

PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: 26 June 2013

Contact: P Ebanks

Telephone: 938-2209

e-mail: pebanks@ucci.edu.ky

Behind-the-Scenes Court Staff Earns Accolades

The public face of the Courts is usually the judiciary and the magistrates, but working silently behind the scenes are “stalwarts,” says the Chief Justice, without whose service the court would grind to a halt.

These are the persons who interface with a wide range of practitioners and public in the legal system, from judges and magistrates, to bailiffs, juries and petitioners. Of course, heading the list of those they serve are probably the anxious lawyers who send those 60-80 emails daily to Listing Officer Yasmin Ebanks; request Deputy Clerk of the Courts Cecile Collins to issue urgent summonses; or apply to Maintenance Officer Jacqueline Scott for maintenance records for their clients.

Among civil servants who were recognised at a recent event honouring long-serving officers, these key officers together have served the courts for some 80 years. In fact, persons such as Ms Collins have actually grown up at the Courts.

Joining the Courts at just 16 years straight out of high school, Ms Collins has worked in all areas of the Courts except the more recently introduced Financial Services Division (FSD). She is now the Deputy Clerk of the Courts responsible for administering the Criminal Registry. Thus, the first-ever Listing Officer for the Cayman Islands, the Bodden Towner has served in numerous roles, including judge’s secretary, cashier, receptionist, filing clerk, “filling in at any chance,” she says. In the process made herself a most valuable officer.

“Ms Collins now holds a very demanding position,” says Chief Justice Smellie, ensuring with the assistance of staff she supervises that criminal court records are complete, secure and available when required. She is also responsible for the issue of summonses, for both witnesses and juries.

“She is well regarded by her colleagues, and well respected in the profession,” said the Chief Justice.

Ms Collins credits long-retired Clerk of Courts and Acting Magistrate Ena Allen for taking her under her wings when the fledgling officer arrived in 1981. “I have had much support from everyone over the years,” she said, adding that her superiors always made her feel capable, taking her advice wherever possible.

She was eager as well to secure training, including most recently a one-year paralegal course, and is now pursuing an online management course offered through the civil service.

“I am still young, still have a few more years to give to government, and I have to keep abreast of new trends, new ways of solving problems and achieving goals, so I can perform the way that my superiors want me to,” said Ms Collins.

For example, in her current role, to which she was appointed in 2006, she is constantly looking to see how she can improve record keeping – and how to take advantage of the capability of the Judicial Enterprise Management System (JEMS), an electronic records management system introduced in 1999.

“Frankly, we were previously skimming the resources of this system,” she said, “but each day we are trying to do more and more with the system.”

She hopes, she said, that “one day the Courts will be truly electronic – eliminating paper files – and, who knows, maybe one day even defendants may be able to search their own records.”

Colleague Mrs. Yasmin Ebanks, now the Listing Officer for the Grand Court, has overall responsibility for listing across the five divisions – Financial Services, Family, Civil, Criminal, and Admiralty. Mrs. Ebanks has served at the Courts for 25 years.

In this very demanding role, held since 2003, she interacts with lawyers involved in Grand Court cases. Under the supervision of the Chief Justice and in consultation with the judges, she schedules cases according to the availability of judges and parties, the demands of the cases and their urgency, as well as what is at stake. Often the more complex cases may involve assets worth hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars. Mrs. Ebanks states that in recent years she has seen a dramatic increase in the number of cases involving Judicial Reviews – legal challenges to the decisions of Government and of public bodies. Mrs. Ebanks also supervises the Courts’ Marshals.

“Her office is a real hive of activity for the administration of cases coming before the Grand Court,” says the Chief Justice, and Mrs. Ebanks “has earned herself a reputation as a dedicated and effective officer.”

As such, the Chief Justice says, she advises him on a weekly basis on what the fixtures should be for the following week.

“Mrs. Ebanks is a highly valued member of staff and very well regarded by her colleagues and the stakeholders she services,” said the Chief Justice. He recently presented Mrs. Ebanks, who had been unable to attend the formal ceremony, with her long-service award.

Reflecting on her 31 years overall with the civil service, Mrs. Ebanks says that she had to be wrenched away from the Licensing Department when she made the move 25 years ago to come to the Courts.

But she claims to have had no regrets despite the demands at the Courts, where she initially worked as secretary for many Judges, including the present Chief Justice. In the early years, the significant support of former senior officers -- Ms. Nova Hall, and Mr. Valdis Foldats -- who are currently Chief Magistrate and Magistrate, respectively, helped her to expand her knowledge of the Courts. Speaking about her current post as Listing Officer, Mrs. Ebanks says: "It's a very demanding job, not a day passes without some sort of challenge."

Complicating things over the years, of course, has been the dramatic increase in work load at the Courts. When she commenced her current role as Listing Officer, there were three Grand Court Judges, the Chief Justice included. Now she can be listing for up to eight judges at a time, managing priorities, juggling resources, coping with some 60 to 80 emails per day -- each urgent -- and working out compromises.

Giving an example of how she uses her experience to reach compromises with her varied stakeholders, especially lawyers needing to bring urgent matters before the Courts, on one occasion, she said, she was able to eke out a half-hour's Court time for an anxious lawyer. That apprehensive lawyer really wanted three hours but, given her trust in the enterprise of Ms Ebanks, she settled for an initial half hour.

The reward is in the support she gets in her role, she says. The Chief Justice and the Judges show appreciation for the demanding job and challenges; the lawyers are very understanding and cooperative; and colleagues Court Administrator Kevin McCormac, Clerk of the Court Tabitha Philander and other senior staff are very supportive.

To bolster her experience and paralegal certification, Mrs. Ebanks earned the opportunity to be trained at the Royal Courts of Justice, in London. She hopes, she says, to see one of her desires for the Courts in the Cayman Islands come to fruition: an electronic diary -- possibly integrating that with the Courts' JEMS database. Mrs. Ebanks was exposed to a similar system during her time London.

Meanwhile, Courts Maintenance Officer Jacqueline Scott holds her own with her two colleagues when it comes to pressures. Mrs. Scott is responsible for assisting applicants in the enforcement of maintenance orders for child care. Following formal court instructions, she assists mothers in drawing up affidavits and issues summonses for delinquent fathers to be brought before a judge for enquiries and issue of appropriate orders.

Similarly, Mrs. Scott supports the judges and magistrates in ensuring that appropriate records are available, especially where applicants are not represented by attorneys.

Prior to joining the court, Mrs. Scott served as a police officer, so she is well experienced in interfacing with the public in legal roles. Prior to her appointment as Court Maintenance Officer, she served as a Bailiff.

"Mrs. Scott has a dignified presence and is very well regarded," said the Chief Justice.

Commenting on the three as well as others among his staff, the Chief Justice said: "These three officers and others like them within the Judicial Administration are shining examples of the

calibre of persons who make the Public Service such a vital part of the success of these Islands. They should be admired for their quiet dedication to the service of the public in the administration of justice.”



-- Ends