

# Center for Legal and Court Technology Media Center

## Courtroom 21 to Use High-Tech Assistive Technologies in Pioneering Experimental Trial

Assistance for Persons with Disabilities and Aging Population Expected

On Saturday, April 1, 2006 at 9 a.m., the Courtroom 21 Project will conduct a pioneering experimental assistive technology trial designed to provide equal access to the courts for persons with disabilities. The case is expected to be notably significant in light of our aging population. Many of the case's participants – judge, counsel, witnesses and jurors -- have special needs.

The simulated case, *United States v. Culinary Enterprise of America d/b/a Mom's Place*, is a case brought under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) against a fictional fast food restaurant chain. The trial is designed to test how assistive technology can be used in giving equal access to justice for judges, lawyers, witnesses, and jurors who have special needs in the areas of mobility, sight, and hearing.

The case stems from wheelchair bound Frank Horton attempting to take his blind daughter, Jesse, to dinner at Mom's Place. In addition to the wheelchair, Frank has Ben, a service dog, to warn him of pending grand mal seizures. When they arrive at the fast food chain, he discovers that it is almost impossible to enter the restaurant and get to the order counter. The staff refuses entry to Ben after discovering that he is not a "seeing-eye" dog and Jesse discovers that there are no Braille menus. Subsequent inquiries to the corporate headquarters prove the chain purposely neglects to accommodate the needs of some patrons with disabilities, considering it too expensive and time-intensive for staff and disruptive to other customers. After the Hortons filed suit, the Attorney General of the United States intervened pursuant to the ADA and took over the case. The trial will be conducted as if it were being heard in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.

The Courtroom 21 Project will experiment with different types of technology intended to assist the participants during the trial. Although based on fictional elements, the case will be tried realistically with many participants having a variety of disabilities that would make their involvement in a trial or hearing difficult. For example, the trial judge, the Honorable Lynn J. Karowsky of Weld County Court in Colorado, is losing his sight due to macular degeneration. Also integrated will be the first known use of a Segway Transporter to allow counsel with mobility limitations to travel about the courtroom and argue the case to the jury. This experiment is being conducted with the support of numerous companies and organizations including the Disability Rights Section of the Department of Justice, The American Foundation for the Blind, and the WGBH Media Access Group.

*The trial will be heard in the world-renowned Courtroom 21 Project's McGlothlin Courtroom—the world's most technologically advanced trial and appellate courtroom. The Project—a joint initiative of William & Mary Law School and the National Center for State Courts—is an ongoing international demonstration and experimental effort which seeks to determine how technology can best improve all components of the legal system.*

**Journalists are invited to observe the case. Space is limited and those interested in**

**attending should reserve seats as early as possible by calling Tammi Flythe at (757) 221-7720 or emailing [Lsflytlatlwm.edu](mailto:Lsflytlatlwm.edu).**

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