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HONORABLE LINDA MARIE BELL

**BY JENNIFER SMITH,
PUBLICATIONS MANAGER**

Judge Linda Bell's daily activities differ significantly from those of her peers. As the presiding judge for the Eighth Judicial District's adult specialty courts, she works hand-in-hand with lawyers, probation officers, mental health professionals, treatment providers and administrators, using a collaborative, team-based approach to address problems and find solutions for the people appearing before her.

"The specialty courts are so different from normal court proceedings," Bell said. "Ultimately, I make the decisions, but it's very collaborative, unlike a traditional calendar."

Bell's docket includes cases from the adult felony drug, felony DUI, mental health and veterans' courts. She also hears competency cases. The specialty courts strive to reduce recidivism by working with service providers and other professionals to address the root causes of criminal behavior, such as substance abuse or mental health problems.

"I'm not making decisions about sentencing or motions," she said. "Virtually all of the people in our program are on probation. We make sure they are doing

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what they are supposed to be doing and, if not, we take action.” Bell and her collaborators help track the progress and treatment of the people appearing in specialty court. They meet prior to court and discuss potential problems in advance, considering factors including additional services needed, penalties for misbehavior, positive drug tests and incomplete community service.

Bell has presided over the specialty courts since August 2012; she first won the election to district court in January 2009. Bell served as a public defender for 12 years before taking the bench. Before attending law school, she worked as a counselor.

The specialty court struggles with funding issues on a daily basis. “Trying to get by with [fewer] resources is the most challenging part of my job,” Bell explained. “For example, we sometimes have a number of people waiting in jail, and they can wait three to four months to get into patient treatment.” Bell often works with program coordinators to find creative solutions to funding problems, such as locating available social services or applying for grants. Bell credits the resourcefulness of the court administrators and other collaborators with finding creative solutions to problems.

Bell also credits her father, who was, like her, a lawyer and a judge, with providing her with inspiration and good advice. Before attending law school, Bell worked in her father’s office and occasionally observed him in court. “He’s been a huge role model to me,” Bell said. “He told me that it is important to have a good reputation and always to guard it.”

With three children aged 6, 10 and 14, Bell spends much of her time outside of the courtroom with her family. She also makes time to serve as president of the Howard D. McKibben American Inn of Court, and she volunteers once a month for the Trial by Peers program. ■