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DAILY REPORT

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Judge Wright's next gig: Mediator at Boyd Collar Nolen & Tuggle

SHE SEES ROLE as an extension of her work on Fulton Superior bench

MEREDITH HOBBS | mhobbs@alm.com

JUDGE CYNTHIA WRIGHT has decided to start a mediation and arbitration practice at family law firm Boyd Collar Nolen & Tuggle after she retires from the Fulton County Superior Court bench later this year.

"I love what I do, and I'd like to do it in a different context," she said.

Wright has spent almost 20 years as a Fulton judge—12 of them on the Superior Court's family law bench. She's also chaired Fulton Superior's business court and its Alternative Dispute Resolution Board.

At Boyd Collar Nolen & Tuggle, the judge plans to handle family law disputes, as well as civil disputes for individuals, businesses and government entities.

Gov. Zell Miller appointed Wright, his counsel, to the Fulton State Court in 1995 and promoted her to the Superior Court in 1996. She became the first judge for Fulton Superior's



JOHN DISNEY/DAILY REPORT

Judge Cynthia Wright, who will retire from Fulton Superior Court this fall, has decided on next job.

family court division, handling a docket made up solely of family law cases, when the court launched

it as a pilot program in 1998. When Wright became chief judge in 2010, she switched to a general civil case

docket so she would have time for the extra administrative duties. “The family division is very time-consuming. You have to be present whenever people need you,” she said.

“I’ve spent the last four years doing civil cases, which is a good background for mediating business disputes,” Wright said. “Business disputes are really the same thing as family disputes—but you’re dealing with, for example, a condo association instead of family members.”

Wright’s second term as chief judge concluded at the end of January, and her current term as a Fulton Superior Court judge expires at the end of the year. That started her thinking about what she wanted to do next, she said.

Wright, 59, plans to step down from the bench in the fall and then, after a sabbatical, join Boyd Collar Nolen & Tuggle as a partner, likely by the end of the year.

“I have a whole lot of respect for them. We’ve established a professional friendship over the years. They’ve watched me grow and I’ve watched them grow. It’s time to grow together,” she said.

John Collar Jr., one of the firm’s founders, said that he and his partners started talking to the judge about joining them after she finished up her term as chief earlier this year. “She is so valuable to us that we are willing to wait for her,” he said.

With the alternative dispute resolution practice, Wright will expand Boyd Collar Nolen & Tuggle’s practice beyond family law, Collar said. “We occasionally get asked to han-

dle a mediation or arbitrate a family law matter, but what’s unique about Judge Wright joining us is that she has tremendous experience in handling family law matters and also civil, commercial and government-related issues.”



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—Judge Cynthia Wright

“What we hope to develop is a private courtroom concept,” Collar said, adding that the firm will expand its Cobb County office space to accommodate mediations and arbitrations. “A lot of people prefer to resolve a dispute in a more private setting. ... Judge Wright can continue to do what she’s done for the past 20 years, and it will expand our practice.”

The 15-lawyer divorce and family law firm is at 3300 Cumberland Blvd. S.E., near the intersection of I-285 and I-75.

Parties choose alternative dispute resolution over litigation because they can schedule their matters in a more expedient fashion than waiting to appear on an overcrowded court docket or because they do not want their dispute aired in a public forum, Collar said.

Many business contracts specify that disputes must be handled through binding arbitration, while in family law cases the parties generally try to mediate before they litigate, Wright said. “Some are court-ordered. In others, the attorneys want to go to mediation—or to get a late-case evaluation to provide a reality check.”

Collar said many metro Atlanta courts initially send litigants to alternative dispute resolution because their dockets are so large, and in family law disputes, most courts require mediation to occur before a trial. The majority of family law cases resolve themselves before trial, most often through mediation, he said.

“One of the most valuable things about having Judge Wright join our practice is she knows the best way to resolve a lot of these cases, whether civil or family law, is to be solution-oriented,” Collar said. “You can’t settle every case—and we will go and try cases if they don’t resolve—but that dovetails nicely with our ideology.” DR