

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 160, No. 9

Flannery to oversee Law Division

Evans picks 25-year veteran judge to replace Maddux, says he eyes 'public-friendly' goals

BY MARC KARLINSKY
Law Bulletin staff writer

When it comes to filling a presiding judge vacancy, there's only one vote — and all votes are now in.

Cook County Circuit Judge James P. Flannery Jr. was named the new presiding judge of the Law Division today by Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans.

Flannery, 63, takes charge of a division he's worked in since 1997. He replaces former circuit judge William D. Maddux, who retired last week.

Evans, who presided over the Law Division during parts of 2000 and 2001 before becoming circuit chief, said his new pick has the background necessary to oversee the part of the court that handles high-stakes lawsuits involving personal injury, medical malpractice, premises liability, libel, breaches of contract and other matters.

"His experience — 25 years — and his willingness to share his knowledge and experience with others all were considered by me when I was making this appointment," Evans said.

Evans said he's relied on Flannery to be a mentor to others in the court system. In 2012, he tapped Flannery to serve as chairman of the court's orientation and training program

for new circuit judges.

Flannery also taught courses on jury selection as part of a weeklong training for new Illinois judges run by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. He also has presented Continuing Legal Education seminars.

Evans also noted Flannery's participation on a reform committee that reviewed Law Division procedures a few years ago as a reason behind his choice.

"I think he will be committed to making our Law Division more public-friendly, so that people will have even greater confidence in justice," Evans said.

One of the topics the reform committee studied was the black line trial call system, a backlog-reduction tool where cases are listed below a black line published in the Daily Law Bulletin while still in the discovery process.

While the history of the black line system extends past Maddux's time running the Law Division, it was not used during Evans' time as presiding judge in 2000 and 2001.

As for details of possible changes regarding the black line and other procedures, Evans said he'll leave it up to Flannery to make such decisions.

Flannery, still busy wrapping

up ongoing trials in his 26th-floor courtroom, said there's no immediate changes to expect, but that he will initiate new conversations.

"Obviously, wherever we can improve things, we would seek to improve things," Flannery said. "What I would anticipate is speaking with a lot of attorneys."

Flannery said he's inheriting a well-run system and feels honored to follow his predecessors.

"I was very, very honored,"

Flannery said. "I'm very appreciative to Judge Evans to give me this opportunity."

He said he's looking forward to working with the other judges in the Law Division, who he regards as some of the most dedicated on the bench.

That feeling is mutual, said Associate Judge Michael R. Panter.

"Everybody in the Law Division is ecstatic. I think the lawyers are going to be very happy," said Panter, who joined the Law Division in 2010. "I think (Evans) made a really good choice."

Panter said he was in a conversation with attorneys at the Daley Center this morning when he learned of Evans' announcement. He said they were excited about the news — but disappointed that Flannery's new administrative duties may mean less time running trials.

Before joining the Law Division, Flannery had assignments in traffic court, the 4th Municipal District Court in



James P. Flannery Jr.

Maywood and the Criminal Division.

After graduating from The John Marshall Law School in 1976, Flannery worked as an assistant corporation counsel for the city of Chicago Law Department before entering private practice with Murphy & Preston in 1980.

In 1984, he became an assistant attorney general, handling eminent domain cases for the state until his appointment to the bench in 1988.

Stephen D. Phillips, a partner at Phillips Law Offices and president of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, said the choice will be well-received by members of the trial bar.

"Judge Flannery is very knowledgeable, very experienced and very fair," Phillips said. "He's an excellent choice, and we look forward to working with him."