

# From backyards to Don's Specialty Meats: Where Lafayette officials have been sworn in since the pandemic | State Politics

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BY KATIE GAGLIANO | Staff writer, Katie Gagliano

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Lafayette Parish Clerk of Court Louis Perret has sworn in an estimated 2,000 people over his career, but no year of ceremonies has been quite like this one.

Perret has overseen some traditional ceremonies, such as those held for Lafayette City Marshal Reggie Thomas and 15th Judicial District Attorney Don Landry, and intimate, nontraditional ceremonies such as the swearing-in for 15th JDC Judge Michele Billeaud, which was held in her family's backyard.

They've been everywhere from a jury pool room to the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, he said. Each ceremony was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, but even with safety changes, each represented an important moment in the system of American democracy and the peaceful transition of power, Perret said.

"I love it because at its very basic, it's an integral part of our representative democracy. It's something I love and revere. I've loved American history since I was a kid and I've been a student of history since I was a kid. ... I love the whole part of it and I take it very seriously," Perret said.

The Clerk of Court estimates he's sworn in 800 officials, law enforcement officers and staff members in this last cycle. Perret said he's shaken few hands, carried hand sanitizer with him to each event and had to break up large groups, like for the sheriff's office, into several ceremonies to accommodate social distancing needs. Most officials have been sworn in with only a couple staff members and some family present.

No matter the setting, or the crowd size, the importance of the moment was clear, Perret said.

"I see it in their eyes when they hear that oath of office and they're swearing their allegiance to the United States and Louisiana, to do their best and to be fair and impartial. ... You see it sink in, in their eyes, the magnitude of the responsibility that you now are accountable to the public," he said.

“I do believe the seriousness of it is still conveyed and still treated with reverence,” Perret said.

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### [Reggie Thomas, first Black citywide elected official in Lafayette, sworn in as city marshal](#)

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Fifteenth Judicial District Attorney Don Landry celebrated his swearing in with a crowd of family, campaign supporters and local elected officials, including the sheriffs of Acadia, Lafayette and Vermilion parishes which Landry oversees, in an event room at Don’s Specialty Meats in Scott. Landry said it was important to him to find a way to safely include as many supporters as possible.

“They’re the ones who really helped me achieve this goal of mine,” he said.

Don’s was settled on as the venue because the multiroom space provided more opportunity for social distancing than a traditional courtroom setting, Landry said. His team rolled up outside doors to increase air flow and provided masks and hand sanitizer, though mask wearing was mixed. The district attorney said when questioned by staff, many said they’d already had COVID-19 and didn’t feel they would be in danger or endanger others.

Judge Michele Billeaud held her swearing-in ceremony in her family's backyard after scouting a few outdoor restaurant and event spaces. The ceremony included Perret, a few family members and her immediate campaign staff; it was bittersweet not to include the many friends and supporters who backed her campaign, but Billeaud said safety felt like her number one responsibility.

Billeaud has been previously sworn in during her career as an assistant district attorney, but she said being sworn in for elected office as a judge was a new and more personal experience. Taking the oath would have been a momentous experience no matter where it took place, she said.

"I felt excited, I felt grateful, very humbled by the fact that our community felt they wanted me to sit on the bench and they trusted me with that job. It was a really nice day and a good feeling," Billeaud said.