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Mary Kay Howe

Douglas County court reporter named honorary bailiff for Supreme Court's special session in Lawrence

TOPEKA—Mary Kay Howe is a staunch advocate of the country's judicial system.

"I'm proud of our court system and the way it works. It's a very fair system, and I enjoy being a part of that," she said.

Her part—since 1975—has been as a court reporter. She records a court's oral proceedings so that what was said can be read back in court or referenced later.

"I've enjoyed the whole atmosphere of the courts, listening to the stories. I think I've heard everything after 43 years, but it seems there's something new every week," she added.

She will take on a different role, however, when the Kansas Supreme Court travels to Lawrence for a special session the evening of April 1.

Howe, who is a court reporter for the 7th Judicial District, will serve as honorary bailiff at the special session. Chief Judge Peggy Carr Kittel selected her for the job. The 7th Judicial District is composed of Douglas County.

Howe is a court reporter for District Judge Sally Pokorny.

"I am the luckiest judge in the world to have Mary Kay as my court reporter," Pokorny said. "Not only is she a stellar court reporter—in that she is fast and accurate—she is a stellar person. She is fun; she is funny; she is dependable. What I love most about her is her kindness and her wisdom.

"I could not have had a better person than Mary Kay to teach me how to be a good judge," Pokorny added. "Her steadiness, her work ethic, and her wisdom symbolize what we all hope our court system stands for."

As honorary bailiff, Howe will call to order the audience assembled at the Lied Center at the University of Kansas, and then the court will hear oral arguments in two cases.

Because they are appellate cases and not trial court proceedings, the Supreme Court session will be a bit of a learning experience for Howe. It will be for the audience, too—which is the intent. The court began holding special sessions outside the Kansas Judicial Center in 2011 to mark the state's 150th anniversary. It is an opportunity for Kansans to learn more about the court, its work, and the overall role of the Kansas judiciary.

Howe says she also tries to inform others about Kansas courts.

"I spend a lot of time educating people about the court system. They are always surprised at how it really works compared to what they see on TV. I think it's a very fair system and that everyone gets a fair trial," she said.

Most of her days are spent in the courtroom. With eight judges, five court reporters, and a growing caseload, there's plenty of work.

"We're always juggling things to cover," she said of her fellow reporters.

Court reporters typically don't provide written transcripts of proceedings unless they're asked. That can mean working nights and weekends to fulfill those requests, Howe said.

"Right now, I have a two-page list of orders," she explained.

While Howe is eager to share her knowledge about the courts, there isn't much education that needs to take place in her own family. Five women have been or are court reporters: two sisters, a daughter, a daughter-in-law, and a cousin.

Her daughter, Miranda Cummings, is the managing court reporter for the 3rd Judicial District, composed of Shawnee County. A cousin, Deanne Besen, is a court reporter for the 18th Judicial District, composed of Sedgwick County. The others are retired or work as freelance reporters.

Howe said a lawyer in her hometown of Wellington told her father he thought court reporting would be a good job for his daughters. Two of her sisters were the first to do so, and she followed suit. She spent her first year on the job in Wyandotte County District Court and has been working in Douglas County District Court since then.

The job has been a good choice, she said.

"When people ask when I'm going to retire, I say I still love coming to work, and until that changes, I'll keep working," Howe said. "I would miss my incredible work family."

Summaries of the cases to be heard in Lawrence and briefs filed by the attorneys involved are available online by following the *Lawrence Special Session* link under *What's New* on the Kansas judicial branch website at www.kscourts.org. A [flyer](#) also contains that information and other important details for people attending or watching online.

Anyone who wants to attend the special session should plan to arrive early at the Lied Center to allow time to get through security screening. The doors open at 5:30 p.m. Court security offers these guidelines to ease the process:

- Do not bring food or drink.
- Do not bring large bags, large purses, backpacks, computer cases, or briefcases. Small handbags are permitted.
- Do not bring knives, pepper spray, firearms, or weapons.
- Do not bring electronic devices like laptop computers, handheld games, personal digital assistants, or tablets. If you must carry a cell phone, turn it off and store it out of sight while court is in session.

Audience members are prohibited from talking during oral arguments because it interferes with the attorneys' remarks and justices' questions. Those arriving after proceedings start or leaving before they end should be as quiet as possible entering and exiting the auditorium. Talking immediately outside the auditorium also is discouraged.

The special session also will be broadcast live over the Internet. The livestream may be accessed selecting the *Watch Supreme Court Live!* link on the judicial branch home page at www.kscourts.org.

The Supreme Court has conducted 16 special sessions outside its Topeka courtroom since 2011, when it marked the state's 150th anniversary by convening in the historic Supreme Court courtroom in the Kansas Statehouse. From there, and through the end of 2011, the court conducted special sessions in Salina, Greensburg, and Wichita. The court visited Overland Park in 2012; Pittsburg in 2013; Kansas City, Kansas, in 2014; Hays and Garden City in 2015; Topeka, Hiawatha, and Hutchinson in 2016; Winfield and Emporia in 2017; and Colby and Manhattan in 2018.

The court started conducting evening sessions when it visited Fort Hays State University in April 2015. That event drew a crowd of nearly 700 people. Subsequent evening sessions also have drawn crowds numbering in the hundreds.

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