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Judicial Branch

# Kansas Courts News Release

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Chief Judge Michael Powers  
8th Judicial District

## Chief Judge Michael Powers to retire August 20

TOPEKA—Chief Judge Michael Powers of the 8th Judicial District will retire August 20 after 31 years of service.

Powers became a judge in 1991 and was named chief judge in 1994. The 8th Judicial District is composed of Dickinson, Geary, Marion, and Morris counties.

Powers said he always is aware that the role of a judge is one of public service.

“You have to check your ego at the door,” he said. “Your job is to conduct court in a way that inspires confidence in the system and gives attorneys a chance to try their cases as they see fit. You have to maintain control of court, and sometimes you have to be firm, but in a way that doesn’t belittle or embarrass people who aren’t in a position to respond.”

Judges make decisions every day that affect people’s lives. He said it’s encouraging and satisfying, after a difficult decision, to see a person turn his life around or children whose parents divorced grow up to be well-adjusted adults.

“It’s a nice feeling,” he said. “When you see good things happen, you know you made the right call.”

His work has not gone unnoticed. Last year, his peers honored him with the Kansas District Judges Association Award for Judicial Excellence. The award recognizes a judge’s:

- knowledge of the law and appropriate application of it to the issues and cases that come before the court;
- considerate and mindful treatment of attorneys, litigants, witnesses, and the general public in daily performance of judicial duties; and
- reputation and respect among peers, attorneys, litigants, and the general public.

Powers said one consistency during his years of working in the judicial system has been the quality of people with whom he has worked.

“I have met and worked with some of the finest people in the world. The staff of your local district court are hard-working and caring. They want to do their job correctly, and they sincerely want to help people. The same is true of the people working in the Kansas Judicial Center in Topeka,” he said.

“I have been amazed at how many smart, caring, and nice people I get to deal with. It’s humbling. I will miss being a judge, but mostly I will miss the people I’ve had the pleasure to work with,” he added.

In addition to their judicial responsibilities, chief judges have general control over case assignments within the district, as well as general supervisory authority over the administrative and clerical functions of the court.

Powers has served on many statewide committees outside of his work in the 8th Judicial District.

He is a member of the Kansas Supreme Court’s eCourt Steering Committee, which is

overseeing the implementation of a statewide centralized case management system that will complete the conversion from local, paper-driven processes to a statewide electronic one.

Powers' 8th Judicial District was the first of two districts to adopt the new centralized case management system.

Powers also chairs the eCourt Steering Committee's Workshare Subcommittee, which looks at how judicial branch employees can work more efficiently. All 105 counties will eventually operate on the same platform, providing standardization, efficiency, and accountability. Standardized processes will enable courts across Kansas to share work and provide a baseline for attorneys who practice in multiple state court jurisdictions.

Powers also has been involved in juvenile justice efforts. In 2017 he served on the Juvenile Justice Subcommittee of the Supreme Court Intermediate Intervention Program. He chaired the Supreme Court Task Force on Permanency Planning from 1997 to 1998 and served on the task force from 1995 to 2006. The task force advises the Supreme Court on ways to provide and improve the care of children who are under jurisdiction of the court.

He was a member of the Kansas Judicial Council's Public Defender Advisory Committee from 1987 to 1989 and the Attorney General's Victims' Rights Task Force from 1988 to 1989.

He served as president of the Kansas District Judges Association from 2015 to 2016 and on its executive committee from 2006 to 2017.

Before becoming a judge, Powers was county attorney in Morris County and in private practice. He received a bachelor's degree from Emporia State University and a law degree from the University of Kansas School of Law.

Powers has been active in numerous civic and community organizations. He cofounded and currently chairs the Marion Advancement Campaign, a community foundation. He cofounded and is a director of the Marion Economic Development Association. He was a founding member of the Chingawassa Days community festival. He also provides play-by-play commentary for cable TV broadcasts of Marion High School football games.

Powers and his wife, Judy, have five children and nine grandchildren.

District judges in the 8th Judicial District are appointed through a merit selection process. State statute requires a nominating commission to accept nominations, interview nominees, and forward the names of finalists to the governor, who appoints a replacement. After serving one year in office, the new judge must stand for a retention vote in the next general election to remain in the position. If retained, the incumbent will serve a four-year term.

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