

Hats Off

Williams appointed to Orleans Parish CDC

Attorney **James M. Williams** was appointed by order of the Louisiana Supreme Court to serve as judge pro tempore of Orleans Parish Civil District Court, Section 7, according to Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Bernette J. Johnson. Williams began serving on the court on October 12, 2009, and will continue to March 30, 2010, or until the vacancy created by the resignation of Judge Nadine M. Ramsey is filled by election, whichever comes sooner.

As a partner in the law firm of Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams, Metairie, he practiced in the area of civil litigation with a concentration on catastrophic personal injury and business litigation.

Williams earned an undergraduate degree from Louisiana State University in 1995 and a Juris Doctorate degree from Washington & Lee University School of Law in 1998. While a law student, he was editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Civil Rights*



James Williams

and *Social Justice* and was selected as a Burk's scholar for academic excellence and aptitude for advocacy.

In addition, he worked with U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to publish

a scholarly article titled "Civility."

Following law school, Williams served as a law clerk for Justice Johnson.

While practicing law, he also served as an adjunct professor at Tulane University, where he taught "Legal Aspects of Sports." He is a past president of the Greater New Orleans Louis A. Martinet Legal Society Inc. and serves on the boards for the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce and the New Orleans Bar Association.

Justice Johnson to receive the 2010 ABA Spirit of Excellence Award

The American Bar Association Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession will honor **Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Bernette J. Johnson** with a Spirit of Excellence Award, recognizing her unwavering commitment to enhancing diversity in the legal profession.

"Justice Johnson epitomizes community service. She has been committed to helping the disadvantaged from her early days as a community organizer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal

Defense and Educational Fund. Even as a justice for the highest court in Louisiana, Justice Johnson maintains her commitment to communities in need," said Fred Alvarez of Palo Alto, Calif., chair of the commission.

"She has been a champion for increasing diversity in the profession since the beginning of her career. Her courage and determination serve as inspiration for others — and not just women and minorities. She inspires all of us who are committed to a more diverse profession," Alvarez added.

The commission will present the award to Johnson on Feb. 6 during the 2010 ABA Midyear Meeting in Orlando, Fla.

As an African-American woman from a working class family, Johnson has overcome substantial barriers throughout her career. She navigated the then-segregated school system of New Orleans, graduating as her high school's valedictorian.

She attended Spelman College on a full academic scholarship before attending law school at Louisiana State University.

She was one of only two African-American students in her first-year class at LSU. Post-graduation, she became a managing lawyer with the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation, where she delivered legal services to more than 3,000 clients from socio-economically deprived communities.

Johnson has been a role model and a trailblazer in other ways, serving as the first woman elected to the Civil District Court of Orleans Parish. She subsequently was the first African-American

woman elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

"Throughout her career, Johnson has touched the lives of many law students and professionals of color," the ABA commission said in a press release.

"Her commitment to ensuring diversity in the legal profession was made early on when, as a newly elected judge, Johnson resolved to hire law clerks from diverse backgrounds. Her commitment to diversity remains evident through her work as co-chair of the Louisiana State Bar Association's Task Force on Diversity in the Profession, where she focused on ensuring retention of diverse lawyers."

Johnson has been the recipient of countless awards, including the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, the Distinguished Jurist Award of the Louisiana Bar Foundation, the National Nobel Woman Award of the Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women and the Medal of Honor of the city of New Orleans.

The ABA says its Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession is a catalyst to change the legal profession to reflect the society it serves. It helps racially and ethnically diverse lawyers advance their careers and standing in the profession.

Its leadership, programs and information help the profession understand and eliminate racism, bigotry and discrimination. The commission works to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the legal profession, and thus enrich it.