an online survey to get feedback, and then designed a plan to respond to the major concerns we heard. The key factors to consider usually include several of the following: ease of navigation; aggregation of content; functionality for online services; and look and feel (branding and marketing).

**4. How often should a website be redesigned and updated and why?**

The answer to that question has evolved over the last decade. When the Internet was in its infancy, sites only had to be redesigned every few years. I think the life cycle for Web sites today can vary anywhere from one year to three years. One of the biggest changes in how we think about Web sites is to remember that they evolve, and require constant care and feeding. They aren’t just a one-time IT project anymore.

# Q & A with Chief Rhys Hodge



**What was your initial reaction when, in 2006, Gov. Turnbull nominated you as the first Chief Justice of the new Supreme Court of the U.S. Virgin Islands?**

I felt honored and tremendously proud to be a part of Virgin Islands history. I was simultaneously humbled by the gravity of my new responsibilities and the many challenges that our young Court would soon face. With the support of my family, colleagues and the Virgin Islands community, I was prepared to face those challenges head on and with a view towards building upon the foundation laid by prior judges, Governor Turnbull and the Virgin Islands Legislature.

**Before you were elevated to the Supreme Court, you were Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. What is the relationship between the two courts?**

The Supreme Court, as the highest local court in the Virgin Islands, now exercises appellate jurisdiction over the Superior Court, with the Chief Justice having general oversight of the territorial judiciary. However, prior to our Court's creation, appeals from Superior Court decisions were considered by the specially-created three judge Appellate Division of the U. S. District Court of the Virgin Islands, and the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court functioned as the administrative head of the local judiciary. Consequently, several functions previously performed by the Superior Court are now carried out by the Supreme Court, such as admission to and regulation of the Virgin Islands Bar.

**The Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands is comprised of the Chief Justice and two Associate Justices. How does this configuration compare to stateside Supreme Courts? What are the advantages; what are the obstacles?**

Our small size has obvious advantages and disadvantages, especially in light of the fact that the Virgin Islands does not have an intermediate appellate court. For instance, each of our justices hears every appeal, whereas similar Supreme Courts often consider direct appeals in smaller panels. This allows our Court to speak with one voice and leads to a cohesive and consistent body of case

law, which is particularly important given the infancy of our Court. On the other hand, the fact that each justice sits on each case results in a higher caseload per justice compared to similar courts that sit in panels, and creates additional difficulties when a justice must recuse him or herself.

**This year you were elected to the board of the Conference of Chief Justices. What is the significance of your election on the court system of the Virgin Islands?**

It was a great privilege to be elected to the CCJ's Board of Directors. My position on the Board will enable me to represent the Virgin Islands and provide the perspective of a territorial judiciary at the national level. The policies and issues addressed by the Board are directly relevant to the Virgin Islands judiciary's goal of promoting the administration of justice and improving the public's trust and confidence in our judicial system.

**The judiciary of the Virgin Islands has an interesting history. From an initial code which established three Police Courts (in Fredericksted, Christiansted and Charlotte Amalie), it evolved into three Superior Courts in the judicial districts of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix and, since 2004, into the Supreme Court. What is the future of the court system in the 21st century? Where does the judiciary go from here?**

The Virgin Islands judiciary has rapidly evolved over the past forty years, most recently with the creation of the Magistrate Division of the Superior Court. Over the next several years, we will continue to take fundamental steps towards developing our judiciary into a complete, robust court system. Notably, the judiciary will encounter several important milestones within the next decade, including an assessment of the Supreme Court by the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. Upon meeting these milestones, our judiciary shall achieve full local autonomy, wherein decisions by our Supreme Court will be reviewable only by writ of certiorari from the United States Supreme Court instead of the Third Circuit.

**What plans do you have for the Conference of Chief Justices when it meets in the Virgin Islands next year?**

In addition to hosting the educational program, we look forward to showcasing the warmth, generosity, and community spirit that is a hallmark of the Virgin Islands. The Chief Justices and their guests will be treated to a variety of cultural, social, and ecological experiences that are part of the daily lives of Virgin Islanders. For instance,

there will be a "Taste of the Islands" Reception where visitors will sample local cuisine, as well as a daytrip to experience the unspoiled, natural beauty of the island of St. John.

**You and your spouse Jean have raised four children. How did your family adapt to the rigors of your public service? How do you balance your private and public lives?**

It can be difficult to balance one's public life as Chief Justice with one's private life as a husband and father. Nevertheless, my wife Jean and I have done everything we can to minimize the impact on our family's private life. We have always attended our children's school functions together, and we continue to set aside time to spend as a family despite our public commitments.

**You have been active in such community organizations as the councils of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. How has your community service influenced your role on the bench?**

Prior to my confirmation as a Superior Court judge, I served on the boards of several community organizations. My work with these organizations enabled me to interact with many members of the Virgin Islands community, which would later serve as a constant reminder that the decisions I make as a judge impact a diverse group of people with a broad range of needs and expectations.

**Who was your most important mentor and how did she/he lead you to pursue a legal career which led to the highest court of the U.S. Virgin Islands?**

I have been very fortunate to have several mentors that have influenced my legal career. One of my most important mentors was the late Almeric L. Christian, former Chief Judge of the District Court of the Virgin Islands, for whom I clerked for two years after graduating from law school. My experience as Judge Christian's law clerk, and later through a life-long friendship, undoubtedly shaped the type of lawyer and judge that I have become. Although I had already decided to pursue a legal career by the time we met, Judge Christian taught me to always approach cases with wisdom and compassion and to let justice be my guiding principle.

I have carried Judge Christian's lessons with me for my entire legal career and I continuously strive to meet the exemplary standard he set for judges in the Virgin Islands.

**What advice do you give young lawyers who aspire to the bench?**

If I could give one piece of advice to young lawyers aspiring to the bench, it would be to seek out a mentor—someone who has realized his or her own goals and can inspire you to achieve your own.

# Photo Gallery



Graphic Designer: Carlos G. Aponte Olivieri  
Puerto Rico Courts Administration

## UPCOMING MIDYEAR JFI MEETINGS (2010)

Saturday, January 30, 2010: 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.  
**Law and Literature**  
Sunday, January 31, 2010: 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.  
**Breakfast and Meeting of JFI Executive Committee**  
Monday, February 1, 2010: 7:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.  
**JFI Website Committee Meeting**  
Tuesday, February 2, 2010: 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.  
**Judicial Family Institute Business Meeting**

Save the Dates!

Learn more about us on the web:  
<http://jfi.ncsconline.org/>

The Ohio Connection  
<http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/Boards/OJFN/brochure.pdf>

**THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO**  
Advisory Committee on the Judicial Family Network

**JUDICIAL Family NETWORK**

Advisory Committee Members:

- Laura Flynn, Cuyahoga County
- Thea Goswami, Montgomery County
- Margie Greig, Clark County
- Sharon Hart, Seneca County
- Paul Hagan, Fairfield County
- Sharon Hagan, Monroe County
- Sharon E. Buchanan, Mercer County
- Bria Jenkins, Lucas County
- Rosalee Lawrence, Lucas County
- Mary Miron, Franklin County
- Deborah Proctor, Harrison County
- Yvonne Russell, Franklin County
- Laura Barr, Seneca County
- Shea Strickman, Delaware County
- Janet Stoeneman, DeWitt County
- Babara Ward, Adams County
- Shea Wallace, Geauga County
- Thea Zirk, Mercer County

*"Before my husband was elected, I had a great idea of how his position would impact the rest of our family. Once he became a judge, the JFI was a great resource for meeting others in similar situations and talking through everyday judicial family life scenarios. For me personally it has been a great way to connect with judicial families from all around Ohio."*  
- Pam Herth, Fairfield County

*"I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet and get to know similarly situated and like-minded friends through the Judicial Family Network. It has been a great experience."*  
- Bill Jennings, Lucas County

*"The JFI was a breath of fresh air for this 'woman' who was in totally unfamiliar territory! The JFI provided practical and emotional support in ways that impacted my own professional mentoring, and attention to detail for those new to a role. There weren't any tricks on how to manage campaigning and parenting, plus a wonderful ceremony or what's expected of you as a spouse of a newly elected judge. JFI filled that void for me, and in the process I formed friendships that I hope to nurture for the remainder of my life!"*

