A Message from PK Jameson, State Courts Administrator

For those who are involved in, are affected by, or even just enjoy observing Florida’s budget process, this has been an unusual and interesting year. The legislative session began, as it typically does, in early March and was scheduled to end on May 1. But budget negotiations came to a standstill—due to disagreement on Medicaid expansion and the impending suspension or reduction of federal low income pool funding (a program for hospitals that provide uncompensated care to uninsured or underinsured Floridians). The House adjourned three days before the scheduled end of session, without passing a budget.

If lawmakers do not agree on a budget before the fiscal year ends at midnight on June 30, a government shutdown is triggered because funding ceases for all functions supported by these dollars. This was the first time Florida came close to that possibility since 1992, when Governor Chiles and lawmakers were locked in a rancorous impasse until the early morning hours of July 1.

This year, a shutdown was averted with ample breathing room. Returning to Tallahassee for a special session on June 1, lawmakers crafted a $79 billion budget and voted on it on June 19. The judicial branch budget includes $2 million for additional case managers, $750,000 for court interpreters, funding for additional senior judge days, and funding for the statewide replacement of hardware for our network infrastructure. We also received funding for facilities issues for the Third and Fifth DCAs and for the next phase of construction for a new Fourth DCA building.

In addition to the delay in passing a budget, there is another reason this year has been remarkable. As of this writing, the 2014–15 fiscal year has not yet closed out; the budget for the 2015–16 fiscal year has only just been resolved; and, because next year’s session will take place two months earlier than usual, branch leaders and the OSCA Legislative Team have already begun working on our 2016–17 legislative budget request and preparing for legislative committee meetings that will begin in September. All of this has created a time compression that is highly atypical in the world of budgeting.

This situation surely has its challenges. But it also presents us with some great opportunities. Foremost, it means our priority issues that were not funded for the 2015-16 fiscal year will be fresh in the minds of legislators and their staff when they come back in September. So, in some ways, this time compression means that our conversations with lawmakers will be able to continue without pause.

The judicial branch appreciates and is fortunate to have the support of many legislators. We are also fortunate in having such dedicated and tireless branch leaders: the judges from the budget commissions and the judicial conferences, and the judges who come to Tallahassee or meet with their local lawmakers, play a critical role in communicating judicial branch priorities. Under the leadership of Chief Justice Labarga and with the support of the OSCA Legislative Team, everyone works together to keep attention trained on branch priorities and to ensure adequate funding for the courts.

Sincerely,

PK Jameson
Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice Already Making Great Strides

Historically, but especially in economically difficult times, the need for meaningful and informed access to civil justice by lower income and disadvantaged people has been largely unmet: legal aid has only been able to address about 20 percent of the needs of low-income citizens, for example, and moderate income Floridians without the resources to hire a lawyer or to effectively represent themselves also experience a civil justice access gap. And the ramifications are manifold. For grappling with an unresolved landlord-tenant, divorce, child custody, or consumer issue can take an enormous toll on a person’s health, safety, family structure, housing, and employment. Seeking solutions to what he describes as a “societal issue,” Chief Justice Labarga established the 27-member Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice on November 24, 2014, bringing together “the three branches of government, the Bar, civil legal aid providers, the business community, and other well-known stakeholders in a coordinated effort to identify and remove these economic barriers to civil justice.” In forging this partnership between the public and private sectors, the chief justice is seeking to develop holistic, innovative approaches to closing the civil legal assistance gap. (This link goes to the administrative order establishing the commission.)

At its first meeting, which took place in Tallahassee on January 16, commission members learned about the scope of the problem and the urgent need for action, discovered what some other state access commissions have been doing to address the issue, and began shaping the role the commission can play in improving the availability and delivery of judicial and legal services to disadvantaged, lower and moderate income, and self-represented Floridians. Chief Justice Labarga, who chairs the commission, also announced the creation of five subcommittees (Outreach, Access to and the Delivery of Legal Services, Continuum of Services, Technology, and Funding), named their members, and identified their charges. (To view this first meeting, follow this link.)

At the commission’s second meeting, which was held in Tampa in mid-May, it was evident that the subcommittees had already made significant headway—indeed, as Chief Justice Labarga remarked, the commission is already “light years ahead of where we thought we’d be!” Each subcommittee had met at least two times within that four-month interim, and each had prepared a report, which was distributed in advance to all the members. The second meeting gave the full commission a chance to learn more about the discoveries and preliminary observations and thoughts of each subcommittee—and to engage in a “healthy exchange of ideas and perspectives.”

Among the highlights of the meeting, Mr. Gregory Coleman, commission member and Florida Bar President, shared insights he gleaned at the American Bar Association’s recent National Meeting of State Access to Justice Chairs, which took place in Austin, Texas, in early May. He reported that the US now has 38 access to justice commissions, but “We are one of the most organized, progressive, and heavily diverse commissions in the country,” as well as one of the more unique bodies because Florida’s commission is chaired by the chief justice rather than the president of the state bar association—a leadership choice that Mr. Coleman called “critical to our success, and to the speed of our success.” Also unique to Florida’s commission is that its membership includes business representatives—a deliberate choice made by the chief justice, who points
out that the business community also has a stake in access to justice because civil justice issues, particularly unresolved ones, can affect the productivity of employees. Mr. Coleman reminded members of “the need to engage the business community in these conversations,” and, to stoke the dialog, he proposed that a study be conducted to determine “the return on investment” in access to justice. The last study done in Florida, by Florida TaxWatch in 2010, found a $4 benefit for every dollar invested—however, a more recent study in Tennessee found an $11 return on investment for every dollar spent. A current study would “show business leaders how important this is to our economy,” he explained.

The unveiling of the commission’s Access to Justice Knowledge Base was another exciting component of the meeting. The Knowledge Base is a searchable database containing links to information about the initiatives of the Florida organizations, courts, bar, and other justice system partners that are already working to enhance access to civil justice as well as the resources that are currently available. The database also includes links to a wealth of reports, white papers, articles, and information from all across the country about access to civil justice resources and programs. A project of The Florida Bar, the knowledge base, which will be updated regularly, was designed to enable commission members to learn about what is now available in the state—and to study the host of ideas that other states have implemented, many of which can be tweaked to suit Florida’s purposes. Mr. Coleman described it as “the beginning point of a wonderful resource for us—and the rest of the country.” (This link goes to the knowledge base.)

Another meeting spotlight was the report on and the animated discussion generated around the concept of a statewide online intake system. Former judge William Van Nortwick, chair of the Access to and the Delivery of Legal Services Subcommittee, introduced and explained this concept, which he described as modelled after triage: a process used in hospital emergency rooms, on battlefields, and at disaster sites for sorting injured people into groups based on their need for, or likelihood of benefiting from, immediate medical treatment. His subcommittee envisions the online intake system as a sorting system that uses information provided by the user, the courts, and service providers to connect the user with the most appropriate resources (online, telephone, or in-person) offered by the court system, legal aid and pro bono programs, and the private bar; resources might include online interactive forms, self-help information, court-based self-help centers, legal aid and legal services agencies, and lawyer referral services. According to the American Bar Foundation, in a given 18-month period, two-thirds of adults experience a legal situation, but only 14 percent of them get to a court, lawyer, legal aid office, or pro bono program; the subcommittee sees the online intake system as a good place for people to start. The commission voted to support, in concept, the creation of an online intake system and directed the subcommittee to develop a plan to realize the concept for further review by the commission. (Follow this link to view the second commission meeting.)

Because of the interest awakened by the commission’s work, Chief Justice Labarga has been invited to give presentations to groups all across the state, as well as to lawmakers in Tallahassee and in Washington, DC. He is heartened by the interest and attention the commission’s work is inspiring and by the people and groups that have reached out to offer help in improving access to the civil justice system (among them, the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Florida State Court and County Law Libraries Association, legal services and legal aid providers, voluntary bar associations that operate pro bono programs, law school deans and professors, entities with experience in legal insurance options, state and federal judges, attorneys, and community advocates). “There can be no doubt that awareness of our initiative is growing,” he said, and he described the excitement it has engendered as “clearly contagious.” He acknowledged that “The challenge is very great, and there’s no doubt we are at the beginning of a long journey. But we are making progress.”

The commission will next meet on September 18, in Tampa again. In addition to sharing subcommittee updates, commission members will discuss preparations for the commission’s interim report, which will be submitted to the supreme court this October. (To learn more about the commission’s members, meetings, and charges, take this link.)
Chief Justice Signs Proclamation Honoring the ADA’s 25th Anniversary

Chief Justice Labarga often says that the work of the Commission on Access to Civil Justice is a priority of his administration. In keeping with his commitment to improve access to the courts, the chief justice, on April 10, signed a proclamation honoring the historic signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 1990, and declaring that “July 2015 shall be known within the State Courts System as a month of commemoration in honor of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary” of its passage. “The very reason courts exist is to provide justice and fairness,” he explained, adding, “Nothing could be more essential to our overall mission than to provide fair and equal access to citizens with disabilities.”

The ADA is often referred to as the most significant piece of federal legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Establishing “a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability,” the ADA was designed to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities available to people without disabilities. Specifically, it prohibits discrimination in employment and in access to government programs, services, and activities; places of public accommodation; transportation; and communications (e.g., telephone and other communications services).

Florida’s judicial branch has a long-established commitment to the ADA. The law requires that public entities with 50 or more employees assign at least one employee to coordinate ADA compliance—but, since the law’s enactment, the branch has consistently exceeded this requirement: each of Florida’s 20 circuits and its five DCAs, as well as the supreme court, has had at least one ADA coordinator to facilitate compliance at the local level, and the branch has also had a statewide ADA coordinator to provide technical assistance to judicial officers and court employees regarding court compliance with the ADA.

Florida’s courts work diligently to ensure that people with disabilities can effectively participate in court processes. For people with hearing loss, for instance, the courts provide auxiliary aids and services (aids and services may include assistive listening devices, qualified sign language interpreters, and real-time transcription services). And for people with vision loss, the courts furnish accessible formats (among the possibilities are large print, Braille documents, and qualified readers). In addition, the branch continues its efforts to reduce both physical and electronic communication barriers. In 2006, for instance, then Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis ordered a statewide survey of all state court facilities in order to identify and create a plan for eliminating architectural barriers. And since 2007, the courts have sought to create and design electronic documents and web pages that are accessible to people using assistive devices like screen readers.

Chief Justice Labarga’s proclamation is consonant with the commitment of his predecessor chief justices who also made efforts to bring attention to the requirements of the ADA. For example, in 1999, then Chief Justice Major B. Harding signed a proclamation denoting the year 2000 as a time to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the ADA; in 2010, then Chief Justice Charles T. Canady issues a proclamation marking the twentieth anniversary of the law’s passage.

Recognizing that “The full promise of this important federal civil rights law as it relates to the justice system will only be reached if the Florida state courts remain committed to full implementation of the Act,” Chief Justice Labarga reaffirms the branch’s commitment and closes the proclamation with this resounding appeal: “I call upon judicial officers and court staff members to renew their efforts to eliminate obstacles that prevent full inclusion of all Floridians in the State Courts System.”

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Governance

The Long-Range Planning Process Advances

Often compared to an elaborate roadmap, a long-range strategic plan details where an organization is and where it wants to go. Shining a light on the past, the present, and the future, a strategic plan can be used to help leadership gauge an organization’s progress; make the most judicious daily decisions; and respond nimbly to unanticipated changes and challenges. By focusing everyone’s attention, resources, and time on the same big picture, a strategic plan also helps an organization improve its effectiveness and efficiency. For nearly two decades, the judicial branch has been guided by the wisdom and forethought of its long-range plan.

Given the magnitude and influence of this document, judicial branch leaders recognize that creating a strategic plan is invariably a complex, multi-faceted undertaking. The branch’s first strategic plan, Taking Bearings and Setting Course: The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch, was the culmination of several years of preparation that included a visioning phase and a far-reaching outreach program to court users and the general public. But because trends, challenges, and opportunities are always changing, a long-range plan is never intended to be a fixed, definitive document—thus, 11 years later, after another extensive outreach process, the branch released its revised plan, designed to steer the branch from 2009 through 2015. (Take this link to access the first two plans.) Then, as 2015 began to glimmer on the horizon, branch leaders advised that it was time once again to re-evaluate and refresh the long-range plan; Chief Justice Labarga, who chairs the Judicial Management Council, established a workgroup within the council to shepherd the process.

Since July 2014, the Long-Range Strategic Planning Workgroup, chaired by Judge Jonathan Gerber, Fourth DCA, has been laying the groundwork for revising the branch’s long-range plan, which will equip the court system to address challenges and trends that lie ahead. To discover how people perceive their courts and what the branch can do to improve, the workgroup developed a comprehensive, thoughtfully-considered outreach effort devised to get feedback from as broad a spectrum of Floridians as possible.

This effort included six regional public meetings for Florida citizens and public officials, held between early January and early March of this year, in Orlando, Bartow, Panama City, Jacksonville, Miami, and Lake City; meeting sites were chosen to reflect the state’s diversity and to offer a fair representation of the variety of Florida communities in terms of size of population and significant demographic characteristics. In addition, to generate feedback from a wide range of justice system agency partners, the workgroup facilitated a day-long meeting in Tallahassee; attendees included clerks, state attorneys, public defenders, representatives from The Florida Bar and Florida Legal Services, and representatives from various state agencies, including the Department of Corrections, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Law Enforcement.

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The workgroup has reviewed and analyzed the research findings and has made some observations and shared some preliminary results. Regarding the six public meetings, for instance, the workgroup reports that each drew a diversity of speakers who described a good sampling of large and small circuit challenges, as well as a variety of individual and systemic concerns; among the common themes were concerns about the lack of uniform technology and resources across the state, assistance to self-represented litigants, and family court issues. The meeting with justice partners provoked a great and animated turnout that included clerks, state attorneys, public defenders, representatives from The Florida Bar and Florida Legal Services, and representatives from various state agencies, including the Department of Corrections, the Department of Children and Families, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement; common themes included concerns about substantive and operational consistency, customer focus, and technology issues (e.g., equal access, consistency across jurisdictions). And common topics raised by the business partners were stable court system funding and the consistency of judicial decisions; they also expressed an interest in participating in judicial education opportunities.

The workgroup expects to have a first draft of the long-range issues and goals by the end of July. After outreaching the draft and incorporating the ideas and recommendations of those who review it, the workgroup will present the final draft to the full Judicial Management Council. After it receives council approval (ideally, by mid-October), the plan will be submitted to the supreme court.

Branch-Wide Communication Plan: Seeking to Promote Effective Communication Both Internally and Externally

Since the mid-1960s, public opinion surveys have revealed a general decline in confidence in this nation’s civic institutions. Historically, the court system has been held in higher regard than other government institutions—but, even so, in the late 1990s, judicial branch leaders in courts all across the nation, recognizing that the courts cannot fulfill their constitutional duty without the trust and confidence of the people they serve, began concerted efforts to bolster public trust and confidence. Indeed, strengthening public trust and confidence became the hallmark of then Chief Justice Major B. Harding’s administration (1998 – 2000). Emphasizing that, to earn public trust, courts must do a good job, and to promote public trust, courts must communicate effectively with the public, the chief justice established a Public Trust and Confidence Initiative that took a two-pronged approach: improve the essential quality of the system and facilitate meaningful communication between the courts and the public.

To address the initiative’s second prong, Chief Justice Harding reorganized the Judicial Management Council’s Communication Committee, charging it with recommending policies related to effective communication between the courts system and the public. Its most pressing responsibility was to develop a communication plan that would advance the communication-related goals and strategies identified in the branch’s first long-
range plan (i.e., actively promote the establishment of comprehensive education and outreach programs to communicate the roles and responsibilities of the courts to the public, and identify and address communication barriers to court access).

Not long after the 2000 release of the Communication Plan for 2000 – 2006, the paramount activity of the judicial branch became preparing for the 2004 implementation of Revision 7. Soon after that, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the US shifted branch attention to the development and implementation of emergency preparedness measures. Meanwhile, the court system was facing budget cuts that prompted a considerable scaling back on initiatives and activities. As a result of these exigencies, the branch had to postpone the realization of some aspects of the communication plan.

Although implementation of the plan was slowed, some goals were achieved, and others were not forgotten. Indeed, shortly after the Judicial Management Council (JMC) was reconstituted in 2012, then Chief Justice Ricky Polston formed an Education and Outreach Workgroup that was asked to focus on issues connected to communication both outside of, and within, the judicial branch; public trust and confidence; and the expression of clear unification of purpose within the branch. The first project of the workgroup—initially chaired by Judge Kathleen Kroll, Fifteenth Circuit, and, since July 2014, chaired by Judge Nina Ashenafi-Richardson, Leon County—has been the drafting of a new branch-wide communication plan. Its work has been shaped by the goal of developing a plan that can help the courts to build relationships with a variety of partners; enhance public understanding of and support for the judicial branch; speak clearly and purposefully about the judicial branch; support open lines of communication; and communicate effectively using coordinated, strategic efforts.

After considerable research into responsible and effective communication strategies that Florida has practiced over the years—and an examination of strategies developed by other states and by organizations with a nation-wide perspective on the topic—the workgroup completed its first draft of the Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida in spring 2014. Since then, workgroup members have adopted a “bottom-up approach,” actively seeking feedback on the plan and revising it in response to the observations and suggestions the draft generated. First, the plan was submitted to the full JMC in May 2014 for response and was re-drafted accordingly. Then, the workgroup solicited input from judges, trial court administrators, marshals, public information officers, and other court personnel; after reviewing their comments, the workgroup developed questions to elicit feedback on specific elements of the draft, incorporating many of these suggestions as well. This fall, the revised version will be presented for consideration and vote by the full JMC; then it will be submitted to the supreme court for approval.

As currently constructed, the plan, which provides a framework for coordinating and organizing communication activities, is built around four strategic issues, defined as high priority strategic areas that must be addressed over the long term in order to establish meaningful com-

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munication between the courts and key audiences (e.g., the public, court users, justice system partners, the executive and legislative branches, the media, and judges, court employees, and court personnel). The four strategic issues are Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence; Speaking with One Voice; Improving Communication Methods; and Strengthening Internal Communication. For each strategic issue, the plan identifies specific goals (broad statements that define the desired ends that the branch is striving to attain to address the strategic issue) and distinct strategies (means to achieving the goals). Each strategy also lays out concrete activities to undertake and suggests a timeline and potential designees; a checklist is provided to assist with tracking activities. And, for readers seeking inspiration or suggestions for implementation, the plan even offers several “Try This” ideas in text boxes.

Ultimately, the communication plan aspires to create, strengthen, and preserve confidence in, and support for, Florida’s courts system by demonstrating commitment to the branch’s mission and vision. And the workgroup deems that this goal can be achieved, in large part, by facilitating meaningful communication between the courts and its various audiences, both external and internal.

**Court Improvement**

**Family Court Update**

Since launching its first family court initiative in 1991, the judicial branch has worked steadily with community, state, and federal partners to develop comprehensive, integrated approaches to handling all cases involving children and families. Many of the branch’s innovative family court programs, projects, and practices have been spearheaded by the supreme court’s Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (originally called the Family Court Steering Committee), established in 1994. Receiving authority and directive through an administrative order of the chief justice, this 23-member body of judges, quasi-judicial officers, and justice system partners provides guidance and support to courts around the state, helping to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of family court operations. ([This link goes to the 2014 administrative order governing the FCC.](#)) Also providing assistance in advancing the family court ideals is OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement (OCI); in addition to staffing the steering committee, OCI develops and coordinates a wide range of family court trainings, publications, and other projects. This article details four cutting-edge endeavors on which the steering committee and OCI have recently been focusing: School-Justice Partnerships, as well as three projects that address the development of a trauma-informed approach to children who appear before the court—the Early Childhood Court Initiative, the Family Court Tool Kit on Trauma and Child Development, and the Dependency Data Project.

**School-Justice Partnerships**

One of the more pressing concerns of the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court these last few years has been a phenomenon referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline”—a term that describes a set of policies and practices that prescribes removing schoolchildren (especially at-risk children) with behavioral issues from the classroom and placing them into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Statis-
tics show that if students are arrested in school, they are twice as likely not to graduate, and if they appear in court, they are four times as likely not to graduate—thus the steering committee realized that the best solution would be to work to keep youth from entering the justice system in the first place.

Seeking a strategy to help children—particularly those who are involved in dependency and delinquency court cases—stay in school and out of court, the steering committee and OCI, working with the Florida Department of Education, created an online School-Justice Partnership Tool Kit, conceived as an ongoing mechanism to develop and encourage collaborations among the courts, school resource officers and school administrators, state agencies, service providers, and law enforcement in each county. Largely drawing from the Palm Beach County School-Justice Partnership, this tool kit offers alternatives to arrests, suspensions, and expulsions—among them, the adoption of practices like a model discipline code, school liaisons in the courtroom, and juvenile probation officers stationed in schools. These alternatives have already been shown to increase positive outcomes for children: for instance, Palm Beach County’s School-Justice Probation Pilot has resulted in a 48.8 percent reduction in out-of-school suspensions; a 42.7 percent reduction in discipline referrals; and a 10.4 percent decrease in parole violations.

The School-Justice Partnership Tool Kit was first launched in summer 2014. Since then, it has undergone some significant modifications: the new website is about to go live and can be found at http://www.schooljustice.org/. With its accessible look, its easily navigable design, and its enhanced content, the refurbished site offers information about established programs; provides material to support efforts to develop partnerships; presents national statistical data by state (judicial system statistics, education statistics); has links to news stories about program successes; and connects readers with a wealth of resources by topic area, including the Department of Juvenile Justice, Court and Judicial, Education and School Safety, Trauma and Mental Health, Social and Emotional, Faith-Based, LGBTQ Youth, Youth Disabilities, Adoptions and Foster Care, and Homeless Youth resources.

Three circuits—the Sixth, the Fifteenth, and the Seventeenth—now have well-established partnerships. And five other circuits are in various stages of developing partnerships: three have begun pilot programs, and two are just beginning their work. To fortify this effort, the steering committee is planning a fall conference designed to give the judges, court staff, and stakeholders in the fledging programs an opportunity to learn from those involved in the three veteran programs. For questions about the conference, or about school-justice partnerships generally, please contact Dacia Roberts, OSCA senior court analyst and lead staff for the court system’s Delinquency Program, at flaschooljustice@flcourts.org.

Early Childhood Court Initiative

When children are maltreated, they often end up suffering a host of developmental issues, among them, cognitive problems, speech delays, health problems, motor delays, and mental health problems. If the underlying factors are not addressed, the effects only worsen over time, and the child appearing in dependency court today is likely to find him or herself in delinquency court in later years—and, years after that, in court again, this time dealing with a domestic violence injunction or a paternity matter, perhaps. Referred to as the multigenerational transmission of trauma and maltreatment, this pattern is familiar to judges who have served on the family court bench.
To address this concern, many courts across Florida have been establishing Early Childhood Court Teams. These teams—which comprise judges, case workers, attorneys, and parent and community organizations—collaborate with experts in early childhood development and mental health to learn how to identify and expand evidence-based services for, and how to prevent the further traumatization of, young children. By addressing the need for trauma-informed services and by offering opportunities for community-based interventions, these Early Childhood Court Teams are working to change the direction for families involved in the court system.

Early in March, OCI received a grant from the national, non-profit organization, Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, to support Florida’s Early Childhood Court Initiative. Only three applicants from across the country were awarded this grant, and OCI was the only applicant to receive a grant for a statewide project. The grant is for training, technical assistance, judicial coaching with national judicial experts, support for sustainability, and enhancement of data collection and data analysis. OCI will perform site evaluations, plan for sustainability, and work to build relationships and “connect the dots” among the 17 Early Childhood Court Teams across Florida.

To begin connecting those dots, OCI facilitated a statewide “kick-off” meeting in April, at which 225 Early Childhood Court Team members came together in Tampa. The agenda for this two-day all-sites program included an overview of federal and state early childhood court initiatives; sessions on child parent psychotherapy, early childhood court team roles and responsibilities, how to know whether early childhood court works, building community resources, and family time/visitation; and break-out discussions by circuit/early childhood court site teams. The attendees’ enthusiasm and energy were notable, and each site returned home with an action plan and with fresh ideas and tools to assist with gauging its readiness for implementation. The implementation will have challenges, but access to support and technical assistance should help to mitigate many of those challenges—as will the eagerness to achieve the lofty goals of the Early Childhood Court Initiative: safety for Florida’s youngest and most vulnerable children; a shortened time to permanency; and enhanced child well-being.

**Family Court Tool Kit on Trauma and Child Development**

Florida’s family court tool kits are repositories of practical strategies designed to assist judges and court staff in responding effectively and efficiently to the judicial needs of Florida’s families. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court and OCI have developed several family court tool kits over the years: Tool Kit Volume I, released in 2003 and updated in 2009, provides promising practices regarding case processing, referrals to services, identification of crossover cases, and family law advisory groups; and Tool Kit Volume II, launched in 2009 and currently being updated, addresses legal questions related to coordinating cases involving families that are navigating multiple court proceedings. Recently, a third volume was unveiled: tasked with assisting the supreme court’s multi-disciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel in creating a family court tool kit that addresses the age-appropriate development needs of youth, including children who have experienced trauma, the steering committee and OCI developed the web-based Trauma and Child Development Tool Kit. ([Take this link to the family court tool kits.](#)

Designed for judges, magistrates, hearing officers who preside over family court cases, and court partners (e.g., mediators, attorneys, parenting coordinators, case managers, probation officers, clerks who handle family court cases), the Trauma and Child Development Tool Kit provides promising practices for moving toward a trauma-responsive court that is informed about childhood development and the architecture of the developing brain. It contains critical, front-line, science-based information that can aid in determining...
children’s needs based on developmental milestones and the impact of trauma. Through the information it provides and the practices it recommends, this tool kit can enhance judicial decision-making, thereby helping to improve outcomes for children.

The tool kit begins with a summary of the problem, proposes a solution, states the goal, considers the court implications, and provides users with practical tools to address the problem. To make this tool kit as useful as possible, the steering committee and OCI designed it to be interactive. Due to the technological limits of the past, the first two volumes were static in nature, so, in terms of content, the electronic version had no advantages over the print version. But the dynamic format of the latest tool kit provides online readers with a spectrum of choices of information and resources, inviting them to engage as deeply as they care to: depending on the amount of time one has, or one’s level of knowledge about or interest in an issue, for instance, one can opt for a quick, helpful “sound bite”—or can spend hours delving into the wealth of materials to which the tool kit links.

Steering committee members recognize that, to make the best use of this rich resource, users could benefit from some training, so the committee is currently developing a promotional and training plan.

**Dependency Data-Sharing Project**

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) refers to a process of identifying, describing, and analyzing the strengths and challenges of a situation or phenomenon (e.g., youth involvement in court) and then testing, implementing, and learning from solutions, revising as needed. Each state that receives federal court improvement program grants is required by the Federal Children’s Bureau to report on ways in which staff are working to enhance CQI principles and approaches. One of the ways OCI seeks to satisfy this requirement is through the projects it has undertaken as a member of the collaborative Multi-Agency Child Welfare Workgroup.

Established in 2007, the workgroup comprises OCI, the Department of Children and Families, Children’s Legal Services, Guardian ad Litem, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the University of South Florida, the Office of Regional Counsel, the FSU Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Florida Coalition for Children, the Executive Office of the Governor, and the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (a consortium of 14 universities that was established by law in 2014 and is housed at Florida State University). By sharing information, data, perspectives, and ideas, the group seeks to make recommendations about policy and practice changes to the entities that serve the child welfare system.

Recently, the workgroup turned its attention to the subject of re-entry into care. Using the court data system (the Florida Dependency Court Information System), OCI identified 720 children whose cases were closed in dependency court in the 2012 calendar year and who subsequently suffered additional abuse/neglect events and re-entered the child welfare system. With the assistance of two researchers from the Florida Institute for Child Welfare, the workgroup is now performing a thorough analysis of the data associated with these 720 children. Through this analysis, the workgroup aims to develop evidence-informed recommendations about how Florida’s child welfare system can prevent the re-traumatization of children in its care.
Helping New Appellate Judges Prepare for Judicial Service

“Welcome to the best job in the world,” declared Chief Justice Labarga, genially greeting the new DCA judges who had just arrived at the supreme court for the three-day New Appellate Judges Program this April. What makes this job “the best,” he explained, is that appellate judges, working together in panels, have the opportunity for thoughtful review of the decisions of the lower tribunals; they “have time to think, time to contemplate” their decisions. Because this work situation is unique to the appellate courts, all new appointees, whether they come directly from the practice of law or from the trial court bench, benefit from assistance with transitioning to judicial service on the appellate bench. And that is what the New Appellate Judges Program seeks to provide. Offered annually, this dynamic judicial education program was established in 1991, and attendance is required by all new appellate judges.

After Chief Justice Labarga’s welcome, the appellate dean of the program and one of its lead faculty members, Judge Jonathan Gerber, Fourth DCA, set the stage for the demanding agenda upon which participants were about to embark. He likened the program to a “discussion” about matters of relevance and concern to appellate judges, stressing that the program is decidedly “not prescriptive.” Rather, it “gives you things to think about” and opportunities to share “ideas with the different faculty members and your colleagues here”—but, in the end, “You must decide what works best for you.” He assured attendees that, for those who seek to learn “How can I do my job better, this program will help.”

Indeed, the curriculum for this education program, consisting of a balance of lecture-style sessions and participatory learning experiences, gave participants many opportunities to absorb, analyze, discuss, and put to the test practices designed to help them do their jobs better. Approximately half the program consisted of information-imparting sessions on topics like ethics, certiorari and writs, motions and fees, supreme court jurisdiction, statutory interpretation, and post-conviction issues. The other half comprised sessions that utilized interactive strategies, giving the new appellate judges practical opportunities to ponder, and to engage in energetic colloquies about, matters they may face on the appellate bench.

Before even accepting a case, one of the first issues appellate judges must decide is whether the court has jurisdiction over the case and over the issue within the case. Thus the first session of the program focused on “Jurisdiction and Scope of Review.” Here, Judge Chris Altenbernd and Judge Edward LaRose, both of the Second DCA, addressed the three limits to the power of appellate judges: jurisdiction, scope of review, and standards of review. Presented with a wide range of orders, writs, administrative decisions, and motions, participants considered, in each case, whether the court had jurisdiction, whether the court was empowered to rule on the issue, and whether the standard of review authorized the court to give the appellant a remedy.

Also unique to the appellate bench is oral argument, a “conversation” between judges and attorneys, during which attorneys clarify the legal reasons for their position and answer questions posed by the judges. Thus another important feature of the program was the session on “Oral Argument: Purposes and Professionalism.” For this, Judge Gerber showed a series of short, fiction-based videoclips of judges behaving less than appropriately on the bench, either toward one another or toward the attorneys before them, and attendees were asked to identify the problematic behaviors—and to consider their ramifications. Reminded that “The dignity of the court is paramount,” they were also invited to talk about what they, as the junior judges on a panel, can do if scenarios like these erupt while they are on the bench.
Since writing occupies a considerable amount of an appellate judge’s time and dedication, it’s no surprise that matters associated with opinion writing played an extensive role in the program. In a session entitled “Opinion Writing: Making Great Writers Better,” Judge Gerber offered advice on “going from a Picasso to a Mona Lisa in your opinions.” Together, the group examined and deconstructed numerous opinions, pointing out each one’s strengths and weaknesses and offering suggestions for improvement. After contemplating and practicing methods for becoming a verbal da Vinci, participants, in a session on “Writing and Collegiality,” considered the cooperative interaction inherent in appellate opinion writing. In this session, Judge Altenbernd directed a discussion about some of the challenges that new appellate judges face as they segue from the “solitary work of a trial court judge or lawyer” to being part of, and learning to work and to write as part of, a panel of judges. By evaluating opinions as a collective, and by considering a series of highly-specific “What do you do if…” scenarios, attendees honed their skills in “dealing with the social psychology of a group of people.” Opinion writing was also the subject of a session on “Collegiality (Including PCAs, Dissents, and Concurrences).” Facilitated by Judge Nelly Khouzam (Second DCA), Judge Stephanie Ray (First DCA), Judge Vance Salter (Third DCA), Judge T. Kent Wetherell (First DCA), Judge Altenbernd, and Judge Gerber, this session, which introduced a variety of challenging opinion-writing scenarios, was the basis for a spirited discussion about what to do if these circumstances arise in a panel on which they are serving.

Although the New Appellate Judges Program isn’t often held in Tallahassee, one of the advantages of setting it in the Capital City is that participants get a chance to meet and interact with the supreme court justices. The first opportunity came on day one of the program, when “Lunch with the Florida Supreme Court” was built right into the schedule. During this informal lunch hour, after introductions were made all around, Judge Gerber invited the justices to share some advice about being an appellate judge—and they responded with words both of a professional and a personal nature. Justice Pariente talked about the importance of engaging in deliberate, responsible thinking when writing opinions; Justice Polston talked about his policy of rotating law clerk staff and about the benefits of writing your own opinions; Justice Quince stressed the usefulness of hearing oral arguments; and Justice Canady reflected on the “intellectual challenge” of being a DCA judge, calling it a “wonderful job for a lawyer who enjoys the law and enjoys writing.”

On a more personal note, Justice Lewis acknowledged that the work of an appellate judge is “isolating—but worth the experience”; to balance out the isolation, he urged the new appellate judges to “stay involved in your communities.” Justice Quince also emphasized the importance of “staying involved in your community, both the legal community and the community you live in,” and she added, “You will be asked to speak a lot, and you should accept some of those requests, for it’s good for your community to see you and hear you and know you’re accessible.” And Justice Perry reminded the new appellate judges that “most judges are introverts, cerebral—but we are public servants and must interact with the public.” Therefore, he encouraged them to “build relationships” with people and “try to demystify what you do, for most people don’t have a clue about it.” He concluded by encouraging them not to “tarry too far from your common sense—for you can use that too!”

Clearly, at the New Appellate Judges Program, participants enjoy opportunities for learning on a great many levels.
First DCA Coordinates Brown Bag Lunch Education Program for Law Clerks

Court attorneys—a term that covers law clerks, staff attorneys, career attorneys, and senior attorneys—are expected to have a broad base of knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform their jobs effectively. But it is not enough to have received an excellent legal education in the past—for professional development is ever an ongoing process. So, to expand their repertoire of knowledge and to augment their abilities and skills, they regularly participate in continuing education programs. In fact, like all Florida Bar members, court attorneys are required to earn at least 30 hours of approved continuing legal education (CLE) every three years.

To earn their continuing education hours, many court attorneys pay to attend statewide programs facilitated by entities like The Florida Bar. But, at times, a DCA or circuit court is inspired to develop its own local program to address the particular education needs of its attorneys. Most recently, the First DCA, seeking to provide free, high-caliber CLE hours to its law clerks, developed a monthly “Law Clerk Brown Bag Lunch and Learn” program that has garnered high praise. Indeed, the program was so successful that plans are in motion to facilitate another nine-month series.

Coordinated by the First DCA’s Education Committee—Judge James Wolf, Judge Lori Rowe, Judge Brad Thomas, Judge Stephanie Ray, and career attorneys Allison Hunter and Megan Matthews—this program, which comprised eight presentations, drew an average of 45 participants, primarily attorneys but also some judges, to the First DCA’s multipurpose room each session. Most of the participants work in the First DCA, but attorneys from the supreme court and the Second Circuit attended, too. In addition, using videoconferencing technology, the First DCA also made this program available remotely, enabling attorneys from the First, Third, Fourth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Circuits to participate as well.

Spanning from September 2014 through May 2015, the program included the following presentations: Search and Seizure (Professor Wayne Logan, FSU College of Law); the Executive Branch (Mr. Peter Antonacci, general counsel to the governor); Post-Conviction/Criminal Law (Judge Jim Hankinson, Second Circuit); Advanced Research (Ms Caroline Strawbridge, government research specialist); Florida’s New Daubert and Other Expert Opinion Standards (Professor Emeritus Charles Ehrhardt, FSU College of Law); Preservation and Jurisdiction (Mr. John Mills and Ms Katherine Giddings, attorneys at law); Alternative Research Tools/Blue Book Update (Ms Katie Miller, FSU College of Law Research Center); and Ethics (former First DCA Judge William Van Nortwick, Jr.). For each of the eight sessions, court attorneys earned 1.5 hours of approved continuing legal education credit, and judges were able to earn continuing judicial education credit for most of them.

Feedback about the program has been very enthusiastic. Nancy Isenberg, career attorney for Judge Ross Bilbrey, First DCA, has “enjoyed the lunchtime lectures,” saying that “The location in our courthouse could not be more convenient, the classes are relevant to our work at the court, and the sessions are good opportunities to earn CLE credits while enjoying the company of our colleagues from this and other local courthouses and agencies.” She also noted that “The speakers have been very engaging, and I look forward to future classes.”

Indeed, the program has been so popular that some court attorneys, preferring the dynamic of an in-person education experience to a distance learning format, have been willing to travel in order to participate. Lisa Brogdon, a senior staff attorney with the Fourteenth Circuit, was happy to drive to and from Tallahassee to attend: “The judges and staff at the First DCA...”
DCA have done a commendable job in presenting the program, and the quality of the instruction and excellent organization are a reflection of the effort that has been put into the series,” she explained, adding that “It’s been a fantastic opportunity to learn more about a variety of very relevant topics and to meet the judges and staff as well as a number of staff attorneys from the First DCA, the Florida Supreme Court, and even the federal court system. And the handouts have been valuable additions to our reference materials.” She underscored “the appreciation that is due the First DCA for presenting the program” and would “encourage others to attend the 2015 – 2016 program in person or by videoconference.”

The First DCA Education Committee is delighted with the success of the program and the feedback it has generated. As Judge Wolf stated, “The committee is very pleased that we have received such a great response from all the law clerks, including those from the Supreme Court, the circuits within our District, as well as our own clerks to the Brown Bag Program. We are excited about the excellent speakers we have attracted and are glad we can provide quality continuing legal education at no cost to our deserving law clerks.”

The next series is scheduled to begin in September 2015, and topics will include Legal Writing, Administrative Law, and Criminal Sentencing. Once again, local court attorneys will be welcome to attend. And other court locations in Florida that have videoconferencing equipment will be invited to “conference in.”

New Circuit Judicial Educators Participate in a Faculty Enrichment Program

Every three years, Florida’s judges are required to earn a minimum of 30 approved credit hours of continuing judicial education. In order for court education leaders to meet the education needs of the state’s more than 1,000 sitting and senior judges, they rely on the dedication and enthusiasm of a host of judges who generously offer to serve as faculty.

Before becoming a judicial educator, judges take a two-day training course that introduces them to, and gives them opportunities to practice implementing, adult education principles. Offered at least once a year, these faculty training programs—which are taught by some of the court system’s most experienced and accomplished judicial educators—teach aspiring judicial teachers how to do a needs assessment, develop learning objectives, create participatory learning activities, team teach, reach different kinds of learners, and plan an effective course.

Florida’s judicial faculty take their teaching responsibilities very seriously and are always looking for ways to improve the quality of court education. The most recent initiative was spearheaded by the chair of the Judicial Education Committee of the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges (FCCJ), Chief Judge Frederick Lauten, Ninth Circuit. Ruing the over-reliance on and misuse of PowerPoint slides at education programs, committee members contemplated ways to encourage faculty to make greater use of techniques that promote active learning. This resulted in the creation of a faculty enrichment program that would give circuit judicial educators, especially first-time faculty, a chance to sharpen their skills at creating the sorts of learning activities that foster full engagement in the learning process.
The 2015 Circuit Faculty Enrichment Event, coordinated by OSCA’s Court Education Section, was held at the supreme court this April. Three veteran faculty trainers facilitated the six-and-a-half-hour program: Judge Lauten; Judge Scott Brownell, Twelfth Circuit; and Ms Martha Martin, chief of OSCA’s Court Education Section. Those in attendance had all participated in a faculty training program; all are going to be teaching at the FCCJ annual program this August; and most are first-time teachers.

By design, the enrichment program was steadfastly practical in nature—and, to reap its benefits, participants had to do a considerable amount of homework before arriving in Tallahassee. Specifically, they were asked to critique the learning objectives and to prepare the PowerPoint presentations they intend to use in their FCCJ class and to be ready to demonstrate a portion of their teaching segment (eight-to-ten minutes) for evaluation and feedback. Once everyone gathered and introductions were shared, facilitators quickly established a secure, trustful environment in which the teachers-in-training would feel comfortable practicing and experimenting with their teaching methods—and making mistakes and learning from them. It didn’t take long before everyone understood what Judge Lauten meant when he said, “You have to set your ego aside to improve.”

Facilitators quickly got into the heart of the training. “When you first walk into the door to teach your class, what is the first thing you do?” they asked. The participants were invited not merely to describe, but actually to act out, what they might do. And their enactments covered the gamut, ranging from self-introductions, to grabbing students’ attention with an interesting “hook” into the content of their teaching, to getting to the room early to make sure the technology works and the room is properly set up. There were no “right” or “wrong” answers—just different paths, and the group discussed the effectiveness of each.

These discussions segued into some very pragmatic considerations with which all good instructors must wrestle: How much time will you have to teach your portion? What can you reasonably hope to effectively teach in your allotted time? What do you want your students to leave the room with at the end of the day—that is, what’s so important that your students have to know—and how will you know they “got” it? What must you address in the classroom—and what can be delegated to handouts? And then came the question that provoked a palpable sense of dread—but that all teachers need to anticipate and prepare for: what will you do if the internet goes down or the technology crashes? These questions stimulated lively, useful considerations and reconsiderations.

Next came a session on learning objectives. After Ms Martin reminded participants that “Coverage is not learning,” and that “This is not about your need to tell but about the students’ need to know,” facilitators offered some sound general advice about the role of, and the crafting of, these outcome statements. Then, one at a time, each participant presented his/her learning objectives for review, and the group worked together to help hone each set, offering suggestions for ordering them (placing the most important ones at the top of the list), making them more focused, and circumscribing them to ensure that the intended course content could be manageable within each teacher’s time allotment.

In a session on learning activities, facilitators focused on strategies for engaging a learner’s “commitment” through the use of participatory learning activities. Option finder exercises, mini-tests, questions that lead to a “yes/no” or “up/down” response either individually or by table—these sorts of engagements not only encourage students to become actively involved in, and embrace ownership in, the learning experience, but they also let teachers know whether their teaching is communicating into learning. Much of the discussion here was about ways in which the participants could work hypotheticals and other interactive exercises into their upcoming courses.
The final session was on PowerPoint Presentations. After prefacing this session with some general warnings—such as, “Faculty don’t do PowerPoints well,” “This is the most violated rule we have,” and “PowerPoints are often a crutch for presenters”—facilitators shared some very useful pointers: create your content first and then lift keywords from your content for your slides; use few words—and big fonts; pay attention to features like spacing, size, color, and order; use images and special effects only if they are not distracting; and, as Judge Brownell suggested, print out all your slides and put them on the ground by your feet—and if you can’t read the type, your viewers won’t be able to read the slides. After summing up their suggestions monotonically—“The ‘power’ is with the presenter; the ‘point’ is what’s on the slide!”—facilitators invited each participant to demonstrate the PowerPoint presentation he/she is constructing for the FCCJ program. The teachers-in-training were grateful to realize they have time to do some serious PowerPoint homework before August.

Participants were visibly inspired by the program. They appreciated the “small, intimate group setting” and felt that the information was “pragmatic to the first-time presenter to avoid disaster.” All said that the program is very useful for first-time faculty—and all suggested that the FCCJ should “make the program mandatory.” To the observer, it was evident that each of the participants experienced an epiphany of sorts and that, as a result of this program, all will be more confident, capable, and effective instructors. And, although they can’t possibly know it, the people they teach will surely reap the rewards of this faculty enrichment program as well.

The 2015 Justice Teaching Institute
By Andrea Ploch, intern with the Florida Supreme Court Public Information Office

The Florida Supreme Court is the highest court in Florida, and its chief justice oversees the entire state court system. The supreme court was created by Florida’s first constitution, in 1845—the year Florida, previously a US territory, was admitted to the Union. The jurisdiction of the court includes death penalty cases, bond validations, and statewide agency actions relating to public utilities. The court also has authority to regulate the admission and discipline of lawyers in the state as well as to discipline and remove judges. (Take this link to learn more about the supreme court.) Given the justices’ many responsibilities, people might think there’s little time for anything else behind the big, white columns guarding the building’s entrance. Yet there are hundreds of people who can challenge that idea—and can even go as far as to say they have received private lessons about the judicial branch from the justices themselves. Joining these ranks each year are about 25 people who have undergone a very competitive process to be here; these people are secondary public and private school teachers who come from all over Florida to Tallahassee for five days to participate in the Justice Teaching Institute (JTI).
First offered in 1997, this law-related education program was established after then Chief Justice Kogan discovered that many Floridians could not answer basic questions about Florida’s justice system. The program was designed to provide educators with the chance to explore the inner workings of the court system and to enhance their understanding of Florida’s judicial branch. Through meetings with the justices and other judges, workshops, interactive activities, group discussions, and a case-study approach, JTI helps educators instruct their students about the nature, history, organization, and process of Florida’s justice system. Since its creation, this program has been a great success, having brought hundreds of teachers over the years to Tallahassee, resulting in the widespread dissemination of the information they have learned and leading to greater public understanding of the courts.

JTI is sponsored and hosted by the supreme court, coordinated by the Florida Law Related Education Association, and subsidized by The Florida Bar Foundation. Its curriculum consists of finely outlined goals and objectives meant to inspire critical thinking about the justice system. The primary faculty are Justice Lewis and Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association. But all seven justices participate in the program, enhancing the experience for the avid teachers: for this year’s JTI fellows, for instance, Justice Polston offered a comparative overview of the state and federal courts; Justice Canady explained the structure, function, and funding of the state courts system; Chief Justice Labarga talked about judicial independence and judicial selection; Justice Pariente discussed the role of a fair and impartial judiciary in American democracy; and Justice Perry facilitated a constitution scavenger hunt.

The highlight event of the week for teachers was a hands-on chance for them to participate in a mock oral argument, recreating the roles of all the participants in an authentic supreme court proceeding. The case on which they focused was McAdams v. State of Florida. The teachers were given three days to review the facts and evidence of the case and to prepare; to help them on their way, Justice Lewis provided them with instruction about the case and applicable law, and Justice Quince offered them tips on the oral argument process. Teachers had to decide two issues: at what point was Mr. McAdams formally in custody, and at what point should he have been told of his attorney’s presence. Throughout their preparation, the teachers maintained complete focus and attention, citing their respect for the exercise as a necessary component of the program.

Only moments after the teachers completed their mock oral argument, they had an opportunity to hear the real oral argument on the case, with Chief Justice Labarga welcoming them to the courtroom before the proceedings began. Afterwards, the teachers noted that seeing the case in action helped them understand the job of a justice further. Justice Lewis reminded them that, as a judge, “You can’t just have tunnel vision; you also have to consider the ramifications of the decision you make.” He also emphasized how difficult the job can be, as judges have to set aside their personal beliefs and focus exclusively on what the law states. Throughout the program, the teachers also benefitted from the experience of two mentor judges—Judge Kelly McKibben, Eighteenth Circuit, and Judge Karen Cole, Fourth Circuit—who were brought in to help facilitate the program. They shared their own stories as well. “My ruling might not be popular, but I have to follow the law,” Judge McKibben related. And Judge Cole added that “There are times where you’re doing a trial and you have to take a recess, because you get too emotional, the jury gets too emotional,” calling attention to the necessity of keeping emotions from clouding the legal proceedings.
The final event was a ceremony honoring the teachers’ hard work and encouraging them to pass on the information, knowledge, and teaching strategies they learned throughout the week. Clearly, JTI leaves educators inspired and driven to impart what they have learned to the youngest citizens of Florida. Often, teachers do this by incorporating aspects of the program into their lessons, such as sharing the words and wisdom of the justices, recreating the constitution scavenger hunt, and even watching some of the live oral arguments, which are usually held the first full week of each month from September through June and can be viewed online at http://wfsu.org/gavel2gavel/. In addition, teachers bring past cases into the classroom for consideration and debate in order to foster critical thinking and analysis, as the teachers were challenged to do during their five days in the supreme court.

Justice Lewis thanked the teachers for what they are doing, emphasizing the importance of their role and reminding them that “Teachers are the most important part of students’ lives.” The teachers noted that the program has become even more indispensable since civics classes became mandatory within schools in the Sunshine State. “This has been an amazing program. I recommend it to teachers and attorneys alike; it is wonderful,” teacher Caryn Siperstein Klein stated, explaining how beneficial it will be for the mock trial group she coaches in Palm Beach County. “I can’t say nicer things about it,” another teacher chimed in, summarizing in a few words the impression JTI leaves on those who attend every year. The week closed with the teachers in high spirits, excited to return home to inform their students and fellow teachers about the judicial branch. For more information about the Justice Teaching Institute, follow this link.
Court History

Portraits Presentation Ceremony

In the Supreme Court Courtroom on Thursday, April 9, Chief Justice Labarga welcomed a lively audience of family, friends, and colleagues to the Portraits Presentation Ceremony, at which the official oil paintings of the four most recently-appointed justices—Justices Charles T. Canady, Ricky Polston, Jorge Labarga, and James E.C. Perry—were unveiled.

These portraits, which were commissioned by the Florida Supreme Court Historical Society, have now joined the paintings of the other three sitting justices—Justices Barbara J. Pariente, R. Fred Lewis, and Peggy A. Quince—in the Lawyer’s Lounge, just off the Supreme Court Building rotunda. There each portrait will remain—until the justice it reflects retires, at which point, his or her portrait will be moved into the courtroom to join the likenesses of other former justices.

With the addition of these new portraits, the Supreme Court of Florida Portrait Gallery, which is open to the public, is now complete, boasting images of all 85 justices going back to 1846, when Florida’s first justice was appointed. The Portrait Gallery dates from the early twentieth century, when the court started to collect and commission oil paintings of its former justices; not until the 1980s were portrayals of all the former justices obtained. When guests to the Supreme Court Building visit the courtroom, they can view the likenesses of the twentieth and twenty-first century justices; and when they stroll down the adjoining hallway, they can examine the portrayals of the nineteenth century justices.

Each one of these portraits is stately and compelling—but these 85 images are far more than just embellishments to the stately building. Indeed, taken together, these paintings reflect some of the momentous ways in which the norms, attitudes, and laws in Florida have changed and developed since admission to the Union was granted in 1845.

As Chief Justice Labarga explained, “One of the ways a government body like the Florida Supreme Court writes its history is through the stories of the actual women and men who sat here as judges. When the public comes here to watch a case or tour the building, they see the faces of these judges staring down from the walls. And these faces give them a glimpse into what life was like in times past. Anyone can look at the portraits and imagine the world in which each of these justices lived and how those worlds have changed in later times. They can see the faces of plantation owners who lived before the Civil War. And a short distance away, they can see the face of the first African-American who joined this court as one of its members. Those two images convey so much about what has happened in Florida law. And it is through these images that we tell the story of the Florida Supreme Court.” ~Chief Justice Labarga
who joined this court as one of its members. Those two images convey so much about what has happened in Florida law. And it is through these images that we tell the story of the Florida Supreme Court.”

Indeed, a considerable part of the hour-long ceremony was dedicated to re-telling the story of the court. After the chief justice’s opening remarks, he introduced the portrait artists: Mr. Jeff Bass, who painted Justices Canady, Labarga, and Perry; and Ms Darlene Williams, who painted Justice Polston. Following that were welcomes from Sylvia H. Walbolt, president of the Florida Supreme Court Historical Society; Gregory W. Coleman, president of The Florida Bar; and Kelly A. O’Keefe, the historical society’s first vice president and portrait program chair. But then, audience members were treated to some vibrantly-told tales of Florida history that keenly illustrated how much Florida has evolved over the years. In a talk called “From Separate to Equal,” former Justice Joseph W. Hatchett focused on the travails of Virgil Hawkins, a black man who waged a 28-year battle to practice law in Florida and helped break the color barrier at the University of Florida Law School. Then, speaking on “When Article V Came Up to Date,” former Justice Stephen H. Grimes reminded listeners of the slow and deliberate efforts to modernize Florida’s court system. Finally, no supreme court history lesson could be complete without mention of Election 2000, and former Justice Major B. Harding shared some fascinating details and anecdotes about that great “civics lesson,” which made so many feel “proud to be an American.”

After the former justices finished speaking about these consequential moments in Florida and Florida Supreme Court history, Chief Justice Labarga added, “Today, we celebrate that history with the addition of these four portraits to our gallery. We also celebrate the lessons learned from that history and employ those lessons as we move forward. If anything,” he stressed, “the lessons taught by our history are that policies of exclusion do not work. Florida’s long story demonstrates that, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. The best future is one where all have equal access to justice. Access to justice must be protected and broadened.” In his closing words, he reminded listeners that he established the Commission on Access to Civil Justice efforts to expand access to justice, saying, “It is my hope, through this commission, to push us farther along the arc of justice to a place where our civil courts are equally available to all of our people.”

To watch the ceremony, follow this link.
Turning Points

Awards and Honors

**Marshal Veronica Antonoff, Third DCA**, recently graduated from the Basic Law Enforcement Academy, housed in the Miami-Dade College School of Justice. This demanding, nine-month training program includes both classroom and physical abilities components.

**Judge Mark Blechman, Ninth Judicial Circuit**, received the Citizen of the Year award from the Osceola County Veterans Council, which annually recognizes people whose innovative contributions to the community create awareness of and present solutions to a problem plaguing Central Florida residents; Judge Blechman was honored for spearheading the development and implementation of Veterans Court in Osceola County.

**Judge Kevin Emas, Third DCA**, received the high honor of being elected to membership in the American Law Institute, which comprises 4,000 lawyers, judges, and law professors of the highest qualifications from 28 states and the District of Columbia. The institute drafts, discusses, revises, and publishes Restatements of the Law, model statutes, and principles of law that are enormously influential in the courts and legislatures, as well as in legal scholarship and education.

**Judge Charles A. Francis**, Second Judicial Circuit, received the Jack McLean Champion for Legal Services Award; the award recognizes an individual, business, firm, governmental entity, or organization that has fulfilled the mission of Legal Services of North Florida by enhancing the provision of services and/or strengthening the ability of Legal Services to provide services.

**Judge Nelly Khouzam, Second DCA**, was recently “tapped into” the Florida Blue Key Honor Fraternity, the oldest and most prestigious leadership honorary society in the state, as a member of the Spring 2015 Honorary Tapping class; her selection recognizes her outstanding ability, leadership, and service to the University of Florida and to the state of Florida.

**Retired Judge William A. Van Nortwick, Jr.**, formerly on the bench of the First DCA, received The Florida Bar Foundation’s 2015 Medal of Honor Award; the foundation’s highest award is presented annually to a Florida Bar member who has demonstrated his or her dedication to the bar association’s objectives: “to inculcate in its members the principles of duty and service to the public, to improve the administration of justice, and to advance the science of jurisprudence.”

**Judge John Phillips, Palm Beach County**, was named the Justice Teaching Select Committee Judge of the Year. Since 2010, Judge Phillips has regularly visited Royal Palm School to share civics education with students with some of the most of severe disabilities in Palm Beach County; most of the students struggle with communicating, so he has created lesson plans and presentations that enable the children and teachers to interact with him. As a result of his work, the students have learned about Florida’s justice system and laws and have developed their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, something that no other Justice Teaching partner has attempted to do with severely disabled children.
Judge John L. Woodard III, Seminole County, was named the Elected Official of the Year by the Central Florida Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers “for his tireless efforts on behalf of Seminole County’s Drug and Veterans Courts” and for “his commitment to providing better, more effective solutions for non-violent offenders in the justice system.”

In Memoriam

Retired Judge Hugh Selwyn Glickstein served on the bench of the Seventeenth Circuit in 1979 and on the bench of the Fourth District Court of Appeal from 1979 – 1998.


When judges and court personnel receive honors or acclaim for their contributions to the branch, please share that information with OSCA Publications.
On the Horizon

July
10    Trial Court Budget Commission Meeting, Orlando, FL
14 – 16 Conference of County Court Judges of Florida Annual Education Program, Orlando, FL
7/30 – 8/1 Dispute Resolution Center Annual Conference, Orlando, FL

August
3 – 5 Florida Conference of Circuit Judges Annual Education Program, Tampa, FL
3 – 5 Trial Court Administrators Education Program, Tampa, FL
7    Florida Courts Technology Commission Meeting, Tampa, FL

September
8 – 11 Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges Annual Education Program, St Johns County, FL
9 – 11 Department of Children & Families Annual Child Protection Summit, Orlando, FL
16 – 18 Court Interpreter Oral Performance Examinations, Orlando, FL
18    Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice Meeting, Tampa, FL

October
1 – 2 Florida Chapter of the Association of Family & Conciliation Courts Conference, Tampa, FL
12 – 13 Annual Reporters Workshop, Tallahassee, FL

November
14    Fourth District Court of Appeal 50th Anniversary Celebration, West Palm Beach, FL

Under the direction of
Supreme Court Chief Justice Jorge Labarga
State Courts Administrator Patricia “PK” Jameson
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