

Nebraska Judicial News

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Judges Bring Unique Perspective and Balance to Bar Foundation's PEOPLE Committee



Channel 7's Andrew Ozaki films defense team for a court education video at Sarpy County Court, Judge John Steinheider presiding. The video was used by county court judges in a seminar designed to educate members of the media on the workings of county courts.

Nebraska State Bar Foundation President Dean G. Kratz recently announced that Senior Judge Lyle E. Strom, U.S. District Court for the District of Nebraska, and Lincoln attorney Thomas E. Keefe have been chosen as chair and vice chair respectively of the Foundation's new Public Education Outreach Promoting the Law & Equity (PEOPLE) Committee. Kratz states that the purpose of the PEOPLE committee is to "help judges, foundation members and volunteer personnel develop skills in public outreach, community collaboration, community leadership, and public service." He is pleased to note that the membership of this significant new Foundation committee has been structured to include equal numbers of attorneys and judges so they may work collaboratively to meet the educational needs of the public and each other.

Committee Members

Strom, who presided over the group's first meeting in Lincoln on June 29, introduced

additional committee members:

Judge Lawrence D. Gendler, Papillion
Katherine R. Hall, North Platte
Judge Todd J. Hutton, Papillion
Larry J. Karel, Schuyler
Judge Thomas A. Otepka, Omaha
Judge Richard D. Sievers, Lincoln
Terry O. Waite, North Platte
George D. Watson, Chadron

PEOPLE Sub-Committees

To best accomplish the goals of the PEOPLE Committee, three sub-committees have been formed. The sub-committees and their purposes are

Law-Related Education

- To review existing programs and consider expanding and/or creating new programs for public outreach

Members:

Tom Keefe, Chair: Law-Related Education
Katherine R. Hall, North Platte

PEOPLE Committee Established

The PEOPLE committee conducts first meeting in June 2006 from Lincoln. Pictured (l to r) Judge Richard Sievers, Tom Keefe, Judge Larry Gendler, Judge Todd Hutton, Larry Karel and Janet Bancroft



Larry J. Karel, Schuyler
Judge Thomas A. Otepka, Omaha
Judge Richard D. Sievers, Lincoln
George D. Watson, Chadron
Additional members of the 'Education' sub-committee are:
Judge Donna Taylor, Neligh
Judge Jodi Nelson, Lincoln
Doris Huffman, Nebraska Bar Foundation, committee staff

Media

- To educate members of the media and journalism classes (high school and postsecondary) about the role of the judiciary
- To review existing programming and expand informational materials for the media and public

Members:

Judge Todd Hutton, Chair - Media
Judge Lawrence D. Gendler, Papillion
Terry O. Waite, North Platte

Additional members of the 'Media' sub-committee include:

Judge John Colborn, Lincoln
Alan Peterson, Lincoln
Judge Linda Caster Senff, Aurora
Judge Frankie Moore, North Platte
Jan Einspahr, Norfolk
Dean Patrick Borchers, Omaha
Mike Kinney, Omaha

Janet Bancroft, Nebraska Supreme Court, committee staff

Web Site

- To monitor educational information to ensure it is available electronically
- To monitor the links on both the Court and the Foundation Web sites.

December Workshop Scheduled

As chair of the Media sub-committee, Judge Hutton is pleased to announce that one of the first activities of the PEOPLE Committee will be to sponsor a "Judges and Journalists" workshop in Lincoln on December 1.

Nationally recognized "law and media" experts will facilitate a day long program for judges and journalists interested in building greater public understanding of the judicial system. The program's goal is twofold: To examine the role of the judiciary in our democratic form of government and to build greater understanding of the First Amendment and a Free Press.

The workshop will accommodate equal numbers of judges and news reporters or editors as participants. Through a grant from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, the National Center for the Courts and the Media will provide trainers for this educational opportunity.

Judges and Lawyers through the Bar Foundation

The State's Judicial Branch Education funds will underwrite the travel expense of Nebraska judges attending the workshop

Justice at Stake

Judge Tom Otepka who, along with Judge Hutton, initiated the development of the PEOPLE committee, is taking primary responsibility for hosting a 'Media' segment of the fall judges meeting focusing on the national 'Justice at Stake' campaign.

Justice at Stake was created in 2002 as a "nationwide, nonpartisan partnership of more than thirty judicial, legal and citizen organizations," online at <http://faircourts.org>. Its mission is "to educate the public and work for reforms to keep politics and special interests out of the courtroom—so judges can do their job protecting the Constitution, individual rights and the rule of law."

"One of my primary interests as a member of the PEOPLE committee is to help provide as much information as possible with the public – and the press – toward the understanding of the functioning of a fair and impartial judiciary," said Otepka.

Public Outreach – Supreme Court and Bar Foundation

Keefe, a member of the LRE Sub-committee, recalls a time when the Supreme Court sponsored the State High School Mock Trial Project from 1982 to 1987. From 1987 to 1998, the Bar Association sponsored a program of LRE for which Keefe served as Director, and the Mock Trial program was overseen by Keefe. He outlines the evolution of Law-Related Education in Nebraska, stating that in 1998, the Bar Association requested that the Bar Foundation assume the administration and funding for all LRE programs for the public. The Bar Foundation is the State Center for



Judges Tom Otepka and Todd Hutton began meeting in mid 2005 to organize a group of judges and attorneys interested in expanding the educational outreach of the courts.

Law-Related Education for the Public as bestowed by Youth for Justice, a division of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Current programs include:

- High School Mock Trial Project
- Reaching the Age of Majority Booklet
- Law Day Essay Contest (for 7th - 12th Graders)
- Law Day Job Shadowing for Fifth Graders
- Teen Parents and the Law (TPAL)
- We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution
- You the Juror (juror orientation video)
- Constitution Day

Keefe comments that both Law Day programs and Constitution Day activities are jointly sponsored by the Supreme Court and the Bar Foundation. The Essay Contest just



Supreme Court Justice Kenneth Stephan explains court procedure to fifth grade students during the inaugural "Job Shadow" project in 2002.

PEOPLE Committee

Photo Left:
Judge Robert Ide (right) presents Law Day certificate to Axtell High School teacher. All teachers with students who participate in the program are awarded a certificate by their local judge.



Photo Right:
Judge Lyle Strom, Chair of the PEOPLE Committee, joins Grant High School 2001 Mock Trial Team members for the awards banquet.



completed its seventh successful year by recognizing winning essayists at a special Law Day Luncheon at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. This year marked the fourth season for statewide Job Shadowing, a program that involves county court clerk magistrates and district court clerks as local coordinators.

Constitution Day, set aside by Congress in 2005, requires that schools receiving federal funding must undertake a lesson on our nation's most significant founding document annually on September 17. With 2006 being the second year of this observation, the Supreme Court and Bar Foundation will again cooperate to provide resources and encourage lawyers and judges to make presentations in classrooms around the state.

Through the PEOPLE Committee, Keefe indicates that he is becoming familiar with the outreach efforts the Supreme Court has been carrying out on its own. Some of those include National Adoption Day celebrations, Drug Court Month observation, and ProSe Assistance (on-line). Other outreach efforts are more specifically directed toward the Legislature and to students and teachers. He states that the LRE sub-committee will be looking at historical and current educational efforts undertaken both by the Supreme Court and the Bar Foundation. Assessments toward improvements of current offerings and consideration of needed new programs will be made by this subcommittee.

PEOPLE Committee Meeting /Legacy of Liberty Breakfast

Strom indicates that the next PEOPLE Committee meeting will be in Omaha on Friday, November 3, following the Bar Foundation's Legacy of Liberty Breakfast.

He states that he looks forward to hearing the specific objectives and strategies toward the PEOPLE Committee's goals that each subcommittee will have identified. At the November meeting, members of the Web site Sub-Committee will be also be named and will begin identifying content and links for the Supreme Court's and Bar Foundation's Web sites that enhance the public education and outreach goals of the committee.

Strom encourages all judges and attorneys to attend the complimentary Legacy of Liberty Breakfast, which will showcase LRE program accomplishments over the past year. The location is the Omaha Hilton Hotel (across from the Qwest Center) and the time is 7:45 a.m. To register for the Breakfast, please contact the Bar Foundation's Executive Director, Doris Huffman at 800-773-5396 or doris@nebarfnd.org. Strom comments that, by attending the breakfast, members of the legal community who wish to volunteer may learn about dynamic LRE programs with which they may choose to become involved.