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Brown defeats McNeil Danish, O'Donnell fends off Hawkins among Franklin County Common Pleas races

By **John Fuddy**

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The Franklin County Domestic Relations and Juvenile Court will have a new judge, after James W. Brown defeated Rita McNeil Danish, who was appointed to the bench by the governor in July.

In another race for an unexpired term, Colleen O'Donnell easily defeated challenger Monica Hawkins to retain the Common Pleas judgeship to which she was appointed in May 2013.

Franklin County voters also selected four winners in open races for full, six-year terms on the Common Pleas bench: Chris Brown, Jenifer French, William H. Woods and David Young.

According to unofficial results, James W. Brown, a Democrat, received 50 percent of the vote to 45 percent for McNeil Danish, a Republican, and 5 percent for Eddie Lewis Pfau, a Green Party candidate.

McNeil Danish was appointed to fill a vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Jim Mason, but her Democratic challenger earned the right to complete the term, which expires on Jan. 1, 2019.

James W. Brown, a Domestic Relations lawyer for more than 30 years, said he could be sworn in as soon as the results are certified, which could occur in two to three weeks.

"We worked extremely hard," he said. "My wife and I put a team together and literally worked seven days a week. I'm by no means a political scientist, but I like to think that had something to do with the victory."

O'Donnell, a Republican who became the youngest judge in Ohio when she took the bench last year at 32, received 57 percent of the vote to 43 percent for Hawkins, a Democrat. She was appointed to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge John F. Bender and now will complete the term, which runs until January 2017.

"I'm just so grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve," O'Donnell said. "I'm honored to return to the bench."

Among those who won full terms on the Common Pleas Court are two Democratic lawyers with a wide gap in experience.

Chris Brown, at 34, is just a year older than O'Donnell, and Woods, at age 68, will be barred by age restrictions from running for another term.

Chris Brown received 54 percent of the vote to 46 percent for Republican John M. Gonzales. Woods received 54 percent of the vote to 46 percent for Republican Val Hoover.

"Being young, I have a lot of energy and drive," Chris Brown said. "I don't pretend to know everything, but I have the energy to become a really good judge."

Young, a Democrat who was elected to the Municipal Court bench in 2011, will step up to Common Pleas Court, receiving 62 percent of the vote to easily defeat Fred Nelson, a Republican and former Hamilton County judge.

Young said he will remain a Municipal Court judge until his Common Pleas term begins in July.

French, a Republican member of Westerville City Council, received 56 percent of the vote in defeating Thomas F. Hayes, a Democrat.

Two Common Pleas judges were re-elected without opposition – Dana Suzanne Preisse of Domestic Relations/Juvenile Court and Robert G. Montgomery of Probate Court. Both are Republicans.

Although judicial races in Ohio are considered to be nonpartisan, the candidates are endorsed by political parties.

Common Pleas judges are paid \$121,350 annually.

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