



Mark Dupree Sr., '07. Photo by Jeremy Wangler

Righting the Wrongs

Wyandotte County District Attorney Mark Dupree Leads the Way to Ensure Justice.

By Annie Flachsbarth

Since 1989, innocent Americans, later exonerated, have collectively served over 21,000 years in prison. It's estimated that more than 15 percent of individuals who are currently incarcerated in the United States are not guilty and were wrongfully charged.

If you ask Wyandotte County District Attorney **Mark Dupree, Sr., '07**, those numbers mean our legal system has made some mistakes deserving further review.

A Second Look

Shortly after taking office in 2017, Dupree learned about Lamonte McIntyre. He had been serving a double life sentence after being convicted of a double homicide at the age of 17, after just six hours of investigation. Although McIntyre's family

had actively pursued an appeal to his sentence for years, Dupree learned the previous district attorney had repeatedly fought to keep the case from coming up for review. Curious to find out if there was truth to the investigation, he decided to no longer object and began looking into the case.

"At the end of the day, we learned a lot of mistakes were made," Dupree said. "He had not been given a fair trial. He was wrongfully imprisoned for 23 years for a crime he did not commit."

On day two of what was expected to be a week-long hearing to review the case, Dupree withdrew his objection to setting aside the jury's verdict. The judge found manifest injustice occurred in McIntyre's case and then set aside the jury's verdict. It was at this moment Dupree had to decide whether to re-try the case

in front of a different jury or choose to dismiss all charges. He chose the latter, thereby dismissing the entire case and McIntyre walked out a free man that day. This was a huge step on the road that would ultimately lead to his complete exoneration.

“That case showed me that if there was one person who was wrongly convicted and incarcerated, there were probably more,” Dupree said. “So, I created the Conviction Integrity Unit to deal specifically with those cases.”

A Unit of Hope

Created in 2018, the Wyandotte County Conviction Integrity Unit was the 40th of its kind in the country and the first in Kansas. Now in 2023, there are still only 85 units in the country. Dupree said ultimately, he aims to lead the way for prosecutors to do what is just for the victims, the accused, and the community.

“If a prosecutor makes a mistake and wrongfully puts someone in prison, they should have the integrity to stand up and say they were wrong,” Dupree said. “It’s about righting the wrongs that we have done, and not focusing on the politics.”

Applications to review guilty sentences come before incarcerated individuals, family, friends, retired police officers, and community members.

“We don’t reverse every case, but we review every application,” Dupree said. “It’s not about letting people out; it’s about doing justice.”

Doing justice is just what he and the CIU did for Pete Coons – a middle-aged man wrongfully convicted of murder. After reviewing the case, Dupree agreed with Coons’ attorneys, that manifest injustice had occurred. After hearing the facts, Coons’ conviction was set aside by the judge, and Dupree again decided to dismiss the case.

“Afterward, he shook my hand, looked me in the eye, and said, ‘Mr. Dupree, thank you for answering my letter.’ He had been writing for 12 years since he was imprisoned and nobody had answered,” said Dupree.

Sadly, Coons passed away three months after he was released from an untreated cancer during his incarceration. But his family was grateful the CIU did something to give them time with him before he passed away.

In the years since the murder of George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the CIU was expanded to include the ability to file official reports and complaints of police overreach or misconduct.

“It’s all about transparency,” Dupree said. “It’s part of reassuring and regaining the trust of the community we serve.”

Dupree believes appealing to the fears of the community gets people elected to these positions and in office for decades. He had a different idea for what the job of district attorney should look like.

“You have to get away from scare tactics and fear-mongering. As a minister of justice, you have to administer justice — both for the victims and the accused.” Dupree said. “You are the prosecutor for all of the community, not just the victims, not just the accused, it’s your job to do what is right.”

Rooted in Right

Dupree’s pursuit for justice began early. At age 14, while attending Wyandotte High School, he was told by his school counselor to wear a suit to school the next day to shadow someone at city hall. Surprisingly he was taken to the courthouse instead, and Dupree was ushered into a courtroom filled with tons of people, including lawyers – none of whom looked like him.

“I was sitting there scared, and then I heard a pound on the bench and ‘The Hon. Judge Cordell Meeks, Jr. is presiding,’ and I look up and see a short, African American man with a mini Afro on the bench,” Dupree said. “It blew my mind. If he could do it, I could do it. That day changed my entire perception of the criminal justice system, and the entire trajectory of my life.”

That day turned into a seven-year mentor/mentee relationship where Dupree received guidance and encouragement to study the law. Dupree went on to receive a bachelor’s degree from the University of Kansas, and then received his law degree from Washburn University School of Law in 2007.

Since then, Dupree has practiced in a multitude of legal capacities. He clerked in Jackson County, Missouri, served as an assistant prosecuting attorney in Jackson County, Kansas, and as assistant public defender in Johnson County. He and his wife, **Shanelle Dupree, ’07** — his law school sweetheart — practiced together in their firm, Dupree and Dupree, LLC, Attorneys at Law, until he was sworn into office.

He is the vice president of the Kansas Bar Association Board of Governors, member of the National District Attorney’s Association Board of Directors, a member of the Earl E. O’Connor American Inn of Court, an active Sunflower House board member, and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated. He has served as a committee chairperson for the Wyandotte County Bar

Association and Board Member of the Johnson County Bar Association, as well as the Kansas Legal Services Board of Directors.

When he was elected to district attorney in 2016, not only was he the first African American district attorney in Wyandotte County, Kansas, but he was also the first African American in the state of Kansas to be elected district attorney.

Being the Change

Dupree is the senior pastor at Grace Tabernacle Family Life Outreach Center – the church his father and mother pastored for 35 years – in Wyandotte County.

“As a pastor’s kid, I watched my father work in tandem with his wife in ministry and in life. My wife, who is also a pastor’s daughter — we work together in everything,” Dupree said. “I knew if we ran for DA, it would not just be my thing. It would affect our time together and with family. So we had to make the decision together as a team.”

Dupree and Shanelle have four children – Layla, age 13; Mark, age 12; Lilly, age 11; and Micah, age 10 – who also played an active role in Dupree’s re-election campaign. As Dupree puts it, it’s a group effort.

“It’s not just me. It’s we.” he said.

Dupree uses that same approach when working with the community. Growing up in inner-city Wyandotte County, Dupree knew the system was flawed. It was crucial to him to get input and hear the voice of the community. When he decided to run, he rode the metro bus to hear from the community and educate individuals on their right to vote.

“I made sure the community knew who I was and that I was serving the community. Otherwise, you’re just serving yourself,” Dupree said.

While riding the bus, Dupree heard stories of how the criminal justice system affected people’s lives positively and negatively. He heard the voices of the people the criminal justice system was supposed to serve.

“That’s why we won the election the first time as well as the second time,” Dupree said. “America is a great country, but there is a lot of bias. As we’ve changed policies and laws we haven’t done enough to remedy where we make those mistakes in the lives we have affected.”



Mark Dupree, '07, Shanelle Dupree, '07, with their four children, Layla, Mark, Lilly, and Micah. Photo submitted

Dupree is determined to change that, too. He gives back by speaking at countless churches and schools and hosting various opportunities to bring students into the courthouse and office through his Brilliant Outstanding Leaders Determined to be the Difference initiative. In fact, Dupree says you cannot be a prosecutor in his office without going out into the schools — they’ve gone out over 300 times to schools in the community and community events.

“We’re showing kids that whether you’re Black, white, brown, broke, college-educated or not — you can do this. You just have to be focused, so that you can be the difference that you want to be,” Dupree said. “That’s what we do for our young people. Because that is the first line of defense for keeping them from being on the criminal side.”