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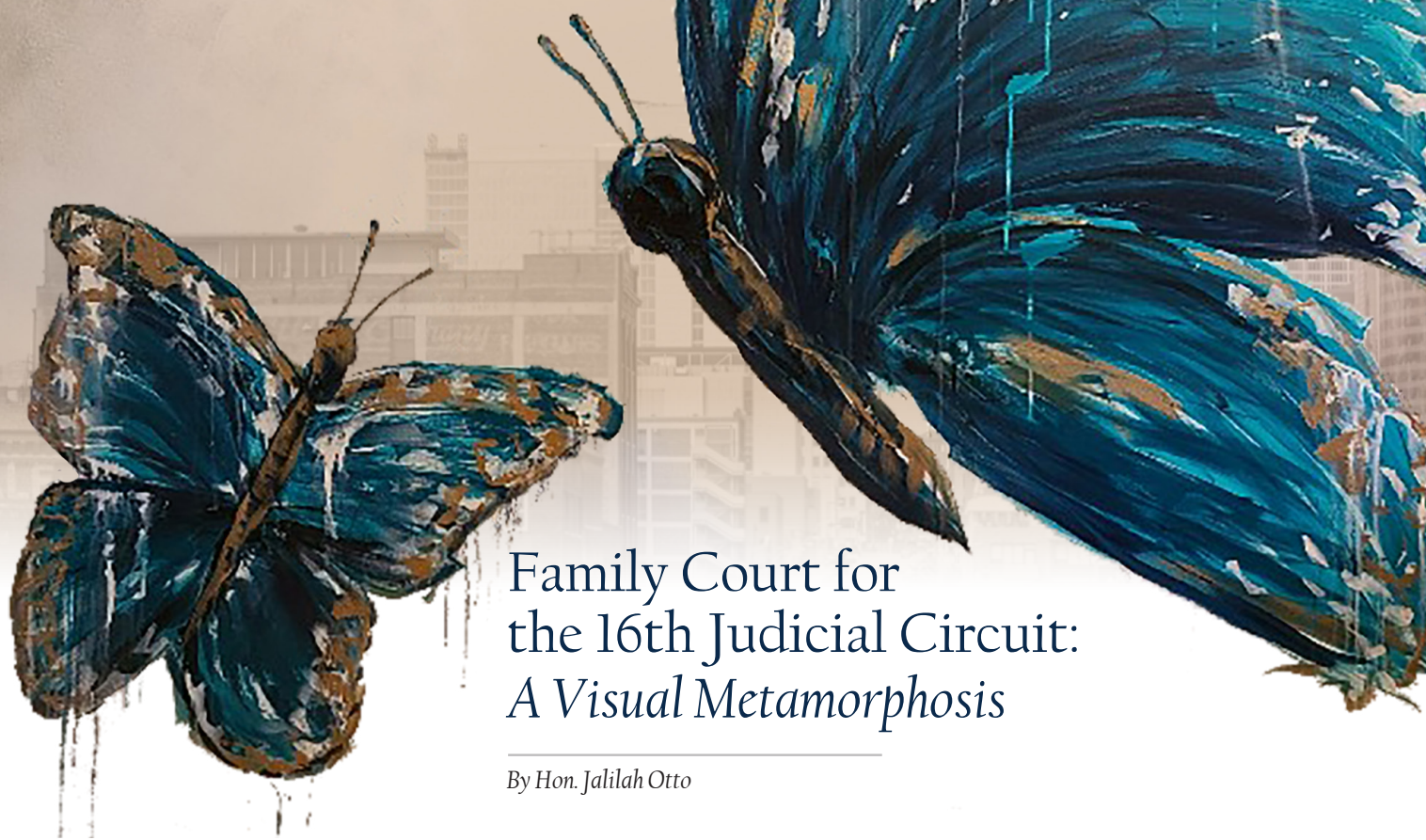
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Your Guide to 2023 KCMBA  
Sections & Committees

Family Court for the  
16th Judicial Circuit:  
A Visual Metamorphosis





## Family Court for the 16th Judicial Circuit: *A Visual Metamorphosis*

By Hon. Jalilah Otto

In January 2020, I was assigned to serve as the Family Court Administrative Judge in Jackson County. Moving from my familiar chambers in the Downtown Courthouse, to preside over cases in an area of the law that was completely new to me, was challenging. Much like the families that we serve at the Family Justice Center, I was nervous and unsure about my surroundings. Essentially, I felt a small fraction of the intimidation that families experience each day in Family Court.

If you have ever worked or received an appointment to serve as an attorney at the Family Justice Center, you understand that the waiting room is not the easiest place to be. All families that enter the waiting room bring with them some level of intimidation, trauma, and fear of the unknown, as they are uncertain of the outcome of their case. This tension is often palpable.

Over the years the waiting room had become worn and dated. It was less than welcoming and mirrored the angst that people brought with them as they entered the building at 625 E. 26th Street in Kansas City. This became even more apparent when the waiting room became largely vacant during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Court pivoted to hearings held by videoconferencing, the Family Court took the opportunity to update the space to make it more welcoming, friendly, and uplifting.

Enter designer A.J. Miller and decorative artist Kerry Stucky.

Miller volunteered her design expertise in helping the Court select paint, carpeting and chairs for the courtrooms and reception area. She told us to “trust the process,” when we questioned her palette selections. So, we moved out of her way.

“I love giving back to the community in whatever way I can, and when it comes to design issues - that is right up my alley as that is what I do for my profession,” Miller said. “And, what a wonderful opportunity for me to make it a better and happier place for the people who come to court.”

Miller also asked Kerry Stucky, a professional artist who has done custom work for some of Miller’s clients, if she would paint six murals. Stucky agreed to volunteer her time and talent for the project.

Miller, Stucky, and I spent a lot of time talking through ideas and concepts before we settled on the idea of transformation. Metamorphosis. Reemergence.

“*We wanted to convey that the children and families who come through the Family Justice center can achieve anything and go anywhere from here.*”

We wanted to convey that the children and families who come through the Family Justice Center can achieve anything and go anywhere from here. They can soar. They can emerge from a place of darkness to a place of beauty.

For over six months in her spare time, Stucky worked in the kitchen of her home painting images of transformation over the Court’s old murals. There are six canvases, 8.5 feet by 3.5 feet, too big to get down the stairs to her basement studio. So large that they touched her kitchen ceiling. “I knew they were big, but I did not fully understand their scale until they were in my house,” she said.

The Court supplied the materials, the acrylic paint and brushes. Stucky gave the extraordinary gift of her creativity and artistic expression. The murals are absolutely fantastic. Vibrant. Beautiful. Powerful. Hopeful.



Kerry Stucky



About the Designer - **A.J. Miller** is the owner of "Ready Set Gorgeous." She has been designing and decorating homes and office spaces for 18 years. She says she works with clients who have "big budgets, small budgets and no budgets." She is known in the legal community through her husband, attorney Pat Miller.



Top Right: Hon. Jalilah Otto and mural artist Kerry Stucky

Middle Left: Commissioner Nancy Alemifar unveiling a mural during the reception

Stucky talked about her thought process in creating the work when the murals were unveiled for judges and court staff at a reception last year. Upon reflection she stated that she was inclined to call the series of paintings, "After the Darkness."

She said she wanted her work to "uplift the children" and wanted to express that, "transformation is painful, but is glorious in the end."

When asked why she donated her time, Stucky stated, "I think the best way to describe my willingness to participate is that I really feel that so many people just need to see the positive. We all, as humans, face struggles. We have all watched and experienced pain. The best part about being alive is connecting with other souls and somehow, we can remind each other that somewhere there is light."

The work at the Family Court can be heavy, but there is now a lightness in the building that was not previously there.

On behalf of the entire 16th Judicial Circuit Court, I want to express that

we are extremely grateful for, and humbled by, volunteers such as Miller and Stucky, and all of the attorneys and members of the Bar and greater community, who unselfishly give their time and talents to the Family Court. You have had a greater impact on the Court than you can imagine. Together all of these meaningful contributions help fulfill the Family Court's mission of "Guiding families to a brighter tomorrow." We truly appreciate each and every one of you for your volunteer work at the Court.

Enjoy the butterflies. ■

## About the Author



**Hon. Jallilah Otto** is currently the Presiding Judge of the 16th Judicial Circuit Court. She started her two-year term of office on January 1, 2023. She previously served as Family Court Administrative Judge from January 2020 to January 2022.



About the Artist - **Kerry Stucky** is a decorative artist who creates custom work for residential and commercial clients. Her works consists mostly of painting, although clients sometimes bring sculptures to her that they want repaired. She also does photography.