



Rodney Harris Takes The Bench, Savors Moment, and Sees Opportunity

By Joe Zdrilich, Secretary, GCBA

For years, Rodney Harris had made no secret of his ambition to break the diversity barrier in Gwinnett County, and on January 6, he was seated as Gwinnett County's newest Recorder's Court Judge. So my first question for Judge Harris is, "How does it feel?"

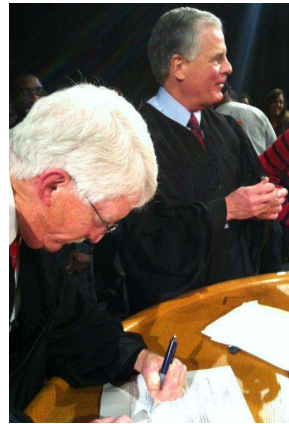


"Great," he says, clearly enthusiastic about the opportunity to the point he can barely sit in his chair, but "opportunity" is the key word.

While he acknowledged he doesn't miss the late night phone calls and rigors of a demanding private practice, where he specialized in criminal defense law and juvenile law, he went on to talk about the pressure of setting a good example.

I asked Judge Harris whom he looked to as an influence for his style on the bench. While he credited all of the Gwinnett judges he has had the opportunity to practice in front of for the past fifteen years, he specifically

credited his predecessor for running a tight ship, Judge Robert Jones.

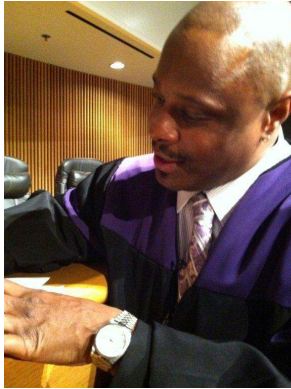


"He ran a smooth courtroom and gave everyone a fair opportunity to make their case," Harris said. He also singled out for praise Judge Bob Mock and Judge Robert

Rodatus, of whom the latter began their judicial career as a traffic court judge as well.

Gwinnett County's newest judge also believes his new position provides an opportunity to impart to younger defendants a respect for the court and the legal system. A good attitude may "determine whether or not your going home that day," Harris said.

While a new position always presents unique demands, Judge Harris is eager to embrace change. He relayed his affections for the Gwinnett County courts as a great place to practice, and emphasized the overall willingness of Judges, clerks' offices, and staff to go out of their way to do the best job they can.



“You don't have to know someone to get on the phone here and find out the right thing to do (for your client),” Harris said. He says he aims to maintain those standards of openness and friendliness for his office moving forward.

The key part of any orderly transition is continuity, and he credited Sheryl Davis and Roxann Perry for being extremely helpful.

I asked Harris if his friends treated him any differently since he's transitioned onto the bench. While he noted that some folks who know him well may sit up a little more straight when they talk to him, his contemporaries may find it a little awkward referring to him as Judge. Some of them have known him since before he was a lawyer and worked



with the Gwinnett County Department of Planning and Development.

To unwind, Judge Harris has two motorcycles, a chopper and a Harley, that he enjoys riding on quick getaways wherever the road takes him. With the energy he is bringing to this newest chapter in his career, there's no telling where the road will take Judge Harris next.

For a video of Judge Harris' Swearing in, visit Gwinnett County's Website at: <http://www.gwinnettcounty.com/portal/gwinnett/Departments/CountyAdministrator/Communications/TVGwinnett/VideoOnDemand>

Photos courtesy of Contributing Editor Margaret Washburn.