

FROM THE CHIEF

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JUDICIAL LEARNING CENTER AND SUMMER ROAD TRIP

In my last column, I discussed how our judicial branch focuses on education so that West Virginians can learn more about our state courts. I also invited lawyers to help us educate the public about what we all do and the important role the judiciary has in our democracy. Now, I share more about the exciting new education location in the East Wing of the Capitol in Charleston, and then about my personal efforts to learn about state courts.

The West Virginia Judicial Learning Center

When it opens late this year, the West Virginia Judicial Learning Center will be an innovative and interactive educational space. It will include informative wall panels and interactive touchscreen exhibits designed to engage and educate visitors — especially students — about the state judiciary.

The exhibits will explain the purpose of the court system and basic legal concepts and terms. Visitors will learn about landmark West Virginia cases, the history and structure of our state courts, court careers, court-houses and judicial officers.

It is important that everyone feels welcome in the space. There will be a hands-on exhibit for young children, including a court seal embosser and scales of justice. Interactive screens will invite visitors to act as a judge and decide cases, get information about jury service and test their knowledge.

The Learning Center will be open whenever the Capitol is open, and we hope that visitors of all ages feel more knowledgeable about how state courts work after they stop by. The exhibits are being carefully designed to teach in a practical (and fun) way about how courts affect our lives and the role of the judiciary as a branch of state government.

The Learning Center will be the culmination of years of work by the Justices, Administrative Office and Supreme Court Clerk's Office, supported by expert contractors who specialize in museum design and fabrication. We are especially grateful to a group of award-winning West Virginia social studies teachers who throughout the process have made valuable suggestions.

To say that I am excited about the Learning Center is an understatement. I can't wait for all of you (and your families and friends) to see it.

Summer Road Trip

As I started work as a Justice in 2017, I set a goal to visit each of the other 49 state supreme courts during my 12-year term of office. What started as a personal quest has evolved into a powerful tool for my own education and professional development as a judicial leader.

THE WEST VIRGINIA SUPREME COURT



West Virginia Chief Justice Walker takes a seat on the bench at the South Dakota Supreme Court.



(Clockwise, from top left) The **Mississippi** Supreme Court boasts a podium for each party. At the **Iowa** Judicial Branch Building, the Supreme Court courtroom is directly above the intermediate Court of Appeals. Justice Walker and her friend and podcast co-host **Arkansas** Justice Rhonda Wood meet in the new court learning center (under construction), which will feature this beautiful view of the Capitol building. Above the bench at the **Nebraska** Supreme Court it reads, “Eyes and ears are poor witnesses when the soul is barbarous.”

As we discuss frequently on our podcast, “Lady Justice: Women of the Court,” every state judiciary is different, and we all learn and benefit from talking to each other.

Beginning in Texas in January 2017, my plan was to visit four to five state supreme courts each year. But then, events including pandemic court closures in 2020

seriously curtailed my progress. To get my quest back on track, I embarked on what turned out to be an epic summer road trip this year.

Once I was invited to speak on the topic of well-being at the annual meeting of the State Bar of South Dakota in June, I convinced my dear husband to come along on



(Clockwise, from top left) This is the view of the courtroom that judges see from the bench at the **Missouri** Supreme Court. Traveling through Springfield, **Illinois**, on a Sunday, the Supreme Court building was not open. The **Indiana** Supreme Court is located in Indianapolis, the state capital since 1825. At the **Kansas** Judicial Center a beautiful statue, featuring a prairie falcon, portrays justice as possessing clear vision and swift and accurate action.

a road trip designed around that meeting. During our 16-day journey, Mike and I traveled 3,960 miles through 14 states (including seven I had never visited before). We stayed in eight different hotels (plus the home of my dear friend and podcast co-host Arkansas Justice Rhonda Wood) and played six rounds of golf along the way.

I visited nine state supreme courts (Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas and Mississippi). That brings my total to 21 state supreme courts visited and only 28 remaining. I share a few photographs here and will continue to track my progress on social media. **WVL**