



25th Anniversary of the Court of Québec
Society has changed—and so has the Court!

Today marks the 25th anniversary of the Court of Québec! On August 31, 1988, the *Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act and Other Legislation to Establish the Court of Quebec* came into force. Through this legislation, the Court of Sessions of the Peace (1908), responsible for criminal and penal law, the Provincial Court (1965), mainly responsible for civil law, and the Youth Court (1977^[1]), responsible for youth law, were combined.^[2]

This anniversary is an opportunity to recognize the vision and determination of those who spearheaded this important overhaul of Québec's judicial system. The major changes they introduced improved access to justice by reducing jurisdictional fragmentation, improving judge mobility, and simplifying the system to make it more effective.

With the reform, the Court of Québec became Québec's leading judicial institution in terms of practice area diversity, number of judges (279 at the time), and volume of cases handled.

The Court's first chief judge, the Honourable Albert Gobeil, summed up his approach vis-à-vis the new institution and the challenges he faced:

“From the beginning, I set out to perform my duties with the idea that the Court of Québec was replacing three judicial institutions cumulating a **wealth of experience**, and that it was our job **to pool** that experience, not ignore it. I felt we should make sure that all our colleagues from each jurisdiction were fully aware that we recognized the importance and value of their **collective contributions**, as well as the **quality and qualifications of each judge**. [...] It was a matter of **moving forward** and although, in the past, each court had to emphasize its specific role and responsibilities in order to achieve its objectives, **the aim now was to emphasize the singularity of the court's position and requirements, while maintaining the specificity of each jurisdiction's subject areas.**”

The first team of chief judges took on a number of projects, including the establishment of a Court administrative structure, improved staff allocation, the standardization of approaches and practices, establishment of target time frames, and development of a permanent training program for judges.

^[1] Formerly the Juvenile Delinquents' Court of Montreal (1910) and Québec City (1940).

^[2] The [history of the Court](#) is actually much longer and dates back to the 18th century. A book on the Court's history will be published in the coming months by Professor Sylvio Normand of the Université Laval Faculty of Law.

In 1995 a new team of five chief judges took office under the direction of the Honourable Louis-Charles Fournier. Mr. Justice Fournier left his mark by continuing a leadership approach based on participatory management. During his tenure, a new administrative entity—today called the Office of the Chief Judge—was created.

In 1996 the Honourable Huguette St-Louis succeeded Judge Fournier. The new management team established a five-year plan (1998–2003) with five priorities, including quality of justice and services rendered, professional development of judges, team-building, and modernization of Court management. In 2002 an agreement was concluded with the Minister of Justice with regard to the Court of Québec's administrative autonomy, allowing the Court to manage its budget and some of the resources needed to carry out its activities.

The Honourable Guy Gagnon started his term in 2003. The Court's vision was defined in a new [three-year plan \(2005–2008\)](#) that set forth a series of measures focusing on people subject to the jurisdiction of the Court, on more efficient organization of the court, and on extending the influence of the Court. Several of the initiatives were completed, including the creation of the Administrative and Appeal Division in 2007. An intranet site dedicated to the judiciary, which serves as a sort of virtual library for judges, was also launched. In addition, the first [Court of Québec annual report \(2005–2006\)](#) was published, and subsequently an annual report would be released each year.

My term as chief judge began on October 21, 2009. I rely on a [team](#) made up of Senior Associate Chief Judge Mario Tremblay and Assistant Chief Judges Pierre E. Audet (Civil Division), Claude C. Boulanger (Youth Division), Danielle Côté (Criminal and Penal Division), and André Perreault (responsible for Municipal Courts).

We've had our share of challenges, starting with the Bastarache Commission, which took up a great deal of time during the first months of my term. The strategic thinking stimulated by the exercise was nonetheless rewarding in that it led to a review of the regulation respecting the selection of judicial candidates. The Court of Québec spares no effort in ensuring that top candidates continue to be nominated.

The Court has also stepped up representations to the Ministère de la Justice concerning the urgent need to increase our resources. These efforts produced results in April 2012, when the *Courts of Justice Act* was amended to bring the number of judges from 270 to 290 and the number of associate coordinating judges from 8 to 12. The number of presiding justices of the peace was also increased from 33 to 36.

In 2012 the Court published its [Three-year Vision](#), which resulted from a joint reflection on its mission, its short- medium- and long-term objectives, and the means to achieve them. We wanted our Vision to address the needs and expectations of today's society. It includes concrete actions in each of the Court's fields of jurisdiction—all intended to improve our effectiveness as the court of first instance.

A number of these projects are well underway and I invite you to browse the most recent [Public Report of the Court of Québec](#) on our website to see how the work is coming along. You may also wish to consult [the Court's Twitter feed](#) for the latest news on the institution.

Our projects and activities regularly involve partnership with the Québec Bar and regional bar associations. Whenever it has the opportunity, the Court reaffirms its strong belief in the need to communicate, consult, and work together to achieve tangible results, rather than working in silos.

Examples of positive actions that have benefited from the synergy between judicial system stakeholders include the [early case management protocols for civil matters](#) negotiated with several bar associations, the current [research project](#) on settlement conferences as a tool for access to justice, the small claims issue table, the [northern missions](#) the Court participates in with the Québec and Abitibi-Témiscamingue bars, and the [agreement for a pilot project on examinations for discovery in criminal matters](#) signed with the Outaouais Bar.

This cooperation is especially valuable given that we must soon work with a new *Code of Civil Procedure*, which will require the participation of all stakeholders to move towards a faster and less costly justice system.

Nationally, the Court of Québec has always been well represented on the Canadian Council of Chief Judges. As the Council's new president, I intend to continue promoting productive dialogue between members, as it gives us the opportunity to build on our collective experience, share best practices, and address common issues.

By taking a look at how things are done elsewhere, we often discover that there's no need to reinvent the wheel! And since the time has come for action and solutions, maintaining links with inspired and inspiring partners from inside and outside Quebec is more important than ever.

The Court of Appeal and the Superior Court are of course among the key partners with which the Court of Québec maintains a close and beneficial relationship.

The Court of Québec currently comprises 290 judges and 36 presiding justices of the peace across Québec. Every day in the one hundred-odd courtrooms open across the province, they hear people who are often appearing before a court of justice for the first time. Judges have extensive knowledge and heavy responsibilities, but they are first and foremost open-minded, impartial, independent, and upstanding individuals recognized for their sense of belonging and their dedication to administering quality justice that is respectful of all citizens.

For its day-to-day operations, Court management also relies on a dynamic team of [10 coordinating judges and 12 associate coordinating judges](#) who oversee Court activities in their respective regions and help develop Court guidelines and practices by drawing on the expertise of judges and taking their region's specific needs into account.

The Court is continuously enriched by the experience of those who have built it and by the energy of new members who are proud to be a part of it. Every day, for nearly four years now, I have felt privileged to lead a modern, well-organized Court made up of extraordinary people (judges, presiding justices of the peace, municipal judges, specialists, researchers, technicians, analysts, assistants, and more) who are dedicated, committed, and eager to innovate and take on new challenges—and adapt with the society they serve!

Happy birthday, Court of Québec!

Élizabeth Corte
Chief Judge
August 31, 2013