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FROM: Chambers of the Chief Judge  
19th Judicial Circuit  
Lake County  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Waukegan, Illinois

## 19<sup>TH</sup> Judicial Circuit Employees Honored

"I am very happy and honored to be here with all of you, including all of you via video simulcast at the Juvenile Complex in Vernon Hills, to recognize the Circuit's outstanding employees for the year 2015," said Chief Judge Jorge Ortiz. "I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your hard work and dedication that makes this Circuit the best in the state."

The 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit holds its Employee Awards ceremony annually to recognize staff members of the Circuit who are nominated and selected by their peers for the following awards: Environmental Sustainability Award; Exceptional Employee Award of the Year; Bonds Officer of the Year; Leadership and Excellence Award; and the Employee of the Year.

The "**Environmental Sustainability Award**" is presented to an employee or organization for their dedication to green practices both in the workplace and in the community that promotes recycling, waste reduction and energy conservation. This year, in place of rewarding one person or an organization, the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Green Team and the County Green Team decided to share a couple of accomplishments and activities reached in 2015. For example, the Green Teams sponsored and participated in Swalco's "Reuse-A-Shoe" Program whereby 800 pairs of shoes were collected. Another was the first organized raised community gardens. These gardens were built by Facilities and are located near the Jury Commission Parking lot on Martin Luther King Avenue, at the Health Department on Grand Avenue, and at the Central Permit Facility in Libertyville. Lake County employees planted and tended to these gardens over lunch hours and after work and shared the harvest at the end of the summer.

The "**Kay S. Finn and Sarah G. Anderson Exceptional Employee Award**" is given to a non-sworn administrative employee who best demonstrates the highest effort in support of the Circuit's mission. The recipient of this year's award is Amy Weltlich, Executive Assistant in Psychological Services. Amy joined the Division in November 2011 for the purpose of

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overseeing the new Fee for Service Program. She was instrumental in the development of the program, working independently to bring about its success with over \$63,000 in collections to date. Amy is highly respected by her co-workers and is frequently the “go to” person for projects in need of her skilled and expedient assistance.

The **“Lawrence Bonds Officer of the Year Award”** was given to Cristina Thornton, Senior Probation Officer in Adult Probation. Cristina has been an employee of Adult Probation for over seven years working in Field Supervision and General Field Units. She works tirelessly with probationers, encouraging them to fight for sobriety and does whatever she can to help individuals find treatment programs. She volunteers often; assisting with Spanish speaking clients, the Mentoring Program, female drug testing and training new employees. The award is given to a sworn officer who supports and promotes the values of the organization in terms of loyalty, ethics, and delivery of service. Cristina is a highly organized individual who puts the organization first and is proud to represent the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit.

Mario Urbina, Principal Juvenile Probation Officer, was named the recipient of the **“Leadership and Excellence Award.”** Mario has been with the 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit’s Juvenile Division for 27 years. He is dedicated to his work to improve the lives of the youth he works with. He is also recognized for his creative initiatives, including the Jr’s Challenge experiential learning program. This award is presented to a judicial staff employee who best illustrates the Circuit’s mission to the citizens of Lake County, the judiciary and fellow employees by setting the standard in leadership and excellence. Mario excels in areas of commitment to the organization’s values and ethics as well as leadership and innovation. He is committed to the field of juvenile justice and currently serves as Vice President of the Juvenile Officers Association. Mario is a true leader and highly respected by his co-workers and the many community agencies he interfaces with daily.

Each year an employee of the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit is selected by co-workers as the **“Employee of the Year.”** This award is looked upon as the highest honor bestowed on any employee. The successful contender is selected from the twelve employees who were recognized as an Employee of the Month. Nominations are made by fellow employees, with the winners selected by a committee of peers representing the divisions of the Circuit.

Judge Ortiz announced, “On behalf of the judges and staff of the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, I am very pleased to announce that the Employee of the Year for 2015 is Cassandra (Cassie) Smith.” Cassie is a member of the Jury Commission and is being honored for her attributes of being a self-starter, teaching herself the process and responsibilities of the jury system (having to digest many processes in a very short period of time while her supervisor was out on medical leave), and having an excellent work ethic. Cassie’s pleasant demeanor creates a welcoming environment in the Jury Commission office and is very helpful when dealing with jurors, many of whom are hesitant or reluctant to serve. Cassie has been with the Circuit since April 2014.

The annual event took place on Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, in the Jury Assembly Room at the main courthouse in Waukegan.

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