

HEARSAY

GENESEE COUNTY
CIRCUIT AND
PROBATE COURTS
E-NEWSLETTER

a quarterly publication



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THE 99TH BIRTHDAY



THE HISTORIC GENESEE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

As the centennial anniversary of the Genesee County Courthouse fast approaches, work has begun to locate documents that reflect what was located in the facility when it first opened. It was the county administration building, along with being the Courthouse for the Circuit and Probate Courts.

Largely drawing on 2 documents, a brief question and answer article is offered as a forecast of events to come for the big celebration in 1926.

As we began the *Courthouse Square Project in 1998*, restoration of the historic portion of the Courthouse was also undertaken. It was important to discover as many historical documents as possible. A visit to the state archives produced the original blueprints, setting forth where courtrooms and offices were located. The blueprints were framed and currently hang on each floor today.

The most recent materials were found with assistance from Sara Brooks, lead librarian, Gloria Coles, Flint Public Library.

When the 1926 Courthouse was completed, the Flint Sunday Journal of November 7, 1926 featured a full edition on the Courthouse with a very detailed accounting of where offices and original courtrooms were located.

We already had one pieced together copy from microfilm with nearly unreadable text and poor quality photos. Ms. Brooks was able to

provide better source material that supports this article. Derek Bradshaw, Director, Genesee County Planning, extended the courtesies of his office to provide enlarged copies.

How about a short question and answer exercise, in anticipation of future events and to satisfy general curiosity. . . .

Did you know that the 5th floor was originally the 4th floor?

The current 4th floor of the Courthouse was originally called the mezzanine and home to the jury office and jury quarters (see photos to the right), including metal cots for staying overnight if ordered to do so during jury deliberations. Clothes presses were also available.

There were separate spaces for male and female jurors. Before the cots, the deliberating jurors who were ordered to remain in the Courthouse overnight slept in chairs or on the floor. Things have changed quite a bit.

The law library and assignment clerk were also on the mezzanine. Only with the Courthouse addition of 2001 did the law library, assignment clerk and jury quarters move from the mezzanine to the 2nd floor of the new addition.

Much has been said about why the 2001 Courthouse addition does not have a 4th floor. Most

of what I have heard is fiction. It was not an oversight. There is a 4th floor with inadequate height to be considered for occupied use. During the construction years, it was referred to as "interstitial space."

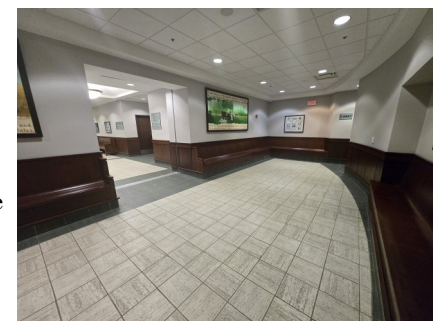
A premium was put on high courtroom ceilings in the addition, along with the ability to have a seamless, barrier free transition from the old to the new side of the Courthouse (see bottom photo below).



Jury Assembly Room



4th floor mezzanine



Transition from old to new 3rd floor

THE CHIEF SPEAKS

I sit in Courtroom No. 3 in the Genesee County Courthouse. It's the same courtroom where Judge Stephen Roth once presided. Since the courthouse was built, there have been seven of us in that room. Judge Roth was number three. My father, Stewart Newblatt, was number four. I'm number seven.

In 1962, Judge Roth was appointed to the federal bench by President John F. Kennedy. When he left, Dad was appointed to fill his seat on the circuit court. Judge Roth said that Dad was "the best successor a judge ever had." Dad would go on to the federal bench himself in 1978. You can imagine what it means to me to now sit in that same courtroom. It is a personal legacy, yes, but it is also a judicial one. A passing of the torch—twice.



Judge Roth is perhaps best remembered not for his time in Flint, but for a single federal case that would reverberate across the nation: *Milliken v. Bradley*. It's a case I knew about long before I understood its full meaning. But now, having read Michelle Adams's powerful book *The Containment*, and having sat with the consequences of that decision every day in my courtroom, I understand better than ever what was at stake—and what was lost.

Adams's book reframes the *Milliken* case not as a footnote to *Brown v. Board of Education*, but as its northern bookend. Judge Roth was the trial judge. At first, he was

hesitant. Adams shows how he approached the case with caution—perhaps even skepticism. But then something happened. He listened. For 41 days, he heard testimony—about school boundaries, redlining, housing segregation, educational opportunity. He connected the dots. And when he issued his ruling, it was one of the boldest in the history of school desegregation: a regional remedy that crossed city and suburban lines. Judge Roth's ruling recognized that Detroit's schools could not be meaningfully desegregated without involving the surrounding suburbs. It was a striking insight. He saw the truth that housing segregation and school segregation were two sides of the same coin. If you draw district lines around racial inequality and declare

those lines sacred, you've done nothing but redraw the lines of injustice.

Judge Roth's decision was overturned by one vote. The Supreme Court's 5–4 ruling in *Milliken* pulled the brakes on the momentum of *Brown* and made clear that, absent intentional, government-imposed segregation across district lines, there would be no obligation to desegregate across those lines. In other words, if the suburbs weren't to blame, they weren't responsible for the solution. As Michelle Adams puts it, this was the moment that meaningful school desegregation in the North came to an end. The legacy of that case is not theoretical. I see it in my courtroom. In the presentence reports I read every day. I see young people from segregated neighborhoods

(Continued on page 6)

ALL RISE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TREATMENT COURT PROFESSIONALS CONFERENCE



Genesee County's Specialty Court programs—Adult Felony Recovery Court, Mental Health Court, Family Dependency Treatment Court, and Veterans Treatment Court—continue to lead the way in providing rehabilitative, treatment-focused alternatives to traditional jail and prison sentencing. These programs are designed to support individuals facing substance use, mental health challenges, or other underlying issues that contribute to criminal behavior, helping them stabilize

and succeed through structured accountability and community-based services.

From May 27 to May 31, representatives from our teams had the opportunity to attend the **All Rise National Association of Treatment Court Professionals Conference**, the largest gathering of treatment court professionals in the country. The conference offered invaluable training sessions, expert panels, and networking opportunities with other jurisdictions committed to innovation and impact in the justice system.

Our team returned with updated knowledge on best practices, evidence-based approaches, and tools to enhance outcomes for

participants. As a result, we are actively integrating new strategies into our specialty court programs to improve engagement, strengthen case management, and further reduce recidivism.

Genesee County Specialty Courts remains committed to providing compassionate, effective justice solutions that support recovery, reunification, and long-term community wellness. —bb



Left to Right: Judge Latchana, Alyssa Hunt, Rhonda Judd, Breana Benham, Judge Christenson

CIRCUIT AND PROBATE COURTS UNVEIL NEW WEBSITES WITH MAJOR UPGRADES

GENESEE COUNTY, MI
PROBATE COURT

HOME | COURT INFORMATION | CASE SEARCH | DOCKETS | FORMS

EN

Search



At long last, the circuit court and probate court received much-needed upgrades to their online website presence. The courts recently unveiled new websites, with the circuit court site going live on *Law Day*, May 1, 2025. The new probate launched on June 16, 2025.

Although the website domain names remain the same – circuit court at www.7thcircuitcourt.com

and probate court at www.gcprobatecourt.com – users will find dramatic improvements in look, feel, and functionality. David Combs, Court IT Director, oversaw the project. The development was guided by a “less is more” approach, focusing on external user navigation and ease of access to information, rather than voluminous links, sub-pages, and “information overload.”

High-resolution drone footage of the courthouse exterior and surrounding areas is prominent. Photographs of community landmarks and historical courtroom locations are displayed throughout the sites.

Each department within the courts has its own specific page on the sites. Members of the public will see quick links on the home pages to the most commonly sought information – e.g.,

case search, court schedules, records requests, etc.

The website project is a precursor to the opening of the Legal Resource Center space, and ultimately statewide e-filing. The court leadership team will continue to position the court for success in embracing technological advancements in its operation. –so



MSC JUSTICE KYRA BOLDEN VISITS



On April 15, 2025, we had the honor to host Justice Kyra Bolden of the Michigan Supreme Court during our weekly Mental Health Court docket.

Justice Bolden is the Supreme Court Specialty Court Liaison. Justice Bolden addressed the participants and expressed how the Supreme Court supports the Specialty Court concept and how proud she was that these participants elected to take advantage of the program.

The feedback from our participants was terrific, they were impressed that the highest levels of the court

system cared about them and getting them back on the right track. -bcc



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Circuit Court



Harry Shinn

Harry Shinn is the judicial law clerk for Criminal/Civil Division Judge, David J. Newblatt. Harry received his undergraduate degree from Bowling Green State University and his law degree from Ohio Northern University; Pettit College of Law.

April Watson is a court operations specialist in the Legal Records Division. April previously worked for the public defender's office in St. Clair County. (not pictured)

Jonah Sjoquist is an attorney referee for the juvenile division. Jonah previously worked for the State of Michigan.

Friend of the Court

William Balcer is an attorney referee for the Friend of the Court. William was previously an assistant prosecuting attorney for Genesee County.



Jonah Sjoquist

Taylor Karam is an attorney referee for the Friend of the Court. Taylor was previously an attorney for Legal Services of Eastern Michigan.

Probate Court

Zachary Huckabay is the Probate Register. Zachary was previously an attorney for the City of Flint.

Patrick Gord is the judicial law clerk for Probate Court Judge, Jennie E. Barkey. Patrick received his undergraduate degree from St. Cloud State University and his law degree from The George Washington University Law School.

Rachel Major is a filing clerk for Probate Court. Rachel previously was a logistics coordinator.



Left to Right: Taylor Karam, William Balcer



Left to Right: Rachel Major, Patrick Gord, Zachary Huckabay



- In the first two weeks of June, the Legal Resource Center assisted 250 visitors—163 of whom needed help understanding how, what, and where to file court documents.

Thanks to its location within the Courthouse, the LRC was able to immediately support 87 individuals in preparing SCAO-approved court forms, provide 49 with requested Michigan Court Rules, statutes, or documents, and guide 47 in accessing legal information from the LRC's computer kiosks. – Rachel Hawrylo, LRC Director.



- The circuit court jury management office began using pre-paid debit cards for jury fees in January 2025, since then over 2000 payment cards have been uploaded with fees. Efficient, cost effective and appreciated by jurors.

The outdated and no longer vendor supported, large cash dispensing kiosks were sold by Genesee County purchasing and removed at the buyer's expense. A very successful project.

WAS THERE A REAL UNCLE SAM?

Apparently, there was a person named Sam and the story goes something like this.

In 1813, Congress acknowledged Uncle Sam as a reference to the United States.

Samuel Wilson (1766-1854), a meat packer from Troy, New York, supplied barrels of beef to the United States Army during the War of 1812. He stamped the barrels with "U.S." for United States.

Because Wilson was known locally as "Uncle Sam," soldiers began referring to the barrels as

"Uncle Sam's." The local newspaper, the *Troy Post*, picked up on the story. Uncle Sam eventually gained widespread acceptance as the nickname for U.S. federal government. -bam



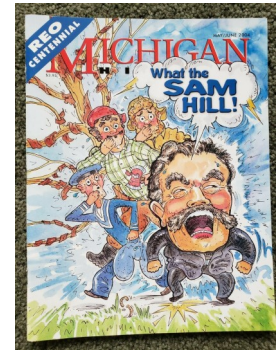
SPEAKING OF SAM, MICHIGAN'S OWN SAM HILL

Have you ever heard the expression, "*What the Sam Hill?*" Sam Hill (1819-1899) was a real person. He was a surveyor, geologist and mining engineer among other talents. He worked in the Keweenaw peninsula copper mining industry, becoming an agent for the Quincy Mine. He worked with Dr. Douglas Houghton, the first state geologist. Houghton conducted the first geological survey of Michigan, with a natural focus on the upper peninsula and its rich copper mines. Sam was well respected but a little rough around the edges.

Sam had a colorful way of speaking that bordered on

the blasphemous and obscene. It was so bad that he is cited as the source for the phrase, "*What the Sam Hill.*" It came to be known as a way of using bad language, without using bad language.

(author's note: 3 generations of my family worked in the Quincy Mine, Quincy, Michigan. Sam Hill was a well known person of history and still is in the Copper Country.) -bam



★ ★ A MOMENT IN HISTORY ★ ★

Although the Second Continental Congress made its decree for freedom on July 2, 1776, no one signed the Declaration of Independence.

Congress did sign the Lee Resolution, named for Virginian Richard Henry Lee, on July 2. This resolution contained three parts: separation from the British Crown, a call to form foreign alliances, and a plan for confederation.

Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence two days later, July 4, 1776, and the alarm for freedom was sounded at Independence Hall with the Liberty Bell.

Americans rejoiced as word spread throughout the newly

declared independent states. Although independence had been declared, delegates of the Continental Congress had not yet inked their signatures onto the document.

On August 2, 1776, when most delegates signed the Declaration of Independence, it became official.

Unfortunately, Americans were getting good and bad news at the same time. British troops were making landfall in New York as the Liberty Bell rang in Philadelphia. At that point, American and British forces already had been engaged in armed conflict for fifteen months.

On July 9, 1776, General George Washington, while concentrating troops in New

York City, ordered the Declaration of Independence read aloud to his men. He hoped that they would find new meaning in the war for independence.

In 1777, the British occupied the capital city of Philadelphia while Washington and his men struggled through a brutal winter at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Nearly two thousand of Washington's twelve thousand men died during that winter encampment.

The Continental Army was hardened by the experience and gained even greater resolve in the campaign to defeat the British. For the next four years, Americans would fight battle after battle

against the mightiest military on earth.

Thanks to the military leadership of Washington, and the combined efforts of the French Navy and Washington's good friend and ally General Marquis de Lafayette, the British surrendered after the Siege of Yorktown on October 19, 1781.

The fight for independence was over. The Treaty of Paris, signed between the United States and Great Britain on September 3, 1783, made it official. The United States had become a sovereign and independent nation after six years of valor and sacrifice. (*National Park System, NPS.gov/ Home/History of Independence Day*) -bam

AI (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)



67th District Court Judge Mark C. McCabe writes “Ask the Judge” for the *Tri-County Times*.

AI (artificial intelligence) appeared in the May 14th, 2025 edition.

In 1968 the science fiction movie “2001: A Space Odyssey” was released.

It was a futuristic vision of what life would be like in the year 2001, including space travel.

I won’t try to describe the plot more than that, except to say that when I watched it, I was exposed for the first time to AI or artificial intelligence in the talking computer “Hal 9000,” which controlled the spacecraft.

I remember thinking there’s no way a computer program like Hal’s would ever be developed.

Fast forward 57 years – I was clearly wrong.

Artificial intelligence is here to stay.

Simply put AI is a program or other piece of software that performs tasks or produces output normally requiring human intelligence.

It’s all around us including personal assistants like Siri and Alexa, movies, voice recognition, and facial recognition.

The list goes on and it’s a very long list.

As to AI and the law, last week I had the pleasure of attending the bi-annual Michigan Supreme Court Judicial Conference

“Embracing The Future: Leveraging Human And Artificial Intelligence In The Service Of Justice.”

There were many topics, but the majority revolved around generative AI, a type of artificial intelligence that creates new original content, such as text, images, and other media, that is helpful to both judges and attorneys alike.

Examples include legal research, drafting contracts, summarizing and reviewing legal documents, aiding in discovery in criminal and civil cases, and quickly producing initial drafts of motions, legal briefs, contracts and settlement agreements.

Although AI is extraordinarily helpful, the human element must also be present to double-check everything before submitting a brief or other filing with the court,

or there can be serious consequences.

A recent example is a federal judge imposing a \$5,000 sanction on a law firm in February for filing an AI written motion which had eight non-existing case citations.

A local example of appropriate AI use is the Genesee County prosecutor’s office recently announcing that in the next 60 days, it will be using an AI system to analyze digital evidence to expedite the processing of criminal cases.

This is an incredibly rapidly developing area of the law.

With a proper blend of technology and oversight by humans, AI will be a benefit to our system of justice.



CHIEF SPEAKS CONT’D

(Continued from page 2)
and schools. I see the long arc of opportunity bending away. I see a city where, despite the promises of Brown, segregation was never undone—it was merely renamed. The logic of containment, as Adams calls it, still defines life chances in Flint.

Judge Roth matters to me not just because he once sat where I sit. He matters because of the example he set when fate handed him the most challenging,

high profile and historically significant case imaginable. In my eyes, he shone because he did what we hope all judges do: he opened himself to evidence and let himself be persuaded by it. He was not fixed in his views; he was not bound by ideology. Rather, he let the case change him. And when the law required a bold act, he didn’t blink. Even knowing the political blowback; even knowing the higher courts might not stand with him, he issued an order

that tried to undo a century of structural inequality.

He was a reluctant hero, but a hero nonetheless. It’s easy to be bold when history guarantees your success. But the measure of a judge is often in the willingness to do the right thing even when it is unpopular or even destined to fail. Judge Roth did his duty, and though he was reversed, he was not wrong. His example reminds me that judging isn’t about always being

upheld. It’s about being open; listening, learning. And when the time comes, having the courage to act, even if history is not yet ready to catch up.

In Courtroom No. 3, Judge Roth’s portrait is on the wall across from my bench, right next to Dad’s. Having him there makes me proud to be a judge and gives me the courage to do the right thing, no matter how hard it is. –cjdjn

geneseeLIVING

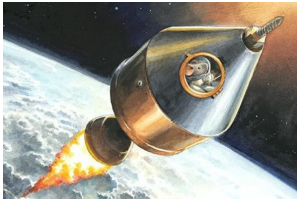
July events from
www.exploreflintandgeneseec.org



A Symphony of Glass: Paperweights from the Ellis Collection

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until March 1, 2026

Flint Institute of Arts Museum + Art School (FIA)



Armstrong - Full Dome Feature

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until July 5, 2025

Longway Planetarium



Beyond Survival: Works on Paper by Artists Incarcerated in Michigan

Recurring daily until September 14, 2025

Flint Institute of Arts (FIA)



Foraging for Native Plants

Robert Williams Nature and Historical Learning Center



Hall of Heroes | Special Traveling Exhibit

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until September 6, 2025

Sloan Museum of Discovery



Love Tapes

Recurring daily until July 31, 2025

Flint Institute of Arts (FIA)



Making Her Mark

Recurring daily until September 28, 2025

Flint Institute of Arts Museum + Art School (FIA)



MI Ink: The Art of Tattoos

Recurring daily until August 31, 2025

Flint Institute of Arts (FIA)



Perfect Little Planet

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until July 13, 2025

Longway Planetarium



Pop Up Photography Tours

Recurring weekly on Tuesday until October 28, 2025

Brush Park



Skies Over Michigan - Live Astronomy Presentation

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until July 5, 2025

Longway Planetarium



Step Inside the Studio: The Annex Becomes a Tattoo Parlor

Recurring daily until August 31, 2025

Flint Institute of Arts (FIA)



Swartz Creek Fine Arts 41st annual summer concert series

Recurring weekly on Tuesday until August 5, 2025

Fred & Phyllis Pajtas Theater



Flint City Bucks

Kettering University's Atwood Stadium



Flushing Area Concerts in the Park

Recurring weekly on Wednesday until August 13, 2025

Riverview Park in Flushing's Downtown Entertainment District



FrankE & DawnE Karaoke

Recurring weekly on Wednesday

S & K Hometown Pub

(Continued on page 8)

geneseeLIVING (CONT'D)



WIP Wednesdays Workshop
Recurring weekly on Wednesday

Breads & Threads Handmade



Fenton Concerts in the Park
Recurring weekly on Thursday until September 4, 2025

Rackham Park behind Fenton Community & Cultural Center



Fenton Farmers Market
Recurring weekly on Thursday until September 18, 2025

Front lawn of Fenton Community & Cultural Center



Figuratively Speaking
Recurring weekly on Thursday, Friday, Saturday until August 23, 2025

Mott-Warsh Collection Gallery



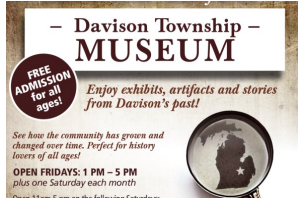
Gaia's Goods Metaphysical Marketplace
Recurring monthly on the 1st Thursday until August 7, 2025

Gaia's Goods



Midday at MW: Daily Guided Tours
Recurring weekly on Thursday, Friday, Saturday

Mott-Warsh Collection Gallery



Davison Township Museum
Recurring weekly on Friday

Davison Township Museum



FIM Holiday Celebration & 10th Annual Flint Water Festival

Flint Downtown Flat Lot



First Fridays at Longway Planetarium
Recurring monthly on the 1st Friday

Longway Planetarium



Independence Day Celebration Crossroads Village and Huckleberry Railroad



Laser Lady Gaga
Recurring weekly on Friday, Saturday until July 5, 2025

Longway Planetarium



Laser Rock Monsters
Recurring weekly on Friday, Saturday until July 5, 2025

Longway Planetarium



Latin Nights
Recurring weekly on Friday

XOLO Tacos & Tequila - Flint



Cosmic Colors
Recurring weekly on Sunday, Saturday until July 5, 2025

Longway Planetarium



Davison Farmers Market 5th of July Craft Show & Flea Market Flip
Davison Farmers Market



Glassblowing Demonstrations - FIA Hot Shop
Recurring weekly on Sunday, Saturday

Flint Institute of Arts (FIA)



Local Fest III Flint Local 432



Whaley Historic House Museum Open Tours
Recurring monthly on the 1st Saturday
Whaley Historic House Museum

IDENTIFY THE CITIES BELOW

Can you identify these U.S. cities based on their iconic fireworks displays?

Each photo captures a city's unique skyline illuminated by celebratory fireworks. -hd

1



5



2



6



3



7



4



8



THE 99TH BIRTHDAY

THE HISTORIC GENESEE COUNTY COURTHOUSE (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)



Courtroom No.1 (308)

have a jury box. Judge Wertman was the first probate judge to occupy this courtroom. A jury box was added shortly thereafter. It was described as simplistic in its ornamentation with only an eagle on the wall behind the judge.

What was the biggest courtroom at the time of the grand opening?

Courtroom No.300 was the largest courtroom, extending all the way to the Saginaw Street facade. A jury deliberation room was added sometime thereafter, which reduced the size of the courtroom.

The original use of the judicial suite is noteworthy. The current judge's office was the jury deliberation room. The judicial secretary's office was the judge's office. When the judicial suite door was opened from the hallway, there would have been a secretarial "station" and perhaps a bailiff. Judicial law clerks were not around in those days.

The court stenographers maintained small offices where the jury deliberation room for courtroom No.308 is now located. There was a buzzer and light system to summon the stenographer to come to the courtroom.

Were there other county offices in the Courthouse?

Yes, the Courthouse was the location of all county offices. The office that occupied the

largest section of the facility was the county engineer with 6 offices on the first floor. The 2nd floor was said to be the busiest floor with the prosecutor, treasurer, county clerk and register of deeds all located on the same floor.

The county board of supervisors had a large chamber on the 4th floor, with a desk for each supervisor. The desks could be moved out if the full auditorium was needed for larger events.

This chamber was on the north end of the courthouse and occupied the entire side of the floor on the Court Street side (see photos to the right). It was



5th Floor Courtroom—windows boarded up behind bench



"Newly Created Historical Courtroom"



Genesee County Board of Supervisors Auditorium



Genesee County Board of Supervisors Auditorium

turned into a circuit courtroom with plain ornamentation and then turned into a courtroom with a 1926 appearance during the Courthouse restoration project of 1998-2003, with support from a grant from *The Ruth Mott Foundation* (see photos to left).

This is a mere sampling of the history of the 1926 Genesee County Courthouse. While the brick and mortar over the years is important, what takes place inside is the enduring legacy. – bam



Courtroom No.2 (303)



Courtroom No. 3 (300)

How many courtrooms were in the Courthouse?

The 3 original circuit courtrooms were on the 3rd floor. There were 3 circuit judges at the time of its grand opening, Judges Black, Brennan and Parker.

There was 1 probate courtroom on what was then the 4th floor, now the 5th floor. It did not

★ Read All About It ★

Hearsay is available on the Circuit Court website, click [HERE](#)

We want to hear from you! Send us an email letting us know what you would like to see in the newsletter and feedback on the current edition. You can also submit ideas and information about activity in your department. hearsay@7thcircuitcourt.com