



NAMELINE: The Honorable Brett M. Spencer

Adams County judge selected as SSCC commencement speaker

The Honorable Brett M. Spencer has been chosen to deliver the commencement address at Southern State Community College on May 3.

“We are delighted to hear that Judge Spencer has accepted the invitation to deliver the address for our 38th annual commencement ceremony,” said Dr. Kevin Boys, SSCC President. “Our aim has been to select speakers who have been impacted by Southern State and who are capable of inspiring our graduating class. Judge Spencer is one who believes in education and its power to transform the lives of individuals, families and communities. I look forward to his challenging encouragement to the SSCC Class of 2013.”

Judge Spencer presides over the Adams County Common Pleas Probate and Juvenile Court. A graduate of Manchester High School, he earned his bachelor’s degree in agriculture from The Ohio State University and his juris doctorate from the University of Toledo. He worked as a private practice attorney until election to his

current appointment in 2005. He is currently serving his second term. He, along with his wife Sherri and son Marshall, live on a farm in Manchester.

Because Judge Spencer is assigned to multiple jurisdictions—the Common Pleas, Probate, and Juvenile Courts and Probation Department—he says, “I get to see all aspects of law and it gives me the broad picture; I’m exposed to it all.”

Beyond his experience in the courts system, Judge Spencer inherently understands the road to higher education is not always easy.

“My father was raised in an orphanage and my mother quit high school to work in a factory so that he could pursue his education,” he said. “My mom eventually went back to school and earned her GED and realtor’s license.”

In Adams County, Judge Spencer has become a champion for the General Educational Development (GED) diploma, sometimes ordering defendants to complete a GED in lieu of harsher penalties. They don’t have to travel far to get one either. Through Southern State Community College’s Adult Opportunity Center, a GED preparation class is on site in the Adams County Courthouse.

“When Judge Spencer first took over in Adams County, 92 percent of the felony cases were committed by people who did not have a high school diploma. He decided then that he needed to make sure more people graduate,” said Mike Cluxton, Adams County truancy mediator and retired assistant principal of Manchester High School. “He has always been a proponent of the GED program, but it didn’t take off until he partnered with Southern State and got the program set up in the courthouse. Our idea is that we’re going to take away all the excuses.”

Not only does Judge Spencer court order GED completion, he also regularly visits the classroom to see if students need anything, including transportation or childcare.

“What we’ve found is that most of them really appreciate the support they get from us. Some continue to make bad choices, but not many,” Cluxton said. “The judge is just phenomenal. He won’t take the credit, but it starts at the top and you need someone who is a champion for the cause.”

When Judge Spencer takes the stage to deliver his commencement address on May 3, a certain special person will be among those receiving their degrees – his son Marshall, a high school senior.

Graduating high school and college at the same time, Marshall will be in good company. A good number of the 2013 graduating class is taking advantage of the college’s post-secondary enrollment option (PSEO) program which offers the dual opportunity.

“How does that happen in just two generations?” asked Spencer, contrasting his son’s vanguard achievement with his parents’ struggles. “Their grandson is graduating high school with an associate’s degree. It’s a shame they’re not still alive to witness this.”

Following in his dad’s footsteps, Marshall will head to Ohio State this fall. He’s already been accepted into OSU’s Fisher College of Business and successfully transferred 11 of his 12 Southern State classes.

Southern State’s commencement exercises will be held 7 p.m. Friday, May 3, in the Patriot Center on the college’s Central Campus, 100 Hobart Drive, Hillsboro. For more information, please call 1-800-628-7722 ext. 2623 or visit www.sccc.edu/students/graduation.shtml.

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