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Message from Lisa Goodner, State Courts Administrator

By the time you read this, we'll be moving into the last few weeks of the legislative session, at which point we should have some idea of the House and Senate positions on the court system's budget. But, as always during these two tumultuous spring months in Tallahassee, change is one of the very few constants, so it's impossible to speculate too finely about the outcome. What hasn't changed is that another budget shortfall is projected. For 2010-11, it's $3.2 billion. The estimate for 2011-12 is even more dire: possibly as high as $6 billion due to the "flame-out" of federal stimulus dollars.

Despite these projections, we can confidently say that our push for dedicated funding worked: the revenues in the State Courts Revenue Trust Fund are adequate to support our current base; in fact, we are projected to have a $134 million cash balance for the year. And, according to predictions by the Article V Revenue Estimating Conference, if the courts continue to bring in dollars at this rate, the branch should be bringing in revenue well above appropriations for the next couple of years.

However, it would be a mistake for us to be complacent. Because the economic conditions in Florida are still grim, we have no assurance that the legislature will give us the authority to spend this money. So, yes, the dollars are in the trust fund, but that doesn't mean we'll be able to use them.

Also, the legislature might decide to "sweep" the trust fund—meaning that our unappropriated cash balances could get transferred to the general revenue fund. Our hope is that lawmakers won't do this: identical Senate and House bills filed this year would prevent cash balances from a Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services trust fund—which collects fees for a specific purpose—from being taken for other uses. Since people pay those fees to protect a constitutional right—and since our trust fund is largely supported by the filing fees that litigants pay to exercise their constitutional right to access the courts—we hope legislators will treat our trust fund similarly. These two bills suggest that they are sensitive to this issue.

Another cause for concern is that our main source of trust fund revenues is mortgage foreclosure cases—80% of our total. This is worrisome for two reasons. First, it represents only a temporary gain; at some point, foreclosure filings, which are projected to be 383,147 this fiscal year, are expected to return to normal levels of about 70,000 per year. And second, the foreclosure crisis has created an enormous backlog in the courts, which lack the resources to provide relief to these litigants. To protect the rights of homeowners and lenders, and to try to ease the burden on the courts, we have requested that the legislature give the courts one-time spending authority to use $9.6 million from our trust fund to dispose of these backlog cases.

Against the backdrop of bad news, economists in the legislature's office recently announced some good news about Florida's financial health: they revised their forecast to reflect an increase in this year's general revenue. That increase is slight, less than .2%, but according to them, this modest growth suggests that Florida's revenue challenges have reached bottom and that the budget is starting to stabilize. They say the full recovery will begin for real in spring 2011.

I want to end by thanking you for your continuing dedication to the court system, especially in this stressful economic climate. Your commitment makes it possible for the branch to carry out its mission.

Sincerely,
Lisa Goodner
Budget

State Courts Revenue Trust Fund: The Courts Embrace New Challenges

For the last five years, Florida, like the rest of the nation, has endured dramatically declining state revenues. Inescapably affected, the court system has also been witnessing the shrinking of its budget: its $491 million budget in 2007 – 08 constricted to $433 million in 2008 – 09, for instance. As part of this 12% drop, the courts lost 290.5 positions—these fiscal and personnel cuts coming at a time when Florida’s citizens and businesses have been turning to the courts in greater numbers.

Over the last several years, current and prior chief justices, the budget commissions, and State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner, in an effort to staunch further losses, worked resolutely to establish a stabilized funding system for the courts. They were guided by several goals—most pressing, to protect the court budget in times of economic crisis. They also sought to link filing fees back to the courts, reasoning that the fees that Florida’s citizens pay to access their court system should be dedicated to the court system. Their endeavors began to pay off when the legislature established the State Courts Revenue Trust Fund, which became operational on February 1, 2009.

Before the trust fund was created, the court system was funded predominantly through general revenue (in fiscal year 2008 – 09 appropriations, for instance, 92% of the budget was general revenue-based). Now, it is largely trust-funded: for this fiscal year, the court system budget, at $451 million, is 70% trust-funded and 30% general revenue-funded. With the exception of some judicial salaries, which remain general revenue-funded, the trust fund supports most court operations.

As Ms Goodner articulated in her message, “Our push for dedicated funding worked”: this year, due in large part to the deluge of mortgage foreclosure cases, the trust fund is projected to have a cash balance of $134 million. But this shift from general revenue to trust funding has presented some great challenges—and has also prompted some major changes in the way the court system does business.

For instance, back when general revenue constituted the courts’ primary funding source, before the beginning of each fiscal year, OSCA’s Budget Office would develop an Annual Release Plan for the chief justice’s approval. The plan would be transmitted to the governor’s office (the “gatekeeper” of all the state’s appropriations), and, based on that plan, cash would be released for use quarterly (typically 25% of the allotted revenues). This method guaranteed that the courts had a fixed amount of money for each quarter; the courts knew what they were getting, and they knew exactly when it would be released.

With the trust fund, however, the courts depend primarily on a cash-based budget now. This means that the health of the trust fund is determined by the amount of filing fees and fines that the clerks take in for the courts. So when court filings and fines increase, the revenues in the trust fund do as well. And when filings and fines decline, so, of course, do the revenues. Consequently, in order to ensure that the courts have enough cash to meet their fiscal obligations, it’s imperative that OSCA scrupulously track the revenue that’s coming in. To monitor, on a statewide level, incoming revenues, the legislature gave OSCA the funding authority to create a revenue work team; this four-person team consists of people in the Court Services Unit, the Budget Unit, and Finance and Accounting.

But as the revenue work team soon discovered, tracking incoming revenues is no easy feat. One complicating factor is that the filing fees have to get divided up into pots earmarked for many different entities, as mandated by the legislature. For instance, let’s say someone goes to the courthouse and pays $397.50 to file for a dissolution of marriage. The clerks take this total payment and separate it out into specified amounts for predetermined categories: $55 goes to the domestic violence trust fund; $12.50 goes to a fund for displaced homemakers; $5 goes to the Child Welfare Training Trust Fund; the court education trust fund gets $3.50; $16 goes to the mediation and arbitration trust fund; $1.50 goes to the Division of Financial Services; $105 goes to the state’s general revenue. And the State Courts Revenue Trust Fund gets $80. The remainder is used to fund the clerks of court. Especially in the beginning, because so many new pots had been added, money was often funneled inadvertently into incorrect categories.

Also complicating the process is that the clerks are not required to submit the funds to the Department of Revenue until 20 days after the end of the month in which the revenues were collected, which delays when the revenues are deposited in the trust fund and are available for use.

Even more challenging is that there’s no mechanism to account for the money that is supposed to go into the trust fund. The clerks collect the money, but the courts are not provided with transactional data that
State Courts Revenue Trust Fund
Revenue Collections by Source
July 2009 to February 2010

Total Revenues Collected July 2009 to February 2010: $280,561,792

Note: Revenues from filing fees and fines that are deposited in the State Courts Revenue Trust Fund represent only a portion of the total amount collected from these revenue sources.

identify each filing and the amount owed the court trust fund. So it’s difficult to know whether the trust fund is receiving all the revenue it’s due.

At present, the only way to track this revenue is to analyze filings data from the Summary Reporting System to calculate estimated revenues from each county—and to juxtapose the estimated revenues against the actual revenues reported by the Department of Revenue. So, each month, OSCA staff generate reports that show the estimated and actual revenues for each type of case; this information helps staff identify any discrepancies in the revenue collected. OSCA sends the reports to the chief judges and trial court administrators, and the circuits work directly with clerk staff and their counties to resolve any inconsistencies. Tracking the revenues is clearly a laborious enterprise.

“This is all so new to us; we never had to monitor such a large trust fund before because we were almost exclusively general revenue-funded,” reflected Kristine Slayden, senior court statistics consultant with OSCA’s Court Services Unit. “There were lots of glitches at first because the money wasn’t always going into the right pots—but a lot of those issues have been fixed,” she added. However, she expressed concern that 80% of the current trust fund revenue comes from mortgage foreclosures, noting that, “Because of the economic crisis, the trust fund is not very diversified now—but diversity is what we seek because a diverse portfolio minimizes the risk.”

Naturally, the courts are vigilant about monitoring the trust fund internally, but the legislature is also interested in how much revenue is being, generated and put into this trust fund, Ms Slayden explained. To perform revenue forecasts, the legislature created the Article V Revenue Estimating Conference last July.
Operating under the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR), this conference consists of four principals—the EDR, the governor's office, the House, and the Senate. Each time the conference meets, three forecasts are presented—one by the governor's office, one by the EDR, and one by the court system (which uses the tracking done by the revenue work team to develop its estimates). The principals then arrive at a consensus decision, which becomes the official revenue estimate. In addition to providing the legislature with the information it seeks, this estimate offers the court system reliable revenue forecasts to support its planning and budgeting process.

The Article V Revenue Estimating Conference meets regularly to adjust its forecast. Originally, the conference projected that mortgage foreclosures would drop off—but trends have shown that they continue to be higher than originally estimated. As a result, at least for the next year or two, the trust fund account is healthy, Ms Slayden noted.

Real Property and Mortgage Foreclosure Filings
Summary Reporting System (SRS)
FY 1990 - 91 through FY 2010 - 2011

*Fiscal years 2009/10 and 2010/11 estimates are based on data provided during the February 8, 2010, Revenue Estimating Conference.

Performance and Accountability
Court Reporting Standards of Operation and Best Practices

Since its creation in 2002, the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability has been responsible for proposing policies and procedures on issues connected with the efficient and effective operation of Florida’s trial courts. In an endeavor aimed at improving trial court performance—and at supporting the unification of trial court operations into a single statewide system—one of the commission’s tasks has been to develop and implement standards of operation (i.e., mandatory practices) and best practices (i.e., suggested practices) for the major elements of the trial courts.
The commission, which is chaired by Judge Robert B. Bennett, Twelfth Circuit, takes a careful and measured approach to developing standards of operation and best practices. It begins by forming a workgroup to address a specific major element (e.g., mediation, court reporting). The workgroup's first step is to construct circuit profiles reflecting the operational practices of each circuit as well as the issues that each circuit faces in providing that element. These profiles—coupled with months of review and discussion—become the foundation of the workgroup's preliminary report, which is a draft of standards of operation, best practices, and other recommendations. At this point, the commission invites comments from various stakeholder groups. After taking feedback into consideration, the workgroup revises its report for review by the commission, which must approve it before submitting it to the supreme court. After the supreme court approves the report, the circuits begin to receive assistance in implementing the standards of operation.

Though lengthy and deliberate, this process has already begun to bear fruit: in May 2009, the supreme court adopted the standards and best practices recommended in the commission's report on alternative dispute resolution services, and OSCA has already started to provide support to help the circuits actualize the standards.

While making progress on that project, the commission was simultaneously working on court reporting services. In January of this year, the supreme court adopted the standards and best practices proposed in the commission's 2007 report, *Recommendations for the Provision of Court Reporting Services in Florida's Trial Courts*, and its 2009 supplement to that report. (To read the administrative order adopting the commission's report, follow this link.)

Offering strategies for improving the uniformity, effectiveness, and efficiency of court reporting services while also allowing for a measure of local flexibility, the report and its supplement cover legal and operational issues arising from the use of digital technology; staffing and service delivery models; transcript production; and the cost-sharing arrangement with the public defenders, state attorneys, and Justice Administration Commission. Not a substitute for the original report, the supplement serves, rather, as an addition to it; specifically, the supplement more pointedly addresses the protection of confidential information when using digital technology. (To read the original report, follow this link. And to view the supplemental report, take this link.)

Sharon Buckingham, senior court operations consultant with OSCA and lead staff to the commission, called it a "beautiful report." But she stressed that "The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability wants to do more than publish beautiful reports that sit on a shelf." The burning goal now is to begin implementing its recommendations: "Now the real work [or, as Ms Buckingham calls it, ‘the fun part’] begins: effectuating the change.” She acknowledged the inherent challenges—both because adapting to new standards involves a “culture shift” and because economic downturns tend to inhibit innovation. But she pointed out that many of the standards of operation are based on what the circuits are already doing—the only difference now is that the court has adopted a policy that standardizes these practices. And she added that a number of the standards will actually save the circuits money because they'll increase efficiency.

As for the benefits of adopting statewide standards of operation for court reporting—they are considerable, Ms Buckingham explained: litigants’ rights will be better protected; the courts will perform their functions more efficiently; and the courts will utilize public resources in a more accountable manner—all of which will help to fortify public trust and confidence in the branch. So "It’s a win for everyone," she pronounced. She and other OSCA staff are already working to coordinate quarterly conference calls with the circuits to begin the dialog about implementing the standards.

As for the commission’s next big project, it’s to arrive at standards of operation and best practices for court interpreting services. Last September, the commission formed a Court Interpreter Workgroup, which completed the circuit profiles in October. The workgroup will release its preliminary report this spring.
Subcommittee on Psychotherapeutic Medication Develops Valuable Tools

With the calamitous death of Gabriel Myers, a seven-year-old in foster care who hanged himself in his foster parents’ South Florida home in April 2009, national attention was suddenly riveted on the dangers of prescribing psychotropic drugs to children, especially to the state’s most vulnerable youngsters, those in foster care. But even before this tragedy erupted, Chief Justice Quince and a host of Florida judges articulated their concerns about prescribing psychotherapeutic drugs to children. Their concerns are manifold. Among them, many of the psychotropic medications prescribed to children were actually formulated for adults. Moreover, many of these medications are being given for off-label use—meaning that the drugs are being used to treat symptoms that are different from those for which they were intended and approved. These drugs, as the death of Gabriel Myers underscored, can jeopardize the lives of children.

Responding to these concerns, Chief Justice Quince, in a December 2008 administrative order, directed the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Courts (FCC) to review the rules, statutes, and procedures associated with the approval and administration of psychotherapeutic medications to children in foster care and protective services and to recommend changes to current practices so as to ensure sufficient oversight of the dispensing of these medications. (To read the administrative order, take this link.)

Soon after the administrative order was signed, FCC Chair Judge Nikki Ann Clark, First DCA, established the Subcommittee on Psychotherapeutic Medication. To chair it, she appointed Thirteenth Circuit Judge Herbert Baumann, who has taken the lead on other foster care issues addressed by the FCC. And in selecting subcommittee members, she chose people with expertise in psychotherapeutic medication—judges and magistrates, members of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and its Gabriel Myers Task Force, mental health professionals and other care providers, a guardian ad litem, and even a pharmacist—assembling what Judge Baumann called a “diverse and unique group that was put together with a lot of thought.”

Meeting monthly through telephone conference calls and videoconferences, the subcommittee has already made significant strides. For instance, subcommittee members worked with the Gabriel Myers Task Force to produce the report that the latter was required to submit to the Task Force on Fostering Success, chaired by former DCF Secretary Bob Butterworth (the report analyzed the specifics of the Gabriel Myers case, addressed psychotropic drug use to treat children in foster care, and investigated child-on-child sexual abuse).

Also in collaboration with the Gabriel Myers Task Force—and with the feedback of a spectrum of judges, doctors, DCF representatives, and foster parents—the subcommittee produced a detailed and comprehensive medical report designed to standardize, statewide, the information that community-based care providers will have to bring before a judge before asking permission to prescribe psychotropic medication for children. If approved by the DCF, the medical report will ensure that the child’s parent or legal guardian has given express and informed consent; the report will also ensure that the physician has gathered information so complete and thorough that the report can be used in lieu of a court appearance.

In addition, the subcommittee created what it refers to as a “medication cheat sheet”—a concise, user-friendly catalog that lays out the various categories of psychotropic drugs that are typically prescribed to children (antidepressants, agents classified as antidepressants that are also used for the treatment of disorders other than depression, first and second generation antipsychotics, and drugs used for mood disorders). A handy reference for dependency judges, this catalog identifies each drug’s brand name, generic name, and possible side effects, also drawing attention to any special notes of which the court should be aware.

The subcommittee’s accomplishments will have significant, long-term ramifications. For instance, the standardized medical report will serve as “a record for the decision to prescribe psychotropic medication to children,” creating “a much-needed chain of responsibility,” declared Jovasha Lang, senior court analyst with OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement and subcommittee staff member. Further, the medical report and the medication cheat sheet are...
practical and beneficial tools that will provide judges with assistance in determining the best path for each child for whom psychotropic medications are being considered.

“This issue of prescribing psychotropic medication to children is big—it’s very important,” remarked Judge Baumann; “It’s an area that we, as judges, really need to give thoughtful consideration to because it is so important to the kids who are involved. All judges around the state feel it is a very pressing issue,” he added, stressing that “Cases involving psychotropic meds must be resolved in a timely and uniform manner.” By providing judges with thorough information about the child who’s being prescribed a psychotropic medication—and about the effects of specific psychotherapeutic medicines on children—these tools developed by the subcommittee should indeed help the court resolve these cases with greater efficiency.

Shelter Hearing Benchcard: An Update

The shelter hearing is an exceedingly important procedure because this is when a judge determines whether a child is at risk and needs to be removed from his or her home. Yet the typical shelter hearing lasts only five minutes. As one of a host of initiatives aimed at improving the dependency court system, the statewide Dependency Court Improvement Panel, chaired by Eleventh Circuit Judge Jeri B. Cohen, developed and piloted a shelter hearing benchcard to help judges conduct more comprehensive shelter hearings. Panel members maintain that, by addressing more issues at the front end of dependency cases, shelter hearings can lead to better decision-making throughout the life of the case—and ultimately abbreviate a child’s stay in out-of-home care.

The four-page benchcard, made of sturdy, spiral-bound cardboard, is laid out in a readable, easy-to-use format, with bold font identifying the items required by statute and regular font signifying best practices. Following introductory remarks are 10 clearly-labeled sections, each of which is parsed into bullet points that smoothly guide judges through the shelter hearing process. The sections cover the following issues: Advise parents of right to legal counsel; Discuss complaint allegations/introduction of evidence; Determine from petition and other evidence whether there is probable cause [this takes up two sections]; Determine placement (begin concurrent planning); Determine visitation/contact frequency; Discuss service needs for parents; Discuss service needs for the child; Address child support and government entitlements; and Issue the order and schedule the next hearing.

From September through December 2009, the benchcard was piloted by five judges representing rural, medium-sized, and urban courts, and when the pilot was over, the judges were surveyed to glean their feedback. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being poor and 10 being outstanding, the benchcard received an average score of 8 for overall usefulness. When asked if they think dependency judges across the state should use the benchcard, three of the judges said “yes”; one pointed out that it is “a valuable educational aid, even if it is not used as a checklist by all judges”; and one affirmed, “Yes, because many times we get so used to what we are doing that it is easy to ‘skip a beat’; the card does not allow you to do this.” And in response to the question, “Will you continue to use this benchcard,” responses were similarly encouraging: “yes,” said one; “I have always followed almost all the items on the benchcard...and will continue to use the same practices,” another answered; the other three responded with a resounding “absolutely.”

The Dependency Court Improvement Panel now seeks to encourage all dependency judges at least to try the benchcard and then decide whether it enhances their shelter hearings. In January, OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement sent the new benchcard to all
judges who hear dependency cases. Then in early February, Judge Cohen invited these judges to take the following challenge: try using the benchcard for the next 10 shelter hearings; after that, “spend a moment to reflect on what you could possibly take away as enhancements/improvements to your current method for conducting shelter hearings.”

This benchcard was designed to help dependency judges achieve some august goals—among them, to prevent the unnecessary removal of children; limit the trauma to children (by addressing visitation and identifying the children’s mental, physical, emotional needs early on); speed the casework by requiring early evaluations; identify potential placements with relatives; speed the location process for absent parents; explain fully to parents why the state has intervened and how the dependency process will unfold; and reduce the time children spend in care (meaning that they achieve permanency faster). Lastly, a powerfully convincing reason for trying the shelter hearing benchcard was offered by one of the piloting judges: “Spending more time at shelter [hearings], even if not time saving in the long run, may create greater safety for children.”

Save This Date

Florida’s 2010 Statewide Dependency Summit will be held in Orlando
August 24 – 26 (Tuesday – Thursday)

Drug Court Expansion Program is Now Up and Running

Approximately $110—that’s what it costs to incarcerate one person in prison for one day, according to Florida’s Department of Corrections. That adds up to over $40,000 per person each year. The state could save millions of dollars annually if it were able to redirect a substantial population of non-violent felony offenders from prison to successful treatment and diversion programs—and that’s precisely the idea behind the post-adjudicatory drug court expansion program in which nine counties across the state are participating (Broward, Duval, Escambia, Hillsborough, Marion, Orange, Pinellas, Polk, and Volusia counties).

A joint project of the court system, county government, the offices of the state attorneys and public defenders, and the Department of Corrections, this two-year drug court expansion program is being funded by $19 million in federal stimulus dollars that the 2009 legislature appropriated to the court system. The funds are being administered by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement; OSCA is the grantee responsible for managing and administering the funds; the nine drug courts are required to meet punctilious data-reporting requirements; and the legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) will be evaluating the data.

“January was the turning point” in building the expansion program, explained Jennifer Grandal, court operations consultant with OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement, for that’s when “most of the counties began program operations.” Meanwhile, OSCA staff have been developing a web-based data system that will efficiently collect the prodigious number and kinds of client-level data elements that the expansion drug courts have to input in order to comply with the various reporting requirements of the Department of Law Enforcement, OPPAGA, and state and federal government. On all participants, the drug courts will be collecting and reporting comprehensive data, including arrest, offense, and sentencing information; demographics; progress in treatment; drug test results; incentives and sanctions; and positive outcomes (outcomes will be measured through the collection of data that reflect matters like the participants’ academic status, employment status, income, housing status, and physical health status both at the beginning and at
The expansion program has indeed been a colossal undertaking. So, to gather into one place all the relevant legislation, protocols, and procedures for the expansion program’s drug court staff, OSCA staff compiled a handy operational manual. Recently distributed, the Adult Post-Adjudicatory Drug Court Expansion Program Manual includes chapters on 2009 drug court legislation and related statutes, the federal grant requirements, the circuit program guidelines, the data collection requirements, FAQs, contact information, and other useful resources.

The expansion program is now operational in all nine counties, and, as of early April, 110 offenders entered the program. Eventually, the program will serve 4,000 prison-bound, non-violent felony offenders over a two-year period. Participation in the program is voluntary, but offenders are required to meet certain criteria: they must otherwise be prison-bound; they must admit guilt or be found guilty of a non-violent felony and must agree to enter a drug court program as part of their sentence; they must score 52 points or fewer on Florida’s criminal sentencing scoresheet (which determines the number of months an offender should serve, given his/her conviction and criminal history); and they must be considered amenable to post-adjudicatory drug court treatment. If they successfully complete the program, the offenders do not have to go to prison, and their judge may reduce the length of their probation.

Based on research and projections provided by OPPAGA, out of the 4,000 offenders who will participate, 2,000 are expected to complete the program successfully, and 1,600 will not enter Florida’s prison system. If these estimates prove true, by significantly reducing future prison admissions, the state could save more than $100 million (which is the amount needed to build and operate a new prison). Moreover, the expansion program will demonstrate that post-adjudicatory drug court reduces recidivism, enhances public safety, restores productive citizens, and saves lives.

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"The delivery of justice is affected by the competence and quality of judges, administrators, and court staff," begins long-range issue #3—Supporting Competence and Quality—of the judicial branch’s long-range plan. Therefore, the plan continues, “Advanced levels of training and development are critical to enable those who work within the system to effectively perform the challenging work of the courts and meet the demands placed on them.” Through its vibrant range of education programs, Florida’s court system underscores that it “is committed to having a workforce that is highly qualified and dedicated to service.”

The entity responsible for administering the budget for, coordinating, and overseeing the development of training and instructional programs is the Florida Court Education Council, created in 1978. Over the years, judges have been the predominant participants in these educational endeavors. The council has now undertaken a broader role—to begin building an education program for court personnel as well.

This initiative was launched in 2007, when the council hired a consultant to perform an education needs assessment of court personnel. After evaluating the training needs of six categories of court personnel (general magistrates and hearing officers, trial court staff attorneys and general counsel, judicial assistants, administrative services personnel, family court personnel, and case managers), the consultant made recommendations about their training needs and about the most suitable and cost-effective methods for addressing them. Then in 2008, to help it create a framework for meeting these needs, the council established the Florida Court Personnel Committee, chaired by Judge Kathleen Kroll, Fifteenth Circuit. Since then—even in the throes of a biting budget crisis—the council has been providing funding and support for a series of energizing instructional programs for court personnel. This article highlights some of the latest educational opportunities.
Florida Court Public Information Officers Conference

With the large volume of high profile cases that comes through Florida courts, regular training for public information officers (PIOs) is critical to maintaining an ongoing and necessary dialogue between the courts, media, and the public. Also, because the work of PIOs constantly evolves to reflect the ever changing news cycle, they need continuing education in order to provide the public with as much transparency as possible. In 2000, an emergency operations planning initiative under the administration of Chief Justice Charles T. Wells required that every circuit and district court appoint a public information officer. In response to this, Florida Court Public Information Officers, Inc. (FCPIO) was founded as an educational nonprofit to promote communication and training throughout the field.

To address trends and challenges facing the field today, FCPIO organized a training conference in November 2009. This was the first time in more than two years that PIOs could get together, due to travel freezes across the state. The two-day conference, the first event for PIOs funded by the Florida Court Education Council, featured several speakers and educational workshops to reinforce traditional skills of the profession and evaluate potential tools for the future, especially the emergence and growth of social media. Addressing such trends, which will undoubtedly impact how public information officers conduct business for years to come, was a top priority for the committee that organized the event.

The explosion of social media, which includes popular sites such as Facebook and Wikipedia, has led PIOs and other court officials to question if and how these new tools should be used. “As voices for the state courts system, we need to be aware of these changes to best serve the public and courts we represent,” said Molly Justice, president of FCPIO and PIO of the Seventh Judicial Circuit. Issues relating to new forms of social media arise frequently and demand a growing amount of attention from PIOs, according to immediate past president Ron Stuart of the Sixth Judicial Circuit. “On almost daily basis, there is a new story about social media issues and the courts. Now our members have the skills to put those matters into perspective for judges, court administrators, technology staff and the media,” Mr. Stuart said.

Aside from highlighting the changing landscape of media, the program also included sessions on crisis and internal communications as well as media skills for beginning and experienced PIOs. This training offered a valuable opportunity for newer PIOs, who often wear many hats, to gain insight from the experiences of those with longstanding backgrounds with media and communications. Glen Rubin, who serves as marshal and PIO for the Fourth DCA, said conferences like this enable PIOs to “enhance our ability to respond accurately to the press and court constituents regarding our operations.”

Past experience has shown that effective management of public information and proper communication methods create positive relationships with the media. In several instances throughout Florida, skilled management of court communications has helped to meet the goal of transparency and to uphold the dignity of the courts at the same time. This is especially evident when high profile cases such as Bush v. Gore and the Terri Schiavo litigation draw national attention to Florida courts.

Maintaining channels of communication requires PIOs to understand and implement the quickly changing methods of communication used by media and the public. Ongoing education is particularly essential since the college coursework that leads to court employment doesn’t usually address the many responsibilities and skills needed to be an effective PIO, according to Craig Waters, the founding president of FCPIO and PIO of the Florida Supreme Court. “High profile news in the courtroom can be at least as disruptive as any hurricane and requires careful management by trained PIOs,” Mr. Waters noted.

The conference gave attendees a valuable opportunity to learn from a variety of speakers and programs and to enjoy the uncommon opportunity to meet in person and share experiences with colleagues from across the state. “The time we spent together was invaluable and something that could not be duplicated through distance learning,” said Ms Justice. “We are extremely grateful for the grant funding and look forward to putting the knowledge we gained into practice for years to come.”

(The above section was written by Nikita Rocawich, an intern with the supreme court’s Public Information Office.)

Faculty Training Program for Court Personnel

Since the early 80s, judges who wish to serve as faculty at court education programs have had an annual opportunity to participate in a two-day training program that immerses them in adult education principles in a small-group setting. Although this program has been open to court personnel, its intended participants are judges who are learning...
how to teach other judges. In October 2008, the Florida Court Education Council offered its first faculty training program designed specifically for court personnel. (The spring 2009 Full Court Press, pp. 11 – 12, has an article on that training; follow this link.) The program was so successful that, this past December at the supreme court, the council offered it again—with a few significant differences.

In many ways, the recent training program was similar to the 2008 program. Both addressed adult learning principles and styles, learning objectives, and interactive teaching strategies, for instance. And both made use of a hybrid learning model—called “hybrid” because it comprised activities that took place outside the classroom as well as face-to-face training. However, while the 2008 program included representatives from each of the six categories of court personnel groups, the December program was geared toward a particular combination of court staff: those who are involved in training as part of their positions and court technology personnel. And while the first training program dedicated some time to addressing traditional, live, in-person training, the December program was emphatically technology-oriented, focusing exclusively on presentation skills associated with distance learning formats such as web conference and videoconference activities. Moreover, while court-based faculty taught at the first program, a guest teacher—Joseph Sawyer, distance learning manager for the National Judicial College—was invited to conduct parts of the December program.

In addition to learning about basic principles of adult learning, the fifteen participants learned how to identify different types of learners; determine the specific needs of learners in their courses; write learning objectives; and develop effective teaching strategies using videoconferencing and web conferencing. They also explored strategies for making distance learning a fruitfully interactive experience and cultivated a sense of ease using distance learning formats.

Attendees found the training extremely helpful. “The Court Education staff put on a great show for those participating, who, as trainers, are considering taking future trainings beyond the bounds of their court building and into other courts throughout the state,” OSCA web administrator Phillip Pollock pronounced. “The two-day session didn’t just tell us how to bridge that cyberspace gap,” he added, emphasizing, “We actually had to create and give a presentation that a distant audience was able to interact with, see, and hear. It was an invaluable program.”

These faculty trainings exemplify the Florida Court Personnel Committee’s goal of developing a body of knowledge— teachers, materials, etc.—that can be deployed over and over as well as shared with other circuits. When these newly-trained faculty return to their courts and offer courses for the personnel in their circuits, they help the committee reach this goal. Toward that end, before leaving the supreme court building, participants identified a topic for a potential course to try to offer within the next year. “Court personnel already teach each other locally, regarding a variety of topics. Our goal is to assist them in developing as instructors and also to help them expand the scope of their trainings beyond purely local opportunities,” affirmed Susan Morley, senior attorney with OSCA’s Court Education Section and lead attorney for court personnel programming, including this training. “We’re particularly excited by the possibilities presented by a combination of faculty-trained teachers and technology staff and look forward to watching new training develop during the coming year,” she added.

Statewide Case Managers Conference

Florida is a large state with a huge caseload: from simple traffic citations to weighty criminal cases to complex civil disputes involving multiple parties, Florida courts dispose of more than 3.5 million cases each year. Yet Florida has fewer judges per capita than any other sizable state. Despite these challenges, cases must be resolved in a timely manner—or else justice is delayed, and litigation costs increase. To manage such ponderous caseloads—and so many different types of cases—Florida’s courts strive to practice effective and meaningful caseflow management.

Thanks to funding from the Florida Court Education Council and a STOP Violence Against Women grant, 153 case managers representing all 20 circuits met in February in Orlando for an intensive workshop on Effective Caseflow Management. The ultimate goal of the workshop was to teach participants how to assess the effectiveness of their court’s caseflow management system and how to apply this knowledge to develop a system that, in collaboration with
stakeholders, ensures a timely and just disposition of all cases. To achieve that objective, over the course of the full two-day program, participants studied the fundamentals of caseflow management, explored strategies to create or enhance their court’s caseflow management program, and learned how to implement an effective differentiated case management plan (a technique for tailoring the case management process to the requirements of individual cases).

Chris Crawford, president of the court management and information technology consulting firm Justice Served, facilitated this highly interactive and experiential workshop, which utilized a multi-textured combination of lecture, group activities, and one-on-one instruction. The workshop included five plenary sessions (two focused on caseflow principles; three addressed differentiated case management) and three breakout sessions, for which case managers were divided into five groups based on area of specialty: domestic violence, drug court, mental health court, family, and civil. For each of the breakouts, which were facilitated by court personnel, case managers tackled an exercise: on calendar workflows, differentiated case management complexity factors, and the differentiated case management task force.

According to Austin Newberry, senior court analyst with OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement and one of the workshop’s lead staff members, this was “a very significant event, bringing so many case managers together; also, this was the first time in a long time—maybe the first time ever—that case managers had a statewide education program” devoted exclusively to their vocational needs. So participants really appreciated this opportunity, as was evident in their feedback: it was “time well spent,” said one attendee; “All the ideas presented were extremely helpful,” another stated; the conference “provided tools and information necessary to launch circuit civil case management,” declared another; and another exclaimed, “20 years with the US Air Force, 13 with the Florida Department of Corrections, this was the best training session yet!” Added lead staff member Cathy Brockmeier, court education consultant with OSCA, “The conference was a wonderful opportunity for case managers around the state to network and compare best practices in caseflow management,” and many expressed gratitude for this chance.

Now, armed with the knowledge and tools they acquired over the two days, case managers have returned to their courts with a commitment to reducing the size and age of their pending case inventory and to streamlining caseflow processes by adopting the principles they studied.

Local Training at the Tenth Circuit

In addition to supporting the three statewide programs discussed above, the Florida Court Education Council also subsidized a number of local education initiatives over the last few months. Court personnel groups willing to plan educational programs during the 2009 – 10 fiscal year were able to apply for funding through a process developed by the Florida Court Personnel Committee; altogether, 16 applications were approved.

The Tenth Circuit was awarded funding to hire outside experts to lead two four-hour workshops; one was called the Power of Great Customer Service, and the other was titled Leadership and Team Building in the Court Environment. To select the workshop topics, the circuit created an Educational Planning Committee composed of members from the target audience, and these were the two most popular requests from among committee members.

Dialog and skills practices were the primary teaching methodologies for the customer service workshop (aka Dealing with Difficult People), which took place in November. Through question/answer exchanges, role plays, discussions, and individual, pair, and group activities, attendees developed a keener understanding of and appreciation for the appropriate attitudes when dealing with court “customers.” Attendees also had a chance to hone their customer service skills—like active listening, regulating their tone of voice, keeping the customer as the focus of the conversation, anticipating questions/concerns, and showing empathy. And they also learned the
likeliest ways to escalate—and thus to avoid—a conflict, how to handle hostile customers, and how to be a “solution-provider.”

Participants were delighted with the quality and the usefulness of these local trainings, according to Tenth Circuit Trial Court Administrator Nick Sudzina, who also serves on the Florida Court Personnel Committee: “This was one of the few times for which we were able to provide training on topics that staff selected: ‘The Power of Great Customer Service’ and ‘Leadership and Team Building in the Court Environment.’ Both sessions were planned extensively by court staff, were well attended, and received high acclamation during the sessions and on the evaluations. Our circuit is hopeful of submitting an application for additional education topics in the next year,” he added.

The Tenth Circuit applied for, and received funding from, the Florida Court Education Council for two four-hour workshops for court personnel: the Power of Great Customer Service and Leadership and Team Building in the Court Environment.

Local Training at the Eighth Circuit

The Eighth Circuit was also awarded council funding for a local training session. In January, court personnel at the Eighth brought in an outside expert to lead a two-day, mandatory training called Building and Maintaining Excellence Through Best in Class Human Resources Practices. Underpinning this workshop was the postulate that today’s courts confront anomalous challenges, e.g., increasing demands and plummeting resources, a changing workforce and constituents, a fluctuating legal and regulatory environment. Therefore, “Best in Class’ courts must fully leverage the most important, significant, and abundant resource they have—the court’s human talent.” The workshop was fashioned to help prepare and bolster the circuit’s court leaders at all levels, “from line employees to senior managers.”

Through this highly interactive training program, attendees learned, among other things, to identify the major challenges facing today’s courts; communicate more effectively in the workplace; implement and adapt to change more effectively; identify the criteria necessary to be an effective supervisor/manager—and identify the most common reasons why supervisors/managers fail; establish clear performance expectations for and with employees; and select appropriate corrective actions given an employee relations problem. In May, the guest facilitator will return to do a follow-up session.

If the budget holds, the council plans to do another round of funding for local trainings for the next fiscal year. This is indeed welcome news for Florida court personnel. As Mr. Sudzina pointed out, “For many years, the Trial Court Administrators' Education Committee members have lobbied vigorously for more education opportunities for our staff. Now that we have legislation that authorizes funding for education programs for Florida's court personnel, quality programs for all court staff can be provided. Florida has always been a leader in providing outstanding education programs for its judges, and now we can look forward to doing the same for staff who support the court.”
Fairness and Diversity

Increasing Access to Court Facilities

Like other public entities that employ 50 or more people, Florida’s State Courts System is required by law to assign at least one employee to oversee its efforts to comply with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities and ensures that programs and services are accessible to qualified individuals with a disability [see §35.107(a), 28 CFR Part 35].

Although the court system is obliged to place only one employee in this position, it has consistently resolved to do more: soon after the 1990 enactment of the ADA, it determined that each circuit and appellate court should have at least one court ADA coordinator. At the same time, the branch also established a statewide court ADA coordinator, who provides technical assistance on ADA compliance to judges and court personnel, develops statewide guidelines and informational materials, and coordinates local and statewide educational opportunities.

Court access remains a priority for the branch, even during periods of budget austerity, and since these positions were created, Statewide Court ADA Coordinator Debbie Howells and the 30-plus court ADA coordinators have worked to ensure that people’s access to the courts is not hampered by architectural or communication barriers. Recently, for instance, ADA coordinators instituted several mechanisms for providing information to people with disabilities. Now posted on each court’s website are instructions about how to request an ADA accommodation in that court. In addition, via links from the Florida Courts website, one can readily access each court’s instructions (follow this link to access each court’s ADA information). Also on the Florida Courts website is a directory of all the court ADA coordinators in the state (this link goes to the directory). And, in what is surely a sign of the times, Florida’s court system has even begun

The First Circuit’s Wall of Honor has multiple purposes: it’s a tribute to outstanding members of the bar and judiciary, a work of art, a fundraising mechanism for the Escambia-Santa Rosa Bar Foundation, and also a communication device dispensing docket information, community notices, and the like. Via the headset, which is on the left side of the Wall, people with visual impairments can access the information presented on the TV monitors.

Save This Date

The Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums are scheduled for May 6 or 7 (depending on your circuit) at 1:00 p.m. local time in all circuits with contested judicial elections.

All candidates for judicial office and their campaign managers are encouraged to attend the forums.

If you have any questions, please contact Pam Addison addisonp@fcourts.org
testing the waters with social networking: it created a Facebook page to provide basic information about ADA accommodations in Florida’s courts and to direct people seeking more answers to the Florida Courts website (follow this link to the Facebook page).

Recent accomplishments in both the First and the Eleventh Circuits also deserve special recognition.

First Circuit Initiatives

Located by the first floor entrance to the M.C. Blanchard Judicial Center, the First Circuit’s Wall of Honor, in its earliest imaginings, was conceived by the Escambia-Santa Rosa Bar Foundation as a way to pay tribute to outstanding members of the bar and judiciary who have passed away. However, over time, the wall took on several additional roles: as a vehicle for raising funds for the Bar Foundation, which supports various endeavors that increase public awareness of the judicial system; as a work of art that embellishes the court building; and as a communication device that dispenses docket information, community notices, and messages about bar events to those attending court—replete with a headset, so that people with visual impairments can also access the messages.

Celebrated as “a combination of beauty and functionality” by Escambia-Santa Rosa Bar Association Director Mike Doubek, the wall, gentled by soft, ambient lighting, consists of seven Plexiglas panels: an etched representation of the scales of justice gracefully bestrides the center panels; framing the scales are two easy-to-read TV monitors that communicate courthouse and legal community information; and on the outermost panels are the etched names of the honorees; at the far left is the headset.

In addition to being versatile, aesthetically pleasing, and useful, the Wall of Honor truly epitomizes the spirit of collaboration, emphasized Ms Sheila Sims, chief deputy court administrator and ADA coordinator for the First Circuit. For the wall couldn’t have come into being without partners like the Escambia-Santa Rosa Bar Foundation, which spearheaded and funded the project, and the Escambia Board of County Commissioners, their facilities department, and the county attorney (the judicial center is a county building, so it was imperative that the court and county worked in concert). Former First Circuit Chief Judge Kim A. Skievaski was involved as well, working with court administration to define appropriate criteria for selecting wall honorees. Also instrumental in the construction of the wall were numerous staff members from the court administrator’s office—many of whom continue to have a part in the day-to-day functioning of the display. Extolling the many different people whose participation was necessary to make this wall a reality, Ms Sims said, “The relationships cultivated themselves—it was a wonderful group of professionals with a single goal—community.”

Several years ago, when this project was initially conceived, its accessibility feature was not part of the design, admitted Ms Sims. But after the recent accessibility survey initiative, “and with the needs and numbers of the disabled growing day by day,” she explained, “we became more sensitive to trying to assure that anything new considered accessibility in the process.” Chief Judge Terry D. Terrell stressed a similar sentiment after the February 18 dedication of the wall: “It is incumbent upon the courts to be aware of the growing disability community and to lead by example in the provision of appropriate accommodations and information at every opportunity.”

The First Circuit, together with the counties it serves, has also taken other steps to ensure that people’s access to the courts is not impeded by architectural or communication barriers. For instance, to make it ADA compliant, Okaloosa County renovated the Crestview Courthouse’s ground floor commission chambers—a room that the court can utilize when it needs an alternative setting for ADA purposes; among its ADA accommodations are hearing assistance headphones, an ADA accessible dais and ante-room, and an ADA accessible water fountain, auto-open entry door, and restrooms. Other improvements to the Crestview Courthouse include an ADA compliant ramp, an ADA accessible restroom for one of the jury deliberation rooms, and ADA accessible customer
service counters in the clerk of court’s offices. Moreover, of the new holding cells under construction in the basement of the courthouse, 50 percent will be ADA accessible. Lastly, Okaloosa County is constructing a courthouse annex to replace the pre-ADA Shalimar Annex; the new annex, which is scheduled to open in late 2011, will have ADA accessible courtrooms.

Thanks to a number of renovations authorized by the Walton County Board of County Commissioners, the historic Walton County Courthouse has also become more accessible to people with disabilities. The courthouse entrances are on several different levels, so many of the ramps and walkways were redesigned to be accessible; the number of disabled parking spaces was doubled; and the courthouse was equipped with ADA compliant countertop heights, door-closer speeds, assistive listening devices, and handrail returns. The two new courtrooms also have accessibility features: in one, an access ramp now leads to the clerk of court’s platform, and in the other, the judge’s bench was constructed such that a lift can be added to accommodate a wheelchair. This courthouse was a particularly challenging project because the original construction was done in 1926, and additions were appended in 1950 and in 2008. But, according to Ms Sims, the county did “a tremendous job in marrying the three construction periods and meeting accessibility needs.”

In her capacity as court ADA coordinator for the First Circuit, Ms Sims declared that “It has been a wonderful opportunity to work with some very conscientious people around the circuit who, though financially challenged, continue to find resources to meet the needs of their disabled communities.”

Eleventh Circuit Initiatives

“For some people, coming to court can be intimidating, especially if they need a qualified sign language interpreter, for example, and don’t know what to do or where to go to get one. Their experience in court can be fruitless if they don’t have the accommodations they need,” explained Ms Maria Mihaic, personnel management analyst and court ADA coordinator for the Eleventh Circuit, when describing what prompted her to create an ADA sign for her circuit. “All the ADA coordinators understand the importance of signage,” she emphasized.

The sign—which cost nothing to create (Ms Mihaic designed it on her computer)—artfully embraces all the international symbols denoting accessibility: it includes the omnipresent symbol of accessibility—the figure in a wheelchair—as well as symbols indicating access for hearing loss, assistive listening systems, sign language interpretation, and access for low vision. Beneath the symbols is a short narrative with information about whom to contact and where to call (voice or TDD) or fax in order for people to get the accommodations they need “to enable their full participation in court proceedings, programs or services.” The sign is posted at the information booth of Miami-Dade’s four main courthouses and at the security desk of the six branch courthouses. This way, “When people with disabilities walk into a courthouse, they see something that’s helpful and looks familiar. These signs are reassuring,” Ms Mihaic commented.

The sign is already having its desired effect: “We get a lot more calls now from folks who are already at the courthouse, telling us that...”
they’re here and they need this or that....It was so simple for us to do, yet it can mean so much to someone with a disability who comes to the courthouse,” she added.

In addition to posting signage, the Eleventh Circuit established an ADA hotline that provides people with information about the circuit’s ADA services. The hotline actually has three lines—in English, Spanish, and Creole—and callers are asked to leave a voicemail; messages are checked twice a day, and calls are returned as quickly as possible. Most often, callers have questions about sign language interpreters, transportation, parking, or receiving something in an alternative format, or they want to make a request for ADA accommodations (which they can also do from the Eleventh Circuit’s website). Typically, the hotline receives about 100 calls a day.

Ms Mihaic stressed that it was especially important to design conspicuous and unambiguous signage and to establish an ADA hotline in the Eleventh Circuit: “We have a very diverse population in Miami-Dade County, including people with disabilities,” she stated, noting that of the 2.2 million people with disabilities in Florida, 25 percent of them live in Miami-Dade. That’s 473,992 people with disabilities in that county. Moreover, membership in the disability community can swell unpredictably, she pointed out, for it is “the only minority group that anyone can join in an instant.” Thus she felt moved to create something that would make the courthouse experience a little less alienating for these populations.

However, the budgets for all these libraries have suffered as a result of the dramatic declines in general revenue over the last three years. The DCA libraries, which are funded by the state, have had to make cuts to personnel, books, and access to online legal research materials. And, due to inadequate funding, the county law libraries, which are funded by non-state sources (e.g., the counties, private donors, etc.), have also been struggling: many have had to curtail services; some have been “absorbed” into their local public library; and some have had to close.

While the Florida Supreme Court Library has also had its share of budget cuts—and while it’s not a circulating library—librarian Billie J. Blaine wants to remind everyone that “If your library does not have a resource you need, we’ll do our best to help you find it.” Particularly now, with so many of the other court libraries scaling back their collections—or closing altogether—Ms Blaine is eager for judges and court personnel to know that supreme court librarians can fax, email, or mail a copy of a resource—and they will even lend out some books on a case-by-case basis.

When asked what people might most likely be seeking from the supreme court library, Ms Blaine noted that historic Florida legal materials (e.g., laws, statutes, treatises) are some of the library’s most valuable resources and are often not available in electronic format—likewise, historical information about a particular justice or court. Those who want to find out what’s available at the supreme court library can search the library catalog (follow this link to the catalog).

Library staff are available to answer questions during regular business hours, 8 – 5, Mondays through Fridays, and can be reached at (850) 488-8919. “The Florida Supreme Court Library serves the whole court system,” Ms Blaine emphasized.
On January 28, at the 2010 Pro Bono Service Awards Ceremony at the Florida Supreme Court, the following attorneys were commended for their exemplary commitment to meeting the legal needs of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the most vulnerable of Florida’s citizens:

Robert C. Josefsberg, Eleventh Circuit, was honored with the Tobias Simon Pro Bono Service Award;

Judge Nikki Ann Clark, First DCA, was presented with the Distinguished Judicial Service Award;

Hunton & Williams LLP, Eleventh Circuit, and Icard, Merrill, Cullis, Timm, Furen & Ginsburg, P.A., Twelfth Circuit, were co-recipients of the Chief Justice’s Law Firm Commendation;

The Seminole County Bar Association, Eighteenth Circuit, was awarded the Chief Justice’s Voluntary Bar Association Pro Bono Service Award;

Monica Miller Evans, Second Circuit, received the Florida Bar’s Young Lawyers Division Pro Bono Service Award;

And Florida Bar President Jesse H. Diner bestowed the Pro Bono Service Award on the following attorneys:

Robert Steven Goldman, Second Circuit
Monica Taibl, Third Circuit
Rebeccah Lee Beller, Fourth Circuit
Michael Jordan Cooper, Fifth Circuit
William G. Bostick Jr., Sixth Circuit
Raven Elizabeth Sword, Seventh Circuit
Robert Anthony Rush, Eighth Circuit
Robert Lee Dietz, Ninth Circuit
Dana Yvonne Moore, Tenth Circuit
Gordon Charles Murray, Sr., Eleventh Circuit
Larry Ronald Chulock, Twelfth Circuit
Caroline Kapusta Black, Thirteenth Circuit
Stephen Lee Romine, Thirteenth Circuit
Timothy Michael Warner, Fourteenth Circuit
Richard Lloyd Abedon, Fifteenth Circuit
Thomas Edward Woods, Sixteenth Circuit
Juliette Ellen Lippman, Seventeenth Circuit
Scott Douglas Krasny, Eighteenth Circuit
John Edward Moore, III, Nineteenth Circuit
Kathleen C. Passidomo, Twentieth Circuit
Kerry M. Donahue, Out-of-State Florida Bar Member, Dublin, Ohio
On January 29, at the Florida Supreme Court, the following were honored at the annual OSCA Employee Recognition Ceremony:

**Steve Henley** (Strategic Planning Unit) received the Annual Award of Excellence;

The Complex Civil Reporting Team—**Vicki Carlton, Bradley Rich, Miriam Jugger, and P.J Stockdale** (Court Services Unit) received the Annual Teamwork Award;

**Stephanie McHardy** (Dispute Resolution Center) received the Joseph W. Hatchett Diversity Award;

And **James Paramore** (Information Systems Services), **Cal Goodlett** (Office of the General Counsel), **Kris Slayden** (Court Services Unit), and **Natalie Miller** (Office of Court Improvement), received the four 2009 Employee of the Quarter Awards.

**In Memoriam**


April
8 – 9  Court Interpreter Orientation Workshop, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
10  Court Interpreter Written Exam, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
12 – 13  Court Interpreter Orientation Workshop, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
14  Court Interpreter Written Exam, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
18 – 22  Justice Teaching Institute, Tallahassee, FL
27 – 30  DRC County Mediation Training, Daytona Beach, FL
30  Legislative Session Adjourns – Sine Die

May
11  Annual Statewide Drug Court Graduation, Daytona Beach, FL
21  ADA Coordinators Conference Call, 12:00 PM
23  Commission on Trial Court Performance & Accountability Meeting, 1:00 – 5:00 PM, Ft. Myers, FL
24 – 28  Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, Ft. Myers, FL

June
1 – 4  DRC County Mediation Training, Miami, FL
17 – 18  Court Interpreter Oral Language Exam, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
23 – 26  Florida Bar Annual Meeting, Boca Raton, FL

July
6 – 8  Conference of County Court Judges of Florida Annual Program, Orlando, FL
16  ADA Coordinators Conference Call, 12:00 PM
20 – 24  National Association for Court Management Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA
26 – 28  Florida Conference of Circuit Judges Annual Program, Marco Island, FL
26 – 28  Trial Court Administrators Education Program, Marco Island, FL

Under the direction of
Supreme Court Chief Justice Peggy A. Quince
State Courts Administrator Elisabeth H. Goodner
Deputy State Courts Administrator Blan L. Teagle
Publications Managing Attorney Susan Leseman

Written and edited by Beth C. Schwartz
Court Publications Writer
schwartzb@flcourts.org

The Office of the State Courts Administrator
500 South Duval Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1900
(850) 922-5081