

William & Mary Law School Completes Major McGlothlin Courtroom Renovation Project

By Ami Dodson

William and Mary Law School has reopened the McGlothlin Courtroom after an extensive renovation project undertaken during the summer of 2009. The renovations have improved upon what was already the most technologically advanced trial and appellate courtroom in the world.

The courtroom is named in memory of B. F. McGlothlin, Sr., and Annie L. McGlothlin, in recognition of a gift made to the Law School in 1990 by their son Woodrow McGlothlin, grandsons James W. McGlothlin and Nicholas D. Street, and The United Co. of Bristol, Virginia. James W. McGlothlin, a 1962 graduate of the College of William & Mary and a 1964 graduate of the Law School, is Chairman and CEO of The United Company and is an emeritus member of William & Mary's Board of Visitors.

The Center for Legal and Court Technology (CLCT), a joint project of the William & Mary Law School and the National Center for State Courts, oversaw the renovation work. The CLCT determined that major improvements could be achieved if the courtroom underwent a substantial renovation. Accordingly, most of the courtroom was stripped to its cinderblock walls and concrete floor, and the walls, floor, millwork, and technology were replaced.

"Other courtrooms around the world can do some of the same things the McGlothlin Courtroom achieves," said Fredric Lederer, Chancellor Professor of Law and Director of the CLCT, "but there is no other courtroom that can do everything we do as fast and thoroughly as we do. The McGlothlin Courtroom is a world pilot for court technology. If it doesn't start here, it definitely comes through here."

The equipment for the new courtroom was primarily donated from companies around the globe. The total value of the replacement technology is approximately \$1.8 million.

"Companies are willing to donate their labor and loan us their new technology products in the hope of exposure to the courtroom's many visitors," noted Lederer. "People from all around the world come to look at and tour our courtroom. Visitors often see new technology here first." The CLCT lists its sponsors and supporters on its website and also reports any perceived difficulties with the equipment back to the donors with suggestions for possible upgrades.

One new feature of note in the renovated courtroom is a jury box designed to accommodate jurors with disabilities, such as visual or mobility impairment. While other courtrooms may offer these accommodations, the McGlothlin Courtroom is the only courtroom that can supply the needed equipment with virtually no prior notice. The supplies necessary to accommodate a visually impaired person, for example, are often very large and cumbersome, but the McGlothlin Courtroom is able to provide this type of accommodation quickly and efficiently.

Additionally, the McGlothlin Courtroom offers extensive video conferencing capabilities. It can operate virtual trials either at the trial or appellate level, and its switching system is the most comprehensive of any in the world.

“Pragmatically, we can do anything you can imagine within the scope of modern technology,” Lederer noted, “and perhaps a few things we can’t imagine. Since we cannot always predict what we will need to do, we must have the capability to react quickly when a new requirement presents itself. This is the area where the McGlothlin Courtroom particularly excels.”