



SITTING *on the* BENCH

By Clara Ross Stamps

FOR THREE
ALUMNI, THERE
ARE NO
SUBSTITUTES

NO ONE WANTS TO BE CONFINED TO THE BENCH — THAT IS UNLESS THE BENCH COMES EQUIPPED WITH A GAVEL. THREE MCSOL ALUMNI — LINDA R. ANDERSON '85, MICHAEL T. PARKER '86, AND ROBERT H. WALKER '78 — HAVE MASTERED THE ART OF BENCH — WARMING AS UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGES FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI.

MAKING HISTORY

On August 4, 2006, Linda R. Anderson '85 became the first female U.S. magistrate judge of the Southern District of Mississippi. "I seldom think about being the first female until I'm asked about it. Chief Judge Wingate and every one of the judges on the court have made me feel absolutely and equally a part of the court," Anderson says. "However, I feel privileged to have been chosen, and will continually

clerked for Justice Reuben Anderson (no relation) from 1985-1987. She then served as the assistant district attorney in the Seventh Judicial Court District, Hinds County, Mississippi from 1987-1999, prosecuting felony offenses involving property crimes, sex crimes and other violent crimes. "The law is seldom black or white," Anderson said. "It usually makes the job much easier when it is, but that is not often the case."

our newest magistrate judge."

As a magistrate judge there is never a dull moment. "There are many challenges in the office each day," Anderson says. "We have a heavy workload but I am committed to keeping abreast of the activity in the cases for which I'm responsible. We also have to keep up with the fast-paced technological advances like EFC and the challenges of electronic discovery. Another difficulty I sometimes encounter



"THE CULTURE OF MCSOL IS A PART OF WHO I AM. THEY TAUGHT ME THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING BACK AND THE TRUE REWARD OF PUBLIC INTEREST LEGAL WORK. I WANT TO LEAVE THE COURTHOUSE EVERY SINGLE DAY KNOWING THAT I'VE DONE THE FAIR AND JUST THING THAT DAY REGARDING EVERY PARTY WHO HAS COME INTO MY COURT." — Linda R. Anderson

strive to meet the challenge honorably. As a youth, I knew of no female attorney or judge role model in my community. Hopefully, my appointment will serve to inspire others to reach their goals."

Prior to receiving her law degree, Anderson served as a staff assistant in the Department of Music at Jackson State University and worked as an elementary music teacher in the Jackson Public School system from 1977-1985. "I was wading into thoroughly unfamiliar waters when I entered law school," she says. "On my first day of class, Professor West flashed her warm smile and offered the guidance and assurance that I needed at the time. She demanded mastery of the subject matter, while she quietly offered encouragement and support. So many other professors had such a very positive impact during my studies at MCSOL, including Professor Hand, Dean Maloney and many others."

After law school, Anderson

Anderson served as an assistant U.S. attorney in the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, a position she held from 1999-2006.

Chris Daniel '02 clerked for Anderson as an extern while working at the United States Attorneys Office in Jackson, prior to her appointment as magistrate judge. "Anderson was truly a pleasure to work for," he says. "She is exceedingly professional, and practices a level of civility that is a superb example for fellow members of the Bar. Anderson truly cared about the people behind the facts of each case we worked on, not only the victims, but also the accused. She was very good at persuading people from different walks of life to agree to come together and work for the good of our community. She was also always willing to consider new ideas, and she possessed a clear focus on providing the highest quality service to the public. I was very pleased to see her selected as

is being judge/mediator/referee in civil discovery proceedings that can often be quite contentious."

In 2003, Anderson received the Robert E. Hauberg Award for distinguished public service beyond the call of duty – the highest award given by the U.S. Attorney Southern District of Mississippi. "One of my proudest moments was volunteering with Professor Kennedy to assist families with the adoption of children," Anderson says happily.

Anderson realizes that MCSOL was instrumental in her career success. "The professors were caring, knowledgeable and wanted my absolute best," Anderson recalls. "The culture of MCSOL is a part of who I am. They taught me the importance of giving back and the true reward of public interest legal work. I want to leave the courthouse every single day knowing that I've done the fair and just thing that day regarding every party who has come into my court."

POSITION OF INFLUENCE

As an undergraduate at Mississippi College, Michael T. Parker '86 sought the guidance of his faculty advisor on which path to take next. "My faculty advisor convinced me that law had a great future for me," recalls Parker. "I was familiar with MCSOL and the area, but my only drawback was whether I could afford to attend. I was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship, which made it possible."

practice was devoted primarily to commercial litigation.

During his law school days, Parker realized that the location of MCSOL proved to be a valuable asset. "The location of the law school created opportunities to work with law firms in Jackson during the school year," he says. "I didn't know a single lawyer when I started law school — not one. But the school's proximity to law firms, courts, government agencies

advice with new law students. "Be sure to find a study group filled with people smarter than you," says Parker. "That's what I did, and I learned so much from them," he laughs. "Of course it wasn't difficult to find people smarter than me."

Parker graduated with honors. "No matter what career you have in mind, always do your best. Right now, be the best law student you can be. If you work

Back Row: Judges Linda Anderson, Mike Parker and Robert Walker



"I DIDN'T KNOW A SINGLE LAWYER WHEN I STARTED LAW SCHOOL — NOT ONE. BUT THE SCHOOL'S PROXIMITY TO LAW FIRMS, COURTS, GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ALLOWED ME TO MEET, WORK WITH AND GET TO KNOW MANY LAWYERS DURING MY LEGAL EDUCATION, WHICH LED TO A JOB IN A LAW FIRM WHEN I GRADUATED."

— Michael T. Parker

On May 24, 2006, Parker was appointed to serve as a U.S. magistrate judge for the Southern District of Mississippi. "It's not every day you're appointed to do something you truly love," says Parker. "I am honored to serve and know it's a real privilege."

From 2002 to 2006 Parker served as a Hinds County Court judge in Jackson, Mississippi, and as judge for the Hinds County Drug Court. Prior to his election to the county court, Parker served as municipal judge for the City of Clinton for nearly eight years. He was also a practicing attorney for 17 years as a partner in the law firm of Scanlon, Sessums, Parker, and Dallas, PLLC, where his

allowed me to meet, work with and get to know many lawyers during my legal education, which led to a job in a law firm when I graduated."

Parker believes the professors at MCSOL provided him with a first-rate education. "I enjoyed Professor Lee's tax class and to this day can remember some of the tax rules because of the funny names he gave them. They were all outstanding and if time and space permitted, I could easily point out how each professor influenced me in a positive way. Suffice to say that they knew their subjects and cared about their students — even though they were tough on us in the classroom."

Now Parker is in a position of influence and is eager to share

hard in law school, you will create more opportunities for yourself upon graduation," he says. "More importantly, you will develop the discipline and dedication that will help you succeed in whatever you do. This reputation and track record of excellence will make lawyers want to hire you in their firms, and clients want to hire you as their lawyer."

As a magistrate judge, Parker is always on the move. "My biggest challenge is learning areas of law I didn't confront in law practice and learning to manage the constant flow of motions and other filings," states Parker. "I enjoy what I do, which is a good thing, because there is a lot of it to do."

WEATHERING THE STORM

"I did not evacuate before Hurricane Katrina made landfall," Robert Walker says. "As a lifelong resident of the Gulf Coast who experienced Hurricane Camille — I knew that no hurricane could be worse than Camille. I live one house from a bayou, but my home didn't flood, although most of the homes on the streets near me received up to 20 feet of water. My home was an island for approximately six hours."

After the storm passed, in a state of disbelief, Walker made his way to the beach to check on friends who had also stayed in their homes. "The beach area looked like an atomic bomb had exploded," Walker

conditions forced him to relocate to Mobile, Alabama."

Because the courthouse in Gulfport received substantial damage, an alternate site had to be found. Walker rented six apartments at a local complex to conduct court business. "It took about three weeks for the apartments to obtain electricity and water, but shortly thereafter, with rented furniture and through the tireless efforts of our clerk, J.T. Noblin, and the court technical staff, we became a fully functional chambers," Walker explains. "I actually held court in the apartments, but for security reasons used the state courthouse to conduct criminal matters." It would be nine

especially my MCSOL family — keeps me hopeful."

When Walker graduated from MCSOL, he went into private practice and served as an assistant district attorney. In 1984, he joined the Bryant-Clark law firm, where he became a partner and remained until December 1994. While at Bryant-Clark, he served as a municipal court prosecutor and later as a municipal court judge for the city of Gulfport. Walker was also elected circuit judge for the Second Circuit Court District (Hancock, Harrison and Stone Counties).

Walker feels that the atmosphere at MCSOL can't be found anywhere else. "When you enter

"MOST OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS I'VE ENJOYED IN MY LEGAL CAREER, AS WELL AS THE POSITION I NOW HOLD, IS DUE TO THE FOUNDATION I RECEIVED FROM MCSOL. THERE ARE NO WORDS TO PRECISELY EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE. I WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL TO THE LAW SCHOOL." — Robert Walker

relives. "Few houses were recognizable at all; most were simply gone, turned into debris piles 15 to 20 feet high. Most all power lines were down and gas lines were exposed and leaking. I was thankful to find my friends alive."

After Katrina, Walker functioned in a survival mode. "One week after the storm, the U.S. Marshals located all of the federal judges on the Gulf Coast and determined that I was the only judge whose home had not been destroyed," Walker recalls. "Judges Guirola and Roper moved to Hattiesburg and began working at the courthouse there. Judges Gex and Russell began working at the courthouse in Jackson. And Judge Senter didn't have a home on the Coast, but

months before Walker and his staff would finally return home to the courthouse in Gulfport.

Walker was appointed a U.S. magistrate judge for the Southern District of Mississippi in November 2004. Hurricane Katrina is by far his most difficult experience to date, and he is still weathering the aftermath of the storm. "Since all the other judges lost their homes and some filed suit against their insurance carriers, Judge Senter and I were the only ones who could hear hurricane cases," Walker says. "The biggest challenge facing my office right now is all the hurricane cases. To date, there are approximately 500 cases pending, but over 1,200 have settled. The support from the legal community — and

through those doors you know the staff and faculty are there to assist you — whatever your need may be," says Walker. "Most of the accomplishments I've enjoyed in my legal career, as well as the position I now hold, is due to the foundation I received from MCSOL. There are no words to precisely express my gratitude. I will always be grateful to the law school."

"From my chambers windows, I still see bare spaces once occupied by thriving businesses and professional offices," Walker says gently. "Although many landmarks are gone, I see the Coast I know and love — strong, resilient, vibrant, full of hope. The Gulf Coast, although bloodied, remains unbowed."