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2012 Judicial Candidates' Forum



Wednesday October 10, 2012

6:00 PM—7:30 PM

The Charlotte School of Law

Moderator: Taylor Batten-Charlotte
Observer





Justice Initiatives envisions a court system that delivers the highest quality justice and fosters community trust and confidence.

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*Candidate descriptions have been provided by each campaign.
They have not been validated by Justice Initiatives, Inc.*



Kary Church Watson
Attorney at Law

In 2001, I began my legal practice at Horack Talley Pharr & Lowndes in Charlotte. Initially, I focused on commercial and real property litigation. However, after experiencing a few domestic cases in District Court, it was clear that practicing family law was where I belonged. For more than eleven years now, I have been in the trenches of family court litigating cases both big and small. My experience has not been limited to just District Court; I have appeared before the Superior Court of Mecklenburg County, the North Carolina Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of North Carolina. The breadth of my experience and the respect of my colleagues has afforded me the opportunity to teach numerous continuing legal education classes and publish several articles and resource materials. I was raised by public educators and learned early the joy and pleasure gained by serving your community.



David Strickland
Attorney at Law

My name is David Strickland and I am running for District Court Judge in Mecklenburg County. I grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and graduated from Wake Forest University. I proceeded to graduate from the Campbell University School of Law and moved to Charlotte where I worked at the Public Defender's office upon passing the bar exam. For the past 7 years, I have owned and operated the Law Office of David H. Strickland, PLLC where I work on a daily basis in Mecklenburg County District Court. I handle all types of misdemeanors and juvenile matters, including representing parents involved with the Department of Social Services. In addition, I represent various small businesses and represent individuals in involuntary commitment proceedings. In my spare time, I have enjoyed being the Chairman of the Mecklenburg County Lawyer Referral Service, working with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and officiating high school and college basketball.

PROGRAM

Welcome

Taylor Batten, Moderator

Introductions

Candidates

Presentation of Rules

Questions and Answers

Moderator Questions (55 minutes)

Audience Questions (25 minutes)

Closing

Moderator

The use of cameras and/or other electronic recording devices by the audience is prohibited

CANDIDATES

District Court Judge (I)

The Honorable Charlotte Brown-Williams
Tracy H. Hewett

District Court Judge (II)

The Honorable Jena Culler
Grant Smithson

District Court Judge (III)

The Honorable Ty Hands
Jeff Thompson

District Court Judge (IV)

The Honorable Donnie Hoover
Alyson G. Traw

District Court Judge (V)

Gary Henderson
Roy Wiggins

District Court Judge (VI)

Kary Church Watson
David Strickland

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Gary Henderson
Attorney at Law

Gary Henderson is a native of Charlotte. He was educated in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System and graduated from West Charlotte High School in 1988. He attended Appalachian State University from 1988 through 1994 where he obtained a Bachelor's and a Master's in Political Science with a focus on International Relations. From 1994 to 1996 he worked as an agent for Child Support Enforcement in Charlotte. In 1996 he went to North Carolina Central University School of Law in Durham where he earned a Juris Doctorate in 1999. Since starting the practice of law in Charlotte in 1999, he has two years experience working for a medium size litigation law firm, nine years experience in successfully operating his own law office and eleven years experience in fighting for the financial support and stability of families and children of Mecklenburg County through the Mecklenburg County Office of Child Support Enforcement as their attorney.



Roy Wiggins
Attorney at Law

My name is Roy Wiggins and I am a candidate for District Court judge. I have been practicing law for 22 years, serving both as a prosecutor and private practitioner. I have handled cases in all areas of District Court and I believe this experience will provide wisdom and insight into the administration of justice and the efficient use of our District Courts. A recent North Carolina Bar Survey rated me the highest rated non-incumbent judicial candidate in Mecklenburg County. This survey shows the respect of my professional colleagues including other attorneys, prosecutors and judicial officials. I have been a member of St. Stephen United Methodist Church for over 18 years. I am also privileged to serve as the Chairman of the Board of Directors for Aldersgate Retirement Community. I also serve on the Board of Directors at Methodist Counseling Center. I look forward to continuing to serve our community.

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**The Honorable Donnie Hoover
District Court Judge**

Judge Donnie Hoover's legal career has spanned 38 years. He spent the first 9 years with the U.S. Department of Justice, and then worked for over 24 years in private practice in Charlotte before becoming a District Court Judge in 2008. As an attorney, he successfully handled virtually every kind of case that comes before the District Court, and he has a wide range of exposure to both domestic and criminal cases as a judge. All of this experience has equipped Judge Hoover with the technical skills, knowledge, and temperament required to be an effective judge. He has consistently demonstrated that he is committed to the efficient operation of our courts, and to the fair, impartial, and respectful treatment of all who appear before him. Please visit www.votedonniehoover.com to learn more about Judge Hoover's background and contributions as a judge. Thank you for your support and your vote in November.



**Alyson G. Traw
Attorney at Law**

Currently, I'm the in-house staff attorney at the Charlotte Housing Authority. Prior to that, I served the community as an Assistant District Attorney. I also have experience as a real estate attorney. If elected: I pledge to set meaningful and appropriate bonds for violent and repeat offenders. I pledge to make prompt and well-reasoned decisions after listening to all who desire to be heard. I pledge to always pursue justice and follow the law. Our community deserves willing and capable public servants on the District Court bench. As a former prosecutor, I know what qualities are important in a District Court Judge: intelligence, integrity, fairness to all, and energy to manage seemingly unmanageable caseloads. I possess each of these qualities and I would be honored to serve this community as a District Court Judge. My husband, daughter and I are members at Temple Beth El where I currently serve on the Board.

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**The Honorable Charlotte Brown-Williams
District Court Judge**

Education: York College, NY , 1979, B.A. Economics; Cum Laude; St. John's University School of Law, 1990, Juris Doctor; *Journal of Legal Commentary*; Hood Theological Seminary, 2001, M.Div; Cum Laude. **Experience:** 2009 District Court Judge– Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, Family Court; Truancy Court Judge. 2001-2008 General Practice: District Court Civil, Criminal, Family, Child Support. 1998-2001 Livingstone College, Executive Assistant to President, General Counsel, Instructor. 1992-1998 General Practice: Civil, Criminal, Family, Child Support. 1991-1992 Public Defender's Office, Fayetteville, NC. 1990-1991 Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, Corporate Associate. New Line Cinema Initial Public Offering, Rogers Communications Inc., first foreign offering on NY Stock Exchange, NationsBank purchase of NCNB. 1987-1990 Internships: Securities and Exchange Commission, Judge Francis X. Altamari, Second Circuit, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie & Ferdon. 1977-1987 Marketing, Insurance and Finance. Series 6 & 7 Licensed, Financial Consultant. AME Zion Church, Pastor, 1995-2008. Board Member: Zachariah Alexander CDC, Dorothy Walls Conference & Retreat Center.



**Tracy H. Hewett, Public Defender's Office:
Misdemeanor Appeals Trial Coordinator,**

The law is a second career for Tracy who graduated from N.C. Central Law in 2004 and has worked for the Public Defender ever since. She left a twenty-one year career with The Charlotte Observer because volunteering as a mediator and guardian ad litem created a desire to work for justice for children and families. Tracy was passionate and persistent in the pursuit of her goal, even driving a truck at night during law school to support herself and her daughter. She says, "there is no greater thrill than being in a courtroom, whether it is the hustle and bustle of District or the slower, more intense pace of Superior." She is delighted to have "her dream job" in her hometown. "My proven analytic and communication skills, successful career and commitment to community service are evidence that I am ready to advance my leadership and service to the people of Mecklenburg

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**The Honorable Jena Culler
District Court Judge**

Jena Culler obtained her undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1986 and her law degree from Campbell University in 1989. In the North Carolina Bar Association's Judicial Performance Evaluation, she was rated among Mecklenburg County's top District Court Judges. Before serving as a judge, she was in private practice for eighteen years in Mecklenburg County and practiced in every area of District Court. She has served as a District Court Judge for almost four years. She presides in criminal, civil, domestic violence, child support, and family courts. She primarily presides in family court. She has been selected as Lead Judge in the area of child support, serves as the Child Support Committee Chair, and serves on the Domestic Violence and Domestic Courts Committees. She lives in Charlotte with her husband and three children, and is actively involved in the community.



**Grant Smithson
Attorney at Law**

Grant Smithson is a native of Nashville, Tennessee, "The Country Music Capital of the World". He won a full academic scholarship at Rice University in Houston Texas. The Houston Rotary Club later awarded Grant a Rotary International Scholarship to attend Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Graduating from the UNC Law School in Chapel Hill, Grant immediately started practicing law specializing in criminal defense, juvenile law, and representation of parents in DSS cases. He also has argued numerous appellate cases before both the North Carolina Supreme Court and the North Carolina Court of Appeals. In almost four decades, Grant has represented thousands of people and has worked with hundreds of lawyers in the Mecklenburg County District Courts. Currently Grant is a member of the United States Supreme Court Bar, the North Carolina State Bar and the Mecklenburg County Bar. Additionally he is a member of the North Carolina Advocates for Justice. Grant is married to his wonderful wife Robin, He has two daughters, Heather and Susan, and three precious granddaughters, Fallon, Meryl and Nia.

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**The Honorable Ty Hands
District Court Judge**

Judge Ty Hands' legal, community and personal experiences enable her to provide impartial and well-reasoned decisions as a District Court Judge. Judge Hands graduated, magna cum laude, from Winston-Salem State University and received her Juris Doctor from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law. Judge Hands was appointed to the District Court bench by the Governor in 2009. She is the Lead Domestic Violence Judge in Mecklenburg County and presides over domestic violence, criminal, child support, first appearance and civil cases. In 2012 Judge Hands was the second-highest rated Mecklenburg County judge in the North Carolina Bar Association's judicial performance evaluation. Judge Hands speaks fluent Spanish and is active with various community organizations. She is married to David Hands of Hands Law Office and they have two sons, David Jr. (3) and Devin (9 months). The Hands family attends St. Paul Baptist Church.



**Jeff Thompson
Attorney at Law**

I was born and raised in South Florida, graduating from Fort Lauderdale Christian School in 1982. I went on to attend the University of Georgia where I earned a Bachelor's degree in 1986 and my law degree in 1989. I began my legal career in Florida where I spent six years doing general civil litigation. I moved to Charlotte in 1995 and spent five years working with firms doing civil and criminal litigation. In 2000, I decided to open my own firm and I have been a small business owner and practicing attorney ever since. I was married in 2005 to my beautiful wife and have a 14 year old step-daughter who is a competitive cheerleader. We live in Mint Hill and attend Blair Road United Methodist Church. I am running for judge because I believe strongly in stopping the revolving door of justice which puts our community at risk.