

Newsletter of the 20th Judicial Circuit

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...and much more!





# JUDGE MCHUGH PASSES THE BATON TO JUDGE PORTER

The Honorable Michael T. McHugh has passed the baton to the Honorable J. Frank Porter after serving as Chief Judge for the past eight years. As we bid farewell to Judge McHugh, it's important to reflect on his remarkable tenure, which included overcoming the challenges posed by natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Judge McHugh was first elected as Chief Judge back in 2015. He also holds the record for being the youngest judge ever to hold that position in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. Talk about a trailblazer.

"It was a blessing for me to work with you for the past 8 years," said Trial Court Administrator Scott Wilsker "He is one of the most thoughtful and kind people I have ever met. Add that in with a high intellect and sound judgement and endless patience."

During Judge McHugh's time as Chief Judge, the Twentieth Judicial Circuit dealt with not just one, but two powerful hurricanes—Irma and lan. These catastrophic events severely impacted the community, including the operations of the courthouse. Courthouse operations were nearly paused for almost a month to give employees and the community a chance to reflect and rebuild. Despite the immense challenges, Judge McHugh displayed exceptional leadership in navigating the aftermath of these disasters and ensuring the swift restoration of operations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Judge McHugh implemented measures to safeguard the health and safety of all involved in the judicial process. These proactive steps allowed the courts to adapt and continue serving the community's legal needs during these unprecedented times.



Judge Michael McHugh recieves appreciation award from Scott Wilsker



Judge Michael McHugh with Scott Wilsker and Judge J. Frank Porter

"These were opportunities to work with everyone to solve a problem, which quite frankly required everyone to pull together and come through," said Judge McHugh. "Throughout it all, I have had incredible support and there is no way I could have done it without everyone."

As the baton is passed from Chief Judge McHugh to Chief Judge Porter, the Twentieth Judicial Circuit can expect a seamless transition.

Judge Porter has been a Twentieth Circuit Court Judge since he was appointed by former Governor Jeb Bush as a Lee County Judge in 2001. He currently presides on the Felony bench; however, he previously served in the Family Law and Civil Divisions. Notably, he has been the Felony Administrative Judge since 2013. Moreover, from 2011 to 2015, he served as the Deputy Chief Judge for the Circuit, further showcasing his leadership skills and commitment to the judiciary.



Judge Michael McHugh

## INVESTITURE OF LEE COUNTY JUDGE LINDSAY GARZA

"What's behind me is not called a throne it is called a bench and we wear black as a symbol of neutrality and impartiality. We are here to serve the community and I feel a great responsibility to do that."

An investiture ceremony was held for Lee County Judge Lindsay S. Garza on April 28, 2023 at the Lee County Courthouse.

Chief Judge Michael McHugh led the investiture ceremony for Garza, who was elected in November 2022.

"As I got to know Lindsay after her election to this position. I have found she is a very positive person. She always has a smile on her face. She always is ready to do what is asked of her," said Judge McHugh.

Judge Garza previously worked for the State Attorney's Office prosecuting DUI's, Domestic Violence, Drug and Theft offenses, and White-Collar Crimes. Judge Garza was promoted to Lead Prosecutor for specialty courts such as Drug Court and Mental Health Court. She was then appointed to the Special Victim's Unit. State Attorney Amira Fox shared fond memories of Judge Garza's time in her office.

"It is so wonderful to watch someone who is so extraordinary in every way take this role," said 20th Judicial Circuit State Attorney Amira Fox.

Judge Garza is a third generation Lee County native. Her father, Mike Scott, served in law enforcement for over 30 years, 14 of those as Lee County Sheriff. He also spoke on her behalf at the ceremony and performed the Oath of Office.



"It's an Oath I have taken several times," said Mr. Scott. "It's an oath I never forgot and an oath I took seriously and I know she will too. It's an honor to be able to do that."

Judge Garza was also joined by her husband and mother, who helped with the oath and enrobing.

During Judge Garza's speech she thanked the community for the opportunity to serve.

"The way the community looks at the robe and looks at the judiciary, what's behind me is not called a throne it is called a bench and we wear black as a symbol of neutrality and impartiality. We are here to serve the community and I feel a great responsibility to do that," said Judge Garza

Judge Garza graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University with a degree in Legal Studies and a minor in Spanish. She went on to earn her Juris Doctor from St. Thomas University School of Law in Miami.



The Circuit Times Newsletter 2023

# INVESTITURE FOR COLLIER COUNTY JUDGE CHRIS BROWN

Friends, family, and colleagues of Christopher Brown gathered at the Collier County Courthouse on Friday, May 5th, 2023 for his investiture with Chief Judge J. Frank Porter leading the ceremony.

Judge Brown filled the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Mike Provost and was elected in November 2022.

"I said the campaign would either break us or bring us closer together, so I'm still here," Lynn Brown, Judge Brown's wife, said during her speech. "We share a homespun value of community that places connection with people above all else. That faith, family and friendship are what matters most."

Before taking the bench, Judge Brown practiced criminal, civil and appellate litigation as a partner at the same firm for over 16 years. Overall, he was primarily a criminal law attorney for 21 of his 23 years of practice as a lawyer (the first two were in corporate law). "The people in this great city and great county are so fortunate to have him because everything he does, he succeeds in," said Attorney Michael Raheb.

Three people spoke on Judge Browns behalf. They were his wife, Lynn; Mr. Raheb; and Judge Brown's sister, Margaret Aune.

"Chris, your many accomplishments, dedication, and faith have led to this moment of service," said Mrs. Aune.

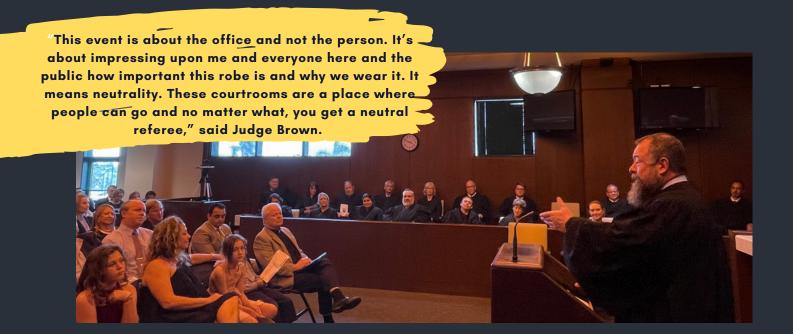


Judge Brown's mother, Laura, and his brother, Matt, assisted with the enrobing.

Judge Porter administered the oath of office to Brown, with his wife and daughter at his side. They also have two other children, who helped lead everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of the ceremony.

"This event is about the office and not the person. It's about impressing upon me and everyone here and the public how important this robe is and why we wear it. It means neutrality. These courtrooms are a place where people can go and no matter what... you get a neutral referee," said Judge Brown.

Judge Brown is currently assigned to the Collier County civil docket where he presides over lawsuits, evictions, civil violations and myriad other matters.



## **CONGRATULATIONS TO...**



### JUDGE DONALD MASON

Congratulations to Judge Donald Mason who has retired as a Charlotte Circuit Judge after 11 years on the bench!

Judge Mason's commitment to community service began at the age of 20 when he became a police officer in his home town of Yarmouth, Massachusetts. Once he received his law degree, he worked in civil practice until moving to Florida. Judge Mason served as a felony prosecutor in Charlotte County, was promoted to head that office in 2008 and served in that position until appointed to the bench by Governor Scott on September 1, 2012.

For his farewell celebration, Judge Mason was "sentenced" to karaoke court to play his guitar and sing a few songs. Judges, clerks and court staff gathered around to enjoy the performance.

### JUDGE ERIK LEONTIEV

Congratulations to Judge Leontiev on his appointment to the Circuit Bench.

In April of 2023, Governor Ron DeSantis elevated Judge Leontiev to serve on the Twentieth Judicial Circuit Court after previously appointing him as Judge on the Lee County Court in 2021. During his tenure as County Judge, Leontiev presided over civil cases, evictions, small claims, and traffic infractions. Prior to his appointment to the bench, Judge Leontiev served 14 years as an Assistant State Attorney for the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. He fills the judicial vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Hugh Hayes in Collier County.





### JUDGE RUSSELL KIRSHEY

Congratulations to Russell Kirshy who was appointed to the 20th Circuit Bench.

Judge Kirshy has been the owner of Russell T. Kirshy, Esquire, P.A. since 2001. Previously, he served as an Assistant State Attorney in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts and his law degree from Suffolk University. Kirshy fills the judicial vacancy created by the resignation of Judge Scott Cupp in Charlotte County.

# LACTATION ROOMS OPEN THROUGHOUT THE CIRCUIT

We now have Lacation spaces in each of our Courthouses throughout the Circuit available to all courthouse patrons.

The Florida Legislature passed a measure in April, mandating that all courthouses in the state must provide dedicated lactation spaces. Now, in an effort to ensure a comfortable and private environment for breastfeeding and pumping, lactation rooms have been opened in Charlotte, Hendry, and Glades County. Rooms were already opened in Lee and Collier County.

In Hendry and Glades, patrons can request the key from security to access the well-equipped and hygienic spaces. While In Charlotte County, individuals can approach Court Administration, and a designated person will assist them.

These lactation rooms are available to staff, jurors, attorneys, witnesses, and the general public. It's important to note that the room is solely intended for lactation purposes.



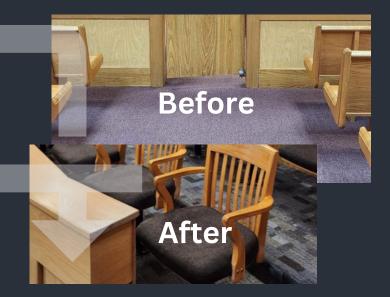




# HENDRY COURTROOMS REFRESHED



Two courtrooms in Hendry get a makeover. New carpet was installed in the courtroom and staffing areas on the second floor of the Hendry County Courthouse. Additionally, the jury chairs were reupholstered and repaired, and the jury box flooring in the courtroom was strengthened.



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# EXCELLENCE IN ACTION: LEE COUNTY'S CRIMINAL DIVISION RECEIVES RE-ACCREDITATION AS AN EXCELSIOR AGENCY

Lee County's Criminal Division has been approved for reaccreditation before the Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission as an Excelsior agency.

In June of 2012, the Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission formally adopted the Excelsior Recognition program. The Excelsior Recognition is awarded to Florida criminal justice agencies which have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to the Florida accreditation process. An important focus of this initiative was to develop a non-subjective recognition program that recognizes agencies with criteria based upon two key benchmarks.

Commitment to Accreditation - Candidate agencies shall have been awarded five successful reaccreditation cycles by the Commission; and Excellence in Accreditation - A candidate agency's reaccreditation interval shall only be credited toward this new recognition status if conditions were not assessed by the Commission.

"This is a true testament of our ongoing efforts to remain not only compliant with standards, but to serve as a model agency following best practices and achieving the highest standards of excellence," said Lee County Criminal Division Director Amy Kinsey.

The Florida Corrections Accreditation program offers the opportunity to evaluate an agency's operations against standards developed by the Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission. This process allows administrative staff to upgrade the quality of the agency's programs and services. Accreditation provides a plan for an agency committed to providing services through accountability and transparency to the communities it serves.

Probation standards were developed in 2016 and the Lee County Probation Department was one of the first Probation Departments to receive its Accreditation on June 20, 2017 and was reaccredited in 2020. The Lee County Pretrial Services Department received initial accreditation in 2009, and was re-accredited in 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2020.



Oscar Ferrer, Amy Kinsey, Ashlee Whitewood,
Iris McDonald, Jennifer Alvarez, and Jeff
Langevin





### **OUR CJIS TEAM ROCKS!**

The Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS)
Department has started a tradition to show
employee appreciation and support. A special rock
is passed around among seven team members to
recognize those who always step up, take on extra
loads, and go above and beyond. This rock serves
as a symbol of appreciation and a moral booster
for the entire team.

The words "you rock" are engraved on it, conveying a powerful message of gratitude. Each month, during the team's monthly meeting, the rock is joyfully handed out to a deserving colleague, fostering a supportive and encouraging work environment.





Tadd Mihelich, Greg Morris, Ben Riels, Richard
LaVorgna, and Dawn Scroggins

### EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION

On April 25,2019 Lee County celebrated National Bring your Kids to Work Day providing students an overview of the criminal justice system. Lee County Judge Josephine Gagliardi welcomed a little over a dozen kids whose parents work in our Criminal Division. She and attorneys explained the basics of the court system and then let them be "the judge."

The students also observed the Juvenile Assessment Center which included a demonstration by the Jail's CERT team and a K9 demonstration. Students also toured the Justice Center's security center. The Lee County Sheriff's Office school deputies discussed important topics such as bullying and drugs. The day ended with students recapping what was learned and being presented certificates of attendance.







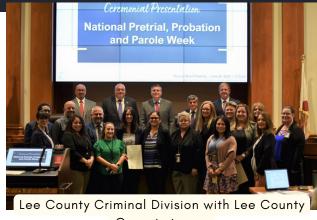


### PROMOTING JUSTICE AND REHABILITATION: CELEBRATING PRETRIAL AND PROBATION WEEK!

2023 marks the twenty-third annual Pretrial, Probation and Parole Supervision (PPPS) Week, a celebration that originated in 1999 when APPA members began to request that states across the country recognize the 100,000+ people involved in community corrections. In 1999, APPA began lobbying every state to make a proclamation that one week in July is PPPS Week. This was a simple and powerful statement each state could make in celebration of the nearly 100,000 men and women who spend their days working to improve outcomes, both for the individual AND for the public safety of our communities.

A Ceremonial Resolution was presented by Lee County Commissioners at the June 20th Board of County Commissioners meeting to recognize Pretrial and Probation Officers Week.

Lee County Criminal Division Management provided staff with tumblers as a token of appreciation. To cap off the week, the Lee County Criminal Division Clerical Staff treated Pretrial and Probation officers to an ice cream and dessert bar during lunch to thank them for all their hard work.



Commissioners







## **#TREATMENTCOURTSROCK!**



The Naples Mayor and City Council presented Collier County Adult Drug Court and Judge Janice Martin with a Proclamation declaring May as National Treatment Court Month. Pictured are several members of the Team, as well as several current Participants and also alumni.

The Hendry Drug Court Treatment Team along with Judge James Sloan had a lunch and learn for National Drug Court Month. Treatment Courts Coordinator, Erin Hutchison, navigated a webinar and discussion on incentives and sanctions.



# CELEBRATING NATIONAL TREATMENT COURT MONTH

National Treatment Court Month was a busy and successful month for our Lee County Treatment Courts! Thank you to all of our stakeholders that came to our different events in support of the programs!

We had NINE Drug Court graduations, four new entries to Drug Court, and one healthy baby born to a Drug Court participant!

We had five new entries to Mental Health Court and two babies born to Mental Health Court participants!

We had one Veterans Treatment Court graduation! We also had one new Veterans Treatment Court graduate complete one year of continued sobriety post-graduation and all training requirements to become an official Veterans Treatment Court Mentor!

The Treatment Courts Team presented in front of the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and had May proclaimed Treatment Court Month in the county!

In addition, we had fantastic speakers come present to our participants, as well. In Drug Court, we had two graduates speak during a group graduation in Judge Hayes' courtroom. In Mental Health Court, the Program Director of NAMI Lee, Charlotte, and Hendry Counties, Gina Britton; Officer Ryan Beiner of the Fort Myers Police Department's Housing Outreach and Treatment Team (H.O.T.); and Heather Cross, the CEO of The Center for Progress and Excellence spoke to our participants. In Veterans Treatment Court, United States Congressman Byron Donalds spoke briefly and listened to our participant's stories. Veterans Treatment Court also had the pleasure of having Wolfhounds Legacy bring some of their service dogs to visit us and speak about their program.



A HUGE SHOUT OUT goes to our Treatment Courts team that works tirelessly for our participants!
Judge Josephine Gagliardi, Judge Leigh Hayes,
Assistant State Attorney Amy Kosinski, Assistant
Public Defenders Nicole Calderone and Emma
Casimir, Office of the Public Defender Disposition
Specialists Brad Alix and Nikki Alexander, Veterans
Justice Outreach Specialist Heather Davis, Veterans
Treatment Court Mentor Coordinator Stephanie
Neurock, TLS team, Centerstone team, AIM Target
team, LCSO team, Clerk of the Courts team, DOC
Probation Officers, and AOC Probation Officer and
Coordinators.





# CONTINUING **EDUCATION**

Staff and Judges have been busy participating in series of continuing education meetings covering various subjects. The training sessions included topics such as human resources, treatment courts, motivation, team building, court communications, and public perceptions of fairness. As a result, our team now has improved conflict resolution skills, a deeper understanding of defendant's challenges, enhanced teamwork, and streamlined communications. The conferences have proven to be a valuable investment in improving our court's performance.





Treatment Courts teams from Collier, Charlotte, and Lee County at the #RISE23 Conference



The 20th Circuit had staff from our Criminal Divisions, Human Resources, and Court Operations attend the annual National Association for Court Managers conference in Tampa!

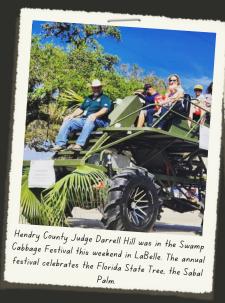


Florida Courts Personnel Institute

The Circuit Times Newsletter

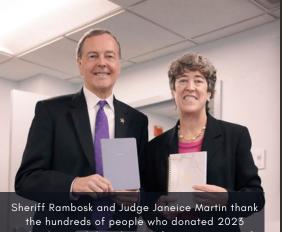
# IN THE COMMUNITY

JUDGES OUTSIDE OF THE COURTROOM









the hundreds of people who donated 2023 calendars and day planners for participants of Collier County's treatment courts. The items will be delivered to David Lawrence Centers and distributed to clients participating in Drug Court, Mental Health Court and Veterans Court in Collier County.



Judge Nick Thompson, Judge Tara Paluck, Judge John Carlin, Judge Leigh Hayes, Judge John McGowan, Judge Gilberto Perez, Judge Nicole Mirra, Magistrate Kim Bocelli, and Judge Lindsay Garza attend the Lee County Bar Association Annual Law Week Luncheon

# AROUND THE COURTS



Collier County Court Administration hosted the Collier Inns of Court. They taught new lawyers and practicing lawyers with little court experience about the Courthouse. Topics included ADA accommodations, court interpreters, technology services, and also the rules of the courtroom.



the past three years as part of an educational

program about the history and ongoing efforts for

a freedom, equality and inclusion for all. It was on





Circuit Judge Carolyn Swift held a mock trial for a group of 60 fourth graders from St. Francis Xavier Catholic School. Students were able to serve as jurors for a "mock" trial about an alleged theft and also ask questions about court system.



# **AROUND THE COURTS**



A local group from America
Heritage Girls visited the Lee
County Courthouse and Judge
Swift to learn more about the
court system and the role of a
judge. They also had fun
checking out different areas of
the courtroom. Maybe one day
you'll find one of these ladies
behind the bench!

Halfway to
#AdoptionMonth: Lee
Circuit Judge Gilberto
Perez held adoptions for
four Lee County families.





Collier Circuit Judge Joe Foster spoke to a group of Boy Scouts about the Justice system and being a judge. Prior to his presentation, two Assistant State Attorneys did a direct and cross examination of an eyewitness to Darth Vader (allegedly) cutting off Luke Skywalker's hand with his light saber! We thank the group for joining us at the Collier County Courthouse.





Administrative Professionals Day is a day to recognize the contributions of administrative professionals. The hard work of administrative professionals is essential to the continued success of a business. These employees keep offices running smoothly and do much of this work behind the scenes so today, we celebrate them! HR handed out lanyards for departments to give to their team of administrative professionals to show appreciation!



their government day! They heard from County Courthouse as part of their government day! They heard from County Judge Chris Brown and our Operations Manager, Kerri about how to become a judge, job opportunities that are available in the court system, and the judicial branch of government.

# 2023 HURRICANE

# OUTLOOK

2023 Hurricane Season Forecast Atlantic Basin					
	1991-2020 Average	2022	Colorado State University	The Weather Company	
■ Total Named	14	14	13	15	
Hurricanes	7	8	6	7	
Cat 3 or Higher	3	2	2	3	
	100	K 74			

Tropical Co	yclone Name	s 2023	b.m.		
Arlene	Gert	Margot	Tammy		
Bret	Harold	Nigel	Vince		
Cindy	Idalia	Ophelia	Whitney		
Don	Jose	Philippe			
Emily	Katia	Rina			
Franklin	Lee	Sean			
* New names in 2023 replacing Harvey, Irma, Maria and Nate					

### Latest 2023 Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook Calls For Busier Season, Despite El Niño

By Jonathan Belles via weather.com

July 07, 2022

The 2023 Atlantic hurricane season is now forecast to be more active than average despite an El Niño, but also more unpredictable, according to the latest outlook.

An update released by the Colorado State University tropical forecast team calls for 18 storms, nine of which are expected to become hurricanes and four of which will reach at least Category 3 status.

This is an increase of three storms, two hurricanes and one major hurricane since their previous outlook, which was released in early June. The increase in storms and the overall outlook takes into account four storms that have already occurred this year.

Arlene, Bret and Cindy formed in June, and an <u>unnamed subtropical storm</u> <u>developed in January</u> that was retroactively upgraded by the National Hurricane Center in May.

The fourth storm of the season doesn't typically arrive until <u>mid-August</u>, according to the NHC.

Two major factors are in play this hurricane season: a strengthening El Niño and extremely warm Atlantic water temperatures.

A major contributor to <u>the planet's hottest June on record</u> was record June warmth in the Atlantic Basin where hurricanes and tropical storms form.

"This anomalous warmth is why CSU's seasonal hurricane forecast has increased, despite (a) likely robust El Niño," wrote Phil Klotzbach, tropical scientist and lead of the CSU forecast team, in a <u>tweet</u>.

Klotzbach noted the scope and magnitude of this anomalous warmth as of late June was well beyond what was seen in other warm ocean hurricane seasons such as 2020, 2010, 2005, 1998 and 1995.

To assist you in planning and preparing for a storm you may find the following websites helpful. Share these with your friends and family to ensure that they're prepared.

**READY.GOV** 

NATIONAL HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

FL DEPT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

**AMERICAN RED CROSS** 

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT EMERGENCY ORDERS







If you have pictures or a story to share, please email Sara Miles at smiles@ca.cjis20.org





**SWFLCourts** 



SWFLCourts in



20th Judicial Circuit Administrative Office of the Courts

## **Chief Judge**

J. Frank Porter

### **Trial Court** Administrator

Scott Wilsker

### **Chief Deputy Court Administrator**

Liza King

#### **Editor**

Sara Miles

#### Contributors

Brooke Dean Liza King Amy Kinsey Bridget Washburn Dawn Oliver Kerri Hixson Judge Paluck Judge Gagliardi Judge Martin Judge Foster Judge Chris Brown Dawn Whittington ller L. Rivera-Chicas Charlotte Clerk of Court