

# JUDGE



JUDGE  
ANGELA E. ROBERTS

by Libby Carty McNamee

When Angela Roberts, then known as Gayle Edwards, was attending a segregated elementary school in Caroline County, the tumultuous events of the Civil Rights era unfolded around her. Recognizing the myriad of new opportunities for young African Americans, she decided to take full advantage by becoming a lawyer and then a prosecutor, never dreaming that one day she would be the first female African-American judge in the Commonwealth.

"It took me a while to accept the fact that I had such a powerful and influential position—and my family too," she reminisces with a chuckle. "My son was two at the time of my investiture ceremony. He had no idea who this Judge Roberts person was whom everyone kept referencing. When I stood up to take my oath, he exclaimed in the silent courtroom, 'That's my mommy!'"

Reflecting back after 16 years as an inner city Juvenile and Domestic Relations judge, she confides, "I like what I do. I am passionate about it and feel that I am making a difference. It is wonderful to have the power to change and affect lives in a positive way as well as to influence policy decisions and help create programs. I enjoy helping individuals get their lives back on track."

In speaking of the challenges, Judge Roberts declares, "It is frustrating to see young people get stuck in the cycle of poverty with teenage pregnancies and dropping out of school. I preach to them to stay in school and get an education, to keep their lives going in a positive direction. Likewise it is frustrating to see adults neglect their families, both financially and emotionally. It is also frustrating to see members of the community feel like there is nothing they can do because the problems are so overwhelming." To avoid that feel-

ing of being overwhelmed, she encourages people to try to make a difference in just one person's life. She offered a number of ways to get involved, such as mentoring, coaching, donating to charities that support at-risk youth, or becoming a volunteer advocate through the Court Appointed Special Advocate program for abused and neglected children.

"I try to keep my personal feelings and emotions out of the case, so I can rule most effectively. In custody and visitation cases, I often speak to the children in my chambers. Thankfully I am able to draw on my experiences as a mother to understand the many developmental stages that children go through."

On the delicate balance between work and family, she declares, "I have found that you have to plan family time. I have been extremely fortunate to have such a strong support system of family, friends, and daycare. My husband is incredibly involved and spends a tremendous amount of time with the boys." She continues with a wry smile, "I try to juggle it all, even being my 14-year-old son's Boy Scouts Troop Committee Chair. But with all of those balls in the air, you just hope you don't drop one."

From the looks of things, Judge Roberts does a mighty fine juggling act. The citizens of Richmond are lucky to have her! **V**

**V** Libby Carty McNamee is a local freelance writer and attorney.