A Message from Lisa Goodner, State Courts Administrator

“Justice in Florida will be accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable.” I’m sure you are familiar with these words, for they express the judicial branch’s vision, giving voice to our fundamental values and describing what we aspire toward. Our vision statement figured prominently in our preparations for the 2014 legislative session, for our legislative budget request for the 2014 – 15 fiscal year specifically focuses on the people, places, and tools we need to reach this vision. And our most pronounced focus this year is our people. In all our interactions with legislators and their staff, we are emphasizing that the judicial branch can achieve its vision only if it can hire and retain a competent, well-qualified workforce.

Research shows that, for comparable work, the courts system lags behind other government employers in pay. OSCA recently reviewed 14 broad job categories to compare Florida State Courts System salaries with salaries offered by other State of Florida government agencies. Our analysis revealed that, for those 14 job categories, the average salary of court employees is 12.59% below the average salary of other state government workers. This salary inequity causes debilitating turnover (e.g., 30% in the supreme court clerk’s office; 26% of trial court law clerks) and makes it difficult to attract talented job candidates.

Therefore, this year, in addition to requesting that judges and staff be included in any competitive pay adjustment provided to other state employees, we are seeking nearly $10 million for salary equity and retention for court staff. We are just asking for a level playing field. And Chief Justice Polston and I, along with a great team of judges—members of the Trial Court Budget Commission and the DCA Budget Commission as well as leaders of the Conference of County Court Judges, the Conference of Circuit Judges, and the Conference of DCA Judges—are all actively engaged in supporting this effort. Employee pay is our #1 priority.

As you all know, the legislative session is always a very preoccupying time of year for us in Tallahassee. But, this year, as I get ready to retire after a little over 10 years as state courts administrator, we have another preoccupation: transition planning. As of the date of this newsletter’s publication, a final announcement regarding the new state courts administrator has not been made, but we have been working tirelessly to ensure that the changeover is as smooth as possible.

To ease the process, for example, the supreme court approved the creation of a second deputy state courts administrator position (this is not actually a new idea but a return to a prior model). Eric Maclure has stepped into that role and will help ensure leadership continuity and stability through this transition. I feel very good about where OSCA is as an organization and have a lot of confidence in our people, and I want you to rest assured that the services we provide the branch, and our advocacy for the branch with other entities, will not be affected by a change at the top: the work we do to support branch efforts to achieve its mission and vision will continue unabated.

Sincerely,
Lisa Goodner
Governance

Judicial Management Council Update

The branch’s Judicial Management Council was established by Chief Justice Polston in 2012. Intermittently since 1953, the branch has benefitted from the guidance of a management council; now in its fifth embodiment, the council was recreated based on a recommendation of the Judicial Branch Study Group, which then Chief Justice Quince created in 2009 to offer the supreme court suggestions to “strengthen the governance and policy development structures of the branch, improve the effective and efficient management of the branch, and enhance communication within the branch.” The court designed this Judicial Management Council to “serve as a focused advisory body to assist the Chief Justice and this Court in identifying trends, potential crisis situations, and the means to address them.” The justices envision the council, which meets at least quarterly, as being “part of a loop that will assist the Court with forward-looking vision, while the Court gets feedback from the trial and district courts, the chief judges, and the conferences.” (Take this link to the opinion on the implementation of the study group’s recommendations.)

Compared with its four antecedents, this council’s membership is more modest in size: while the former councils had between 17 and 27 voting members, this one has 15. Members include two justices (the current chief justice, who chairs the body, and Justice Labarga, who will succeed him as chief justice), three DCA judges, three circuit court judges, three county court judges, and four public members (two of whom are Florida Bar members). In addition, the state courts administrator serves on the council as a non-voting member. The membership is deliberately lean, ensuring that the council remain a “nimble body” that can respond rapidly and vigorously to the administrative issues the branch might be facing.

The scope of this council’s tasks is also more focused and court-centric than the charges that its antecedents were given. The current council has been given five areas of responsibility: to identify potential crisis situations affecting the branch and develop strategies for addressing them; to identify and evaluate information that will assist in improving the performance and effectiveness of the branch; to develop and monitor progress related to the branch’s long-range planning efforts; to review the charges of various court and Florida Bar commissions and committees, recommend consolidation or revision, and propose a method for coordinating their work; and to address other issues that the court may bring to the council. (See rule 2.225, Florida Rules of Judicial Administration.) When the members convened for the first time, Chief Justice Polston, using a “headlights” metaphor to describe their enterprise, emboldened them to shine a light on the trends and potential issues and crises down the road and to help the branch prepare for and navigate them.

Based on the issues raised by members at the inaugural meeting in January 2013, Chief Justice Polston formed three workgroups: Access to Justice, Education and Outreach, and Performance. Each member was summoned to join one, and, already, all three workgroups have made significant progress: the Access to Justice Workgroup has been focusing on strategies for facilitating access for self-represented litigants; the Education and Outreach Workgroup has been looking at issues related to improving internal and external communications and is considering strategies for fostering public trust and confidence in the judicial branch; and the Performance Workgroup has been gathering and evaluating case-related data, seeking ways to improve the performance and effectiveness of the branch. These workgroups are addressing the first two of the council’s charges; the chief justice intends to establish two other workgroups later: one
to address strategic planning and one to review and make suggestions for coordinating the work of court and Florida Bar committees and commissions.

The judicial branch is indeed fortunate to be able to utilize the expertise and effort of the members of the Judicial Management Council; their commitment and enthusiasm will ultimately benefit both the people who work in and the people who are served by Florida’s court system.

The 2013 State Court Funding Institute: An Education Program on Branch Budgeting and Funding Issues

The Trial Court Budget Commission and the DCA Budget Commission, in addition to recommending budgeting and funding policies and procedures to the supreme court, also prepare and implement the judicial branch budget for the trial courts and the DCAs, respectively. Clearly the work of these commissions has a significant impact on everyone who works in, works with, and uses Florida’s court system. Because commission members have staggered terms to ensure continuity in the carrying out of the commissions’ weighty responsibilities, approximately every two years, OSCA has coordinated an orientation session to familiarize new members with the myriad, complex issues related to court budgeting and funding. This October, however, new budget commission members were treated to a different kind of opportunity to acclimate themselves to their new role: the branch’s first State Court Funding Institute.

At the State Court Funding Institute, Trial Court Budget Commission Chair Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, gave presentations on How to Tackle New Funding Needs in the Courts System and on Making a Persuasive Case for Court Funding.

Funding Institute was developed to give new members an overview of the overall state funding process and to provide them with practical information to help them do their jobs effectively, thereby preparing them to meet their commission charges.

In several considerable ways, the funding institute was different from the orientation sessions that were held in years prior. For instance, while the orientations were developed primarily for new commission members, also invited to this year’s institute were the leaders of the DCA, circuit, and county judicial conferences—who, among their many responsibilities, assist the judicial branch in seeking support and resources for certain judicial branch issues.

Second, unlike the orientations of the past, the institute was fashioned like a formal judicial education program. So, as they would for an education program, for example, faculty developed their sessions around specific
learning objectives (learning objectives describe what participants should be able to think, do, or feel as a result of each session; they also set goals that faculty members are expected to meet—and against which they are evaluated when they're done). Altogether, the institute’s six sessions were structured around 10 discrete learning objectives, including the following: as a result of attending the institute, participants will be able to identify the roles, responsibilities, and functions of the DCABC and the TCBC; to explain how the court system develops its funding proposals and allocates the funds that are received; and to develop an effective message in support of court funding.

And third, while the orientations were typically passive learning experiences, the institute was, by design, a highly interactive forum. Although attendees necessarily had to spend some time listening and learning, they also had numerous occasions to—indeed, they were encouraged to—offer their own insights and observations. In addition, each session culminated in a professional task or an individual or group exercise, giving participants the opportunity to apply what they’d learned in immediate, practical ways. All told, the institute was a lively, synergistic experience that richly facilitated the learning process.

In their evaluations, participants noted that they especially appreciated the professionalism of the program, the choice of topics, and the quality and depth of the information. They also called attention to the excellence of the faculty. Presenters included the DCABC chair, Judge Alan Lawson, Fifth DCA; the TCBC chair, Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit; Judge Mark Mahon, Fourth Circuit; Chief Judge Belvin Perry, Ninth Circuit; and Judge Olin Shinholser, Tenth Circuit. Also numbered among the faculty were State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner, Deputy State Courts Administrator Eric Maclure, and four OSCA staff: Patty Harris (Court Services), Kris Selayden (Resource Planning and Support), Theresa Westerfield (Personnel), and Dorothy Wilson (Budget). One participant succinctly captured the many strengths of the program and the presenters with these words: “Very good. Very effective. Very professional. Very knowledgeable.” Given the success of the institute, coordinators anticipate that it will be offered again in two years.

**Court Operations**

**The Mortgage Foreclosure Initiative:**

~The Context
~Training and Education Opportunities
~Performance Indicators Dashboard & Judicial Viewers
~Looking Ahead: The Integrated Trial Court Adjudication System

**The Context**

Florida’s housing market is clearly showing signs of re-invigoration, with positive growth expected to continue through 2014. But Florida still posts one of the nation’s highest foreclosure rates, and the court system continues its efforts to resolve the mountain of backlogged cases: according to the most recent calculations, as of the end of December 2013, the courts had about 253,000 pending mortgage foreclosure cases. Moreover, the Article V Revenue Estimating Conference projects that the number of foreclosure filings will not return to normal levels until fiscal year 2016 – 17.
Measurable progress has been made, however. In the last five years, the trial courts have settled more than 1.2 million foreclosure cases—and the legislature has lent support to these efforts. In fiscal year 2010 – 11, for instance, it appropriated $6 million for temporary judicial and case management resources to reduce the backlog. And, in fiscal year 2012 – 13, lawmakers appropriated $4 million for judicial and case management resources toward disposing of the backlogged cases and keeping pace with the incoming caseload to try to avert adding to the backlog. Then, before the 2013 legislative session convened, lawmakers, drawing from the $8.4 billion that Florida was awarded from the national foreclosure settlement funds, gave the court system $4.9 million for senior judge days, temporary case management staff, and enhanced technology to improve the flow of foreclosure cases through the judicial process.

At the same time, the legislature asked the judicial branch to develop and submit a proposal for funding necessary to reduce the backlog. In April 2013, the branch released the report, Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan for the State Courts System, which, culling from strategies successfully carried out in certain jurisdictions at the local level, recommended three main solutions to the problems impeding the just and timely processing of foreclosure cases: more active judicial or quasi-judicial case management and adjudication, including expanded use of general magistrates; additional case management resources; and deployment of technology resources to help judges move these cases forward (this link goes to the report). During the 2013 session, the legislature appropriated $21.3 million to the courts to implement these recommendations: $16 million for senior judges, general magistrates, and case managers who focus exclusively on the backlogged cases, and $5.3 million for technology enhancements (lawmakers also appropriated $9.7 million to the clerks of court to assist with these cases).

Currently being implemented, these solutions are significantly supporting branch efforts to ensure the full participation of parties, avoid unreasonable delays, and dispose of those cases that have been pending for the longest period of time, while being ever mindful of the rights of parties and the integrity of the process. Since last July 1, when the 2013 – 14 fiscal year began, the trial courts have been resolving, on average, 20,000 backlogged foreclosure cases per month.

Training and Education Opportunities

To ensure that judges, general magistrates, case managers, and support staff have the information and skills they need to fulfill their duties efficiently with regard to the mortgage foreclosure initiative—and to make the best possible use both of the money appropriated by the legislature and of judicial time and resources—the supreme court, in an administrative order, directed the Trial Court Budget Commission and OSCA’s Court Education Section to develop and present training and education for the jurists and court personnel involved in the foreclosure process (take this link to the administrative order). The first training was held last August: the 2013 Foreclosure Initiative Training Program comprised a half-day training on foreclosure basics and new legislation and a half-day training on best practices, case management, and evidence. Also included was a day-long training exclusively for all new general magistrates who were hired for this initiative.

Then last October, the Tenth Judicial Circuit developed and hosted a statewide workshop on Foreclosure Case Management for case managers and support staff who are working on the foreclosure initiative. Approximately 100 people attended this day-long program, with a team participating from nearly every judicial circuit.

The training was facilitated by staff from the Court Administrator’s Office and staff from the Polk County Clerk of Court. The collaboration between these two offices demonstrated how best practices can be developed and implemented, culminating in positive results in eliminating the backlog of pending foreclosure cases—and in a case management system with which legal staff and litigants from both sides express their satisfaction. As Trial Court Administrator Nick Sudzina said, “We have had numerous attorneys come to case management hearings in the Tenth Circuit expressing that they like the way we handle these cases here. We thought it might be a good idea
to share some of our practices with the other circuits and, at the same time, learn from some of the good things they are doing in foreclosure cases.”

After the workshop’s introductory session (Foreclosure in Florida—How Did We Get Here?), PJ Stockdale, a senior court statistics consultant with OSCA, familiarized attendees with the Foreclosure Initiative Performance Indicators Dashboard, a web-based application that the branch recently developed to give judges and their staff access to performance indicator information that supports their efforts to manage their foreclosure cases more efficiently (for more on the dashboard, see below). Mr. Stockdale presented an overview of the system, explaining the new data being provided to the courts by the clerks, how the data are being collected, how these data will be useful to judges and court personnel, and how these data will be helpful at the local level (e.g., improving case flow), the circuit level (e.g., improving case management and resource allocation) and the state level (e.g., monitoring the initiative’s progress and developing comparative measures for process improvement). Following this presentation were sessions on Foreclosure Case Flow Management Triage, Case Management Tools and Techniques, and a Best Practices Panel.

Mr. Stockdale and Mr. Gregory Youchock, chief of OSCA’s Court Services Unit, called the training “very well done”; especially helpful, they thought, were the numerous opportunities for brainstorming, discussion, and the sharing of ideas and practices. One of the program’s many strengths, Mr. Stockdale added, was that it was “eminently practical training in the field”: presenters described “successful models they’ve used for tackling certain kinds of problems in the foreclosure arena and then said, ‘See if these models offer you something you can take back to your circuit and use.’” Both agreed that more trainings like this one would be beneficial to all judges and court personnel involved in the foreclosure initiative.

Foreclosure Initiative Performance Indicators Dashboard & Judicial Viewers
To assist judges in their efforts to move foreclosure cases (especially the oldest cases) forward—and to support efforts to use court resources efficiently and effectively—the Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan recommended that the branch begin to utilize three nationally-recognized performance indicators: time to disposition (which measures the length of time between filing and disposition); age of pending cases (which measures the age of the active cases that are pending before the court); and clearance rate (which measures the ratio of dispositions to new case filings and assesses whether the court is keeping pace with its incoming caseload). In an administrative order, the supreme court accepted the recommendations outlined in the Backlog Reduction Plan and directed the clerks of court to collect the data necessary to report these performance indicators (this link goes to the administrative order). Currently, all 67 clerks are reporting the data at least monthly, with many providing the data on a weekly basis—and, some, on a daily basis. Eventually, all the data will be reported and available in real time.

Judges and court personnel are now accessing these data via the Foreclosure Initiative Performance Indicators Dashboard, a web application that aggregates the data submitted by the clerks, calculates—by judge—the three performance indicators, and represents the indicators in a user-friendly graphical interface. Through the dashboard, initiative participants can access reports about the three indicators; these reports help them determine which cases need to be addressed first and equip them with other information that supports their efforts to manage their time and workload efficiently. In essence, as Mr. Stockdale explains, “The dashboard provides the capability to drill down from the performance indicators into the case detail to identify specific cases at issue. This capability has provided enormous opportunities for case data clean-up and correction as well as for pinpointing critical areas of backlog.” He describes this phase as “intense preparation for additional action.”
In the next phase, the performance indicators will be available through a case management system called a judicial viewer. Purchased with a portion of the national foreclosure settlement funds that the legislature earmarked for court technology enhancements, the judicial viewer is an interactive application designed to allow judges to view and use electronic documents and to manage their cases electronically from any location and across many devices; it also provides judges with basic tools and capabilities at the local level to manage and track case activity. In addition to providing users with rapid and reliable access to current case information, judicial viewers will enable them to access and use information electronically in the courtroom; let them prepare, electronically sign, file, and serve orders in the court; and generate case management reports that will help them manage their cases efficiently. Furthermore, with the implementation of the judicial viewers, the judicial branch will be able to begin measuring the success of the foreclosure initiative at a more discrete level.

Looking Ahead: The Integrated Trial Court Adjudication System

The judicial viewer, while initially being used to support the processing of foreclosure cases, also has the potential to serve as the framework for a fully-automated, statewide case management system—something the judicial branch has been seeking to develop for at least 10 years. Toward that end, the Florida Courts Technology Commission is working on an implementation strategy to employ judicial viewers in all Florida counties.

The judicial viewer is one of two components of a judicial branch project called the Integrated Trial Court Adjudication System (ITCAS). The second component is known as Judicial Data Management Services, and it is described as a state-level data management strategy that will pull court activity data from the local judicial viewer systems, among other sources, and integrate them into a coherent whole (focusing on local essential adjudicatory functions, the data management system will provide for the state-level collection of case activity for statewide court operations management).

An outgrowth of the Trial Court Integrated Management Solution (a project of the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability that culminated in the December 2012 publication of its final report and recommendations), ITCAS has the potential to lead to better management of cases, better statewide-level court data reporting, and improved performance generally.

As Mr. Stockdale points out, the foreclosure initiative is “the first salvo in things we can do in court data management; it is a great proving ground, showing us what is possible” in the other trial court divisions.

Senior Judges: An Important Judicial Resource

As the above article on the Mortgage Foreclosure Initiative mentions, during the 2013 legislative session, lawmakers, drawing on Florida’s portion of the national foreclosure settlement funds, bolstered the court system’s efforts to address the mortgage foreclosure backlog: in addition to appropriating $5.3 million for technology enhancements (to facilitate the transition from paper files to electronic files), the legislature designated $16 million for the courts to employ senior judges, general magistrates, and case managers who focus exclusively on the backlogged cases.

Instrumental in the resolution of these pending cases, senior judges have been a topic in the news lately. But senior judges are not a new phenomenon; in fact, they have been making critical contributions to Florida’s justice system since 1948, when voters passed a constitutional amendment giving judges who are about to reach the end of their careers the option of retiring rather than resigning—“in which case they shall be qualified to continue to perform all of the functions of their respective offices when called upon by the Chief Justice, if it be a Supreme Court Justice, or by the Senior Circuit Judge of his Circuit, if it be a Judge...
of the Circuit Court.” Although not actually called senior judges at that point, their role was very similar to the role of today’s senior judges.

In 1990, the branch began to use the term senior judge to signify “a retired judge who is eligible to serve on assignment to temporary judicial duty” [rule 2.205(a)(3)(D), Florida Rules of Judicial Administration]. A senior judge can be selected to serve by the chief justice, or the chief justice can authorize a chief judge to make a selection: the Florida Constitution articulates the chief justice’s “power to assign justices or judges, including consenting retired justices or judges, to temporary duty in any court for which the judge is qualified”—and “to delegate to a chief judge of a judicial circuit court the power to assign judges for duty within that circuit” [article V, section 2(b)].

Senior judges are a vital judicial resource, contributing significantly to the administration of justice and to the services that Florida’s courts provide their citizens. For instance, when a demonstrated need for new judges remains unmet, the continued public service of senior judges facilitates parties’ access to courts and shortens trial calendars; in addition, senior judges mitigate interruptions caused when judicial offices are vacant, when sitting judges are unable to serve because of illness, or when sitting judges must devote extended stretches of time to complex, lengthy cases.

To be selected to serve as a senior judge, retiring judges first must undergo a rigorous process that requires both resolution and planning. At least three months before they retire, judges who seek to become senior judges must submit a letter notifying the chief justice of their retirement and of their interest in serving as a senior judge. They are then given two forms to complete. The Consent to be Assigned to Judicial Service form requests factual information (e.g., about the court from which they are retiring) and inquires into their willingness to abide by certain requirements (e.g., earning continuing judicial education credits, refraining from the practice of law). The Judicial Questionnaire seeks information about their docket preference and their willingness to travel outside their own circuit; it also asks them to provide the names of five attorneys who have appeared before them within the prior three months.

After the supreme court receives these forms, it sends an inquiry to the Judicial Qualifications Commission to find out if any disciplinary action has been taken against the aspiring senior judge. In addition, the retiring judge’s chief judge is asked to comment on his/her ability to serve. Once the various inquiries have been satisfied, the supreme court considers the application. If the application is approved, the judge’s name is placed in a database that chief judges use to assign senior judges. Even after receiving approval, senior judges receive regular reviews.

Senior judges are a vital judicial resource, contributing significantly to the administration of justice and to the services that Florida’s courts provide their citizens. For instance, when a demonstrated need for new judges remains unmet, the continued public service of senior judges facilitates parties’ access to courts and shortens trial calendars; in addition, senior judges mitigate interruptions caused when judicial offices are vacant, when sitting judges are unable to serve because of illness, or when sitting judges must devote extended stretches of time to complex, lengthy cases. Their service is especially helpful when the economy, and thus the court budget, is depressed and when the courts face temporary caseload spikes and backlogs. Most recently, of course, they have been playing a major role in ensuring the just and timely resolution of the backlogged mortgage foreclosure cases.

Florida closed out the fiscal 2012 – 2013 year with 194 active senior judges, and that number continues to rise. Clearly, both Florida’s judicial system and the people of Florida benefit from the support of these competent, experienced jurists who are willing to continue public service.
Court Access

The Redesigned flcourts.org Website Has Much To Offer Visitors

Those who have not been to flcourts.org lately are in for a welcome, and welcoming, surprise. For on January 24, OSCA launched a major website redesign—a remodeling that has dramatically transformed the site, giving it a more contemporary look while making it both more accessible and more user-centered.

The last time the flcourts website was redesigned was in 2004—which, according to those who gauge the lifespan of digital technologies, means that the site was fully three lifecycles ancient! Not surprisingly, because technology has morphed radically over the last decade, the old site was no longer responsive to more recent technological innovations, like the various generations of mobile devices, for instance. But, in other ways too, the former site had begun showing its age; internal structural problems started becoming more problematic, for example, making modifications and updates difficult, if not impossible. For these reasons alone, a redesign had become imperative.

The redesign was facilitated and implemented by a web team—which included Phillip Pollock, the OSCA web administrator, and Tricia Knox, the supreme court education and information administrator (a position that includes web administrative duties for the supreme court site)—under the direction of State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner. While seeking ways to address the technology concerns, the web team also took advantage of the opportunity to re-conceptualize the organization of the entire site. The new homepage immediately signals some of the big changes that were made, both in the site’s visuals and in the layout of its content.

For instance, even though the former site was not an OSCA site, it had a more OSCA-oriented feel to it. The new site has a Florida Courts logo that comprises the image of a generic courthouse framing the map of Florida within its columns. This logo lets everyone know that this site reflects, and is a resource for, all of Florida’s courts.

But the shift is more than skin deep—for the content has also been re-grouped to more clearly and usefully meet the needs of the various audiences that visit the site. For instance, from the main navigation tools at the top of the page, viewers can find dropdown menus for Florida Courts, Resources and Services, Administration and Funding, and Publications and Statistics. The right-hand menu consists of “quicklinks” to topics like Education and Outreach, Small Claims, Juror Information, Dispute Resolution, Court Interpreting, and Online Services. Then, running across the center of the page is a tab menu consisting of three tabs—Representing Yourself, Court Community, and Media—appealing to the three main audiences that tend to utilize the site.

Under the Court Community tab, judges, court personnel, and justice system partners can readily link to statistical information, family law opinions and rules, e-filing information, ADA-related information, and information about alternative dispute resolution, court commissions and committees, funding and budget, and emergency preparedness, for instance.

Under the Representing Yourself tab, members of the public can find family law forms, rules and opinions; a self-help center locator; a lawyer referral link; the court interpreters registry; and information on the ADA and court accessibility, jury duty, mediation, probate, small claims, elder court, and guardianship.

And the Media tab takes one to resources like the Florida State Courts Annual Report, newsletters, a listing of court commissions and committees, supreme court opinions, statistical information, and information about funding, the mortgage foreclosure initiative, the strategic plan, and the organization and structure of the court system.
And, because different viewers have different intuitive navigation patterns, the site has been designed to ensure that all of the above information is reachable from a variety of paths.

Also deserving attention are two other features of the redesign. First, prominently displayed toward the top of the homepage is a revolving series of Court News Stories—a so-called “image slider” that offers visitors enticing tidbits about current court innovations across the state and about court people in the news; indeed, if your court would like to offer a story idea or submit a story to share, please contact Mr. Pollock (pollockp@flcourts.org). And, second, also eye-catching is a Court Locator, where members of the public can find a specific courthouse, get its address and phone number, and even access a map with directions to its front door.

Preparing for this major overhaul took a serious group effort. It began with the web team working with Ms Goodner and staff from OSCA’s Information Systems Services to select a vendor of web content management. After the vendor was selected, Mr. Pollock and Ms Knox began scrutinizing the “analytics” of the former site—that is, they evaluated the “hit counts” of individual pages to determine visitor priorities, which helped them conceptualize the best way to map out the information and resources for the redesign. At the same time, they coordinated meetings with the OSCA employees who typically field questions from the public as well with various groups of frequent site-users to get their input into content organization—and to find out about content gaps that needed to be filled (filling two conspicuous gaps, for instance, the redesign introduced a Topics A – Z as well as a compilation of all court-based publications—e.g., annual reports, benchguides, family court materials, newsletters, and reports produced by supreme court committees over the years). Fuelled with all this feedback, the web team crafted an aesthetically-appealing design that is truly user-friendly as well as eminently accessible, both to users of auxiliary aids as well as to users with mobile devices.

So please check out flcourts.org—and explore the many ways this redesign enhances the branch’s internet presence and serves as a valuable resource to judges, court employees, and the variety of visitors seeking information about Florida’s courts.
Welcomes

A warm welcome to these recently-hired supreme court and OSCA employees who will be working closely with many judges and court personnel across the state as well as with various state courts system commissions, committees, and task forces.

**John A. Tomasino, Clerk of Court, Florida Supreme Court**

John A. Tomasino, unanimously selected to be the new clerk of court, was sworn in by Chief Justice Polston on November 4, 2013; he succeeds Tom Hall, who retired after more than 13 years as clerk. The twenty-first clerk of court since statehood, Mr. Tomasino received his bachelor’s degree from the University of South Florida and his law degree from Florida State University.

Before joining the Office of the Clerk, Mr. Tomasino was the administrative director of the Public Defender’s Office in the Second Circuit, overseeing the daily operations of trial and appellate offices throughout the six-county agency. Among his responsibilities, he managed the technology needs of more than 150 staffers and oversaw the successful migration from a client/server case management system to a custom-developed web-based system integrated with a cloud-hosted document automation system. During the statewide transition to e-filing, the Florida Public Defender Association selected him to be its point person; as such, he served as a member of the E-Portal User Group of the Florida Courts Technology Commission—an experience that stands him in good stead as the court system continues its advancement into the age of electronic records.

**Eric Maclure, Deputy State Courts Administrator, OSCA**

Effective November 1, 2013, Eric Maclure assumed the role of the second of two deputy state courts administrators (Blan Teagle continues his role as the other of the two deputys).

Mr. Maclure—who has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from West Virginia University, a master’s degree in public administration from George Washington University, and a law degree from the University of North Carolina—was OSCA’s Director of Community and Intergovernmental Relations for the two years prior to his selection as deputy state courts administrator. Before joining the court system, he worked for the Florida Legislature, which included service as the staff director for the Senate Judiciary Committee, where he was extensively involved in matters relating to the judicial branch.

Since taking on the role of deputy state courts administrator, Mr. Maclure has been given responsibility for the following OSCA units: Information Systems Services, Community and Intergovernmental Relations, Budget, Finance and Accounting, General Services, and Resource Planning and Support Services.

**Sarah Naf, Director of Community and Intergovernmental Relations, OSCA**

On January 22, OSCA’s Office of Community and Intergovernmental Relations welcomed a new director: Sarah Naf. The Office of Community and Intergovernmental Relations is the coordinating entity for statewide community, intergovernmental, legislative, and communications initiatives on behalf of the state courts system; it serves as a central point of contact for information regarding the judicial branch.

Ms Naf, who earned both her bachelor’s and her law degrees at Florida State University, came to the state courts system from the Florida Senate; as an attorney with the Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee, she addressed issues related to state employee health insurance, state personnel management, administrative law, and public records and open meetings. Before that, she worked with the Florida House of Representatives and the Department of Business and Professional Regulation. In addition to her strong communications skills, Ms Naf has extensive experience in legislative analysis, bill and amendment drafting, and legislator and intergovernmental relations.
Farewell


Arthur J. England’s 1974 campaign for the position of supreme court justice was considered quite a long shot. Before being elected to the bench, he was a tax law specialist, an author, and a teacher. But, as Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte pointed out at the recent supreme court Program of Remembrance and Celebration of the jurist’s life, Mr. England had “no previous judicial experience. He had no active involvement with the Bar at all.” Because he was neither born nor schooled in Florida, “He had no network of contacts in this state. He did not have an alumni association from a state university backing him in any way.” Moreover, Mr. D'Alemberte added, “He did not have a large personal fortune. And, extremely important [because his specialty was federal tax law], he never argued a case before any state court.”

In addition to lacking experience, a professional network, and financial support, he had no campaign headquarters and no professional staff: he turned his garage into his command center, and he enlisted the aid of his wife and four daughters to serve as his staff. Yet, still, he was triumphant.

Moreover, he was on the supreme court bench a mere six-and-one-half years: he became the state’s first Jewish justice in January 1975; served as chief justice from 1978 – 1980; and resigned from the bench to return to private practice in August 1981.

Despite his many initial hurdles, and despite the brevity of his public service on the bench, all the Program of Remembrance speakers emphasized that Justice England left a great legacy to the supreme court and significantly improved the quality of justice for all Floridians.

The court on which Justice England served has come to be considered a highly innovational court. In 1979, for instance, while he was chief justice, Florida became the first state in the nation to open its courtrooms statewide to cameras—leading the way for most state court systems in the US and even for some federal courts.

And in 1980, also while he was chief, he vigorously supported a constitutional amendment that would considerably limit the supreme court’s jurisdiction. “The most dramatic change in the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Florida in 24 years,” as he called it, had the effect of reducing the supreme court’s growing caseload, eliminating delay in the finality of appellate proceedings, and permitting the timely and careful resolution of important decisions issued from the supreme court. "The intended overall effect of these amendments," he wrote, "was to limit the Supreme Court to policy matters of statewide significance, leaving to the district courts of appeal the dispensation of appellate justice to individual litigants." Restricting the jurisdiction of the supreme court also had the effect of enabling “the district courts of appeal to work properly,” explained Mr. D’Alemberte, adding that the work of the DCA judges “has remained more meaningful because of Arthur’s amendment to the constitution.”

The innovation about which Justice England was proudest, many say, was his effort to develop a mechanism to fund legal services for the poor. In 1981, under his leadership, the Florida Supreme Court implemented the Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts program, an initiative that encourages banks to pay interest on certain inactive funds sitting in lawyers’ trust accounts and then
uses this interest to fund legal aid for the poor as well as to subsidize endeavors to improve justice and to enhance the public’s understanding of the courts. This enterprise was subsequently adopted by every state in the nation. As Mr. D’Alemberette reminded the audience, among the many people who have been positively affected by Justice England’s service are the “lawyers who work at legal services programs, and their clients, the people who have been funded by the Interest in Lawyers’ Trust Accounts.”

Clearly the years that Justice England was on the bench were times of leading-edge change and opportunity. But they were also years of great challenge for the supreme court. Former Justice Joseph W. Hatchett, who served with him on the bench from 1975 – 79 and who also spoke at the Program of Remembrance, noted that “The court was undergoing tough times” when Justice England began his service: “Investigations revealed that favoritism, corruption, and cronyism ran rampant in the court,” he reminisced. But "Justice England brought to the court all of the qualities needed for a progressive and growing state for an important court.” Among them, “He had legal ability, the intellectual capacity to interpret and apply and establish legal principles to factual situations and to communicate, in speech and in writing, the reasoning behind a legal conclusion. He also brought a record and reputation for excellent character and integrity, characteristics so dearly needed at that time in the court’s history. Most of all,” he stressed, “Justice England brought to the court a devotion to the improvement of the quality of justice.”

In his own words, Justice England was committed to “sincere, open and honest communication,” urging judges and lawyers to speak “just plain English” in the courtroom. He stated that “Our court system should ‘be there’ and function without a great deal of flurry and attention,” and, in keeping with this philosophy, he believed his role as chief justice was “to administer the state’s judicial system tightly enough that its operation will be smooth and quiet—in the background.” This is another of his achievements. For all the reasons described above, the program speakers agreed that Justice England played an instrumental role in restoring the people’s trust and confidence in the supreme court.

Succinctly summing up the speakers’ sentiments, former Governor Reuben Askew pronounced, “Few people have had the impact for good as he had when he came to Tallahassee,” pronounced former Governor Reuben Askew.
Special Recognitions

Justice R. Fred Lewis & Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, Executive Director of the Florida Law Related Education Association
2014 Sandra Day O’Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education
The National Center for State Courts

Florida Supreme Court Justice R. Fred Lewis and Ms Annette Boyd-Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, received the 2014 Sandra Day O’Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education, conferred by the National Center for State Courts. This award is named for the retired justice of the US Supreme Court Justice in appreciation of her ongoing commitment to improving civics education, and it “honors an organization, court, or individual who has promoted, inspired, improved, or led an innovation or accomplishment in the field of civics education related to the justice system.” This year’s award recognizes Justice Lewis and Ms Pitts for their joint work on Florida’s Justice Teaching Initiative and several other civics education programs in which they have been involved in Florida. Justice Lewis established the Justice Teaching Initiative, and Ms Pitts developed the teaching materials and lesson plans.

Justice Teaching is a law-related education initiative that aims to partner a judge, lawyer, or other law-related professional with every elementary, middle, and high school in the state. The volunteer legal professionals undergo structured training and are furnished with proven teaching materials, ensuring they are well-prepared to create a lively and meaningful educational experience for the students. Justice Lewis and Ms Pitts are both personally involved in training and motivating the volunteers.

After initiating the program in 2006, Justice Lewis assembled a statewide leadership group of judges and Florida Bar leaders representing each of Florida’s 20 circuits and five DCAs. This group recruits and coordinates the volunteers who then work with the schools. The group also works in partnership with court managers, school superintendents, teachers, and administrators to advance the program.

The goal of the Justice Teaching Initiative is to promote an understanding of Florida’s justice system and laws, develop critical thinking abilities and problem-solving skills, and demonstrate the effective interaction of Florida’s courts within the constitutional structure. Since the program’s inception, more than 4,000 lawyers and judges have been trained by Justice Lewis and Ms Pitts to serve as resources for Justice Teaching; currently, all of Florida’s public schools—as well as nearly 400 of its private schools—have Justice Teaching volunteers.

Judge Cindy S. Lederman, Eleventh Judicial Circuit
The 2014 National CASA Judge of the Year Award

Judge Cindy S. Lederman, Eleventh Judicial Circuit, was honored with the 2014 National CASA Judge of the Year Award. The National CASA Association—an acronym for Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children—is a network of 933 programs that recruit, train, and support volunteers to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in the courtroom and other settings. Every year, this association honors the outstanding contributions of a judge who has furthered the best interest of children through his or her support of the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program.

Nominated by the Florida GAL Program, Judge Lederman, who has been on the bench since 1988, was a co-leader of the team that created the Dade County Domestic Violence Court, helped to conceive the Dependency Court Intervention Program for Family Violence, and co-created the Miami Safe Start...
Initiative. In addition, she has served on numerous committees that focus on bettering the lives of children and families, and she has written articles, done research, developed programs, and given talks on the needs of dependent children.

Jessica Allen, director of the Miami-Dade GAL Program said, “At the heart of every successful GAL Program are dedicated judges, and Judge Lederman has shown her dedication to children’s issues and the GAL Program throughout her career. And Michael Piraino, chief executive officer of the National CASA Association, called Judge Lederman “a leader in Florida and nationally in behalf of abused and neglected children.”

Mr. Matthew L. Benefiel, Trial Court Administrator of the Ninth Judicial Circuit
2013 Distinguished Service Award
The National Center for State Courts

Mr. Matthew L. Benefiel, trial court administrator of the Ninth Judicial Circuit since 1996, is a recipient of the 2013 National Center for State Courts Distinguished Service Award, which honors those who have made substantial contributions to the field of court administration and to the work of the National Center. Specifically, this award honors Mr. Benefiel for his assistance with the National Center’s development of court, state, and national models of Virtual Remote Interpreting; more generally, it recognizes his many efforts to advance court technology both in the Ninth Circuit and across the country.

The Ninth Circuit established its Remote Court Interpreting Program in 2007—the first of Florida’s circuits to develop such a system. Since then, Mr. Benefiel has given presentations on remote interpreting at numerous events, including a Conference of State Court Administrators meeting, a National Association for Court Management Conference, several Court Technology Conferences, a Center for Legal and Court Technology Conference, the National Summit on Language Access in the Courts, and an education program of the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida. He has also worked with the National Center’s Language Access Advisory Committee to develop the national Virtual Remote Interpreting model. In 2012 alone, the Ninth Circuit won several awards for its highly innovative program: the 2012 Government Computer News Outstanding Information Technology Achievement in Government Award; the 2012 Digital Government Achievement Award; and a 2012 Harvard Kennedy School – Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation Award; the circuit was also a 2012 Computerworld Honors Laureate winner.

Broward County Mental Health Court
Finalist for the 2013 Innovating Justice Award
The Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law Foundation

Broward County’s Mental Health Court was a top three finalist for the prestigious Innovating Justice Award for 2013. The “Successful Innovation” awards, which recognize projects around the world that develop innovative ways to deliver justice, are given annually by the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law Foundation, an institute for international justice based in the Netherlands. The criteria for the award are originality, sustainability, and scalability.

Established in 1997 and pioneered by Judge Ginger Lerner-Wren, Broward County’s specialized Mental Health Court, the first of its kind in the nation, is dedicated to the decriminalization of people with serious mental illnesses who are arrested for misdemeanor offenses. Before the court’s inception, defendants with mental illnesses routinely spent months in jail for minor crimes such as loitering or disorderly conduct rather than getting treatment they needed. The Broward County Mental Health Court relies on a restorative justice approach; it is supported by an expert clinical team and dedicated mental health/criminal justice community collaborative. The court is considered a human rights strategy
and is acclaimed for its swift jail diversion to break arrest cycles and promote humane access to community treatment and services. Since its launch, the Mental Health Court has provided a compassionate, alternative form of justice to an estimated 16,000 people.

The Broward County Mental Health Court has been widely copied by at least 250 cities across the country, with dozens more in the planning stages. Congress embraced this concept as a national model, passing legislation in 2000 to expand diversionary criminal justice strategies.

The First DCA’s Technology and Programming Development Team & the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit’s Court Technological Innovation Team
2013 Top 25 Adaptable Achievements Awards Florida Taxwatch Prudential-Davis Productivity Awards

Since 1989, Florida Taxwatch’s Prudential-Davis Productivity Awards Program has been recognizing and rewarding state government employees for their development of cost-effective initiatives that have saved millions of dollars for Florida’s taxpayers and businesses. In 2013, Florida Taxwatch presented a “compilation of the top 25 saving and revenue enhancing award winning achievements from the last 25 years of the Prudential-Davis Productivity Awards.” Included among the top 25 were the First DCA and the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, both of whom were recognized in 2011 for their technology innovations.

The First DCA’s Technology and Programming Development Team received a 2013 Top 25 Adaptable Achievements award for its design, development, and implementation of iDCA/eDCA, a fully electronic solution for the appellate workflow. iDCA/eDCA is closely connected to the court’s existing case management system and includes e-filing, document management, and tasking features designed for the appellate process. It comprises three closely linked sites: Internal DCA (iDCA), which is an internal component for document management for use by judges and law clerks; External DCA (eDCA), which is a portal for the transmittal of all filings with the court (and also includes access to public digitized documents for those listed as the attorney or party of record as well as e-service of court orders, opinions, etc.); and the Case Review System. iDCA/eDCA is now successfully deployed at the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth DCAs. In addition to reaping substantial time and cost savings, iDCA/eDCA is playing an instrumental role in the court system’s transition to a fully-realized electronic courts structure.

The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit’s Court Technological Innovation Team received a 2013 Top 25 Adaptable Achievements award for developing an automated system to process inactive case dispositions. This first-in-the-nation system electronically identifies cases that have been inactive for an extended period, automatically generates court orders signed by judges, and automatically prepares, prints, and mails notices to the parties in the case. This process creates a 93 percent reduction in the labor required to process the disposition of thousands of cases. The hours saved by this process freed up a position, enabling it to be assigned to the criminal case management department to ensure compliance with supreme court time standards, to facilitate the equitable allocation of capital cases among members of the judiciary, and to process post-conviction motions. This system can be adapted to meet the needs of other circuits and any court division.
Turning Points

Awards and Honors

**Former Justice Rosemary Barkett**, who was on the supreme court bench from 1985 until 1994 and then served on the bench of the US Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, was recently named a US-appointed member of the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal in The Hague.

**Judge David M. Gooding**, Fourth Judicial Circuit, was commended with the William E. Gladstone Award for his judicial leadership and his service to Florida’s children.

**Mr. Michael Kamen**, a member of the Mediator Qualifications Board for more than 17 years, was presented with the Dispute Resolution Center’s 2013 Award of Appreciation.

**Former Justice Ben F. Overton**, who was on the supreme court bench from 1974 – 1999, was the posthumous recipient of this year’s Sharon Press Excellence in Alternative Dispute Resolution Award, which is bestowed upon an individual for visionary leadership, professional integrity, and unwavering devotion to the field of alternative dispute resolution.

**Judge Robert K. Rouse, Jr.**, Seventh Judicial Circuit, received the William M. Hoeveler Judicial Professionalism Award, conferred by The Florida Bar’s Standing Committee on Professionalism; this award recognizes a judge who best exemplifies strength of character, service, and competence as a jurist, lawyer, and public servant.

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On January 31, the Florida Supreme Court hosted the 2014 Pro Bono Service Awards Ceremony. In fiscal year 1993 – 94, the first year for which pro bono hours were calculated, attorneys donated over 800,000 hours of free service to the people of Florida; in the most recent reporting period, fiscal year 2012 – 13, that number had risen to over 1.7 billion hours. This year, the following attorneys were commended for their extraordinary commitment to meeting the legal needs of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the most vulnerable of Florida’s Citizens.

**Karen Meyer Buesing**, Tampa, was honored with the Tobias Simon Pro Bono Service Award;

**Judge Emily A. Peacock**, Thirteenth Judicial Circuit, was saluted with the Distinguished Judicial Service Award;

**Strichter, Riedel, Blain & Prosser, PA**, Tampa, was lauded with the Law Firm Commendation;

**Central Florida Bankruptcy Law Association**, Orlando, was awarded the Voluntary Bar Association Pro Bono Service Award;

**Laura E. Ward**, Tampa, was distinguished with the Young Lawyers Division Pro Bono Service Award.
And the following attorneys were commended with The Florida Bar President’s Pro Bono Service Awards:

Joseph L. Amos Jr., Orlando
Virginia Marie Buchanan, Pensacola
Karen Meyer Buesing, Tampa
Maria Frances Caldarone, Vero Beach
A. Leigh Cangelosi, Branford
Susan V. Carroll, Panama City
J. Davis Connor, Lake Wales
Sonja R. Crockett, Tallahassee,
William Walker Gallogly, Jacksonville
Timothy G. Hains, Naples
Michael Harshman, Lakewood Ranch

Amy U. Hickman, Boynton Beach
David Mangiero, Miami
Joseph M. Mason, Jr., Brooksville
William Fletcher McMurry, Louisville, KY
Stephen Bruce Moss, Fort Lauderdale
Jessica L.C. Rae, St. Petersburg
David J. Rodziewicz, Ormond Beach
Gary Siegel, Sanford
David Van Loon, Key West
Nancy Ericksen Wright, Gainesville

In Memoriam


Retired Judge Amy Karan served on the bench in Miami-Dade County from 1997 – 2010.


Retired Judge Robert Clement Scott served on the bench of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit from 1982 – 1993


If you have information about judges and court personnel who have received awards or honors for their contributions to the branch, please forward it to the Full Court Press.
March
4 Legislature convenes
9 – 14 Florida Judicial College Phase II, Orlando, FL
23 – 27 Justice Teaching Institute, Tallahassee, FL

April
7 Trial Court Budget Commission Meeting, Tallahassee, FL
9 – 11 New Appellate Judges Program, Tampa, FL
28 – 29 Senior Judges Education Program, Orlando, FL
29 – May 2 Dispute Resolution Center County Mediation Training, Ocala, FL

May
2 Legislative Session ends, Sine Die
5 New Attorney Induction Ceremony, Tallahassee, FL
9 Dispute Resolution Center Advanced Mediation Training, Port St. Lucie, FL
14 – 16 Court Interpreter Oral Performance Examinations, West Palm Beach, FL
19 – 20 Steering Committee on Families & Children in the Courts Meeting, Orlando, FL
22 – 23 Task Force on Substance Abuse & Mental Health in the Courts Meeting, Orlando, FL
30 Judicial Management Council Meeting, West Palm Beach, FL

June
4 Retirement Ceremony for Lisa Goodner, Tallahassee, FL
9 – 13 Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, Orlando, FL
19 – 20 Court Interpreter Orientation Workshop, Orlando, FL
21 Court Interpreter Written Examination, Orlando, FL
30 Passing of the Gavel Ceremony, Tallahassee, FL