



The Circuit Times

Newsletter of Twentieth Judicial Circuit

Volume Two

Summer 2008

COVER:
County Judge
Appointed to
Circuit Bench

**A Message from
the Court
Administrator**

INSIDE:
**Administrative
Review Hearing
Program**
pg. 2

**AOC Employee
Becomes Citizen**
pg. 3

Did You Know?
pg. 4

**Students have
Q&A with Judges
from the 2nd
DCA**
pg. 5

**About Our
Judges**
pp 5-6

**20th Mourns
Loss of Public
Defender**
pg. 6

The HR Spot
pg. 8

County Court Judge John W. Dommerich Appointed to Circuit Judgeship

County Court Judge John Dommerich was appointed to the circuit bench on April 16, 2008 by Governor Charlie Crist. One of several applicants, Judge Dommerich was selected to fill the position left open with the passing of Judge Isaac Anderson in December 2007. He brings with him over thirty years of legal experience to the circuit bench.

A graduate of Tulane University and Stetson University College of Law, Judge Dommerich began his career as an Assistant State Attorney in 1976. In 1989 he was appointed to the county bench.

While on the county bench he served on the Delphi committee "to help develop a formula by which the need for additional judges could be determined"; and, he served as the Administrative Judge for 1.5 years.

According to Judge Dommerich, becoming a Circuit Judge is a natural progression in his career. He said he tries to remember every day that "for success, attitude is equally as important as ability". As he takes this next step Judge Dommerich is "looking forward to addressing new legal issues, working with attorneys that I haven't previously worked with, and meeting people in other parts of the Circuit."

On July 1, 2008 Judge Dommerich will begin a split docket, sharing his time between Collier and Lee Counties, presiding over Family Court. He will have a family law docket excluding domestic violence cases in Lee County and a dependency docket in Collier County. Family Court will be a change for him since almost all of his work in county court involved criminal law. Although he is excited about the challenges of doing something new, Judge Dommerich is "looking forward to returning to criminal court again- as the judge, not one of the participants!"

Message from the Court Administrator

Weathering the Storm

Welcome to this summer edition of the 20th Circuit Times newsletter. I think it would be safe to say that this has been an eventful year! We are facing some of the most difficult budget struggles in the history of the Florida Judiciary and the 20th Circuit. But, I am proud to say that we are not only weathering the storm, we are making tremendous progress as an organization despite budget constraints.

That is not to say that it has not been difficult or that the budget struggles won't continue. It has and they will. All divisions of the court are dealing with increased workload with less staff support. The circuit judicial caseload continues to grow at a faster pace than we can add new judgeships.

It may sound trite, but the real measure of the organizations progress is how well the judges, managers, and staff are pulling together for the good of the circuit. Judges and



Probation Enforcement Officers Provide Additional Support to Probationers

Lee County Administrative Review Hearings are a success.

In January 2007 the Lee County Probation Department implemented an Internal Administrative Review Hearing/ Enforcement Officer Program in response to ever-increasing caseloads for Probation Officers; the average caseload per Probation Officer at that time exceeded 300 criminal offenders. The goal of the Probation Department is to effectively reduce probation violations and increase levels of personal contact. To that end, the Administrative Review Hearing Program was created. This program requires clients to meet with an Enforcement Officer within 90 days of sentencing to ensure compliance with all court orders. The role of an Enforcement Officer is to motivate, encourage and assist the probationer in an effort to successfully complete the probation period. The Enforcement Officers are Senior Probation Officers who lend years of experience to the process of guiding probationers, while at the same time mentoring newer or less experienced Probation Officers. These officers attempt to identify probationers who have medical or financial hardships, which may impede their ability to comply with the conditions of probation. Also, they elicit information from the probationer and discuss various problems/solutions with the assigned Probation Officer so that an appropriate case plan can be formulated. The Administrative Review Hearing Program affords the probationer the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification or explain possible obstacles to successful termination.

The program has been very successful toward the supervision of individuals on probation. The officers at the core of this program, Bill Shuga and Doug Jaye, have worked hard with a single-mindedness to see that probationers succeed. Their dedication to the goal of probation has honed this fledgling program into a powerful mechanism for improving compliance and increasing fee collections.

Shuga and Jaye have the combined experience of almost 36 years in probation. Each of them brings their own experiences and talents to the table. They also find it helpful to “bounce” ideas off each other to ensure the consistency of the program. They cull their knowledge to provide “a road map with specific instructions” says Jaye, so that the probationer can succeed. “Many years of experience handling probation cases is needed to fully understand the practices, techniques and laws relating to the supervision of probationers in order to be an effective enforcement officer” states Bill Shuga.



Probation Enforcement Officers: Doug Jaye (left) and Bill Shuga (right).

Successful termination is the goal of this new program; however, there are other benefits generated as well. For every case that is successful, the Probation Officer is spared time in court at a revocation hearing which in turn allows for more time to make contacts with their other probationers. Also, this program provides a “unified department standard for supervision of all types of cases” according to Shuga.

Both agree that for the Enforcement Officer there can be a downside: “knowing that some individuals we are trying to assist are not going to listen to our advice or follow our direction and will not succeed on probation”. However, the Administrative Review Hearing Program has spun positive results by reducing technical violations and increasing fee collections by 45%. And, it has been very rewarding for Shuga who “like[s] the challenge of dealing with many different types of personalities”. For Doug Jaye, he “like[s] being part of a proactive program that has been achieving positive results”.

Circuit Times Newsletter

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Charlotte County Probation Supervises Diversion Program

Supervision of the Charlotte County Diversion Program was transferred from the State Attorney's Office to the Charlotte County Probation Department in 2007 (it's true good news travels slowly). Currently, the Diversion Program monitors 67 defendants and it is projected to have 100 enrolled by the end of 2008. Like the Probation Department, Diversion uses case management techniques and requires clients to report monthly. The Diversion Program has the latitude to decide the length of time a defendant is on diversion and retains the right to deny entry to the program if a background check is not clear.

Probation Officer, P.J. Woods and Secretary III, Tricia Hopkins, administer the program, along with the Probation Supervisor, Judy Heck.

Message cont. p.1

managers from all counties in the circuit have made budget sacrifices and put aside differences and self-interest to make sure that cuts were handled evenly and that no court employee, division or county was left behind.

The Chief Judge and Administrative Judges on the Circuit Budget Committee made some hard decisions that had to be made, and they showed real leadership in covering budget shortfalls, judicial illnesses and sharing judicial resources between counties. Circuit and County Judges in leadership positions went to Tallahassee many times this year to fight budget reductions posed by the state economic crisis. I personally witnessed many judges from our circuit spending days on end meeting with one legislator after another to tell the judiciary's story and fight the huge cuts proposed. Because of their efforts we are in much better shape than expected moving into 2009.

County Court judges also voluntarily stepped up to the plate throughout the circuit to assist in areas that were cut or where help was needed in Drug Court and other special circuit dockets.

Staff are handling more cases, more efficiently than ever and continue to amaze me

with their creativity in developing innovative case management initiatives with no or reduced staff. New programs, automation solutions and collaborative efforts with other agencies continue to take shape.

The justice and larger community that encompass the 20th Circuit is stronger than ever because of your efforts. It has been a beautiful thing to watch, and I am grateful for the chance to be a part of it. Thank you.

AOC Staffer Becomes Citizen

On April 29, 2008, Sharon Ragoonanan, Lee County Law Librarian, became a naturalized citizen in a ceremony held in Tampa. Originally from Trinidad, but of Indian

descent, she arrived in the United States over 12 years ago to be with family.

Sharon began the naturalization process a year ago.

She states "the process was not a difficult one"- she studied for a 100 question civil exam. Although she embarked on this journey alone, she was one of 502 individuals participating in the ceremony. It was a "touching" experience and "one I will never forget".

So, what does becoming a citizen mean to her? "Becoming a citizen means that I can now exercise my right to vote." The process has been "very emotional" but well worth it.

In 2006, Sharon earned her Master's Degree in Criminal Justice. She has worked in the court system since 1999. Her goal is "to continue working in the criminal justice field and...to use my degree in whatever capacity I can within the criminal justice system."



Sharon Ragoonanan with her certificate of citizenship.

Did you know?

The 20th Circuit has 7 full time interpreters and contracts with an additional 50.



Lee County Interpreters from left to right: Martin Gilderman, Rebecca Lade (supervisor) and Leon Fontanova. Not pictured, Marlen McDougall (Charlotte), and Maria Blecha, Maria "Guadalupe" Delashmet and Maxime Joseph (Collier).

The Twentieth Circuit currently employees seven full time interpreters and contracts with an additional 50, to include Spanish, Haitian-Creole, German and Sign language interpreters, as well as, a plethora of other language interpreters.

In 2007 four staff interpreters were hired due to a documented population boom. In Lee County, over a four year period, the population grew 23.6%, while individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin grew by 68.4% for the same time period. This is almost triple the general population growth. This phenomenon occurred in each of the Twentieth Judicial Circuit's counties.

Interpreters are crucial to Due Process and are, therefore, in great demand. Coordinating these services is no small task, especially when taking into consideration that some hearings or trials require two interpreters to adequately meet the needs to the court, and, that many trials take multiple days to complete. Rebecca Lade, Court Interpreter Supervisor, is the person charged with keeping our courtrooms adequately staffed so that we can go about conducting the business of the courts.

Digital Court Reporting is now in all five counties.

Digital Court Reporting (DCR) now monitors all five counties under the guidance of Brenda Giessman, Electronic Reporting Manager. Hendry and Glades Counties were the last to be incorporated into this system and are monitored from Lee County. Charlotte and Collier Counties have their own DCR staff. DCR is responsible for monitoring and tagging the numerous hearings, trials and court appearances that occur in our courts every day. Also, staff of the DCR office provide media to the public and attorneys upon request.

Last year, 2007, DCR monitored and recorded over 17,000 hours of hearings and trials and fulfilled 1,901 requests for media- all completed by the twenty employees in the DCR office.

Staff distribution:

- 13 in Lee County, also covering Hendry/Glades (including 3 temps)
- 2 in Charlotte County
- 5 in Collier County (including 2 temps)



Brenda Giessman, Electronic Court Reporting Manager

Local Judge Honored for Dedication to Helping Children

Judge Hugh E. Starnes was presented with the Prendergast Award on April 22, 2008 at an evening event dedicated to the prevention of child abuse.

The Prendergast Award is given to individuals who have devoted their efforts, and indeed, their lives to the prevention and abolishment of child abuse. Judge Starnes is one of those individuals. He has been on the bench for 30 years and during this time has put in countless hours establishing services and court procedures to minimize the negative effects on children involved in family law cases. Further, he has worked actively in the community sitting on various councils and spearheading the development of programs to assist children and their families.



Jim Nathan, President of Lee Memorial Health Systems, presents Prendergast Award to Judge Hugh E. Starnes.

At the presentation Judge Starnes acknowledged members of the audience for all their efforts to help families and children, noting he was just one of the many. He also thanked Michael Schumarcher, a young man who recently graduated from a local parenting program. Mr. Schumarcher told how the program helped him improve the relationship he had with his young daughter. Judge Starnes pointed out that Mr. Schumarcher is the reason he and so many others advocate for children and their families.

Judges in attendance were: Judge Peter Bell, Judge Michael McHugh, Judge Joseph Fuller, Judge James Seals and Judge W. Wayne Woodard.



Judge Starnes accepting his award.

Judges from 2nd DCA in Lee County to Hear Oral Arguments

High School students from various schools participate in Q&A with the judges.

High School students from Estero, Ft. Myers and Cape Coral arrived at the Lee County Justice Center to hear oral arguments before a 2nd DCA panel on May 2, 2008. Before court commenced, the students were presented with an overview of the justice system and the layout of the courtroom to familiarize them with the surroundings-most of the students had never been in a courtroom. Three 2nd DCA Judges, Judge James W. Whatley, Judge Chris W. Alterbernd, and Judge Darryl C. Casanueva, explained the appeals process and their roles. Following the overview, Judge Whatley opened the floor for questions. The Q&A session lasted a little over 20 minutes. Questions ranged from what the volume of cases was for the judges to what cases they preferred to preside over least. The judges also invited comment from the attorneys who were there to present their oral arguments. The students observed arguments on three cases. In between the cases, the judges took questions as well.

Feedback from the students was positive: the judges were knowledgeable and the experience unique and very much enjoyed. Some of the students who attended morning court, were also "shadowing" local judges as a part of law week and they had the opportunity to attend a Lee County Bar Luncheon along with the Appeals Court judges.

Robert R. Jacobs II

October 20, 1945-December 27, 2007

The Legal Community of the Twentieth Judicial Circuit Mourns the Loss of the Public Defender.

Robert Jacobs II was the Public Defender from 1999 until his death in 2007.



Robert R. Jacobs II was born on October 20, 1945 in Tampa, Florida. He graduated in 1963 from Charleroi High School (Pennsylvania) and enlisted in the United States Navy, serving aboard the U.S.S. Saratoga. He received a B.A. in Political Science in 1970 from the University of South Florida and a J.D. in 1972 from Florida State College of Law. Bob became an assistant public defender in Lee County in 1973 and subsequently became Deputy Public Defender for the 20th Judicial Circuit. He was elected as Public Defender for the 20th Judicial Circuit without opposition in 1998, 2002 and 2006, and served as Public Defender from 1999 until his death on December 27, 2007. Bob was active in numerous professional and civic associations and as a parishioner at the Church of the Resurrection of Our Lord in Fort Myers. Bob is survived by his wife, Mary Daley Jacobs; son, Robert R. “Jake” Jacobs III, (Rebecca) and grandchildren, Henry Robert Jacobs and Harper Caroline Jacobs.

Lee County Judge Takes on Role of Legal Historian

Circuit Judge Lynn Gerald has agreed to be the court historian-documenting the lives and contributions people in the legal community of Lee County have made over the years. The idea crystalized when Judge Gerald became aware that there were pictures in the law library of former judges that no one could identify. He thought writing 1-2 page biographies of lawyers and judges who molded our community would be an important thing to do, explaining that “people tend to forget history”, and, that there is so much rich history that needs to be preserved. Stories have been passed from one generation to another, but oral history morphs and details sometimes fade over time. From the first multi-attorney firm to the origins of the law library, Judge Gerald can regale you with stories from the first days he traveled the corridors of the old courthouse when his father was a circuit judge. Judge Gerald seems the perfect person to capture the stories and connect-the-dots of our history.

Of course, Judge Gerald alone cannot know all there is to know, so he is reaching out to others in the legal community to write about retired attorneys or judges to help capture this history. The biographies will be compiled into a book and placed on display in the law library. He hopes this will be the first step upon which others can build an ongoing history.

Bench/Bar Take Each Other On In Collier County

Putting a Face to a Name on the Softball Field

The date was November 17, 2007 when Collier County Judges faced off against the Collier County Bar Association (CCBA) in a winner-take-all softball game. The teams gave it their all and had fun playing, enjoying each other's company and spending time together outside the courtroom. Goal achieved!

The idea of a bench/bar event was the brain-child of Judge Hugh Hayes who worked with Lisa Mead, Executive Director of the Collier Bar Association, to pull the game together. His thought was to bring members of the Bar and the judiciary together in a laid-back atmosphere: "We need the less formalistic interaction, both among judges and among lawyers because we sometimes get so tied up with the formal structure of our jobs and relationships that we lose sight that we are all on the same team, i.e., supporting the 3rd branch of government in the delivery of justice and legal services to the citizens of Florida." Team member Judge Murphy echoes this sentiment and further states: "It helps us keep the small-town, personal atmosphere in the practice of law." Judge Murphy did his part to maintain the small-town atmosphere by inspiring his teammates with music from *Rocky* and *Born In The USA*.

Inspiration notwithstanding, it doesn't matter who won the game, the fun was in the playing and the camaraderie. According to Mead, the Bar team had great fun as well. They are open to future matches with the Bench team.

So, will they hit the field again? Not likely- but they may hit the alley. Hayes said "absolutely" when asked if they would participate in a Bench/Bar activity, but it would not be softball, due to some minor hamstring injuries. He believes "this is a great Bench/Bar event and can lead to better understandings and relationships among our members as the years go by."



Group photo Team Bench and Team Bar



First row, left to right: Judge Hayes, Judge Greider, Judge Krier; second row: Judge Keith Kyle, Judge Manalich; third row: Judge Hardt, Judge Murphy, Judge Crown, Judge Baker.

What was the score? Who keeps track of such things? It should be noted that Judge Hardt "parked one over the fence" (demonstrating "cool judicial control"). Sources say his motivation was so that he would not have to run the bases, he could walk. Unfortunately, Judge Hardt was one of the walking wounded. Kudos for still getting up to bat!

Other judges that comprised Team Bench: Judge Baker, Judge Crown, Judge Greider, Judge Krier, Judge Keith Kyle and Judge Manalich. Judge Martin lead the cheering section in the stands.

The Human Resource FYI

- * People First is the 3rd party administrator hired by the Division of Management Service to provide benefit administration to state employees. As of April 12, 2008 People First requires all state employees to use a new password format to access their system. In this system you can view your benefits, print enrollment and change forms, make open enrollment selections, view insurance dependents, etc. If you need your People First ID number contact the People First Service Center at 1-866-663-4735.
- * Florida Retirement System (FRS) Beneficiary Designation Reminder: Please remember to keep your beneficiary (ies) up to date, especially if your life circumstances have changed (for example, if a beneficiary has died or your marital status has changed). You can find the appropriate Investment Plan or Pension Plan beneficiary forms on MyFRS.com under the "Resources" tab. AOC HR staff will be happy to forward the documents to Tallahassee on your behalf.
- * Ernst & Young provides **FREE** financial planning to members of the Florida Retirement System. Human Resources encourages you to use EY services to help plan for your financial future. There is no gimmick. No one will try to sell you something. It is **FREE**. A percentage of the employer paid FRS funds pays for this service, so by all means, use it. 1-866-446-9377.
- * The HR staff will be offering extended business hours for employee questions & appointments, M-Th, 7:30am-6:00pm. Fridays the office will be open 7:30am-5:30pm. If you have questions or need assistance during extended hours please call 533-1705. This will be the number answered during the extended business hours. The HR hours for the public will remain M-F, 8:30am-5:00pm.

AOC Staff Help Support the Arts in County Schools

*Current and former staff work
Arts Celebration*

Craig McLean, Trial Court Technology Officer hosted the premier party for the Edison Celebration of the Arts held at the Edison Estates on January 25, 2008. Proceeds from this event went to support art and music programs in Lee County Schools. Over 70 professional and student artists donated their art work for this worthwhile cause. McLean organized the event, procured sponsors and enlisted the aid of Kim Cambareri, CJIS Programmer/Analyst and former AOC staffer, Allison Eskin. Also co-hosting and working the party was Amy Stonner, Coordinator for the ESE program, Lee County School System.



*Allison Eskin (left), Craig McLean (center)
and Kim Cambareri*

**WORKING FOR
THE ARTS IN
OUR COMMUNITY**