Message from Lisa Goodner, State Courts Administrator

Reading the article “Reminiscences: 36 Years of Technology in the Courts” (see page 12), I was struck by how incredibly far court technology has come in the last three-and-a-half decades. Given some of our recent projects, the article also made me reflect on the future. That led me to think about our current work on electronic filing (e-filing). As was recently described by statute, “The purpose of the electronic filing process is to reduce judicial costs in the office of the clerk and the judiciary, increase timeliness in the processing of cases, and provide the judiciary with case-related information to allow for improved judicial case management” (Florida Statutes 28.22205). The ramifications of e-filing are monumental—it will significantly alter the way the courts, and the people they serve, do business.

To ensure successful e-filing implementation throughout the state, the branch first must implement a statewide e-portal as well as document the case-related information required by the judiciary and necessary for improving judicial case management. The supreme court has charged the Florida Courts Technology Commission with these tasks—which would be enormous undertakings even if we weren’t hampered by the current budget constraints. We are proceeding as expeditiously as possible.

But we are also proceeding carefully. The judicial branch has often been reproached for being resistant to technology. No doubt we’d find some instances of technophobia in the branch, as we would in most professions. But the most compelling reason for proceeding deliberately is this: if the new technologies fail to give us outcomes that are better than—or at least as good as—before, then what kind of victory have we really achieved? Technology can be a friend or a foe. We are working to implement e-filing that is unequivocally a “friend.” That means that, while simultaneously reducing costs for the courts and the clerks and while improving case processing and case management, e-filing also must enhance people’s courtroom experience and their access to the courts—without substantially increasing their costs to use the courts.

For many people, e-filing epitomizes access because anyone with a computer and a connection to the Internet can file documents at any time; people won’t have to travel to the courthouse and wait in line. But judges, who see people in all walks of life, understand that e-filing will not enhance access for everyone—many people in this country, especially elders, racial and ethnic minorities, and persons of limited means, don’t use or have convenient access to computers. According to statistics recently released by the US Census Bureau and several consumer research firms, computer use and Internet access are clearly on the rise. But, at the same time, among adults 65 and older, 58 percent do not have access to the Internet; nor do 46 percent of Hispanics and 33 percent of African Americans; moreover, 40 percent of households with an annual income of less than $30,000 don’t have Internet access. Thus, e-filing will not initially be a solution for all populations who are seeking court information and access.

In this delicate balancing act, the branch is striving to implement e-filing so that it fulfills the statutory vision of it and enhances people’s access to the courts, while remaining attentive to the needs of the considerable number of people who, for whatever reason, will not readily be able to take advantage of this new technology.

Sincerely,

Lisa Goodner
Strategic Planning

Judicial Branch Governance Study

The court system’s long-range plan has been likened to a roadmap designed to guide the branch in advancing its vision and mission over the next six years. On July 1, after a three-year process that involved wide-ranging public outreach, review, and analysis, the Task Force on Judicial Branch Planning, with the support of OSCA’s Strategic Planning Unit, issued a revision of the plan. The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch: 2009–2015 identifies and describes five fundamental long-range issues on which, over the long term, the court system must focus in order to move toward fulfilling its vision and mission; it also names 16 goals (aspirational, big-picture objectives) and 71 strategies (practical, realistic steps) for addressing the long-range issues (follow this link to access the long-range plan).

Because of the fundamental importance of the long-range plan in setting the orientation of the judicial branch, judges and court personnel can expect to see its language reflected in all sorts of court-related phenomena: administrative orders, committee tasks, education and training endeavors, workplace priorities, and, in general, branch-inflected documents and conversations all across the state. For example, not long after the revised long-range plan was issued, it inspired Chief Justice Quince’s creation of the Judicial Branch Governance Study Group.

In its description of Issue #1, Strengthening Governance and Independence, the plan describes the governance and administrative structure of the judicial branch as “diffused,” noting the unsystematic methods by which judicial policy is often developed and implemented. While recognizing that “This structure may have been adequate to meet the needs of the judicial branch in the past,” the plan supports a reconsideration of this approach to branch governance. Given current realities—the plan names “the cumulative effects of constitutional amendments, growing complexity of legal and social issues, and increasing fiscal constraints,” as well as the ramifications of Revision 7—it suggests that “A more permanent and streamlined framework for decision-making and setting policy would benefit the branch as well as court system users and provide for greater consistency and continuity of administration.”

For its first goal, Long-Range Issue #1 states, “The judicial branch will be governed in an effective and efficient manner”; to achieve this goal, the first strategy is to “Reform and strengthen the governance and policy development structures of the judicial branch.” Given this goal and strategy—coupled with the current realities described above—Chief Justice Quince, in an October administrative order, wrote, “It is therefore appropriate and timely for the judicial branch to undertake a study of its present governance structure” and established the Judicial Branch Governance Study Group.

The administrative order directs the study group “to undertake an in-depth study of the current governance system of the judicial branch of Florida.” (It defines governance as “the system of exercising authority to provide direction and to undertake, coordinate, and regulate activities to achieve the vision and mission of the branch,” specifying that it “encompasses policy-making, budgeting, rulemaking, leadership, decision-making, planning, and intergovernmental relations.”) Based on its research, the study group will prepare a final report that includes an examination of the structure and functions of the present governance system of the branch and an assessment of its effectiveness and efficiency; recommendations of actions or activities that would support improvement in the governance of the branch; and recommendations of any changes to the present governance system that would improve the effective and efficient management of the branch.

The chief justice appointed 10 members to this group, including two justices: Justice Ricky Polston, who chairs the group, and Justice Jorge Labarga. As vice chair, she named Judge Joseph P. Farina, Eleventh Circuit. Members also include two DCA judges, two additional circuit court judges, two county court judges, and one Florida Bar representative; staff support is provided by OSCA’s Strategic Planning Unit. The group held its first teleconference at the end of November and will be meeting again in mid-January; it has until the end of December 2010 to submit its report. (This link goes to the administrative order establishing the study group.)
Court Improvement

Dependency Court Improvement Initiatives

As reported in previous editions of the Full Court Press (spring 2008; summer 2009), in January 2008, the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau evaluated Florida’s child welfare system to determine whether it has been improving outcomes for the state’s most vulnerable children. This evaluation, called the Child and Family Services Review, entailed an assessment of seven “outcomes” (in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being) as well as seven “systemic factors” (elements relevant to the child welfare agency’s ability to achieve positive outcomes). Florida was determined to be not in substantial conformity with any of the outcomes—or with three of the systemic factors. Since then, Florida has been working purposefully to improve its dependency system. At stake are millions of federal dollars that significantly support the state’s foster care system—as well as the well-being of every child involved in the system.

To address the issues that the Children’s Bureau deemed not in substantial conformity, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) was required to develop a Quality Improvement Plan that lays out broad goals as well as specific strategies and action steps for resolving the areas of nonconformity. Because the Quality Improvement Plan can be effective only if the court system takes concurrent actions to improve the dependency court system, OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement has been working with the DCF through all phases of this process. The Office of Court Improvement also drafted a court-related work plan that identifies specific action steps the courts can take to help rectify some of the deficiencies uncovered in the review.

To help realize this work plan, a statewide, multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel was formed, and the chief justice appointed Judge Jeri Beth Cohen, Eleventh Circuit, as chair. In addition to judges from across the state, the panel includes members of the DCF, Department of Juvenile Justice, Guardian ad Litem (GAL), Parents Regional Council, Florida Coalition for Children, and a young adult formerly in foster care. Convening since March, the panel has already made consequential headway in improving the dependency court process. Below is a synopsis of some recent dependency court improvement initiatives.

Involving Children in the Court Packet

To ensure that children in dependency cases have a voice in the services provided to them and in the aspects of cases that will dramatically affect their lives, the Dependency Court Improvement Panel has been focusing on ways to encourage children of all ages to participate actively in the court proceedings that concern them. The panel’s first project was to assemble a packet of useful tools for involving children in the court. Heralded by a memo from Chief Justice Quince that discusses the federal review of the state’s dependency system, the Quality Improvement Plan, and the Dependency Court Improvement Panel, the packet includes thirteen germane documents, among them, statutory information about children in the court; legal authority for including children in court; guidelines for engaging children in various age groups in court procedures; some pertinent articles and a bibliography of other relevant literature; and a technical assistance brief. This packet was mailed in May to all judges and magistrates hearing dependency cases.
Notice Letters
In section 39.01(51), Florida Statutes, the child is defined as one of the parties in dependency hearings. This means that, unless it is not in the best interest of the child, he or she has a right to be present. The first step in involving children in court proceedings is to ensure that they receive notice of hearings. Toward that end, Judge Cohen’s model dependency court team (which includes DCF attorneys, GAL, community-based care agencies, and others) developed age-appropriate notice letters and orders for children in four age groups: 0 – 5; 6 – 11; 12 – 15; and 16 – 18. These letters were approved by the Dependency Court Improvement Panel, and attorneys across the state are being urged to use them.

Court Guide for Young Children
To help young children (8 – 12 years old) prepare meaningfully for court visits, or to help them with the debriefing process after a court visit, the Office of Court Improvement developed a guide called *What’s Happening in Dependency Court: An Activity Book for Children Going to Court in Florida*. In addition to identifying and explaining the roles of the judge and other principal players in the courtroom, the guide answers questions that children might have, such as why they had to leave their home, where they’ll live, when they’ll get to see their parents and siblings, and what sorts of issues the judge will consider when making his/her decisions. The guide repeatedly encourages children to speak to the GAL and the judge, emphasizing that it’s OK to ask questions about anything that concerns them. The guide is both a teaching tool and a game book: in addition to its soothing, age-appropriate, charmingly-illustrated narrative, the guide includes pictures that children can color and language puzzles that help them understand and feel comfortable with court-related words. *What’s Happening* is being distributed to foster care parent associations, GAL, courthouses, and community-based care agencies statewide.

Video for Older Children Preparing for Dependency Court
What is dependency court? How will I get to my hearings? Who will be in the courtroom, and what is each person’s role? What can I expect in court? Young people between the ages of 12 and 18 who are preparing to go to dependency court now can watch a video that provides answers to all these questions. Called *Make Your Voice Heard: A Guide to Dependency Court*, the video also encourages them to play an active role in their hearings. The lead actor is Tammy Workman (a former foster youth), who plays a former foster youth making a video about dependency court; in “her” video, she goes to a courthouse, interviews a judge, meets everyone in the courtroom, and observes court hearings. The video also stars Tommy Fair (another former foster youth), who plays a youth at court for his hearing; supporting roles are played by OSCA staff. Written at a fifth grade reading level, the script was composed by John Couch, court operations consultant with the Office of Court Improvement, and reviewed by four dependency court judges. Copies of the 14-minute video have been distributed to courthouses, GAL, community-based care agencies, and the DCF; the video can also be viewed online.

Shelter Hearings Model
Typically, shelter hearings—during which a judge determines whether a child is at risk and, therefore, whether he or she needs to be removed from the home—last about five minutes. However, the Dependency Court Improvement Panel believes that meaningful, comprehensive shelter hearings can significantly benefit everyone involved: for when more issues are addressed at the front end of dependency cases, the decision-making through the life of the case is better—and the stay for children in out-of-home care can be shortened. To help judges improve the quality of shelter hearings, the panel developed a shelter hearing benchcard that considerably expands the hearing. Although the hearings take longer (approximately 30 minutes), the extended hearings actually save time in the long run. The bench card has been piloted across the state, and the panel is currently documenting judges’ experiences with this new process.

Florida Dependency Summit and National Judicial Leadership Summit
Approximately 1,600 people—among them, 153 judges and court personnel, along with representatives from DCF, GAL, law enforcement agencies, and community-based care agencies—attended Florida’s 2009 dependency summit, “Excellence Starts Here: Dependency Summit for Florida’s Child Protection Communities,” in Orlando this August. Attendees participated in
workshops on topics like Reducing Delays in Adoption, Introduction to Family Centered Practice, Key Components of Good Case Planning, and Finalizing Permanency. Judicial workshop presenters included Judge David Gooding, Fourth Circuit; Judge John Fruscianti, Seventeenth Circuit; Judge Jeri B. Cohen, Eleventh Circuit; and Judge Sandra Robbins, Fifth Circuit. In DCF Secretary George Sheldon’s words, this summit embodies the attendees’ commitment to “working collaboratively and innovatively with families and each other to make life better for Florida children.”

Also, this October, Chief Justice Quince took a team (State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner, Judge Jeri B. Cohen, two OSCA staff members, DCF Secretary Sheldon, and Department of Education’s Bettye Hyle) to the Third National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children, held in Austin, Texas. This summit had a three-pronged focus: education (providing optimal educational opportunities for children in foster care), collaboration, and the disproportionality of children of color entering into the child welfare system. Chief justices from 45 states took teams to participate in this summit, which was sponsored by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators.

Dependency Court Retreats
According to the federal review of the state’s dependency system, one of Florida’s most serious deficiencies is the lack of “family engagement” in the dependency system process—hence the Dependency Court Improvement Panel’s efforts to devise ways to get children of all ages more involved in their court proceedings. Most of the panel’s early “youth in court” efforts were informational; however, the final thrust—five regional, daylong Dependency Court Retreats, held in late October/early November—was implementation.

Although some of the speakers differed, the agenda was the same for all the retreats. The morning session opened with an honest and engaging “Connected by 25” youth panel (Connected by 25 is a community initiative that endeavors to improve outcomes for foster care youth through investments in services and programs; its goal is to ensure that foster care youth are educated, housed, employed, and connected to a support network by age 25). Following the youth panel was a showing of the Make Your Voice Heard dependency video. Next, a child psychologist addressed concerns voiced by judges about involving children in court, and an Ed.D. specializing in prevention and early intervention policy talked about ways to include children from 0 – 3 years old in court proceedings. The afternoon featured an American Bar Association facilitated discussion covering the mechanics of the implementation process, e.g., who will, and how to, prepare children for court and debrief them after court; transportation issues; and notice letters. Concluding the retreat was a presentation on the shelter hearing pilot project.

Altogether, 107 people participated in these retreats, including judges, magistrates, trial court administrators, case managers, mediators, and court staff who work with dependency cases. Attendees said they appreciated the opportunity to meet with people from different circuits and share ideas and practices and expressed a desire to have educational events of this nature several times a year.

The initiatives described above have been advanced in an effort to help bring Florida’s dependency system into conformity with federal regulations and recommendations. At the same time these statewide measures are being ushered in, Chief Justice Quince is counting on the introduction of positive changes at the local level. As she wrote in the memo accompanying the Involving Children in the Court Packet, “The paradigm of meaningful change needs to begin at the circuit and community levels with commitment, leadership, and action from our judges and magistrates who oversee dependency cases in their courtroom.”

Domestic Violence Virtual Courtroom
Through video scenarios and the presentation and explication of relevant legal documents, the Office of Court Improvement’s Domestic Violence Virtual Courtroom introduces judges and court staff to the issues and challenges that frequently arise in civil domestic violence injunction cases—e.g., conflicting testimony, lack of counsel, paternity, child support, and allegations of violence. Providing viewers with a strong foundation in domestic violence law and the injunction process, this online learning opportunity was designed specifically with new judges, and with judges newly transferred to the domestic violence docket, in mind.
What distinguishes this particular distance learning course is that it is exceptionally interactive. Immediately upon entering the virtual courtroom, viewers discover the dynamic role they’ll play: they become active participants in the process, playing the part of a judge who is presiding at a hearing and making decisions about issues like temporary injunctions, final injunctions, and motion modification. As “virtual courtroom judges,” they navigate the injunction process and make their rulings, getting instant feedback and learning about the ramifications of the choices they’ve made. For instance, after watching a particular video scenario and being introduced to various relevant cases and the law behind them, they are asked the following question: “Would you include a provision in the Temporary Injunction for Protection Against Domestic Violence that the respondent be allowed to retrieve his personal belongings from the shared residence?” After choosing their answer, they find out if they are correct—and why, or why not. Participants also discover when judicial discretion, rather than a simple yes or no answer, is required. Because they are so involved in the process itself, the viewers’ critical thinking skills truly get a workout with this program. In addition, those who complete it get 1.5 hours of CJE or CLE credit and a certificate.

The virtual courtroom, which was supported by funding from the Violence Against Women Grants Office, is a “high-quality production with professional actors playing the lead parts in the scenarios,” emphasized Kathleen Tailer, senior attorney with OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement and lead staff person in the development of the program. It has “lots of potential for the future,” she explained, because, if successful, “It will become the model for online training programs on other docket types.”

People are only just beginning to hear about the Domestic Violence Virtual Courtroom, so, so far, participation has been limited. But feedback has been energetically favorable. For instance, Judge Robert B. Bennett, Twelfth Circuit, called the program “an excellent training/refresher tool for judges handling domestic violence cases. It focuses the judge’s attention on issues that are litigated in most domestic violence cases, and provides concise instruction on the proper remedies that should be employed.” And Judge Frederick Koberlein, Dixie County, declared, “I thoroughly enjoyed the ‘virtual’ experience of the Domestic Violence Virtual Court.

The program is an excellent primer; I heartily recommend it to all judges transitioning into domestic violence cases.”

The virtual courtroom can be found at http://virtualcourt.flcourts.org/. Most judges and court personnel can enter the program using their standard email usernames and passwords. But, if anyone has trouble getting in, the site has a convenient mechanism for emailing OSCA to set up a password. Please send questions or comments about this program to vcsupport@flcourts.org.

Distance Learning Program for Drug Court Professionals

On October 21, drug court professionals across Florida participated in a day-long distance learning program featuring Douglas B. Marlowe, chief of science, policy and law for the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (and also senior scientist at the Treatment Research Institute and adjunct associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School Of Medicine). The Eighteenth Judicial Circuit hosted the program, and through the court system’s videoconferencing network, Dr. Marlowe was connected with all 20 circuits and OSCA; altogether, 381 drug court professionals participated, including judges, court personnel, treatment professionals, state attorneys, public defenders, and representatives from the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Children and Families.

Participants were treated to two spirited, information-rich sessions: in the morning session, Dr. Marlowe focused on “Targeting Dispositions for Drug Offenders by Risks and Needs” (i.e., who should be the target population for drug court programs); and in the afternoon session, he covered “Best Practices in Drug Courts” (i.e., how to implement drug court services to lead to the best outcomes). Both a lawyer and a clinical psychologist, Dr. Marlowe is ideally positioned...
to address these issues: he has received numerous state and federal research grants to study coercion in drug abuse treatment, the effects of drug courts and other diversion programs for drug abusers involved in the criminal justice system, and behavioral treatments for drug abusers and criminal offenders.

Invoking the treatment options for drug-involved offenders, Dr. Marlowe began by emphasizing that “A one-size-fits-all approach does not fit all.” Given the range of possible sentencing dispositions, he declared that the challenge is to determine the most appropriate intervention to use for each offender. It’s imperative to select the disposition that will balance what he calls “the three masters”: cost to taxpayers, public safety, and impact on offenders (i.e., the disposition must “optimize outcomes”). Using a “risk and needs matrix” (high vs. low risk, and high vs. low needs), Dr. Marlowe then demonstrated that, for each kind of offender, one can gauge the disposition that best serves all three masters. After a lively question-and-answer period (to simulate a face-to-face teaching experience, he offered participants a chance to email him questions during the presentation), Dr. Marlowe reminded viewers that “Across-the-board policies are always problematic, especially if they’re reviewed on appeal,” as they can lead to overturned rulings; “Decisions,” he asserted “should be made on a case-by-case basis” with the help of experts. And he ended the morning session by stressing that “Different populations should have different treatment interventions and should be kept separately; it’s very important not to mix populations.”

In the afternoon session on best practices, Dr. Marlowe elaborated on the key components of a successful drug court program. Among them, he identified the need for team involvement (e.g., judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, probation authorities, other corrections personnel, law enforcement, local service providers, and the greater community); prompt and effective treatment; frequent alcohol and other drug testing; written sanction and incentive guidelines; interaction between the drug court participant and the judge; rigorous program evaluation; continuing interdisciplinary education for all team members; and formal partnerships with community organizations.

Sponsored by the Florida Association of Drug Court Professionals, OSCA, the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit, the Florida Department of Corrections, the Office of

Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Drug Court Institute, and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, this was the second distance learning session for Florida’s drug court professionals (the first one, last fall, was so successful that it invited emulation). Typically, OSCA and the Florida Association of Drug Court Professionals coordinate a statewide training conference every two years. But in the current fiscal climate, when live programming is not viable, these distance learning sessions “provide excellent training at little cost” and are “a great way to supplement in-between live conferences when there’s no money for face-to-face interaction,” said Jennifer Grandal, court operations consultant with OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement.

Participants seemed to agree. “Enjoyed it and I learned a lot,” one said. “Very informative and helpful—great job!” another exclaimed. And “This was the best drug court training of my 12 years in drug court,” declared a third.

**Education and Outreach**

**Eighteenth Annual Dispute Resolution Center Conference**

In welcoming the nearly 1,000 attendees to the Florida Dispute Resolution Center’s eighteenth annual conference in Orlando this August, Chief Justice Quince began by emphasizing “just how much the court system appreciates everyone in this room.” She then went on to clarify why Florida’s judicial branch so highly values its mediators and arbitrators: although Florida is a large state with a huge caseload, she explained, Florida has fewer judges per capita than any other big state; she also pointed out that the national average is 7.3 judges per population of 100,000, but Florida has only 4.5 judges per population of 100,000. Therefore, she continued, “It’s very important that we have people who are trained to do mediation and arbitration…. We really could not make it without you” because “You make it possible for us to dispose of cases on a timely basis.” She closed with a hearty “Thank you for all you do for the court system and the people of Florida.”
Co-sponsored by the Florida Academy of Professional Mediators, the day-and-a-half-long conference offered participants a broad swath of learning opportunities—diverse enough to pique the interests and satisfy the intellectual cravings of all. The opening plenary session and keynote presentation featured Rachel Wohl, executive director of Maryland’s Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office, who elaborated on her experience serving on the American Bar Association's Task Force on Improving Mediation Quality, which set out to answer the question, what do mediation seekers really want? (The answer: in addition to intelligence, neutrality, and skill, people want mediators to have a sense of humor, empathy, intuition, creativity, and perceptiveness about what’s really happening during the mediation process.)

Anthony Porter, co-founder of A Call to Men: The National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women, headlined the second plenary session, leading attendees in a rousing colloquy called “Violence Against Women: Become Part of the Solution.” And Sharon Press moderated the closing plenary, a panel discussion on Mediator Ethics Advisory Committee Opinions: A Year in Review.

Interspersed among these plenaries were three sets of fifteen workshops covering a range of inviting and relevant subjects—mediator ethics, diversity/cultural awareness, domestic violence education, emotional awareness, dealing with pro se parties, building your practice, and train the trainer, for instance. For attending the entire conference, mediators earned up to 12.7 continuing mediation education hours.

Named “Changes and Challenges,” this year’s conference was pertinently themed, for attendees were certainly called upon to welcome transitions and to embrace pleasingly difficult enterprises. The most palpable change was the departure of former Dispute Resolution Center Director Sharon Press, who, in July, after 20 years with OSCA, left to become the director of Hamline University School of Law Dispute Resolution Institute.

The sadness at “losing” Ms Press was somewhat tempered by the sweetness of the creation, by Dispute Resolution Center staff, of the Annual Sharon Press Excellence in Alternative Dispute Resolution Award—which guarantees that Ms Press will, in some form, be present at Dispute Resolution Center conferences for years to come. Award-recipients will be selected for their visionary leadership, professional integrity, and unwavering devotion to the field of alternative dispute resolution in Florida. This year, the award was fittingly presented to Judge Shawn L. Briese, Seventh Circuit—for 20 years, “a champion for the profession and for professional mediators throughout the state,” declared OSCA’s Kimberly Kosch, conference organizer for the Dispute Resolution Center.

Also easing this transition was the introduction of Janice Fleischer, hired in July to replace Ms Press as the chief of OSCA’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Unit and director of the Dispute Resolution Center. Ms Fleischer, who has her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Miami, has been a Florida certified mediator (circuit, county, and family mediation) since 1990; she has also served on the Mediator Qualifications Board since its inception and on a variety of Dispute Resolution Center committees. And she has known, and worked with, Ms Press for years; the two are “great friends.”

Ms Fleischer came to mediation somewhat obliquely. She began practicing law in 1978 but, in her words, “didn’t love it.” When, in the late 1980s, “rumblings” of mediation began entering her consciousness, she found herself intrigued, so she took the first of her trainings (circuit) in 1990. In the course of the training, “A light bulb went on in my head: this is what I really want to do,” she said—“and that was the end of my law practice.” Her career has taken many interesting turns since then: among them, she was a certified mediator with the Mediation/Arbitration Division of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, a private mediator, the project director for the Hurricane Andrew Pro Bono Project, the project director for the Pro Se Family Mediation Project (an enterprise she conceptualized, establishing it with funding from a Florida Bar Foundation grant), a coordinator for the South Florida office of the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium, the program developer and manager for the Institute for Community Collaboration (the neutral division of the South Florida Regional Planning Council), and a private consultant providing court-based and public policy conflict prevention and resolution, primarily in the environmental arena.

But Ms Fleischer described this position—chief of OSCA’s ADR Unit and director of the Dispute Resolution Center—as her “dream job.” With only one drawback: “I always wanted to be the director of a state office of dispute resolution—but not because one of my closest friends had to move away for me to do it,” she emphasized. Taller than Sharon Press, Ms Fleischer quipped, “Her feet may be smaller than mine, but they are large shoes to fill!” As she transitions into taking on this new and complex position, she said her “main goal is to maintain the Dispute Resolution Center’s reputation for being
capable and efficient.” She calls herself “lucky” to have inherited a “wonderful staff” and is looking forward to working with old friends and colleagues as well as to making new ones.

20th Annual Reporters’ Workshop Held in Supreme Court

In October, 21 journalists who are either new to Florida or new to the legal/courts “beat” were invited to the supreme court to participate in an intensive two-day workshop designed to introduce them to the basics in legal reporting. To be selected, journalists had to be nominated by their editors. Attendees included 14 reporters from print media, two freelance writers, two radio journalists, two TV news anchors, and one Internet news service reporter. The Reporters’ Workshop is an annual event—this was, in fact, the twentieth; it is presented by The Florida Bar Media and Communications Law Committee and subsidized by The Florida Bar Foundation.

Launching the event was an introduction to the supreme court and a tour of the building by Supreme Court Director of Public Information Craig Waters. The rest of the workshop was packed with an arrangement of enlightening sessions presented by judges, lawyers, and veteran journalists, often in panels. Sessions covered topics like Public Records and Florida’s Open Government Laws, Covering High-Profile Court Cases, Lawyer Regulation, Libel Law and Defamation, Trademark/Copyright Law, Legal Resources on the Internet, and Funding Our State Courts. Participants described these sessions as “informative,” “educational,” and “helpful.”

Also playing teacherly roles in this workshop were many of the current justices and two retired justices. Retired Justice Major Harding gave a presentation on Judicial Selection and Election: How Judges Reach the Bench, for instance, and Retired Justice Joseph Hatchett spoke about judicial independence. In addition, the four new justices were introduced to reporters by Justice Pariente, who moderated a panel discussion shaped by questions the reporters had submitted in advance. Justices Canady, Polston, Labarga, and Perry were each asked to talk about the ways in which their pasts, and prior vocations, inform them as judges. Each was also asked to discuss what has most surprised him about being on the supreme court (Justice Canady: the number of death cases; Justice Polston: the number of appeals to the supreme court; and Justices Labarga and Perry: the huge stacks of reading—or, as Justice Labarga so jocularly put it, “I feel like I’m in a constant, never-ending finals week!”). They also were asked to identify some of the issues that are plaguing the state court system (all agreed that the most pressing issues are revenue shortfalls, lost staff resources, and the system’s struggles to sustain itself in the budget crisis). Reporters also had a rare opportunity to talk with and mingle informally among the justices at a reception held the first evening of the workshop.

Feedback about the program was decidedly enthusiastic. “The reporters’ workshop was extraordinarily well done,” emailed Margie Menzel, reporter/producer at WFSU-FM/Florida Public Radio in Tallahassee; “I loved being at the Supreme Court, even before learning that the Florida courts are unusually open and accessible compared to other states. The presentations were specific and helpful. And it was a pleasure to chat with the justices at the reception and get to know the new ones at the workshop hosted by Justice Pariente. We came away with a sense of the importance of good coverage of the courts,” she added, “and received both the tools and the inspiration to go forth and make it happen.”
Fairness and Diversity

Court-Community Relationship-Building

For over two decades, Florida’s judicial branch has actively worked to ensure that the court system is open and accessible to all, respects the dignity of everyone, includes judges and court staff who reflect the community’s diversity, and responds to the needs of all members of society. To support its efforts to foster fairness and diversity throughout the branch, the supreme court created the Gender Bias Study Commission in 1987; the Racial and Ethnic Bias Study Commission in 1989; the Committee on the Court-Related Needs of Elders and Persons with Disabilities in 1992; and the Commission on Fairness in 1997. Each of these committees submitted a report to the supreme court, which implemented many of the recommendations that fell within its jurisdiction.

More recently, by administrative order in 2004, former Chief Justice Barbara Pariente established the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity; former Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis renewed the order in 2006, and Chief Justice Peggy Quince renewed it again in 2008. This committee was conceived “to help advance the State Court System’s efforts to eliminate from court operations bias that is based on race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, financial status, or any characteristic that is without legal relevance.” (Follow this link to the 2008 administrative order.)

Chaired by Eleventh Circuit Judge Gill Freeman for its first four years, the committee amassed some considerable achievements. It created an online court diversity information resource center; researched and prepared the report Promoting and Ensuring the Diversity of Judicial Staff Attorneys and Law Clerks and began implementing its recommendations; completed a comprehensive outreach project on perceptions of fairness in Florida’s courts and submitted a report that was distributed to people in leadership positions in the Florida justice system; worked with the chief judges to create a Diversity Team in each circuit and DCA; supported the creation of local court diversity and sensitivity awareness programs for judges and court staff; and coordinated the development of a court-specific survey instrument used to evaluate all state court facilities to determine their accessibility to people with disabilities.

When Chief Justice Quince renewed the administrative order in 2008, she appointed Eleventh Circuit Judge Scott M. Bernstein as chair and gave the committee several new responsibilities, the first of which is to collaborate with the Diversity Team in each circuit and DCA in order to “identify, explore, and share information about various opportunities for building relationships between the court and the community that will facilitate a dialogue on fairness and diversity topics and thereby lead to increased trust and confidence in the courts among all Floridians.”

Addressing the initial phase of this charge, the committee distributed a survey to all the Diversity Teams last March, asking them to identify court projects and activities that educate the public about the court system and energize court-community relationships. The survey generated a bounty of information about the courts’ endeavors to connect with the public, enumerating enterprises like courthouse tours, citizen guides (informational brochures, pamphlets, etc.), Justice Teaching and other school outreach efforts, teen courts, Law Day activities, meet your judge programs, speaker’s bureaus, public opinion surveys, and media outreach efforts.

The survey also showcased the wide range of organizations with which the courts regularly interact—among them, educational institutions (public and private schools, homeschooling co-ops and groups, colleges and universities), public libraries, local governments, community service centers, social services organizations and providers, voluntary bar associations, and chamber of commerce leadership programs. (This link goes to a compilation of court-community relations activities.)

Ninth Circuit Initiatives

“Amazing!” is the word used by OSCA Human Resources Officer Karen Samuel, who staffs the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity, to describe the breadth of the court-community relationships that the Diversity Team survey uncovered. “So much
relationship-building is going on in the circuits and DCAs, some really positive things. So many of our courts really are an important part of the communities they serve!” she exclaimed. Because the survey revealed such a plethora of innovative and inspiring outreach initiatives, Ms Samuel was hesitant to single out any particular court’s undertakings for special acknowledgment. However, she did call attention to the Ninth Circuit for having developed some “unique” programs “that could very well be adopted by other courts.” Two programs in particular captured her imagination: the Judicial Ride-Along and the Inside the Courts program.

Coordinated through the court administrator’s office, the Judicial Ride-Along provides local and state elected officials and other community leaders with a chance to experience, firsthand, the daily work of a judge and the role the courts play in the community. The officials who participate in this program actually sit on the bench with a judge during court proceedings, witnessing the judicial process directly and gaining a personal understanding of the operations of the courts as well as the complexity and range of cases that come before the courts.

According to the Ninth’s Circuit’s Rob Bains, communications coordinator, participation in the Judicial Ride-Along is often issue-driven, or it results from questions raised about what the courts can do about a particular problem—for example, juveniles charged with certain kinds of crimes in the official’s jurisdiction. As a result, each program is tailored to address the participant’s interest, and he or she is then paired with a judge who can cast light on that issue from the judiciary’s, and the judge’s, point of view. Among the benefits of this program is that it opens the lines of communication on matters of mutual concern to the courts and community leaders. The Judicial Ride-Along has been in existence for at least nine years, and many of the circuit’s commissioners, mayors, and police chiefs have participated in it.

While the Ninth Circuit’s Judicial Ride-Along program is primarily for public officials, the Inside the Courts program is geared toward citizens. Created, developed, and hosted by Orange County Judge W. Michael Miller, the program is seen as a way to “open the doors to the courts and invite people in” to learn about the justice system, Mr. Bains explained. For four consecutive Tuesday evenings, two hours each session, Inside the Courts gives people a chance to learn about the court system and to interact with the judges in an informal setting. The experience is designed to be intensely interactive: the presentations, which are given by teams of judges, are dynamic, and the audience has ample opportunity to participate and ask questions. The focus tends to change somewhat from year to year, but presentations generally cover topics in the criminal and civil courts; in the juvenile, probate, mental health, domestic, and traffic divisions; and mediation.

The participants certainly benefit from this program, but, as Judge Miller emphasized, so do the judges: "The program offers the public a rare opportunity to understand the functions and limitations of our courts, and to interact directly with the judiciary. As judges, we gain a better understanding of how people see the courts and the role of the judiciary in our society."

Inside the Courts—which is a free program—is extensively publicized through press releases; advertisements in local schools, police academies, and libraries; and flyers and brochures. People are asked to register in advance, and those who attend at least three of the four sessions receive a certificate of achievement. On average, 120 people are present each night, and a good number of attendees come year after year. The entire four-night event is video-recorded and then broadcast throughout the year on Orange County’s government access channel. Since the program’s inception in 1998, it’s estimated that over 4,000 citizens have participated in it, and thousands more have viewed it on TV.

When asked what he most relishes about coordinating and hosting this annual program, Judge Miller reflected, “I enjoy the creativity that goes into developing the presentations each year, but most of all, I enjoy the opportunity to connect on a very personal level with the people we serve.” Also extremely satisfying has been the feedback: “The public response to Inside the Courts has been amazing. It has exceeded our wildest expectations. Every year, the participants tell us how much they appreciate the judges taking the time to reach out and explain how our judicial system works and how
the program changed their perception of our courts. It is a very rewarding and positive experience for the judges and court personnel who give their time to make the program such a success,” he added.

But can a program like Inside the Courts open the door to dialogue about fairness and diversity—and ultimately foster public trust and confidence in the courts? Judge Miller believes it can: “If there is one underlying message of Inside the Courts, it’s that the courts are here for everyone. Our program is attended by people from widely varied socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. As fundamental as it sounds, all of the participants leave knowing that, in the eyes of the law, we are all equal.” Surely this is just the kind of harvest that the chief justice and the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity hope to reap from the courts’ various court-community relationship-building activities.

Miscellany

Reminiscences: 36 Years of Technology in the Courts
(as recounted by two longstanding OSCA employees)

Familiarly referred to as OSCA, Florida’s Office of the State Courts Administrator was created in 1972 to assist the chief justice in carrying out his or her responsibilities as the chief administrative officer of the judicial branch. For 37 years, OSCA, housed in the supreme court building, has performed and overseen many of the administrative functions necessary to facilitate the smooth and efficient operation of the court system—which includes tasks like preparing the branch budget requests to the legislature, collecting and analyzing data relevant to court operations, coordinating judicial educational programs, and furnishing technical support for the courts [see the Florida Rules of Judicial Administration 2.205(e)].

In its earliest days, OSCA was an almost unimaginably tiny entity, consisting of the court administrator, his administrative assistant, his executive secretary, a judicial planning and grants coordinator, and his secretary. In addition to these five employees, OSCA also loosely included a group of grant-funded employees who, at an off-site location, collected and analyzed the data used to prepare the branch’s operating budget and to project the need for additional judges.

Over the years, OSCA—and, indeed, Florida’s entire court system—have undergone a profusion of metamorphoses. On the verge of retirement after 36 years with OSCA—the last 24 with Information Systems Services (ISS)—Merica Granger agreed to share memories of some of the more dramatic of these (r)evolutions, especially those in court technology. Spurring her memory, and adding some lively anecdotes of his own, was co-worker and friend Clyde Conrad, who’s been with OSCA since 1985 as the ISS Applications Development Manager.

In the early 70s—and for a good number of years after that—office technology was decisively more humble than it is now. In 1973, when Ms Granger was hired as secretary to the judicial planning and grants coordinator, her most high-tech piece of equipment was “just a typewriter—and not even a self-correcting one,” she marveled; “We used carbon paper to make copies.” For administrative orders and letters, judicial assistants had a rather primitive, mainframe-based word processing system called the Automated Text Management System, or ATMS; as Ms Granger recalled, “You slipped in a card, which got sucked into the machine; typed your letter; and saved it on the card.” Because documents couldn’t be saved, judicial assistants could print multiple copies—and additional copies at any time. However, although the cards could be overwritten, they couldn’t be modified, so if a document needed any changes, it had to be retyped from scratch. Also, Mr. Conrad added, no more than seven people could use the ATMS at any given time, so it was somewhat limited. He described the ATMS as “cryptic” and “cumbersome”—but “high tech for back then, and a big step up from typewriters with carbon copies!”

Archaic as well was the building’s phone system. When he was hired in 1985, Mr. Conrad noted, OSCA had one phone system with four or five lines (the entire court administrator’s office had one phone number with lots of extensions). “The phone was answered in the court administrator’s office, and an intercom let you know if the call was for you.”

State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner and Chief Justice Quince present Merica Granger, in center, with a proclamation honoring her for her 36 years of OSCA service.
Over time, however, the number of court cases mounted; the classification of crimes expanded; the courts frequently had to implement new, mandatory criminal procedural requirements; and legal issues were becoming increasingly complex. In order to continue managing court resources efficiently and effectively, OSCA’s administrative functions needed to grow. In the mid-80s, under the leadership of State Courts Administrator Ken Palmer, OSCA began evolving, becoming partitioned into various divisions to better address the branch’s burgeoning administrative responsibilities. This is when Ms Granger was promoted to administrative assistant for ISS (then called the Information Systems Division, or ISD). And, as she triumphantly announced, it’s when she finally got her first self-correcting typewriter. At the time, ISD provided technology support to the supreme court, OSCA, and the five DCAs, and it consisted of four programmers, a data entry person, two time and study analysts, Ms Granger, and Mr. Conrad.

It was also about this time, 1985 – 1986, that technology in the courts began morphing at a feverish pace. Mr. Conrad’s first responsibility with ISD was “to get the DCAs automated with computers” that were not mainframe-based—which he described as a “very bold change” over which “huge battles” were waged, in part because there was “major resistance” to this new technology. ISD evaluated the word processors from four different companies and finally selected Burroughs (which later became Unysis) “because it gave us more disk space and also had connectivity that allowed a judge’s suite of people to be able to work from a central box that the whole court worked from”—which meant that electronic documents could be shared for the first time. Burroughs was also unique because, if the main CPU went down, the desktop machines could be rebooted, and everyone in the judge’s suite could continue to work from his or her location. Even though, at the time, only the DCAs were scheduled to get these computers, he described this change as “so big that the supreme court had to get involved.” ISD had to go before the Appellate Technology Committee and the Supreme Court Technology Board to justify the selection of Burroughs. “It was a major, major undertaking to get the first court up and running,” he ruminated. Soon thereafter, Ms Granger recalled, the supreme court and OSCA adopted the Burroughs computers, but only the secretaries and division chiefs were given one at first (even though she worked in ISD, she didn’t get a computer until the late 1980s). She remembers the Burroughs as having a very small screen; it took 5.25 inch floppies—and ate up an enormous amount of desk space. On top of that, “It was definitely not user-friendly: all the parameters for letters and administrative orders had to be changed, and everything was in code; it was a big challenge to get used to,” she emphasized. “The technology was evolving so quickly, and it created a lot of trauma for everyone,” Mr. Conrad added. Not surprisingly, many judges and court employees were resistant: they were anxious about this alien technology and wary of anything that threatened to eradicate face-to-face interaction; many had never developed keyboarding skills; and they lacked computer training. To try to allay people’s unease, Mr. Conrad reminisced, “Training was the big emphasis in ISD back then; ISD put in the computers; did training classes for all the judicial assistants and law interns; brought in vendors to do classes.” In spite of some reluctance to embrace the computer age, Florida’s courts truly were “pioneers,” he reflected, because the judicial branch “began using this new technology before the other branches—and they did it with very little money.”

Since then, the court system has witnessed a number of momentous computer-related shifts, Mr. Conrad explained. With the invasion of the world of Windows in the early 90s came the use of the mouse and the ability to open several documents at once, making it desirable for the courts to move to a Windows environment. So, in the early 90s, the courts adopted the Digital Equipment Corp operating system. With this switch to Windows, the courts shifted to Corel WordPerfect, which required a massive conversion of all court documents—and lots of new training classes,” Ms Granger added. “At this point, email (the courts had Novell at the time) and Internet access were available—but “No one really knew what to do with them back then,” Mr. Conrad chuckled. Then in...
2003 – 04 came another upgrade, to Dell computers, and with that, the switch from WordPerfect to Word for word processing and from Novell to Outlook for email. Which brings us to the present—the fairly recent switch to the Vista operating system, the use of videoconferencing, the move toward e-filing. But, as Mr. Conrad underscored, though almost “Everybody loves their computers, email, and Internet now, they still love their paper,” and he wondered whether the court system would ever be able to do away with paper altogether.

On the whole, Ms Granger concluded, ISS, and OSCA, have had “an amazing journey...It’s never been boring because every day brought something new.” And the future beckons with even more breathtaking novelties. Mr. Conrad anticipates technology offering shared workspaces and collaboration functions that readily enable users to manage various document versions and document approvals. He also imagines that working remotely will soon become far easier for judges and court personnel: home monitors will have big screens, and cameras will be connected to everyone’s computers, so interaction will be immediate and personal, even if not in-person. All things considered, it seems inevitable that this “amazing journey” will long continue....

Office Ergonomics: Creating a Safer Work Environment

People come in all sorts of shapes and sizes—and people also differ widely in strength, 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. Improving workersafety is essential—not only because it protects employees but also because it reduces costs both to employees and employers (e.g., medical bills, missed work days, workers’ compensation payments). According to representatives from Florida’s Division of Risk Management, slips, trips, and falls are the top causes of workplace injuries. Another frequent cause is strains, generally from picking things up. Following these are repetitive motion injuries, like carpal tunnel syndrome, which tend to develop over time and can lead to long-term disability. Some estimates suggest that up to 50 percent of US workers are in jobs that put them at risk for these kinds of injuries. But, because these injuries are often caused or exacerbated by workstations that are set up incorrectly, workers can take many actions to avoid hurting themselves.

Office Ergonomics: Creating a Safer Work Environment

Photo by BC Schwartz

A representative from Florida’s Division of Risk Management shares some tips for avoiding shoulder, arm, and back strain with Brenda Vila, a safety coordinator with OSCA’s General Services Unit.
that the workstation invariably has to be adjusted to the body that utilizes it. Chair, keyboard, monitor, mouse, telephone, lighting—if these are not properly adjusted for your body, they can cause serious strain to your 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 we all remember being commanded as children to “sit up straight,” it’s actually not good to keep your back at a 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’re sitting upright, your eyes should be level with 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 chair or monitor. 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 face in the same direction—that will keep 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—otherwise, that constant reaching can strain your shoulder, arm, and back. And check to make sure your keyboard is flat on your desk or keyboard tray. (If you haven’t done so already, tuck in those little, retractable legs sticking out of the bottom of the back end of your keyboard—they’re a throwback to the primeval days when people typed on typewriters, which came with slanted keyboards, but that slant is actually very tough on the hands and wrists.) 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. (Speaking of glasses, for computer-users, bifocals may promote eyestrain and cause people to unnaturally strain their neck, so progressive lenses might be preferable.)

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.

Most importantly, during the course of the day, move, move, move! This 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 phone, walk to the copy machine—whatever it takes to keep you from sitting in the same position hour after hour.

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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 could very well atrophy, the Risk Management people warned. In addition to encouraging physical movement, they invoked what they called 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.

The subtext of their presentation was that we have to develop new habits in our bodily approach to work. Because we're so used to doing things wrong, in ways that have hurt our bodies over many years, these new habits will seem awkward at first. They also cautioned that it takes 30 days 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.

If you have any questions about office ergonomics or would like some helpful links to additional information, please call alternate Safety Coordinator Brenda Vila, with OSCA’s General Services Unit, at (850) 410-2379, or email her at vilab@flcourts.org

Thanksgiving with Sixth Circuit TCA Gay Inskeep and Company

Try to get your mind around the mental and physical gymnastics involved in planning, purchasing the ingredients for, cooking, and serving a homemade Thanksgiving dinner for nearly 300 guests! For the last nine years, Sixth Circuit Trial Court Administrator Gay Inskeep and her husband Paul—with the help of a cadre of family members, friends, and Sixth Circuit co-workers—have done precisely that.

Not only is the number of guests exceptional, but so are the people who are welcomed to this annual celebration: rather than offering hospitality to the usual Thanksgiving callers—extended family and friends—the Inskeeps invite homeless people, people with no family, and others in need. Ms Inskeep contacts St. Petersburg homeless shelters, domestic violence centers, transition houses, and substance abuse groups to publicize the event, making sure that people who need a place to go know they have one.

What makes this feast even more special is the Inskeep philosophy that everything (except the cranberry sauce) has to be made from scratch: their thinking is that they “always had a home-cooked meal, so everyone else should as well,” Ms Inskeep emphasized. To prepare a homemade meal for so many guests, they have to begin cooking the Sunday before the holiday, starting with the cornbread for the stuffing (Mr. Inskeep, “the primary cook,” believes that, in order to achieve the right taste and texture for the stuffing, the cornbread needs time to get stale).

This year, the 290 diners were treated to a cornucopia of ritual favorites: turkey (30 large birds); mashed potatoes (100 pounds); sweet potatoes (70 pounds); green bean casserole (70 pounds); cornbread and regular stuffing; 40 dozen homemade “threwed rolls” (based on a recipe that Mr. Inskeep got from a Missouri restaurant, where rolls have traditionally been thrown to customers too impatient to wait for the busy owner to bring the rolls to their table); gravy; cranberry sauce; and apple, pumpkin, and pecan pies (45 altogether). (In case anyone was wondering, Mr. Inskeep did not get to throw any rolls this year; unfortunately: he was too occupied with roasting and carving the turkeys, which were being devoured as quickly as he could carve them!)

In addition to serving this feast, the Inskeeps also set up a “Free Market” (to rhyme with flea market) to give guests an opportunity to “shop” for items they need. Thanks to the donations of family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors, the Inskeeps were able to supply people with many sorely-needed provisions—blankets, toiletries, scarves, gloves, slightly used clothing, and the like. The Free Market, a component of the feast for the last two years, has been very popular, so they plan to keep doing it.

Several court staff assisted at the event, and “others donated (unsolicited!) money, food (my assistant made eight of the apple pies), or Free Market items,” Ms Inskeep noted. “This is a very generous circuit,” she said of her Sixth Circuit colleagues. She had to turn down some of their offers of help because she “already had all of the stations covered,” but she’s begun to put together a list of volunteers for next year.

Asked what enkindled her and her husband to take on this amazing enterprise, Ms Inskeep said they were inspired by an article about a St. Petersburg woman who provided a home-cooked Thanksgiving meal to anyone who had nowhere else to go. Because of its size and location (it’s on a bus route), they asked their church if they could use its kitchen and hall to...
do something similar and enlisted their family to partner up with them. “We had wanted to do this for years, and finally, in 2001, we just decided, ‘It’s time.’ Over the years, neighbors and other friends and family joined in our efforts,” she added.

The guests surely enjoy the fruits of this considerable, and tasty, endeavor. But so do the Inskeeps. “Participating in this event has enriched my family in many ways,” Ms Inskeep reflected: “It provides an opportunity for us to get together and focus on someone else’s needs rather than our own. All the typical stress associated with the holidays has all been eliminated because everyone knows that Thanksgiving is not about us—there are no debates about who is bringing the green bean casserole and whose house we are going to. It also forces us to focus on how fortunate we are when we see so many who are lonely or who want for even the most basic necessities of life, like food.”

In addition to being an awesome opportunity to get together with loved ones, put the needs of others before their own, and reflect on their own good fortune, Ms Inskeep realizes that “It’s been an especially great lesson for our children. My son Andrew, who turned 12 on Thanksgiving Day, doesn’t know any other way to celebrate Thanksgiving because we’ve been doing it this way for most of his life. We’re hoping our kids will follow this tradition in some way in their own lives.” She ended by saying that there have been so many “heartwarming stories and interesting things that have occurred at the dinners over the years” that she’s considering “writing a book some day!”

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**Turning Points**

**Awards and Honors**

**Judge John M. Alexander**, Seventh Judicial Circuit, was honored with the William E. Gladstone Award for his work in the St. Johns County juvenile dependency court; this award commemorates the significant contributions of a judge or magistrate in dependency court.

**Judge Shawn L. Briese**, Seventh Judicial Circuit, was presented with the first Annual Sharon Press Excellence in Alternative Dispute Resolution Award by the Florida Dispute Resolution Center; this award recognizes “visionary leadership, professional integrity, and unwavering devotion to the field of alternative dispute resolution in the state of Florida.”

**Judge O. H. Eaton, Jr.**, Eighteenth Judicial Circuit, was honored with the Selig I. Goldin Memorial Award by the Criminal Law Section of The Florida Bar; this award salutes outstanding contributions to Florida’s criminal justice system.

**Judge Claudia Rickert Isom**, Thirteenth Judicial Circuit, was presented with the Abraham Lincoln Award by the Tampa Bay American Inn of Court; this honor is awarded to the member who best exemplifies the goals of the inn in promoting legal excellence, civility, professionalism, and ethics in the practice of law.

**Chief Judge Belvin Perry, Jr.**, Ninth Judicial Circuit, was chosen Jurist of the Year by the Florida Chapters of the American Board of Trial Advocates; he was selected because of his “profound impact on the level of professionalism in the courtroom” and his “outstanding leadership in ensuring adequate funding to maintain access to the courts.”

**Chief Judge William Roby**, Nineteenth Judicial Circuit, was honored with The Florida Bar’s 2009 Outstanding Jurist Award; a judge is nominated by his/her peers for this award, which recognizes “an excellent reputation for sound judicial decisions and an unblemished record of integrity as a lawyer and a judge.”
Judge James Seals, Twentieth Judicial circuit, was elected to the board of trustees of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; Judge Seals presides over Lee County's dependency court and handles Department of Children and Families cases that involve neglected, abused, and abandoned children.

Judge Lynn Tepper, Sixth Judicial Circuit, was presented with the Humanitarian Hope Award by the National Alliance on Mental Illness; this award recognizes individuals "who have demonstrated courage, innovation and resiliency" in dealing with people with mental illnesses.

Judge Dan Wilensky, Clay County, was presented with the Guardian ad Litem's 2009 Judicial Advocate Award.

In Memoriam


If you have information about judges and court personnel who have received awards or honors for their professional contributions to the branch, please forward it to the Full Court Press.
January
4 – 8  Florida Judicial College Phase I, Tallahassee, FL
20  Judicial Governance Study Group Meeting, 11 AM - 1 PM, via videoconference
20 – 23  Florida Bar Midyear Meeting, Orlando, FL
22  Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee Meeting, 8:30 - 11:30 AM, Tampa, FL
21 – 22  Court Interpreter Oral Language Exams, Tampa, FL
22  Court ADA Coordinators Conference Call, 12:00 PM
28  Pro Bono Awards Ceremony, 3:30 PM, Tallahassee, FL
28  Florida Supreme Court Historical Society Annual Dinner, Tallahassee, FL
1/31 – 2/4  National Association for Court Management (NACM) Midyear Conference, Colorado Springs, CO

February
16 – 17  Statewide Case Managers Conference, Orlando, FL

March
2  Legislative Session Convenes (tentative)
11 – 12  Faculty Training Specialty Program for Judges, Tampa, FL
18 – 19  Families & Children in the Court Steering Committee Meeting, Tampa, FL
19  Court ADA Coordinators Conference Call, 12:00 PM
21  Florida Court Education Council Meeting, Tampa, FL
21 – 26  Florida Judicial College Phase II, Tampa, FL
25  Judicial Governance Study Group Meeting, Tallahassee, FL

April
8 – 9  Court Interpreter Orientation Workshop, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
10  Court Interpreter Written Exam, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
18 – 22  Justice Teaching Institute, Tallahassee, FL

Under the direction of
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