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Judge DeLozier won't seek re-election

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Judge Hugh E. DeLozier Jr. plans to leave a job he loves at the end of his current term and spend more time with the people he loves -- his wife, children and two 5-year-old grandsons.

DeLozier announced Tuesday that he will not seek re-election as judge of General Sessions Court, Section 1, a position he has held for the past 25 years.

DeLozier said the court was created in 1947 and the late Will A. McTeer was the first judge. McTeer was followed by Judge J.N. Badgett. DeLozier was appointed to succeed Badgett in 1981. He was elected to an eight-year term in 1982 and re-elected without opposition in 1990 and 1998. He plans to remain on the bench through Aug. 31, the end of his current term.

"I think I'm giving up one of the best jobs anyone could possibly have," DeLozier said. "It's been a labor of love. But, I believe that you need to leave a great job while you still love it. I thank the citizens of Blount County for allowing me to serve them in a position I have enjoyed so much over the past 25 years."

In Blount County, the General Sessions Court exercises jurisdiction over probate, juvenile, divorce and orders of protection in addition to its traditional jurisdiction in criminal and civil cases. DeLozier said the court also handles nearly 250 involuntary commitment cases each month.

DeLozier's quarter of a century on the bench, the case load in General Sessions Court has nearly quadrupled to over 25,000 cases each year. To accommodate the case load, two additional divisions of General Sessions Court have been added during DeLozier's tenure. In addition to DeLozier in Section I, Section II has Judge William Terry Denton presiding in juvenile cases, Section III has Judge William R. Brewer presiding, and the recently created Section IV has Judge David Duggan presiding.

"The General Sessions Court is the place where most people get their only taste of the judicial system," DeLozier said. "Most cases are filed and disposed of at this level so General Sessions Court is the place where lasting impressions of our system of justice are formed."

"If that impression is not a good one, then the system has failed," the judge said. "In the eyes of most litigants, respect for the law and our system of justice will rise or fall at the General Sessions Court level. Even if a litigant doesn't agree with the decision made, they need to leave the courtroom feeling that they were heard and were treated fairly and with respect."

DeLozier said he has been treated with respect by most who have appeared before him but sometimes the respect has come in an unusual manner.

"I've been called many names -- Judge DeLozier, Your Honor, Mr. DeLozier, Ol' Buddy and some less complimentary names not suitable for print. However, there was one more memorable than most of the others," the judge said with a smile.

"On one occasion, I had just announced a decision involving a young ex-military man who was standing at attention in front of me. He stood one step backward in close-order drill style, clicked his heels together, bowed, and said 'Thank you, Your Excellency.' I could only surmise he was expecting a longer jail sentence than I had just announced."

DeLozier said he has tried to follow the high standards set by his predecessors in office.

"While on the bench, Judge McTeer and Judge Badgett were men of high character and integrity. They were firm but fair in dealing with the people coming before them," DeLozier said. They had a keen sense of insight and compassion. They had people skills and a healthy respect for the law.

"They also sprinkled in a little humor where it seemed appropriate," the judge said. "They took their job seriously, but, in my opinion, they never lost touch with the fact that the people before them were still human beings.

"While I may have failed to exhibit all these characteristics during my tenure on the bench, these attributes are lofty goals for the judge elected to succeed me."

At least five people have expressed interest in seeking election to the post DeLozier will leave in August.

DeLozier said he is very concerned about the low number of people voting in primary elections for judicial posts.

"Traditionally, there are not that many who vote in a primary election and many of those pass over the judicial positions on the ballot," DeLozier said. "That means a very small number will choose the person who will hold a judicial position for the next eight years."

DeLozier's preparation for his current job included graduation from Maryville High School,

East Tennessee State University and University of Tennessee College of Law. He was a practicing attorney before his appointment as judge.

Civic contributions

He served as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army during the war in Vietnam. He is a member of the Blount County Memorial Post 5154, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and is a past commander of Capt. Emerson J. Lones Post 13, American Legion. He has also been 2nd District commander and vice commander of the Tennessee American Legion.

Prior to his appointment, he had 10 years experience in county government, elected to both the Blount County Quarterly Court and the Blount County Commission where he served as chairman pro tem. He also served on the Budget and Finance Committee for eight years, served on the Blount County Election Commission and Republican Primary Board. He is a past president of the Blount County Young Republicans. He also served as president of the Blount County Bar Association and is a member of the Tennessee Bar Association.

DeLozier is a member of the Blount County Public Library's Board of Trustees. He has also served on local boards for the American Red Cross, Chamber of Commerce, Blount Memorial Hospital, YMCA Camp Montvale, United Way, Maryville Little League, Child and Family Services, and Girls Club.

As a judge, he has served on the Executive Committee of the Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and as chairman of the Legislative Committee for the Tennessee General Sessions Court Judges Conference.

Family connections

DeLozier is the son of the late Hugh E. DeLozier Sr. and the late Harriet Brown DeLozier. He and his wife, the former Rhonda Mitchell, live in Maryville and are members of Fairview United Methodist Church. The judge said his wife is also retiring this year after a 30-year teaching career, primarily at Porter Elementary School.

Their plans include a trip to Austria -- "my wife wants to visit the land of composers" -- and a return trip to Scotland where DeLozier played the historic golf courses including St. Andrews last spring.

The DeLoziers are the parents of three daughters -- Dana, Paige and Mandy. They have two grandsons -- Liam, who lives in Nashville, and Nate, who lives in West Hartford, Conn.

DeLozier said Nate has shown considerable talent as a mimic, imitating his grandfather DeLozier's habit of "hitching up his pants" before beginning a task.

That reminds DeLozier of the day in court when he had admonished a defendant for failing

to attend a court-mandated anger management class.

"I told him to take a seat while I considered his fate. Later in the docket, I again summoned him to the bench. When he stood from his seat in the audience, his beltless pants fell to his ankles," the judge chuckled. "By noon, the story around the justice center was that Judge DeLozier had just scared the pants off someone else."
