The Justices
of the
Supreme Court of Ohio
Since the establishment of the judicial branch of Ohio government with the adoption of the first state Constitution, 156 men and women have served as judges and justices of the Supreme Court of Ohio. These public servants have come from every corner of our diverse state. That first Constitution provided for a court consisting of three judges and required they hold session each year in every county of Ohio. So the judges traveled extensively on horseback, and the early sessions of the court were not held in courtrooms or the Statehouse, but in private homes.

Today, there are seven justices who serve on the court, each elected by the citizens of Ohio in all 88 counties. The justices serve six-year terms, with two seats open for election every even-numbered year. The exception is in the year when the position of chief justice is open, when three seats are up for election. The chief justice, in addition to hearing cases and writing opinions, oversees the administrative functions of the court and its superintendence of the Ohio judiciary.

The justices hear oral arguments, deliberate on cases, and conduct other business in the Thomas J. Moyer Ohio Judicial Center, the court’s home on the Scioto River in Columbus. The court still holds session outside of Columbus twice each year in a program designed to educate high school students about the judicial branch and the workings of the court.

This guide is designed to introduce citizens to the justices of the Supreme Court by providing basic biographical information. For more information about the justices, the court, and the state judiciary, including live and archived video of oral arguments, visit the Supreme Court website at supremecourt.ohio.gov.
Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor is the 10th chief justice in Ohio history and is the first woman to lead the Ohio judicial branch.

She first joined the Supreme Court of Ohio as an associate justice in January 2003. She was re-elected in November 2008 in a landslide victory in which she carried each of Ohio’s 88 counties and took approximately 68 percent of the vote. She was elected chief justice in 2010, by a 2-to-1 margin over her challenger and again carrying every county.

Her first statewide judicial election in 2002, in which she took more than 57 percent of the vote, made her the 148th justice to the court, the sixth woman to join the court, and gave the court its first-ever female majority.

Born in the nation’s capital, but raised in Strongsville and Parma, Chief Justice O’Connor’s career in public service and the law spans three decades and includes service as a private lawyer, magistrate, common pleas court judge, prosecutor, and Supreme Court justice.

She earned her bachelor of arts at Seton Hill College in 1973 before going on to earn her law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 1980.

While gaining experience in practice as an attorney during the early 1980s, Chief Justice O’Connor created a home for her family and her legal career in Northeast Ohio. Appointed a magistrate in Summit County in 1985, she served in that capacity until becoming a common pleas court judge in 1993. As a busy trial judge, Chief Justice O’Connor was selected by her peers to serve as the administrative judge — a testament to her ability to build coalitions and maintain collegiality while administering to the business of the courts.

She resigned from the bench to become the Summit County prosecuting attorney in 1995. There, she aggressively prosecuted repeat offenders, violent criminals, and public officials who committed ethical violations or improprieties, and lobbied for tougher laws on rape and gang-related offenses. Her untiring work received accolades from victims’ rights groups and educational institutions, and earned awards from Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Cleveland State University. As prosecutor, Chief Justice O’Connor also lobbied the General Assembly on important criminal justice reforms.

In 1998, she was elected lieutenant governor — the second-highest official in the state. She became the governor’s chief advisor on criminal justice issues, serving as director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and as chair of Ohio’s Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, she led the state in its response to new threats of terrorism by working with law enforcement, the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, efforts that garnered the praise of federal homeland security officials.

Chief Justice O’Connor also has raised two adult sons, Alex and Ed Kipp, who both married lovely intelligent women, much to her surprise and delight.

Last day of current term: December 31, 2016.
Justice Paul E. Pfeifer grew up on his family’s dairy farm near Bucyrus. He still resides just down the road. As a teenager, he raised purebred Yorkshire hogs to finance his college education. Those years taught him the value of hard work, determination, and clean overalls.

Justice Pfeifer’s first job after graduating from OSU’s law school was as an assistant attorney general trying eminent-domain cases associated with the building of Ohio’s highway system. Traveling the state gave him an appreciation for Ohio’s county courthouses, architectural jewels that are the crossroads of life in our towns and cities. He always tries to keep in mind how the Supreme Court’s decisions might affect the people seeking justice in county courthouses every day.

In 1972, he became a partner in the law firm of Cory, Brown & Pfeifer, where he practiced — primarily as a trial and tax lawyer — for 20 years. He also served several years as an assistant county prosecutor.

Justice Pfeifer served in both houses of the Ohio General Assembly, including one term in the House of Representatives and four terms in the Senate. He held a variety of leadership posts in the Senate, and served as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee for 10 years. His proudest legislative accomplishment was crafting the legislation creating the Ohio Tuition Trust Authority.

Justice Pfeifer was first elected to the Supreme Court in 1992. For him, the most inspiring thing about the Court is that every voice gets heard, from that of the widow fighting for her husband’s workers’ compensation benefits, to those of corporations battling over tens of millions of dollars.

He began his fourth Supreme Court term in January 2011. At Justice Pfeifer’s side was his wife, Julie, whom he first met when their steers were tied across from each other at the Crawford County Fair “more years ago than it would be polite to mention.” Together, they have two daughters, Lisa and Beth, a son, Kurt, four granddaughters and one grandson.

Because of his career in state government, Justice Pfeifer has one foot in the capital city, but the other always remained firmly planted in his hometown, where he has his own farm now. He raises Black Angus cattle, and enjoys the time spent outdoors doing chores. He says there is clarity to life in the country, where there is no pomp and circumstance, just the green fields of Crawford County, a gaggle of grandkids who call him “Papa,” and a herd of Angus that know him as the guy with the hay.

Last day of current term: January 1, 2017.
Justice Terrence O’Donnell joined the Supreme Court of Ohio in 2003, and since that time has led statewide efforts to increase professionalism among lawyers and judges across Ohio. His leadership culminated in the implementation of a Lawyer to Lawyer Mentoring Program that is recognized nationally as one of the finest in the United States. He regularly speaks on topics of ethics, professionalism, and appellate advocacy, and also supports the expansion and strengthening of lawyer mentoring in Ohio. Additionally, he participated in a national forum on professionalism and mentoring at the University of South Carolina.

Justice O’Donnell began his judicial career in 1980 on the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court — the busiest trial court in Ohio — and served there for 14 years until his election to the Eighth District Court of Appeals in 1994. He served there for eight years, and subsequently served as a visiting trial court judge in various counties throughout the state before joining the Supreme Court in 2003.

He began his legal career at the Ohio Supreme Court as a law clerk to Justice J.J.P. Corrigan in 1971, and then clerked for Judges John V. Corrigan and John M. Manos on the Eighth District Court of Appeals. Before beginning his judicial service, he practiced law with the firm of Marshman, Snyder & Corrigan in Cleveland for six years.

A former school teacher, Justice O’Donnell is a founding member and past president of the Legal Eagles — a law fraternity for alumni of St. Edward High School in Lakewood, and a frequent lecturer at its year-end seminar. He also is a member of the Ohio State Bar Foundation Fellows Class of 2005, a past member of the board of trustees of Magnificat High School, and the board of trustees of the Lawyers Guild of the Diocese of Cleveland.

Justice O’Donnell also was chairman of the Ohio Legal Rights Service Commission, which oversees the protection and advocacy of the developmentally disabled and mentally ill statewide. He is a past member of the board of trustees of Our Lady of the Wayside, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the needs of the mentally and physically challenged where his brother, John, lived for 10 years until he died in 2011.

Justice O’Donnell has been honored by every school and university he attended: St. Edward High School presented him with its Alumnus of the Year Award in 2005, Kent State University recognized him as an outstanding graduate of the College of Arts & Sciences, and Cleveland State University awarded him its Distinguished Alumni Award. In addition, the University of Akron School of Law conferred an honorary doctor of law degree when he presented the commencement address in 2005.

He also is a 2006 recipient of the Jurisprudence Award from the American ORT Cleveland Chapter, and he became a member of the 2011 Irish Legal 100, a group of prominent Irish lawyers and judges selected from across the United States.

Justice O’Donnell currently resides in Rocky River with his wife, Mary Beth. The couple has four adult children — Terrence, Michael, Colleen, and Nora, and enjoy spending time with their six grandchildren, Terrence, Charlie, Claire, Emmett, Kevin, and Molly.

Last day of current term: December 31, 2018.
In 2004, Judith Ann Lanzinger made history by becoming the only person ever elected to all four levels of the Ohio judiciary. She was re-elected to a second six-year term in 2010. Over the last 27 years, she has served on the Supreme Court, the Sixth District Court of Appeals, the Lucas County Court of Common Pleas and the Toledo Municipal Court. This background gives her a wide-ranging perspective of Ohio’s court system.

The granddaughter of coal-miners and daughter of a carpenter, Justice Lanzinger was the first one in her family to attend college. She received a bachelor’s degree magna cum laude in education and English from the University of Toledo. She then taught elementary school and started a family before earning a law degree cum laude at the University of Toledo College of Law where she was valedictorian of her class. She was named Distinguished Alumna of her alma mater in 2012.

Before taking the bench, Justice Lanzinger worked in the Toledo Edison legal department and then practiced law for five years with Shumaker, Loop and Kendrick. Later, as a judge, she won scholarships to become one of the first to earn a master’s degree in judicial studies from the University of Nevada, Reno and the National Judicial College, where she was recognized for 12 years of faculty service.

She was an adjunct professor for 18 years at her former law school and also taught judicial courses throughout the United States, as well as in the former Soviet Union. She continues to speak about the court system to community groups, and has special interest in the Law and Leadership program.

In the spring of 2010, Justice Lanzinger started a blog, justicejudy.blogspot.com, for public education about the courts. She is Ohio’s representative for former U.S. Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s www.icivics.org, a national website with a similar intent. Her special interest in the use of technology and writing spurred her to chair a committee that published the first Supreme Court Writing Manual in 2012.

Justice Lanzinger has performed extra-judicial service in her quarter of a century as a judge. She was the first chair of the Supreme Court Commission on the Rules of Superintendence for Ohio Courts. Previously, she served as chairperson and a board member of the Ohio Judicial College.

She is past president of the Morrison R. Waite American Inn of Court and now serves as the Supreme Court liaison to the Ohio Historical Courts Society. She also served as co-chair of the Public Education and Awareness Task Force of the Ohio Courts Futures Commission and was a member of the Supreme Court of Ohio Board of Commissioners on Grievances & Discipline, as well as the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission.

Among her awards are the Toledo Junior Bar’s Order of the Heel and the Arabella Babb Mansfield Award from the Toledo Women’s Bar Association, both given for assistance to young lawyers. Married for more than 40 years, the justice and her husband, Robert Lanzinger, live in Toledo and have a daughter, son, and son-in-law, who are all attorneys, and three grandchildren, who keep her well-balanced and enjoying life.

Last day of current term: December 31, 2016.
On November 4, 2014, Justice Sharon L. Kennedy was re-elected to a full term on the Supreme Court of Ohio in a decisive victory, winning all 88 counties and garnering 73 percent of the vote. Justice Kennedy first joined the court in 2012, having been elected to fill an unexpired term.

Prior to her term on the Ohio Supreme Court, Justice Sharon L. Kennedy served at the Butler County Court of Common Pleas, Domestic Relations Division since 1999. From 2005 until December of 2012, Justice Kennedy served as the administrative judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Domestic Relations Division.

Serving as the administrative judge, Justice Kennedy improved the case management system to ensure the timely resolution of cases for families and children. Working with state legislators she championed a “common sense” family law initiative to reduce multiple-forum litigation for Butler County families.

During Justice Kennedy’s term as administrative judge, Butler County faced tough economic times. Justice Kennedy organized concerned elected officials in a county-wide Budget Work Group. Seeing the need to bring private sector financial know-how to the government, she worked to create the Advisory Committee to the Budget Work Group. Serving as its facilitator, Justice Kennedy led discussions between county officials and private sector leaders to analyze county finances, study and implement cost saving measures, and present business-driven fiscal policy to the county commissioners.

Beginning her legal career as a solo practitioner, Justice Kennedy ran a small business of her own. While in private practice she served the legal needs of families, juveniles, and the less fortunate. As special counsel for former Attorney General Betty D. Montgomery, Justice Kennedy fought on behalf of Ohio’s taxpayers to collect monies due to the State of Ohio. As a part-time magistrate in the Butler County Area Courts, Justice Kennedy presided over a wide array of civil litigation and assisted law enforcement officers and private citizens seeking the issuance of criminal warrants for arrest.

Justice Kennedy began her career in the justice system as a police officer at the Hamilton Police Department. She worked undercover operations, implemented crime prevention programs, and later, as a civil assistant, assisted in drafting police policy and procedure for the accreditation program.

Throughout her career Justice Kennedy has served on numerous boards, developed and facilitated programs to address the needs of young people, and worked with judges across the state. As a dedicated jurist she has received numerous awards of recognition, including, The Furtherance of Justice Award, in 2001; Above the Fold Award, in 2002; Judge of the Year, in 2006; Excellence in Public Service, in June 2009; and was named one of 15 professional women to watch by The Cincinnati Enquirer, on March 17, 2013.

Last day of current term: December 31, 2020.
Justice Judith L. French became the 155th justice of the Ohio Supreme Court on January 1, 2013, following her appointment by Gov. John R. Kasich in December 2012.

On November 4, 2014, she was elected to her first full term in office.

Prior to her appointment, Justice French served at the Tenth District Court of Appeals, which hears appeals from Franklin County courts and state administrative agencies. She was elected to the appellate court in November 2004 and served until her appointment.

Prior to becoming a judge, Justice French served as chief legal counsel to former Governor Bob Taft. Dedicated to public service, Justice French also served as an assistant attorney general and then chief counsel in the office of Attorney General Betty D. Montgomery from 1997 to 2002. While there, she argued twice in the United States Supreme Court. Most recently, she argued on behalf of the State in the Cleveland school-vouchers case.

Justice French began her state service in 1993 as deputy director for legal affairs at the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. She also was an associate counsel at Steelcase Inc. in Grand Rapids, Mich., and an associate at the Columbus law firm of Porter, Wright, Morris & Arthur, where she practiced environmental law.

Justice French earned a B.A. in Political Science, an M.A. in History (Military History & Strategic Studies), and a J.D. (with honors), all from The Ohio State University. She currently serves as a member of the Moritz College of Law National Council.

Justice French grew up in Sebring, Ohio, a small town in Mahoning County and was a mentor and tutor in the Columbus public schools. Justice French resides in Grandview Heights with her husband, Ed Skeens, who is a magistrate in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, and two children, Julia and Joseph.

Last day of current term: January 1, 2021.
Justice William M. O’Neill became the 156th justice of the Ohio Supreme Court on January 2, 2013. His life has been dedicated to public service. Justice O’Neill is a former judge, an army officer, a registered nurse, and an adoptive parent.

Prior to becoming a justice, Justice O’Neill served on the Eleventh District Court of Appeals from 1997 until 2007. He was most recently a registered nurse at Hillcrest Hospital, an affiliate of the Cleveland Clinic Foundation. He also is a former army officer, Vietnam veteran, and was both a newspaper and television reporter.

Justice O’Neill is a graduate of Ohio University, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, and Huron School of Nursing. Before being elected to the Eleventh District Court of Appeals, Justice O’Neill was an assistant attorney general for the state of Ohio from 1984 to 1996, representing the Ohio Civil Rights Commission and the Industrial Commission of Ohio. In private practice, he founded O’Neill & Brown in Geneva, Ohio, where he represented small businesses and individuals in both civil and criminal cases.

Justice O’Neill is a retired lieutenant colonel in the United States Army and was awarded the Bronze Star and the Army Commendation Medal for his service during the Vietnam War. He served as the commanding officer of the Armored Cavalry Troop from Painesville, and retired from the Ohio National Guard as a Judge Advocate General (JAG) Lieutenant Colonel in 1996. In 2007, LTC O’Neill, U.S. Army (Retired), was inducted into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame.

Justice O’Neill has four grown children.

Last day of current term: January 1, 2019.