Nearly 20 years ago, Bill Gates declared that "Information technology and business are becoming inextricably interwoven. I don't think anybody can talk meaningfully about one without the talking about the other." This has become no less true for our courts. To support their day-to-day operations, Florida's courts rely increasingly on information technology. Indeed, IT has revolutionized the way the judicial branch meets the needs of all court audiences: the public, court users, the media, justice system partners, and of course judges and court employees.

That said, would it surprise you to know that the technology that supports the trial courts continues to be the responsibility of Florida's 67 counties rather than a state obligation? And that the definition of court technology, and how it is funded, are enshrined in statutory language that dates back to the late 90s, when technology (called "communications services" back then) signified fax machines and telephones?

In 1998, when Florida voters approved Revision 7, most of the costs of running the courts system were covered locally—which often meant dramatic inequities in funding and services between one county and another. Revision 7 was designed to relieve local governments of the increasing costs of subsidizing the trial courts and to ensure equity in court funding across each county in the state. When this amendment to the constitution was implemented in 2004, the state became responsible for funding all trial court operations—with a few exceptions, one of which is technology.

So to this day, funding for trial court technology falls under the jurisdiction of each of the 67 boards of county commissioners. An inevitable result is that technology resources differ from one county to another, resulting in disparities in the level of information and the services that the trial courts are able to provide. Moreover, because technology is funded locally, the branch has faced challenges in trying to establish circuit-level, as well as state-level technology: communication between local systems is inconsistent, and efforts to collect statewide data are hampered.

To acquire, support, maintain, and refresh the technical capabilities that our trial courts need in order to function effectively, the branch, in addition to the county funding it receives, must have adequate and reliable state funding. For the last few years, through the legislative process, the judicial branch has been pursuing funding to implement and sustain the technology projects it identified in the Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan: 2015 – 2019 (these include hardware and software to receive and manage case files electronically; functional digital court reporting systems; remote court interpreting equipment; sufficient bandwidth; and a minimum level of technology services in communities across the state). As the branch prepares its 2018 – 19 legislative budget request, funding to address the technology needs of the trial courts will continue to be a top priority. In seeking the resources necessary to develop a minimum level of technology infrastructure in all of the trial courts, the branch is working to ensure equal justice to Floridians in all 67 counties.

Sincerely,
PK Jameson
Transitions

Welcome Justice C. Alan Lawson

Although he has been on the bench since 2002, Justice C. Alan Lawson, the supreme court’s newest member (since December 31, 2016), did not always want to be a judge: “It wasn’t something that I started my career wanting to do,” he admitted, when asked what drew him to this calling. Indeed, he practiced law for many years before he felt impelled to apply for a judgeship: “I really was drawn to a trial practice, the courtroom setting, litigation—that’s what I was interested in when I decided to become a lawyer,” he disclosed, and he wasn’t actively looking to make any changes.

But as he was approaching his fifteenth year of legal practice, even though he relished the dynamics and stimulation of the daily life of an attorney, he started to see the “great appeal” of being a judge: “It is such an important position: when you spend a lot of time in the courtroom and observe many different kinds of judges, you see what a difference it makes for litigants. Also, I was interested in public service. And I thought I would do the job well.” So, for all these reasons, when a vacancy opened up in the Ninth Judicial Circuit in 2001, he was ready to apply.

He was appointed to the position and soon began to savor the variety and texture of the work of a trial court judge. In his four years at the Ninth (2002 – 2005), he served in the felony division but also handled some civil and some business court cases; in addition, for a year, he was the drug court judge, which he called “a really good experience.” About his service on the trial court bench, he reminisced, “I really enjoyed the interaction with the lawyers and litigants in the courtroom; I liked the excitement of the courtroom.”

After having been a circuit judge for several years, he was prodded by a judge friend to consider applying for an opening on the Fifth District Court of Appeal (DCA). But Justice Lawson was reluctant: “I just didn’t know if I’d enjoy the isolation and the amount of research and writing that you do as an appellate judge,” he explained. At the same time, however, he realized that it was something he’d “like to do eventually.” Because vacancies on the DCAs are so rare—and because candidates typically end up having to apply multiple times anyway—he figured he’d apply for that seat. He doubted he’d be selected, but at least “I’d get my name out there,” he figured. Needless to say, “It was a little bit of a surprise” when he was offered the job.

Transitioning from a trial court to a DCA culture is a significant shift for a judge. Trial court judges preside over cases individually, focusing on discovering the facts, which they or a jury determine after listening to the evidence presented by both sides; they are the sole decision-makers on the legal issues that arise and, at times, decide the outcome of the case. The work of a DCA judge is very different: typically working in panels of three, DCA judges are responsible for reviewing the material from the original trial to determine whether the lower tribunal made any legal errors; their focus is on questions of law, not questions of fact. So it is no surprise that, in his early days on the DCA, Justice Lawson “missed the day-in and day-out activity in the courtroom and the interaction with lawyers and other judges.” But he quickly added that he also “thoroughly enjoyed being a DCA judge”: he had “great colleagues” at the Fifth, and—particularly in retrospect—he treasured “the pace” of the work at the DCA: he appreciated having time “to dig into cases before oral argument or before you conferenced,” he reflected.

After serving on the Fifth DCA for 11 years (2006 – 2016), Justice Lawson was appointed to the supreme court. Asked what he especially likes about being a justice, he mused, “There are so many good things the judicial branch is doing, so many great projects to get involved with.” And being a justice gives him an opportunity to consider “Where can I help the most,” he said. His first thought (which was shaped, no doubt, by his years as a trial court judge) was problem-solving courts—drug court, veterans court, mental health court, early childhood court—which he called “great innovations.” For instance, through intensive
judicial supervision, mandatory substance abuse treatment, and drug-testing (with escalating sanctions and incentives), drug court is designed to break the cycle of drug addiction and concomitant crime—and to turn defendants into productive, law-abiding citizens. “If we can improve society by helping an individual tackle their addiction, then we’re doing a greater good than we did in the past, which was to respond to addiction with incarceration and probation,” he emphasized.

Another project about which he’s passionate is civics education—programs like Justice Teaching (the law-related education initiative founded by Justice Lewis). “These are so important,” he stressed: “If we’re going to continue to enjoy the freedom that we have in our country, then is it more important that we teach every kid things like calculus and higher math? Or is it more essential that they understand basic civics and why we have the freedoms we have? Given the lack of civics education today, I don’t think that kids really understand what the alternative is—they don’t understand what most of the rest of the kids growing up in the world face and have faced throughout human history. We enjoy an unparalleled degree of freedom in this country. If we don’t teach our kids why our structure of government is so important and why we have these freedoms and who paid the price to make sure that we do—and if the next generation doesn’t appreciate what we have—then it would be easy to discard our freedoms unknowingly. That is why civics education is so critical.”

Being on the supreme court certainly gives Justice Lawson the opportunity to do much good. However, he conceded that the job also comes with a fair amount of pressure: “My stress level is noticeably higher since I’m on the supreme court,” he said half-jokingly. Even though he has occupied this seat for a little more than half a year now, he feels he’s still getting used to the quantity of cases, the complexity of the cases, and the overall tempo of the workload—which, he remarked, never really slows down, given the convenience and flexibility of electronic filing. In addition, on top of all the case-related demands, now that he’s a justice, he frequently receives invitations to speak to various groups of judges and lawyers, as well as to the school and leadership groups that regularly visit the supreme court. He’s a skillful and compelling speaker—and he enjoys these speaking engagements and knows how important they are—but they take a lot of preparation: “You need to carve out time to think about what to say to hopefully inspire and do a good job” with these audiences. In short, he declared, “You’re ‘on’ all the time in this job.”

Thus he recognizes that he needs to “take time to recuperate and recharge” whenever possible. To de-stress, he paddle boards and scuba dives with his wife when he can, and he visits with his grandchildren.
(twins, born in November). Reading also helps him relax: he enjoys a broad variety of fiction (he named Grisham, Patterson, Silva, and the Harry Potter books), but he also likes to read books on leadership and personal development as well as some devotional kinds of books—“I usually am reading four or five books of various kinds at a time,” he noted. Reading about Elon Musk—the inventor, engineer, and product architect at Tesla—has been especially inspiring to him lately; he explained that “When Musk approaches a project, he asks not ‘How can we make things incrementally better,’ but ‘Is there a way we can make something radically better?’” This has prompted Justice Lawson to wonder whether “there are things the judicial branch could do to radically improve something while cutting costs.”

Another “great stress reliever” for him is running: “This morning, I got up early and did a great five-mile run and came in refreshed and ready for oral argument at 9:00,” he reported. Indeed, when in Tallahassee, this FSU College of Law graduate runs the same route he ran when he was in law school. In addition to calming stress, he finds running a clarifying experience, for it provides him with “great ‘thought time’ for processing difficult issues.” Running is “grounding” for him in every sense of the word.

He is also very much “grounded” in Florida: “My grandmother was the first child born in Lake Butler, Florida, at the turn of the last century—on January 3, 1900. Her father was a state representative. And my grandfather was on the school board in what is now Bradford County. My father was also from that area; he served as an aide to the president of the senate when he was in college.” He proudly commented that his “wife Julie is also a multi-generational Floridian,” adding that “Her mother served in the state legislature and was also the first female president of the University of Florida Alumni Association.”

This deep-rooted Floridian admits that “I have a lot to learn” about being a supreme court justice. And he understands that it will take time to understand the many expectations and nuances of the office. But he is clearly embarking on this journey with the same meticulousness, discipline, and dedication that he has brought to all the other undertakings that he has embraced as he’s staked out his path.

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**Farewell Justice James E. C. Perry**

James E. C. Perry, a native of New Bern, North Carolina, was appointed as the eighty-fifth justice to the Florida Supreme Court by Governor Charlie Crist and took office on March 11, 2009. Prior to sitting on the supreme court bench, he served as a circuit judge in Florida’s Eighteenth Judicial Circuit, appointed by Governor Jeb Bush in March 2000; he was the first African-American appointed to the Eighteenth Circuit and was its chief judge from 2003 – 2005.

The Florida Constitution sets the mandatory retirement age for state judges and justices at 70 years old, the exact date depending on when their seventieth birthday occurs. Justice Perry reached what is jocularly referred to as “constitutional senility” in 2014. Because his birthday fell in the second half of his six-year term, he was able to remain on the bench until his term expired. He retired from the supreme court bench on December 30, 2016. *(For biographical information about Justice Perry, please follow this link.)*

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At the time of this interview, nearly eight years had passed since Justice Perry joined the supreme court. Of the court’s seven justices, he was the last one appointed, so it had been a while since anyone would have had reason to ponder over the kinds of personal qualities that might ease a newly-appointed justice’s transition to the supreme court bench. Justice Perry’s imminent retirement presented an opportunity to seek his unique perspective on this matter.

When asked what advice he might impart to a new supreme court appointment, Justice Perry’s first response was an eloquent silence. Then, after a deep chuckle, he declared, “The problem is that this is unlike any other experience; you can’t really prepare to do this—there’s really no preparation. What advice would I give a new supreme court justice? I don’t have a clue!” But after a brief interval, he offered the following: “Just be honest, have integrity, have a sense of purpose, fairness, and justice. And remember that you’re dealing with issues that affect everyday life”—a point that he quickly clarified: “Sometimes we can lose sight of the fact that this is not just an academic pursuit, where you go through legal gymnastics and come to a conclusion. You need to determine how your decisions are going to impact the average man and woman walking around on the street.”

Another expressive pause followed. But it soon gave way to a bustling, wide-ranging exchange, during which Justice Perry segued seamlessly from stories about some of his most memorable public school teachers and what they taught him, to his recipe for writing clear, meaningful opinions. During the course of this conversational journey, the justice offered a bounty of aphorisms and common sense advice from which any aspiring or newly-appointed jurist—surely, any human being—might learn a useful thing or two. Broadly speaking, his insights fell into four overlapping areas: the need to recognize and respect everyone’s humanity; the importance of feeling comfortable in your own skin; the wisdom of fostering collegiality; and the responsibility to communicate plainly and comprehensibly.

Clearly, Justice Perry thinks deeply about “the average man and woman walking around on the street” (he admitted that, before he makes a final decision, one of the questions he asks himself is, “Does this make walking-around sense?”). For he recognizes that, at heart, “We are all human beings. We have a sense of humor. We have pain. We have suffering…” This appreciation of the humanity in everyone probably explains why he believes it is “important for judges to go out and speak to the community.” He sees these occasions as opportunities to connect with people and help them understand something about the justice system: “For people have no idea what we do and how important it is. And they are always interested in hearing a judge speak.” He gets asked to speak at a great many events, and “rather than preparing a speech that the audience might not be interested in,” he invites people to ask him questions—“That becomes my whole presentation. For they have a lot of questions,” he exclaimed. He also pointedly avoids using his title when he introduces himself: “I purposefully don’t walk into a room and say, ‘I’m Justice Perry.’ I say, ‘I’m Jim Perry.’” He knows that his title—which reflects “what I do, not who I am”—is likely to “build a wall between us”; when he presents himself by name rather than title, he hopes to “tear this wall down.” He noted that the average person does not understand how the courts operate; and, historically, people have had doubts about the efficiency, fairness, and accessibility of the court system. Thus “It doesn’t bode well for judges to be so mysterious, so unapproachable.” He wants people to see that “Judges are human beings like everyone else. The air here is not any more rarefied than the air anyone else breathes.” And again he distinguished between what he does and who he is: “Take seriously what you do, but not who you are. I try not to take myself too seriously,” he added with a chuckle.

When asked to talk a bit about “who he is,” Justice Perry responded, “I’m happy. I’m at peace with myself. I don’t talk down to anybody. I don’t talk up to anybody. I’m not trying to impress anybody.” Governor Charlie Crist said that this unassuming manner “really struck” him when the aspiring justice visited the gov-
ernor’s office to be interviewed for the supreme court vacancy. The governor described his office as being “big and imposing,” so, upon welcoming his guest, the governor invited him to “Please be comfortable”—to which Justice Perry is said to have responded, “I am the most comfortable man you’re ever going to meet. I just do what’s right, so I’m never going to be uncomfortable.” Justice Perry’s disposition to “be at peace” and to “be comfortable” is palpable to anyone who spends any time with him, and it is a quality from which most people would benefit, especially judges. For, “In this line of work, people often disagree with or disapprove of you,” he warned, “so it’s very important that you don’t disapprove of yourself; you have to be comfortable in your own skin to be comfortable with the criticism.” He also stressed that “Being a judge is not a popularity contest. And it shouldn’t be. You need to be satisfied with who you are.”

This might be especially true of a supreme court justice, because the seven of them must learn to work efficiently and effectively together as a unit. Speaking of his colleagues, he said, “My story is different from anybody else’s. My decisions were honed and influenced by my experiences; they are ‘baked in,’ part of the water the fish swims in. We all have different stories.” But, even so, “You can learn to disagree in an agreeable manner. And that’s what collegiality is really all about,” he emphasized. “The bottom line is that we are all human beings; we have families, children, health issues....” He recognizes that “Maybe we won’t change each other’s minds. But we can respect each other’s opinions. And like each other as people.” When asked what he does to help achieve this level of respect and amity, he says, quite simply, “We go to lunch: when you go to lunch, you get to know someone. And then you can see why they think the way they do. And they can see why you think the way you do.” Lunching together is surely a good strategy for building collegiality. Indeed, he shares his warm collegiality with all the people who work in the supreme court building, speaking kindly with everyone he passes in its halls: “We’re all in the human family,” he remarked: “We have different jobs, different lives. But it takes a village to raise the democracy we have.” Ultimately, he sees everyone as working together, doing his or her part to “make things better.”

One of the topics to which Justice Perry circled back the most was communication—specifically, the importance of communicating clearly and understandably. Regardless of who he’s talking to, or who he’s writing for, he said, “I don’t try to razzle dazzle people with esoteric language. The goal is to communicate. It would be like me speaking to you in French when you don’t understand French. What’s the point? The whole purpose of communication is to get people to understand what you’re saying.” This is no less true when he writes opinions: “With all my opinions, in the first 70 words, you understand the pertinent facts, the pros and cons, and the conclusion—in plain, clear language, so that if you don’t want to read any further, you know where I’m going. The whole reason for writing opinions is to communicate to the judge and the public. They have a right to know without having to read through 120 pages!”

Given his dedication to the responsible and straightforward expression and interchange of thoughts and ideas, it should come as no surprise that Justice Perry’s favorite subject in high school was English (especially grammar: he laughed softly upon recalling that one of his teachers spent six weeks on the verb “to be,” and after mentioning that he particularly loved learning how to diagram sentences in fifth grade, he proceeded to diagram a quite complex one in the air with his finger!). He attributed his passion for strong, unambiguous communication to his having had exceptionally good teachers as a child and young man, noting that “one of the unintended consequences of segregation” was that many African-Americans with masters degrees and even doctorates, because they had limited job opportunities, ended up teaching in the public schools that served minority students.
As the interview wound down, Justice Perry became pensive about the chance-driven journey that led him, against so many odds, to the bench of the Florida Supreme Court: “I always wanted to make a difference. I had a plan to make things better for the generations that follow me. But I had no idea how to go about doing it. And I still don’t understand how it happened. But I’m just thankful that it did.”

Chief Justice Awards for Judicial Excellence

The Chief Justice Awards for Judicial Excellence, established in 2015 and presented annually, recognize one county court judge and one circuit judge who demonstrate exceptional commitment to the judicial branch and who personify judicial excellence, embodying qualities such as strength of character, integrity, fairness, open-mindedness, knowledge of the law, sound judgment, professional ethics, intellectual courage, compassion, and decisiveness. These prestigious awards are granted by the chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court at the annual education programs for each level of the trial court. At this year’s program of the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida, Chief Justice Labarga conferred the 2017 Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence on Judge Carroll J. Kelly, Miami-Dade County. And at this year’s Florida Conference of Circuit Judges, the chief justice bestowed the 2017 Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence on Judge Peter R. Ramsberger, Sixth Circuit.

Judge Carroll J. Kelly, Miami-Dade County, Receives the 2017 Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence

Appointed to the Miami-Dade bench in 1999, Judge Carroll J. Kelly is esteemed for “lead[ing] by example from the bench, treating all parties with the utmost respect and dignity while simultaneously being compassionate and fair.” Letters supporting her nomination say that “She epitomizes the very qualities that every trial judge should emulate” and that “She is a model for all judges to aspire to”: indeed, another letter writer asserts, “Her accomplishments, dedication and professionalism should serve as an example to all judges throughout the State of Florida and the nation.” In particular, Judge Kelly is singled out for having “tirelessly...spent her entire judicial career as a leader, teacher and a mentor in combatting all forms of interpersonal violence and improving court responses to domestic violence.” As one letter writer proffers, “I would submit that every judge in the state of Florida well knows that Judge Kelly is the ‘guru’ on all matters pertaining to domestic violence.”

Judge Kelly’s accomplishments are far-ranging, but her achievements in two areas especially stand out: her innovative efforts “to improve the community, the court system...and the lives of the individuals” affected by domestic violence and her “extensive and selfless devotion toward judicial education.”

Since her appointment in 1999, Judge Kelly has served in the Miami-Dade County Domestic Violence Division, which handles approximately 12,000 domestic, sexual, dating, stalking, and repeat violence injunctions, as well as thousands of DV criminal cases, each year. She has been the administrative judge of this division since 2009. Over the years—in addition to managing her caseload and overseeing 11 judges as well as hundreds of court personnel working in four
separate courthouses in the county—Judge Kelly has written grants to bring thousands of dollars into the community for DV projects; secured and trained advocates to assist each victim of DV; helped to coordinate—and trains attorneys to participate in—a pro bono program that represents children in families unsettled by DV; worked with mental health professionals to institute a program that provides wrap-around services to families whose lives have been touched by DV; created protocols and contracts for batterers intervention programs to uphold quality programming and oversight; instituted and presides over DV compliance calendars to ensure batterers meet the requirements of court-ordered programs; instituted the use of GPS devices as a condition of release in DV criminal cases; and created various education programs and resources to help DV litigants understand the cycle of violence and how the court can help them. These are just some of the manifold innovations Judge Kelly has developed and implemented to improve the ways in which the court responds to families affected by domestic violence. “Under her leadership, the Eleventh Judicial Circuit’s DV Court has been named a model domestic violence court in the United States,” one letter writer remarks.

Letter writers also praise Judge Kelly for her commitment to judicial education. She is a long-standing faculty member of the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida, the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. She also serves on the faculty of the Florida Judicial College, where, for the last 16 years, she has taught all new Florida judges domestic/sexual violence law and procedure. In addition, in 2014, under the auspices of the Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence, she co-created a two-phase Regional DV Training for Florida judges, with the goal of enhancing statewide consistency and uniformity in the handling of DV cases: more than 170 judges have already participated in the first phase, which has been offered in 11 locations, and the second phase, which was recently introduced, has trained 41 judges so far. As the nomination letter stresses, Judge Kelly “created and presents these programs because she is passionate about judges being informed about DV and ensuring these crimes are taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.”

The letters of support all emphasize Judge Kelly’s distinction and singularity: “I do not know of any judge who gives more of themselves to the public and legal community,” states one judge; says another, “She deserves this recognition more than anyone I know”; and another underscores that, “While many judges are deserving, I believe no judge is more deserving than Judge Kelly.” To read more about the accomplishments of Judge Kelly, whom one letter writer calls a “true champion and hero for Florida,” please take this link to the press release.
Judge Peter R. Ramsberger, Sixth Judicial Circuit, Receives the 2017 Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence

Intelligent, fair, concerned, and hard worker”—these words and their equivalents appear persistently in the letters supporting the nomination of Judge Peter R. Ramsberger for the Award for Judicial Excellence. Elected to the Pinellas County bench in 1990 and appointed to the Sixth Circuit in 1997, Judge Ramsberger is extolled for being “an outstanding scholar, leader, and teacher” who “has “impeccable integrity, is very knowledgeable...and works well with others.” His “relentless pursuit of excellence” is universally admired.

Judge Ramsberger’s accomplishments are indeed extensive and consequential, but his supporters are particularly fervent about three of his attributes: his commitment to judicial education, his efforts to improve the courts system’s domestic violence services, and his demeanor.

Judge Ramsberger’s devotion to judicial education began to take root soon after he took the bench: within a year of being sworn in, he enrolled in a faculty training seminar, a two-day education program that teaches prospective judicial educators about planning a successful course founded on adult education principles (participating in this seminar is a pre-requisite for teaching in most of the courts system’s education programs). Since then, “He has created, prepared, researched, revised, updated, and presented more judicial education programs than any other judge in the State of Florida, having taught at least 100 judicial education programs throughout his career,” the nomination letter states. Since then, “He cares about the educational product, he cares about his colleagues and he cares about the entire Florida legal system.” As a result, “He is widely regarded as one of the finest judicial education presenters and consistently receives rave reviews.” As one of the support letters notes, “Nationally and internationally, the Florida judiciary has a unique tradition of excellence in judicial education. No other state offers the quality and breadth of training offered by Florida judges. Judge Ramsberger is one of the best of the best.”

His dedication to judicial education also includes his recruitment and mentoring of new judicial faculty, and many letter writers call attention to this “labor of love.” One writes, “I have seen the countless hours and the outstanding effort that Judge Ramsberger has put into recruiting faculty, inspiring the faculty to develop a meaningful and complete curriculum, and then facilitating and teaching the track....He is tireless in his efforts to inspire those teaching with him to go ‘above and beyond’: he leads by example and with great humor and patience.”

For his dedication to improving court processes, especially those associated with domestic violence, Judge Ramsberger is also esteemed. One letter writer remarks on the “indelible imprint” he makes on judges regarding the handling of domestic violence cases. She singles out the two-day Regional Domestic Violence Trainings Judge Ramsberger co-created and has been conducting around the state, saying, “His influence on [the judges attending this program] is profound. They come back from the training with Judge Ramsberger with new insights and new vigor for handling some of the most difficult cases we have in the court system, and they are so impressed with Judge Ramsberger’s knowledge, intellectual courage, and passion for seeing that jus-
Notice is provided to some of the court system’s most vulnerable clients: those families and children impacted by domestic violence in their homes. Judge Ramsberger’s impact on judges who handle domestic violence cases is extremely significant and, consequently, he has significantly impacted our judicial system for the better.”

The letters of support also call attention to Judge Ramsberger’s exceptional deportment—particularly his inclusiveness, his self-deprecating humor, and his humility: “He inspires with a calm demeanor and an ever present sense of humor”; “His self-deprecating sense of humor and ability to include others is a great gift in the education of judges”; “He is someone who does not seek recognition for what he does. He supports others to achieve judicial excellence, and he does so with great self-deprecation and humor”; “He has put in many, many hours of service to the branch in various educational programs, and he has done it all with humor and humility”; and “He also possesses the unusual trait of humbleness. He works tirelessly and always deflects praise to others. This is a rare quality in our profession that deserves special mention.”

As the letters of support demonstrate, Judge Ramsberger has truly “earned the respect and confidence of his colleagues.” They are not exaggerating when they say that he “fully personifies judicial excellence and has demonstrated exceptional commitment to the judicial branch in the State of Florida.” To read more about his accomplishments, please take this link to the press release.

Education and Outreach

Training Introduces Judges to Unique Matters that May Arise During Domestic Violence Injunctions

Chilling…there’s probably no better way to describe the sensation of the judges attending a recent Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence training when they were informed, at the beginning of a session on Hi-Tech Stalking, that, at that very moment, the photos and messages on the smartphones of four of the 17 of them could easily be accessed remotely by an uninvited guest!

After this gasp-inducing introduction, session presenter Steven Bradley, the safety and technology specialist for the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, explained that if someone forgets to turn off his or her phone’s Bluetooth technology, unwanted visitors can “pair” with that person’s phone, easily breaching its bounty of private words and images. Indeed, attendees soon learned that trespassers have a bundle of ways to hijack a person’s personal information and whereabouts and use it to their advantage. They can install spyware and remote log-in software on their target’s computer, for instance, which enables them to monitor his or her computer activities—and even control the computer webcam. Utilizing the GPS tracking device in a person’s car, smart phone, or camera, they can track down their “mark”—in fact, they can hide a GPS chip in just about anything the victim or the victim’s child has—a handbag or a stuffed animal, for instance—and then use their computers or phones to ferret out that person’s precise movements. And because social networking posts and photos are generally “geotagged,” cyberstalkers have the ability to pinpoint exactly where their prey is at the time of a post.
Most of the judges participating in the training had no idea that people—especially victims of domestic violence—could be so vulnerable to the machinations of cyberstalkers. But, as Mr. Bradley emphasized, this technology is out there, and it is being used—and judges who handle sexual violence injunctions need to be aware of it.

This session on Hi-Tech Stalking was just one of many highlights of the second phase of a recent Regional Domestic Violence Training. This two-part training is the brainchild of the Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence, which was established in 2014 under the auspices of OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement (OCI) to organize, develop, and provide continuing specialized education and training for all judges who handle matters involving domestic violence. Enhancing statewide consistency and uniformity in the handling of these cases has been one of the institute’s principal objectives.

In September 2014, OCI began coordinating Phase I, a two-day training envisioned as a statewide “best practices” approach to the manifold challenges (substantive, procedural, and other) unique to domestic violence cases, especially domestic violence injunctions. Conducted by Judge Carroll Kelly, Miami-Dade County, and Judge Peter Ramsberger, Sixth Circuit—who have worked together for 16 years to provide domestic violence education to judges—Phase I focuses on domestic violence dynamics, the effects of domestic violence on children, elder abuse, and other civil protective injunctions (dating violence, sexual violence, repeat violence, and stalking). Altogether, 11 Phase I trainings have been offered so far, all across the state, and more than 170 judges have participated in them; additional Phase I trainings are scheduled for the 2017–18 fiscal year.

While the first phase of the training aims to ensure that judges across the state are on the same page with regard to domestic violence injunctions, the second phase, which was first offered in December 2016, addresses rarer matters that may arise during domestic violence injunctions. In addition to Judge Ramsberger, Judge Kelly, and Mr. Bradley, Phase II faculty include Judge James Colaw, Eighth Circuit; Judge Dan Traver, Ninth Circuit; Judge Michelle Morley and Judge Thomas Eineman, Fifth Circuit; Judge Karen Cole, Fourth Circuit; and Mr. Andy Wentzell, senior attorney I with OCI. Among the topics addressed in this two-day event are firearms issues; mental health matters; violations and contempt; post judgment motions; judicial stress and vicarious trauma; and alimony, child support, economic relief for victims, supervised visitation, and time-sharing.
In addition, a significant portion of the second phase consists of role plays based on domestic violence final hearing scenarios—an exercise that invariably inspires the gathered judges to talk about how they handle certain issues that arise in domestic violence cases, according to OCI’s Kathleen Tailer, senior attorney II who coordinates the Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence. As Ms Tailer explained, inherent in domestic violence proceedings are concerns and problems exclusive to these kinds of cases, so judges who adjudicate these cases really appreciate the chance to talk with their peers about some of the unique issues: the role plays “bring up many important conversations,” she added, leading to “opportunities to hear about others’ solutions and suggestions and to a more in-depth study of DV issues appearing in Florida’s courts.”

Feedback about the recent training emphatically confirmed its practical value. In their assessments, participants praised the “excellent presenters and information” and underscored that the training was “really well done—don’t change a thing!” Most gratifying is that the training will likely have positive long-term effects, for, when asked about the improvements they will try to make when they return to their courtrooms and their communities, attendees offered that they “will have more discussions with stakeholders—sheriff’s office, DV shelters, the press—to improve education about the process and to increase efficiency and safety”; “will look into establishing compliance court”; “will try to have a victim advocate in the courtroom on each court date”; “will be more alert to signs of trauma”; “will concentrate on the effects of domestic violence on young children—parents need to understand the effects”; “will try to be more aware of dynamics taking place (power, control, mental health issues, financial issues, substance abuse) and try to create orders to address these concerns”; and “will allow all parties to know and feel that they have been heard and understood.”

Phase II has been offered twice thus far, reaching 41 judges, and two more trainings will soon be scheduled for the 2017 – 18 fiscal year. For questions or more information about these trainings, please contact Ms Tailer at Tailerk@flcourts.org.

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**The 2017 Florida Domestic Violence Benchbook Is Now Online**

A comprehensive resource guide, the *2017 Florida Domestic Violence Benchbook* is designed for judges on the domestic violence bench as well as for judges who may be expected to review filed petitions for protection against domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, repeat violence, or stalking. The benchbook provides information on every step of the injunction process, complete with flowcharts and checklists designed to provide at-a-glance illumination of the procedures the judge must follow to comply with Florida law. It also contains a legal civil outline, evidence outline, and criminal domestic violence outline, each complete with case law and statutory authority. [Take this link to access the Benchbook.](#)
The Justice Teaching Institute: Florida Civics Education Reimagined

By Miranda Nicolosi, intern with the Florida Supreme Court’s Public information Office

The Justice Teaching Institute (JTI) is a competitive and rewarding law-related education program designed, in part, to reduce the civics education deficit in Florida classrooms. Offered annually, this tremendous resource is funded by The Florida Bar Foundation, sponsored and hosted by the Florida Supreme Court, and coordinated by Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association. This program, under the dedicated leadership of Justice R. Fred Lewis and the thoughtful guidance of all the supreme court justices, gives 25 middle and high school teachers from across Florida an opportunity to immerse themselves in the justice system. These talented educators work alongside the justices in what many of the teachers refer to as “judicial boot camp.” The curriculum, which reflects a hands-on, case study approach, never fails to leave educators eager to get back to their classrooms to share what they have learned about the complexity and importance of the judicial branch of government.

The 2017 Justice Teaching Institute was held from Sunday, February 19, through Thursday, February 23. The day they arrived in Tallahassee, the teachers met with the JTI’s mentor judges, Eighteenth Circuit Judge Kelly McKibben and First Circuit Judge Ross Goodman, and immediately dove into the material. They set their sights on the week’s goal: to become better educated citizens and to develop the capacity to help their students do the same. The compact agenda for the week was constructed with this goal in mind.

Monday marked the beginning of three days of justice-led teaching sessions that both tested and expanded the teachers’ knowledge of the third branch of government. Justice Charles Canady gave an educational presentation on the structure, function, and funding of the state courts system. Justice Ricky Polston provided the teachers with insight into the differences between state and federal courts. Justice Lewis introduced cornerstone information relating to the case the teachers would examine as they prepared for the mock oral argument they would be holding. Chief Justice Jorge Labarga talked about judicial independence and judicial selection. Justice Barbara Pariente spoke about the role a fair and impartial judiciary plays in modern government and shed light on the “human” side of being a justice. Justice Peggy Quince introduced useful tactics for creating a compelling oral argument and encouraged the teachers to put these tools to use in their mock trial and in their classrooms. And to wrap up the interactive JTI experience, Justice Alan Lawson invited the teachers to have some fun and put their thinking caps on in a Florida Constitution Scavenger Hunt. In addition, staff from the supreme court law library assisted the teachers with their case exploration by providing an introduction to legal research and pertinent terminology; this information would help teachers better argue their case, and it also made them aware of countless legal research tools they can use in the classroom.

The educators had until Wednesday morning to prepare for their mock oral argument, the undeniable highlight of the program. This year’s case involved Fourth Amendment rights. The teachers took part in an in-depth study, facilitated by Justice Lewis, of the exclusionary rule and probable cause, and they talked about how new technologies may challenge the traditional understanding of these principles. The teachers spent a great deal of time absorbing the facts of the law before they analyzed case specifics. And they came to
understand what each of the justices stressed: that the job of a judge is not to “pick sides” based on how they feel about cases but rather to understand the law and to make a decision that aligns with constitutional principles.

The mock oral argument is a moment of high intensity for the teachers; playing the parts of justices and attorneys, they have a chance to showcase everything they learned in the last few days and put ideas and content into action. The JTI fellows worked tirelessly and diligently, utilizing the tools they had been given to create and respond to compelling oral arguments, effectively portraying and expanding on what they were taught. When given the chance to prove themselves, they exceeded expectations and are sure to bring the same level of dedication to their classrooms.

Throughout the five-day training, the justices and Ms Annette Boyd Pitts showed their appreciation and respect for teachers and emphasized the importance of providing a quality education for Florida’s young minds. The teachers left Tallahassee knowing where to find resources for teaching their students about the judicial system in Florida. Justice Lewis describes the JTI as a resource to teachers, saying “We make information available so teachers can pass it on. We don’t tell students what to think; we just want to get students thinking.” To help teachers in this endeavor, the supreme court has an education webpage that offers educational resources such as mock oral argument cases they can use when instructing their students about the judicial branch of government. (Take this link to the Justice Teaching website.)

The teachers raved about how the justices made such complex material enjoyable and how immensely lucky they felt to have been chosen for JTI. They especially appreciated the time the justices shared with them: “The individualized attention is pretty amazing!” said Mike Lee, from Sebring High School in Highlands County. They had nothing but praise for the unparalleled value of this experience and the wealth of information they will now be able to bring to their students.

Their first-hand experience has the potential to shape and expand civics education in Florida classrooms for years to come. And it also has the potential to shape the students sitting in those classrooms for years to come. This great education for today’s teachers inspires a chain reaction, leading to better-informed citizens, voters, and leaders of tomorrow.
Commission on Access to Civil Justice: Update

In November 2014, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga signed an administrative order establishing the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice. Citing the challenges faced by disadvantaged, low-income, and moderate-income Floridians when seeking meaningful and informed access to the civil justice system, the chief justice brought together the three branches of government, The Florida Bar, The Florida Bar Foundation, civil legal aid providers, the business community, and other well-known stakeholders to embark upon a coordinated effort to identify and remove economic and other barriers to civil justice.

Since its launch, the commission has proposed the development of a statewide online triage gateway portal that recommends the best existing civil legal resources for users based on variables such as type of case, user's location, user's preference, and other factors (currently being piloted in Clay County); the use of retired judges and retired and active law professors to serve as emeritus attorneys; and the development of web-based, interactive interviews to help self-represented litigants assemble pleadings and other documents suitable for filing.

This term, the commission has been directed to consider “Florida’s legal assistance delivery system as a whole, including but not limited to staffed legal aid programs, resources and support for self-represented litigants, limited scope representation, pro bono services, innovative technology solutions, and other models and potential innovations.” To carry out this work, the commission established three committees: the Executive Committee, the Services Options Committee, and the Resource Evaluation Committee.

In addition, because “Employers, too, have a stake in access to civil justice,” Chief Justice Labarga recently created the Council of Business Partners, a five-member body that will work closely with the Executive Committee to cultivate a collaborative relationship between the corporate community and the civil legal services community. The chief justice emphasizes that “Employees who have challenges accessing justice have higher absenteeism and reduced productivity. It is in all our interests to address access to justice.” He named Ms Tere Blanca, president and CEO of Blanca Commercial Real Estate in Miami, to serve as the liaison between the commission and the Council of Business Partners. (This link goes to the press release.)

To avoid majority turnover in any year, the commission designates staggered terms for its members. In addition to appointing Ms Tere, the chief justice selected Mr. Alfredo Garcia, dean of the St. Thomas University School of Law, to fill the position that was vacated when Mr. R. Alexander Acosta, dean of the College of Law, Florida International University, was tapped to become the US secretary of labor. He also reappointed five members whose terms are set to expire on June 30, 2017: Judge Timothy J. Corrigan, United States District Court, Middle District of Florida; Mr. Thomas S. Edwards, Jr., attorney, Jacksonville; Judge Robert Lee, Broward County; Ms Robin Hassler Thompson, attorney, Tallahassee; and Mr. William A. Van Nortwick, attorney, Jacksonville.

On June 30 of even-numbered years, beginning in 2018, the commission is directed to submit a report on its progress to the supreme court. For more information about the Commission on Access to Civil Justice, please follow this link.
The Judicial Branch Facilitates a Statewide Guardianship Initiative

With its boundless sunshine, glorious beaches, opportunities for an active lifestyle, doctor availability, low taxes, and relatively modest cost of living, Florida has long been a haven for retirees. Thus it is no surprise that the nation’s third most populous state is also home to the highest rate of residents aged 65 years and older. Currently, nearly 3.5 million Floridians, approximately 17 percent of the state’s inhabitants, are at least 65 years old. Meanwhile, like the population of the U.S., the population of Florida is aging at an unprecedented rate, so that number is expected to rise: in 2030, more than 24 percent of the state’s denizens are likely to have already celebrated their sixty-fifth birthday (Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research).

Because the risk of developing one or more disabilities grows with age, accompanying the burgeoning of the state’s older population is the increasing number of guardianship cases in Florida’s courts. In fact, guardianship—a process in which a court appoints someone to exercise certain legal rights of an individual who has been adjudicated incapacitated—is one of the few case types in the state that has shown growth over the last five years. And in the years ahead, that caseload is projected to escalate even more quickly.

Even though older Floridians constitute the majority of guardianship cases, it is essential to note that they represent only one demographic for whom a guardian may be appointed. Indeed, adults of any age may become incapacitated and require the appointment of a guardian on a temporary or permanent basis. For instance, a guardian may be appointed for a person with a developmental disability (e.g., cerebral palsy, autism, spina bifida); an age-related disability (e.g., cognitive and/or physical limitations); a mental health condition (e.g., personality disorders, anxiety disorders, mood disorders); or an acquired disability (e.g., a traumatic brain injury, a spinal cord injury, diseases such as muscular dystrophy). However, regardless of someone’s ability, every person who is 18 years or older has certain legal rights that cannot be annulled except through this court process called guardianship. In addition, every person 18 or older is able to delegate specific decision-making authority using various legal options (e.g., powers of attorney, representative payee, living wills).

To best meet the needs of any adult who may require decision-making assistance, stakeholders have long agreed that Florida law and guardianship processes must periodically be assessed and improved. Recently, numerous efforts have been made to promote guardianship reform in the state. For instance, in 2015 and 2016, the Florida Legislature passed laws to increase the state’s regulation and oversight of professional guardians and enacted measures designed to curb abuses; the jurisdiction of the clerks of the circuit courts was expanded to allow for greater investigative authority to uncover fraud and financial exploitation; the Office of Public and Professional Guardianship began working to establish standards of practice, disciplinary guidelines, and credit investigation procedures for public and professional guardians; and the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council has funded projects related to guardianship, alternatives to guardianship, and the development of a person’s abilities. Meanwhile, members of The Florida Bar’s Real Property, Probate and Trust Law Section have been considering a rewrite of Florida’s current guardianship statute.

The judicial branch has also been working to improve the guardianship process. Under the umbrella of the Judicial Management Council, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga established a Guardianship Workgroup in October 2016. Chaired by Judge Olin Shinholser (ret.), Tenth Circuit, this workgroup is examining judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianship to ensure that courts are best protecting the person, property,
and rights of people who have been judged to be incapacitated and people who may have diminished capacity to function independently. The workgroup is also developing strategies for improving accountability to better protect these vulnerable people.

All of these efforts are designed to promote guardianship reform. However, each entity has been working largely independently of the others, targeting policy and practice issues from its own unique perspective and advancing solutions that address its own particular concerns. What has been lacking in Florida is a concerted effort to address the issues systematically among all the stakeholders. To ameliorate the ways that courts and guardians practice, and to enhance the lives of people who have, or may need, guardians, judicial branch leaders recognized the need for a broad-based, interdisciplinary, collaborative initiative. The time was ripe for establishing a WINGS—Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders—in Florida.

Emerging from a core recommendation of the 2011 Third National Guardianship Summit, WINGS promotes the development of court-community partnerships to improve practices in adult guardianship and to provide less restrictive decision-making options. Thus far, with grant and technical assistance from the American Bar Association and the National Center for State Courts, 18 states have established and maintain WINGS entities. The judicial branch applied for a grant in February 2017 and, on May 1, received notice that its application for funding had been selected to establish a WINGS (Florida is one of five states receiving funding to establish new WINGS partnerships).

To initiate the process, Chief Justice Labarga has called together a large, broad-based stakeholder group that is scheduled to meet four times in the coming year. For the first meeting, which took place on July 27, more than 60 guardianship stakeholders from across the state were invited to share their particular perspectives and to identify key issues that need to be addressed (invited stakeholders included members of the judiciary, of legislative and executive branch agencies, and of related, private organizations, as well as guardians and self-advocates). In addition, to collect, cull, and process the torrent of data, information, and ideas, both from Florida and across the nation, that will emerge over the next year, and to shape a strategic plan for Florida’s reform efforts, the chief justice appointed an eight-member steering committee (comprising a judge, a guardian, and representatives from the Department of Elder Affairs, the Department of Children and Families, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Disability Rights Florida, the Social Security Administration, and the US Department of Veterans Affairs). At this point, Florida WINGs will be strictly planning-oriented, focused on improving the ability of state and local guardianship systems to develop protections less restrictive than guardianship, on advancing guardianship reforms, and on addressing abuse. For more information about this initiative, take this link to the press release.

The chief justice and State Courts Administrator PK Jameson have both emphasized that WINGS is a priority of Florida’s courts system and has the highest level of support. Ms Jameson stated that with this grant and the technical assistance, “Florida will be positioned to embrace systems change within the guardianship process, avoid unnecessary guardianships, and better identify ways to address financial exploitation.” They envision WINGS as an exciting opportunity for the three branches, organizations with guardianship components, and self-advocates to concentrate on decision-making assistance and develop synergistic solutions both to current and emerging guardianship issues.

This link takes you to more information about guardianship in Florida.
Innovations and Outreach at OSCA

As the dawn of 2017 was approaching, State Courts Administrator PK Jameson announced a number of changes in OSCA—some of which may be of interest and consequence to judges and court personnel across the state.

Several of these modifications are nominal—literally: the Personnel Unit is now called Human Resources; Information Systems Services is now dubbed the Office of Information Technology Services; and the new appellation for the Office of Community and Intergovernmental Relations is the Office of Legislative Affairs. These offices continue to have the same general purviews, but their work has been reshaped somewhat to better align with the branch’s 2016 – 2021 long-range plan.

Other developments are more substantive. For instance, the Office of Court Improvement (OCI) and the Court Education Section have been brought under a single umbrella: Ms Rose Patterson, who used to be the chief of OCI, is now the chief of the combined unit, called the Office of Court Education and Improvement. In addition, OSCA now has a new chief information officer, Mr. Roosevelt Sawyer, and Mr. Alan Neubauer is the deputy chief information officer; Mr. Sawyer oversees the ever-growing responsibilities of the Office of Information Technology Services with the expert assistance of Mr. Neubauer. And OSCA also has a public information officer: Mr. Paul Flemming serves as the OSCA contact for all press inquiries and is working on various components of OSCA’s internal and external communication endeavors.

Perhaps the biggest change of all is the creation of a new unit. Called the Office of Innovations and Outreach (I&O), this unit has the following responsibilities:

• Identify promising innovations throughout the state courts system as well as nationally;
• Assist in implementing the goals of the judicial branch’s long range strategic plan and communication plan;
• Compose and produce administrative publications such as the Florida State Courts Annual Report and the Full Court Press newsletter;
• Staff the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice, the Judicial Management Council, and the new OSCA WINGS (Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders) program;
• Develop electronic training programs/courses in coordination with the Office of Court Education and Improvement; and
• Provide leadership assistance in developing strategic approaches to expanding innovative programs including, but not limited to, integrating innovative technology into the operations of OSCA and the courts system. (Take this link to the I&O webpage)

I&O is a rich and multi-faceted resource for all of Florida’s courts—indeed, it was designed to support the cutting-edge work that judges and court personnel are engaged in all across the state...Taken together, the background and court experience of the I&O employees is indeed far-reaching—encompassing strategic planning, project management, grant writing, legal expertise, court communications, and information technology.
closely with—some of the folks now housed in I&O, for the new unit absorbed the former Strategic Planning Unit, a third of the former Publications Unit, and a sliver of the former Court Education Section. Taken together, the background and court experience of the I&O employees is indeed far-reaching—encompassing strategic planning, project management, grant writing, legal expertise, court communications, and information technology.

Below is some information about the skills and abilities of the members of the newly-minted I&O Unit:

Ms Tina White, the unit’s chief, has served as a government attorney for the past 20 years. Her positions have included assistant attorney general and policy chief for various legislative committees. Her skills include legal research, analysis, and writing; legislative drafting; facilitating committee work; and staff management.

Mr. Andrew Johns, formerly with OSCA’s Strategic Planning Unit, is the unit’s deputy chief. He has 20 years of state government experience, serving as a customer services administrator, investigator, and senior analyst. Since joining the court in 2011, he has focused on planning, project management, grant writing, and committee staffing.

Dr. Beth C. Schwartz, formerly with OSCA’s Publications Unit, is the court publications writer. She has a Ph.D in English (Cornell), and, before joining the court in 2005, she was an English professor. With OSCA, she writes and designs the Full Court Press newsletter and the Florida State Courts Annual Report and composes court news stories for flcourts.org.

Ms Marquita Green, formerly with OSCA’s Court Education Section, is a senior attorney I. Prior to joining the court in 2014, she worked at the Department of Children and Families, litigating dependency issues. For OSCA, she serves as staff for WINGS, the Judicial Management Council, and the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice.

Ms Melinda Coulter, an OPS senior court operations consultant, was a client rights champion and statewide coordinator of provider training at the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. With OSCA since 2016, she provides staff support to the Judicial Management Council’s Guardianship Workgroup and the WINGS initiative.

Ms Patty Ceci Sharp, formerly with OSCA’s Court Education Section, is the I&O technologist. An erstwhile history teacher and sales and account manager with IT companies, she has experience with developing online learning modules, webinar training, and project management. Currently, she is OSCA’s web content manager.

Ms Tricia Knox, formerly with OSCA’s Strategic Planning Unit, is a senior court operations consultant. With the judiciary since 1998, she first worked at the supreme court Law Library and then at the Public Information Office. Her background includes planning, education and outreach, communications, curriculum development, and web design and administration.

If you think I&O may be able to help your court expand or promote an innovative program or connect you with other judges and court personnel who are developing initiatives that you are interested in implementing, please contact Ms White at InnovationsOutreach@flcourts.org.
Office Ergonomics: Creating a Safer, More Comfortable Work Environment

People come in all sorts of shapes and sizes—and they differ widely in strength, flexibility, speed, and skill. In creating a workplace environment that promotes the welfare and efficiency of the people who work there, one must take into account all these factors. The science of designing the job, equipment, and workplace to “fit” the worker is called ergonomics. In studying the interactions between humans and their environments, ergonomics draws upon a variety of disciplines: mechanical and industrial engineering, for instance, as well as fields like physiology, kinesiology, and psychology.

Although the term ergonomics, literally work management, wasn’t coined until the 1850s, the concept long predates the word. Endeavors to select or create tools to make tasks easier to accomplish date back to the early stages of the development of the species, anthropologists point out. An oft-cited—albeit far more recent—example of someone who thought ergonomically is Hippocrates, the “father of medicine,” who lived in Greece in the fifth century BCE and wrote in great detail about the best way to design a surgeon’s workplace, discussing issues like the posture of the surgeon, the position of the patient, the placement of the surgeon’s tools, and the optimal lighting for a hospital. Naturally, the workplaces of today bear little resemblance to those of Hippocrates’ time, but concerns about ergonomics certainly continue to permeate the workplace.

These days, the ergonomic focus tends to be the safety, both short-term and long-term, of employees, and, in OSCA, it comes under the purview of OSCA’s Office of General Services. For Mr. Steven Hall, the chief of this office, improving worker safety is essential—not only because it protects employees and boosts productivity but also because it reduces costs both to employees and employers (e.g., medical bills, missed work days, workers’ compensation payments). To help supreme court and OSCA employees make their work areas as safe as possible, Mr. Hall periodically facilitates seminars on office ergonomics. At the most recent seminar, court employees learned that by making simple adjustments to their workstations, they can significantly reduce or prevent the likelihood of musculoskeletal disorders—injuries that result in pain in the body’s joints, ligaments, muscles, nerves, and tendons. In fact, court employees can take many actions to avoid getting hurt.

The typical workstation is designed for someone who is considered “average” in size—whatever that means these days. As a result, to be both safe and comfortable, a workstation must be adapted to accommodate the body that utilizes it. Chair, keyboard, monitor, mouse, telephone, lighting—if these are not properly adjusted for a person’s body, he or she can suffer serious strain to the neck, back, shoulders, arms, hands, and eyes.

For instance, when you’re sitting in your chair, your feet should be able to rest flat on the floor. Ideally, we’d all have ergonomic chairs that enable us to adjust their height, the height and width of the armrests, the lumbar support, the seat pan, and the backrest. If you don’t have an ergonomic chair, then be sure to position yourself comfortably in your chair: rest your shoulders and back against the backrest, and try to keep your neck, shoulders, and arms relaxed—but not slouched—while you’re keyboarding. Interestingly, although most of us probably remember being commanded as children to “sit up straight,” it’s actually not good to keep your back at a stiff 90 degree angle all day long—it puts an enormous amount of pressure on your lower spine—so be sure to make a conscious effort to relax your back and let the chair do its job of supporting it.

When you are sitting upright, your eyes should be level with or just below the top of your monitor so that when you’re looking at something on your screen, you’re looking down about 20 degrees. This position keeps you from straining your neck; to achieve it, you might have to adjust the height of your monitor or chair. (Note: if you wear bifocals or progressives, the adjustment might have to be slightly different.) And because our natural focus point is about 30 inches away from our bodies, be sure to keep some distance between your body and your monitor: separate them by at least an arm’s length. Also, when you’re working at your computer, your body, keyboard, chair, and monitor should be in a straight line—that keeps your body properly aligned.
So that you don’t have to reach for it all day, place your mouse next to, and on the same level as, your keyboard—for constant reaching can strain your shoulder, arm, and back. And check to make sure your keyboard is flat on your desk or keyboard tray. Your elbows should be at a 90 degree angle, with your forearms and wrists sloping gently down toward the keyboard—with your fingers below your wrists, as if you were playing the piano. And if you don’t have one, consider getting a wrist rest, which is actually for resting your wrists when you’re not typing, not for leaning on when you are. If your keyboard is on your desk, you’ll definitely want a wrist rest to protect your wrists from the desk’s hard edges—the pressure of which can aggravate carpal tunnel syndrome (a foam rest is fine, but the gel rest is reputed to be even better).

If at all possible, try to set up your computer at a 90 degree angle from a window (if you have a window, that is). It’s best to avoid having competing light behind your monitor as it can cause eyestrain and eye fatigue. If your computer is unavoidably in front of a window, close the blinds to reduce the glare. Also, if you can, adjust the lighting in your office to prevent glare on the screen, perhaps shutting off very intense overhead lights and using indirect or shielded lighting instead. If you spend a great deal of time on your computer, you might want to consider investing in computer glasses: they focus solely on what is 30 to 40 inches in front of you (which is where your monitor should be) and also have an anti-glare feature.

Finally, a headset is essential if your job involves using the phone a lot: resting the phone between your ear and your shoulder not only puts you in an infernally unnatural position, but it is also likely to cause tension, stiffness, and muscle spasms in your neck, upper back, and shoulder.

In the last few years, research has linked extended sitting to a host of health problems—among them, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and premature death—so many employees, recognizing that movement might improve their health, now use standing workstations. But if your standing workstation is not correctly adjusted, you too are at risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders. If you stand at your desk, the same principles apply for positioning your monitor, keyboard, mouse, and the workplace objects to which you need easy access. In addition, comfortable, supportive (work-appropriate) shoes are a must, and an anti-fatigue mat might help as well. (For more information about setting up ergonomically sound workstations, both standing and seated, take this link to the website of the US Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration.)

Most importantly, during the course of the day, especially if you don’t use a standing workstation, remember to move, move, move! “It is vital that employees in sedentary jobs make time for movement. Approximately once per hour, workers should get up from their desks and stretch. Spending breaks walking can also mitigate much of the potential strain of long periods of computer use,” according to the Florida Division of Risk Management. Movement is the kindest gift you can give to your body during work hours. Periodically, get up from your desk, walk to your printer, walk to your co-worker’s office, walk to the copy machine—whatever it takes to keep you from sitting in the same position hour after hour. If you tend not to move much while at work, or if your idea of moving is gliding around on your chair from your computer to your printer, your body, and your productivity, are likely to pay a price. In addition to changing your position and physically moving around, employees are encouraged to follow the “20/20/20 rule”: every 20 minutes, for 20 seconds, look away toward something at about a 20-foot distance. This will cause your eye muscles—and your brain—to stretch a bit, rejuvenating you for the work ahead.

It’s critical that we develop healthy habits in our bodily approach to work. Because most of us are so used to doing things wrong, in ways that have hurt our bodies over many years, these new habits may seem awkward at first. It’s said that it takes about three weeks to create a new habit, so we have to be patient with ourselves until the new habit settles in. But the rewards will definitely be worthwhile, and our bodies will surely thank us.
Turning Points

Court Innovations Garner Statewide Honors

Since 1989, Florida Taxwatch’s Prudential Productivity Awards Program has been recognizing and rewarding state government employees and work units for their development of cost-effective initiatives that increase productivity and promote innovation, thereby improving the delivery of state services and saving money for Florida’s taxpayers and businesses. This May, the judicial branch was honored with seven Prudential Productivity Awards.

Two of the seven award recipients were also honored with inaugural Florida Excellence in Technology Awards. This awards program, a collaboration between the Agency for State Technology and e.Republic/Government Technology, was established to recognize state and local government information technology projects and professionals that demonstrate excellence and provide value to Florida and its citizens.

The honorees are as follows; read about their inspired initiatives below:

• The Fifteenth Circuit Institutes Driving under Suspended License Docket
• Fifteenth Circuit Team Creates Therapeutic Court
• Palm Beach County Courts and Justice Partners Offer Operation Fresh Start
• Mr. Fred Buhl, Court Technology Officer with the Eighth Circuit, Develops OpenCourt and the Integrated Case Management Solution
• The Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup Facilitates the Sharing of Interpreting Resources among Different Circuits
• OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement and Florida State University Establish Early Childhood Courts
• OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement Increases Learning Opportunities for Family Court Judges

The Fifteenth Circuit Institutes Driving under Suspended License Docket

Judges, court operations personnel, county clerk staff, and attorneys in the public defender’s and the state attorney’s offices in the Fifteenth Circuit are working together to reduce the public and private costs of prosecuting driving with a suspended license violations.

In Palm Beach County, approximately 1,100 juveniles and adults are arrested annually for driving with a suspended license. After reviewing the data, then Chief Judge Jeffrey Colbath created a committee to establish a protocol to assist these individuals. The Driving under Suspended License (DUS) Committee developed a diversionary program designed to keep these individuals out of jail, assist them with obtaining their driver licenses, and free up law enforcement resources for other purposes.

This specialized DUS docket allows individuals to enter into a deferred prosecution agreement with specific, defined requirements for regaining their Florida driver license (indigent defendants may choose to perform community service in lieu of paying outstanding fines). If an individual complies with the agreement, does not commit new criminal law violations, and obtains a valid driver license, the state attorney no longer prosecutes the case.

A Florida Taxwatch study estimated that for each civil citation issued in lieu of prosecuting a case, the state saves between $1,467 and $4,614. When the Prudential Productivity Award application was submit-
ted, this diversion program had issued 334 civil citations; calculations based on the low end of potential savings suggest that the program resulted in $489,978 in cost savings.

For their initiative, Judge Jeffrey Colbath, Judge Leonard Hanser, Ms Michelle Spangenberg, Mr. Louis Tomeo, Ms Adrienne Ellis, Mr. Daniel Eisinger, and Mr. Stewart Saalfeld received a Prudential Productivity Award.

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**Fifteenth Circuit Team Creates Therapeutic Court**

Fifteenth Circuit Magistrate Judette Fanelli presides over judicial reviews for children in the dependency system. These children have been abused, abandoned, and/or neglected; in most cases, their parents have surrendered their parental rights, and the children have typically endured numerous placement changes, have been prescribed multiple psychotropic medications, and are languishing in the system, often considered “not adoptable.” Thus many of the children whom Magistrate Fanelli sees are in crisis, fraught with extensive trauma histories and mental health issues. She recognized that, to reach stability and ultimately a permanent placement, these children need more frequent judicial oversight by a support team. Her realization gave rise to Therapeutic Court.

Therapeutic Court is an innovative specialty court that uses a non-adversarial, team approach to ensure that each child in the dependency system receives the treatment most appropriate to his or her circumstances. To stay up-to-date on information about the therapeutic needs of children in these circumstances, team members participate regularly in continuing education.

In November 2016, when the Prudential Productivity application was submitted, the Therapeutic Court team had worked with 27 children (the court has worked with additional children since then). The parental rights of 24 of these children had been terminated, and the children had been in the dependency system for an average of four years. Since entering Therapeutic Court, the children have experienced fewer placement and school changes and have reduced the number of psychotropic medications they take. In addition, thus far, 10 children have been adopted or placed with a family member through permanent guardianship, thereby achieving permanency—and saving the state thousands of dollars in associated placement and care costs (in 2016, the estimated cost savings was $109,823).

For their initiative, Magistrate Judette Fanelli, Mr. Daniel Lieberman, Ms Kathleen Clendining, Ms Kathleen Alexis, Ms Mary Quinlan, Ms Renee Rattray, and Ms Heather Burr-Shulman received a Prudential Productivity Award.

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**Palm Beach County Courts and Justice Partners Offer Operation Fresh Start**

Then Chief Judge Jeffrey Colbath, in collaboration with the offices of the county clerk and comptroller, the sheriff, the public defender, and the state attorney, worked together to coordinate Operation Fresh Start, an innovative pilot program that offered defendants with outstanding, nonviolent misdemeanor and criminal traffic warrants an opportunity to resolve them without jail time.

During the one-day event, which took place in April 2016, individuals voluntarily appeared in court, established payment plans for fines and costs, completed documentation and payments to have their driver licenses reinstated, and, most importantly, reached a resolution of their warrant without incarceration.

Operation Fresh Start resulted in the recall of 379 bench warrants, the reinstatement or clearing of 160 driver licenses, and the collection of more than $20,000 in fines and fees. Additionally, 96 payment plans were established, enabling litigants to begin settling their fines at a manageable payment rate. As a result of Operation Fresh Start, the citizens of Florida have saved approximately $56,471.
For their initiative, Judge John Kastrenakes, Judge Laura Johnson, Judge Ted Booras, Clerk Sharon Bock, State Attorney Dave Aronberg, Public Defender Carey Haughwout, and Lieutenant Talal Masri received a Prudential Productivity Award.

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Mr. Fred Buhl, Court Technology Officer with the Eighth Circuit, Develops OpenCourt and the Integrated Case Management Solution

Mr. Fred Buhl was recognized for his work on two projects: the Integrated Case Management Solution and OpenCourt, both of which support courts’ due process functions. Because both projects use open source technology (i.e., technology that is available and free to the general public for use and/or modification from its original design), they diminish the need for outside vendors and significantly reduce startup costs and ongoing licensing expenses.

The Integrated Case Management Solution is an application that provides judges and court staff with case-related data and performance metrics across all divisions. Because the system is eminently adaptable, it can be shaped to meet the criteria and business needs of other Florida circuit courts: it is comprehensive (it adapts to a given court’s scheduling, reporting, and case management needs); flexible (it adapts dynamically to incorporate mandates and innovations); scalable (it can serve as a solid foundation for future applications); and economical (it requires only minimal costs to develop and sustain).

OpenCourt is a digital court reporting system that makes high-quality audio and video recordings of court events without the high cost of commercial software. Until a few years ago, the Eighth Circuit was using a commercial system but lacked the funding to maintain or replace it. In 2014, when Mr. Buhl first received a Prudential Productivity Award for this initiative, he explained that “necessity (mixed with a little hubris)” inspired him to build his own system using open source programs.

Implementation of these systems has expanded to courts across the state: the Integrated Case Management Solution is now installed in 23 Florida counties, and OpenCourt is used in more than 200 courtrooms and hearing rooms across the state.

For his initiatives, Mr. Buhl received a Prudential Productivity Award and an Excellence in Technology Award.

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The Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup Facilitates the Sharing of Interpreting Resources among Different Circuits

According to US Census Bureau statistics (2015), nearly 2.2 million Florida residents—approximately 12% of the state population—have limited ability to communicate in English. To ensure the constitutional right of access to justice for litigants with limited English proficiency, court interpreting services are essential. However, due to the short supply of qualified interpreters, courts face challenges in addressing the increasing need for quality interpreting services. This is especially true in rural areas of the state: while large population centers are generally home to a sufficient number of interpreters in certain languages, rural areas lack the same resources. Faced with a shortage of available qualified court interpreters, the supreme court’s Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability established the Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup in 2014 to make recommendations regarding the business processes associated with sharing remote interpreting resources via the assisted use of technology.

The workgroup, chaired by Mr. Thomas Genung, trial court administrator for the Nineteenth Circuit, began by conducting an extensive data collection effort on court interpreter workload. After reviewing the findings, the workgroup concluded that, by sharing interpreter resources across judicial circuit boundaries with the use of enhanced technological communications, courts could significantly improve interpreter services while also using state resources wisely. Newer, innovative technology would enable the state courts sys-
tem to establish a statewide pool of qualified court interpreters to provide services, irrespective of location, assuring that resources match demand; benefits would include efficiency, quality, and accountability. Based on these conclusions, the workgroup developed business model guidelines leveraging and maximizing state-funded resources using technology to access court interpreters over the statewide network.

The work of the Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup was the fruit of a highly collaborative effort. The workgroup comprised members from three court committees—the Trial Court Budget Commission, the Court Interpreter Certification Board, and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability: in addition to Mr. Genung, workgroup members included Ms Ody Arias-Zerivitz (interpreter services coordinator, Ninth Circuit); Mr. Matthew Benefiel (trial court administrator, Ninth Circuit); Judge Ronald W. Flury (Leon County); Mr. Gary Hagan (court technology officer, Fourteenth Circuit); Ms Shirley Olson (criminal court services manager, Seventh Circuit); Judge Carlos A. Rodriguez (Seventeenth Circuit); and Ms. Kristina Velez (court operations consultant, Eighth Circuit). In addition, various judges, court administration professionals, court interpreters, and other stakeholders contributed to the project at various points, and 12 OSCA employees provided staff support. Furthermore, six circuits—the Third, Seventh, Ninth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth—participated in a regional model pilot whose success galvanized the workgroup’s development of business model guidelines. And, finally, the workgroup relied mightily on the contributions of more than 150 court interpreters around the state who participated in the six-month data collection project.

For its initiative, the workgroup received a Prudential Productivity Award and an Excellence in Technology Award.

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OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement and Florida State University Establish Florida’s Early Childhood Courts

Early Childhood Court grew out of a concern about a pattern that was becoming increasingly evident to judges on the family court bench. Called the multigenerational transmission of trauma and maltreatment, this pattern unfolds as follows: children who are maltreated often end up suffering a host of developmental issues (e.g., cognitive problems, speech delays, health problems, motor delays, and mental health problems); if the underlying factors are not addressed, the effects worsen over time, and the child appearing in dependency court today is likely to end up in delinquency court years later—and, later still, in court again, facing, perhaps, a domestic violence injunction or a paternity matter.

In 2013, the Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy and OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement formed a partnership to address this pattern. Later that year, using a small portion of a grant to fund trauma informed systems, they established, and piloted in two jurisdictions, an Early Childhood Court: a specialized problem-solving docket that focuses on cases involving children ages zero to three who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected. In each of these dockets, members of an Early Childhood Court Team—comprising judges, case workers, attorneys, infant mental health clinicians, and parent and community organizations—worked together to identify and expand evidence-based services for, and to prevent the further traumatization of, young children. Their goals were to improve child safety and well-being; heal trauma and repair the parent-child relationship; expedite permanency; and stop the intergenerational cycle of abuse/neglect/violence.

This initial seed funding deepened the cross-agency work, and, since then, the two pilot court teams have expanded to 18 Early Childhood Court Teams that have thus far served more than 300 young children and their families and have “resulted in substantial savings to taxpayers by educating judges on trauma, linking the courts with fast tracked therapeutic services and gathering data documenting improved child and family outcomes.”

For its initiative, five Office of Court Improvement staff—Ms Sandra Neidert, Mr. John Couch, Ms Leigh Merritt, Mr. David O’Kane, and Mr. George Roberts—and FSU’s Dr. Mimi Graham, director of the Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, received a Prudential Productivity Award.
OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement Increases Learning Opportunities for Florida’s Family Court Judges

The judicial branch is committed to maintaining a professional, ethical, and skilled judiciary and workforce; indeed, among the goals of the long-range plan are to “provide timely education and training to judges and court employees to ensure high-level performance” and to “develop technology-based approaches to complement existing education programs for judges and court employees.” Taking these goals very seriously, OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement has worked hard to develop high-quality education and training opportunities for the people who work in Florida’s family courts, making efficient and effective use of limited funding and staff resources.

The Office of Court Improvement regularly develops interactive, web-based publications for family court judges and court personnel (e.g., the Dependency Benchbook, the Delinquency Benchbook, the Child Support Benchbook, the Domestic Violence Benchbook, and the Family Court Tool Kits). The office also publishes a monthly electronic family court newsletter, emailed to more than 800 judges and court staff, about the latest innovations and initiatives. In addition, the office facilitates a host of distance learning courses, including webinars and videos for judges hearing delinquency cases and judges hearing domestic violence cases; it also coordinates Ask the Expert webinars for family court judges. And it developed an online virtual court to assist in training judges who are newly appointed to hearing domestic violence injunctions.

To curb costs associated with traveling to statewide training events, the Office of Court Improvement, through its Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence, has also facilitated regional and local trainings. Moreover, staff developed a curriculum package for a course on Moving Toward a Trauma-Responsive Court—complete with logistics preparation tips, a list of session supplies, sessions materials, and a PowerPoint presentation—for circuits to use at the local level. This interactive workshop was released in November 2016, and several circuits have already offered it. Furthermore, the office regularly leverages a variety of federal funding sources to coordinate statewide, multidisciplinary, blended funding training events.

As a result of all these initiatives, the Office of Court Improvement has trained more while spending less. In addition to saving taxpayer dollars, these initiatives, by increasing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of Florida’s judiciary, have resulted in improved judicial decision-making and ultimately improved outcomes for children and families in court.

For its initiatives, OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement received a Prudential Productivity Award.
Awards and Honors

Judge Augustus Aikens, Leon County, was presented with the 2017 Richard W. Ervin Equal Justice Award; an annual honor presented by the Capital City Bar Presidents Council, this award recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions to the legal justice system in Florida. Judge Aikens was honored for being fair and thoughtful, for his dedicated and distinguished service, for the dignity and respect with which he treats all litigants, and for his learned contributions as teaching faculty for Florida judges.

Senior Judge W. Douglas Baird, Sixth Circuit, was distinguished with the Clearwater Bar Association’s George W. Greer Judicial Independence Award.

Judge Linda Babb, Sixth Circuit, was selected for the 2017 Judicial Professionalism Award by the Women Lawyers of Pasco; among other things, she was recognized for encouraging those who practice law to maintain high ethical standards.

Judge Thane Covert, Sixth Circuit, received the William J. Castagna Award for Judicial Excellence from the Barney Masterson American Inn of Court; he was honored for displaying the highest standards in all aspects of judicial performance, including knowledge of the law, ethics, civility, professionalism, and demeanor.

Chief Judge Ronald Ficarrotta, Thirteenth Circuit, received the Jurist of the Year Award from the Florida Chapters of the American Board of Trial Advocates; this award is given to a judge who demonstrates a strong commitment to preserving and improving the jury trial system; exhibits professionalism, knowledge, and preparedness in the courtroom; and maintains an open and accessible working relationship with the trial bar.

Judge Ron Flury, Leon County, was presented with the 2017 Parks and Crump Thurgood Marshall Award for Judicial Excellence; an annual honor, this award recognizes Judge Flury’s leadership and professional excellence.

Judge John D. Galluzzo, Eighteenth Circuit, was honored by the Florida Council on Crime and Delinquency with a Distinguished Service Award; the award is “In recognition of your outstanding contributions to our communities and those you serve in the criminal justice field.”

Judge William Haury, Seventeenth Circuit, received the Broward County Bar Association’s President’s Award, given “in recognition and appreciation for your outstanding commitment, loyalty and service to the bar and legal community.”

Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit, received the Outstanding Jurist Award from The Florida Bar’s Young Lawyers Division; the award honors her for promoting and contributing to the improvement of the legal system and the administration of justice, for dedicating herself to educate Florida’s youth and at-risk youth, and for promoting local pro bono legal services.

Judge Steve Jewett, Ninth Circuit, was selected for the 2017 Judge of the Year Award; presented by the supreme court’s Justice Teaching initiative, this award honors the judge who most accurately embodies the spirit of Justice Teaching in delivering civic education to the children of Florida. Judge Jewett is actively involved in education programs for students aspiring to be attorneys, such as the Florida High School Mock Trials.

Judge Keith R. Kyle, Twentieth Circuit, was named Jurist of the Year by the Southwest Florida Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates.

Judge Robert Paul LeBlanc, Ninth Circuit, received the William M. Hoeveler Judicial Professionalism Award from The Florida Bar’s Standing Committee on Professionalism; the award recognizes an active
judge who best exemplifies strength of character, service, and competence as a jurist, lawyer, and public servant, and who has communicated his/her dedication to the ideals of justice and demonstrated diligence in inspiring others to the mission of professionalism.

**Judge Declan P. Mansfield, Sixth Circuit**, was awarded the 2017 President’s Heart Award by the West Pasco Chamber of Commerce; also called the Heart of the Community Award, this accolade recognizes Judge Mansfield’s tireless work to support the community.

**Judge Patrice Moore, Sixth Circuit**, was honored with the Judicial Appreciation Award by the St. Petersburg Bar Association; in selecting the award recipient, the association considers factors such as courtroom demeanor, judicial experience, helpfulness to lawyers and litigants, and activities off the bench that promote the administration of justice and civic participation.

**Judge Christopher N. Patterson, Fourteenth Circuit**, was recognized as the 2017 Judge of the Year by Justice Teaching; presented by the supreme court’s Justice Teaching initiative, this award honors the judge who most accurately embodies the spirit of Justice Teaching in delivering civic education to the children of Florida.

**Judge Nushin Sayfie, Eleventh Circuit**, was presented with an In the Company of Women: Outstanding Woman in Government and Law Award 2017 for her service, leadership, and contribution to women; this award was presented by the Miami-Dade County Commission for Women, the Parks Foundation of Miami-Dade, and the Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department.

**Judge Walter L. “Skip” Shafer, Sixth Circuit**, was posthumously given the John U. Bird Judicial Excellence Award; presented by the Clearwater Bar Association, this award was created to recognize honor, high ideals, personal character, judicial competence, and service.

**Judge Gilbert Smith, Twelfth Circuit**, was presented the William C. Grimes Lifetime Achievement Award by the Manatee County Bar Association.

**Chief Judge Bertila Soto, Eleventh Circuit**, was honored with the Judge Rosemary Barkett Women of Distinction Judiciary Award; presented by the Dade County Bar Association, this award recognizes the role of women in the legal profession and the community.

**Judge Jack Tuter, Seventeenth Circuit**, received the Broward County Bar Association’s Stephen R. Booher Award, given “in recognition and appreciation for your humanity, integrity, and dedication to the bench, bar and community.”

**Chief Judge Peter M. Weinstein, Seventeenth Circuit**, received the Broward County Bar Association’s Executive Director’s Award, given “in recognition and appreciation for your outstanding commitment, loyalty and service to the bar and legal community.”

**Judge Angelica Zayas, Eleventh Circuit**, was presented with an In the Company of Women: Outstanding Woman in Government and Law Award 2017 for her service, leadership, and contribution to women; this award was presented by the Miami-Dade County Commission for Women, the Parks Foundation of Miami-Dade, and the Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department. She also received the Women of Impact Award for her professional accomplishments; presented by the Women’s History Coalition, this award honors trailblazing women in labor and business.

The Florida Supreme Court Marshal’s Office met the required standards to become accredited by the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation. According to the assessment report, the Marshal’s Office “is the first law enforcement agency within a judicial function in Florida to seek accreditation. Additionally, they are the only agency located within a judiciary anywhere in the nation to seek any type of accredited status.” The announcement letter commends the Marshal’s Office for its “continued diligence, professionalism, and commitment in maintaining this highest recognition among Florida’s law enforcement community.”
In Memoriam


**Judge Scott P. Polodna** served on the bench of the Ninth Judicial Circuit from 2006 – 2016.


**Mr. Sid J. White** served as the clerk of the Supreme Court of Florida from 1964 – 1999; he was the supreme court’s nineteenth clerk.

When judges and court personnel receive honors or acclaim for their contributions to the branch, please share that information with OSCAPublications@flcourts.org
### August
- **10**  
  Trial Court Administrators & ADR Directors Meeting
- **10 – 12**  
  25th Annual Dispute Resolution Center Conference
- **15 – 16**  
  Florida Early Childhood Courts All-Sites Meeting
- **16 – 18**  
  National Zero To Three Early Childhood Courts Cross-Sites Meeting (in FL)
- **29 – 31**  
  2017 Florida Child Protection Summit

### September
- **5 – 8**  
  Florida Conference of DCA Judges Annual Education Program
- **6 – 8**  
  Court Interpreter Oral Performance Examinations
- **12 – 14**  
  Court Interpreter Oral Performance Examinations
- **12 – 15**  
  Judicial Assistants Association of Florida Annual Educational Conference
- **14**  
  Task Force on Substance Abuse & Mental Health Issues in the Courts Meeting
- **14 – 15**  
  Steering Committee on Families & Children in the Court Meeting
- **22**  
  Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice Meeting
- **29**  
  Judicial Management Council Meeting

### October
- **16 – 17**  
  Florida Bar/Florida Supreme Court Annual Reporters Workshop
- **19 – 20**  
  Florida Trial Court Staff Attorneys Association Annual Conference
- **25 – 26**  
  Florida Courts Technology Commission Meeting
- **30 – 31**  
  Court Interpreter Orientation Workshop

### November
- **1 – 2**  
  Court Interpreter Orientation Workshop
- **16 – 17**  
  Steering Committee on Families & Children in the Court Meeting

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Under the direction of  
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