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# Judge Harrington in final month with circuit court

by Mark Dykes

Early January marks the end of Circuit Court Judge Thomas Harrington's time with the Fifth Judicial District, as he will retire from the position effective Jan. 7. His successor will be Edward Luhm.

Harrington started as an associate with Messenger & Jurovich from 1991 until 1994, before he was Washakie County Attorney for two terms and had his private practice. He was then Thermopolis Municipal Judge and a part-time circuit court magistrate, filling in for Judge Robert Skar, who was then the circuit court judge.

In 2008, Judge Skar moved to the district court bench and Harrington was appointed the circuit court judge on Dec. 1, 2008, where he's been since. Being a circuit court judge, he's handled cases in three counties and four courts, including Thermopolis, Worland, Basin and Lovell.

"I drive over 10,000 miles per year," Harrington said, noting his is a unique position. Monday mornings he's in Lovell, then in Worland Monday afternoons; Tuesday is his trial or "catch all" day for him to get caught up with cases; Wednesdays he is in Basin; Thursdays it's Worland and Fridays he's in Thermopolis. Because people have to be seen within a certain timeframe of when they're arrested, some days he starts here, goes to Worland and ends in Basin.

Harrington works with six court clerks, two in each county, and he noted the two here —

April Andreen and Sara Ford-Rankin — are the newest. "The two in Basin and one in Worland were there when I arrived and we hired another in Worland. I've got wonderful clerks who work hard." In other communities, he noted, there are sometimes clerks who are in a supervisory position and designate jobs to others. In contrast, the clerks in this area are cross-trained and do it all, even covering offices in other counties. "In these rural counties, these ladies do everything."

Harrington said he's seen everything from homicide cases, and from simple to complex, in his time as a circuit court judge. The toughest for him have been those that involve children, particularly sexual assault or drugs. "The drug situation continues to worsen," he said, and there seems to be more. Meth always seems to be floating around, but there seems to be more heroin, pills and heroin laced with other drugs. "It's just devastating. We've had deaths because of that, and we're going to have more I'm afraid."

There seems to be hopelessness among those involved, he added, but there are impacts of poverty to take into account as well.

The cases run together after a time, though Harrington noted he's seen some people in all three counties he serves. "The first time they see me in the second county, they do a double take, their jaw drops and they kind of say 'Uh oh, him again.'"

Another aspect Harrington spoke to is that he sees people before him in court but often

sees those same people out running errands. "That's a reality of living in rural Wyoming. That's difficult in a certain respect, but

I try to just treat people with respect and decency. If you've got to make a decision, make it and try to explain it as best you can. Most people, if you do that, they'll return that courtesy." He believes people want to be heard, and if they have that opportunity they are often fine with the decision made.

Harrington was a high school wrestling coach and teacher before he went to law school, so right now he's volunteering as an assistant coach with the Worland wrestling team and he plans to continue that in retirement. He's also signed up for the Ameritas program with the Wyoming State Bar, a pro bono program through which he plans to volunteer at crisis centers and help clients prepare for court proceedings.

The judge is also expecting a granddaughter in early March, so that means more time with his daughter and son-in-law in Oklahoma. He lives in Worland and owns a lot there, and plans to build a house in the next year or so.

"This has been a huge honor, a privilege to be in this position," he said. "I've worked with tremendous, wonderful people. The magistrates I've had have been wonderful, and the judges I've got to work with at all levels have been fantastic."

A celebration of Judge Harrington's career will be at the Worland Circuit Court on Fri-

Friday, Jan. 4 from 3-5 p.m.

