

2024

Circuit Times

Newsletter

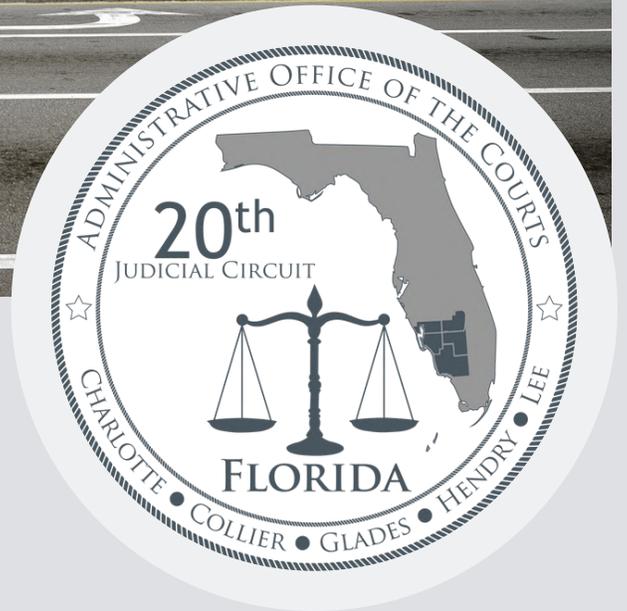
Vol. 1

Newsletter of the
20th Judicial Circuit

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- Honoring the Retirement of Circuit Judge Leigh Frizzell Hayes
- Investiture for Circuit Judge Russell Kirshy
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...and much more!



REMEMBERING JUDGE FREDERICK HARDT

The Honorable Frederick Robert Hardt, age 76 of Naples, Florida passed away at his home on December 29th with his loving wife Jamie Lee Hardt by his side. In addition to his wife Judge Hardt is survived by two sons, Tyler (Meganne) Hardt, and Bradley (Kara) Hardt, four grandchildren, Collin, Allison, Siena, and Daniel Hardt all of Florida. Judge Hardt was predeceased by his parents William and Mariann Hardt, and two brothers, William G. Hardt and Thomas J. Hardt.

Judge Hardt was born on June 10, 1947, in Highland Park, Illinois. He grew up on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. In 1969 he earned his bachelor's degree in accounting and finance from the University of Wisconsin and later a Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Wisconsin Law School. After law school he served as trial counsel for the Judge Advocate General's Corps for the U.S. Navy where he reached the rank of Lieutenant Commander. In 1975 he began his civilian legal career in a private practice in Wisconsin. In 1983 he moved his family to Florida and worked as a civil litigation attorney. In December of 2003, Judge Hardt was appointed to the bench as a Collier County Judge of the 20th Judicial Circuit Court by the former Governor Jeb Bush. He was elected in 2006 and re-elected in 2012. He retired in 2019. Judge Hardt has held office as Collier County Republican Executive Chairman, Florida State Committeeman and Chairman of the Republican Party of Florida. He also served on many community and HOA Boards, as well as on the board of Trustees of the North Collier Hospital and Naples Community Hospital. He also taught classes as an adjunct Professor at Hodges University.

Judge Hardt was a man of integrity, who believed in and fought for our Constitution, freedom and this great country. He will be sorely missed.



Judge Hardt pictured with Judge Evans at his Retirement party in Collier County

HONORING JUDGE LEIGH HAYES' RETIREMENT

In honor of Circuit Judge Leigh Frizzell Hayes' 27 years on the bench, dozens of people packed Courtroom 1A at the Lee County Justice Center to say goodbye on December 8th, 2023.

"What a great day to honor Leigh Frizzell Hayes," said Chief Judge J. Frank Porter.

In attendance were several present and former members of the judiciary, local dignitaries, court administration colleagues, clerks, attorneys, friends, and family.

Her retirement is not just a transition in her professional life but also a poignant moment for those who have had the privilege to work alongside her, appear before her, and run against her. That includes Chief Judge Porter who first became friends with Judge Hayes in the summer of 1996 when they were both running for County Judge. Hayes came out on top, but that didn't sour their friendship. Fast forward five years, and Hayes was writing Porter a reference letter that helped him land a seat on the bench.

In Chief Judge Porter's own words, using a bit of wisdom from an "Alabama philosopher" he said, "Judges are like a box of chocolate. You don't know what you're going to get. But with Leigh, we got a good judge and more importantly we got a good person."

Judge Hayes is a native of Lee County. She attended Fort Myers Senior High School then went on to earn her AA from Stephens College, BA from Indiana University and an MA from the University of South Florida. She earned her JD from Emory University Law School. When Judge Hayes was elected as a County Judge she was the only female Lee County Judge at the time. She was also one of only six County Judges in Lee County. Among her fellow judges was former Chief Judge and now Senior Judge, Judge Keith Cary.

"Right from the beginning I could tell that Leigh was going to make a great judge. She never rushed to make a decision and she was always very deliberate," said Judge Cary. "Not every judge is cut out to serve in Drug Court but one of Leigh's qualities is her genuine care and compassion to the people who come before her."



Chief Judge Frank Porter presents Judge Leigh Hayes with a service award plaque from the 20th Circuit.



Judge Leigh Hayes with Trial Court Administrator, Scott Wilsker, and Judge Michael McHugh

Familiar with that sentiment is Judge Josephine Gagliardi, who partnered with Judge Hayes as a treatment court judge. Addressing the crowd, Judge Gagliardi highlighted some of Judge Hayes's accomplishments since she took on the role of specialty court judge back in 2008.

"She championed a system centered on rehabilitation. Her commitment extended far beyond the courtroom," noted Judge Gagliardi. "She invested time in understanding each individual, ensuring they received the personalized attention necessary to overcome addiction."

Judge Hayes served as a volunteer Drug Court Judge in Lee County for a combined 11 years where she has positively impacted those who have come before her as well as those who have worked with her.

"Would not be who I am or where I am without my working relationship with you," said Trial Court Administrator Scott Wilsker. "When I think of Judge Hayes some prominent qualities that come to mind are, her honors ability to be a good communicator, a decision maker, an empathetic leader and of course, fair and impartial."

Scott Wilsker and Chief Judge Porter then jointly presented Judge Hayes with a plaque on behalf of the Twentieth Circuit. Following this gesture, it was Judge Hayes's turn to address the gathered crowd.

"I didn't know when I walked into the Lee County Justice Center 35 years ago that I was going to stay so long," laughed Judge Hayes. "To my colleagues, friends and family, I couldn't have done it without you. Your kindness your support, and your help through the years. To my colleagues, I will miss you in the good times. I may miss you in the crazy times. But I will not miss you during the difficult times."

Judge Gagliardi addresses Courtroom 1A at the Lee County Courthouse, which was packed with colleagues, family and friends.



INVESTITURE OF CIRCUIT JUDGE RUSSELL KIRSHY

"I commit to you and the people of this beautiful state that I will always consider cases with the utmost respect and without bias or prejudice."

The Twentieth Judicial Circuit kicked off 2024 by welcoming Judge Russell Kirshy to the bench. His Honors Investiture was held on January 5th at the Charlotte County Justice Center.

Chief Judge J. Frank Porter led the investiture ceremony for Collier Circuit Judge Kirshy, who was appointed in April 2023.

"I know this is something you have wanted for many years and saw it as a goal," said Assistant State Attorney Dan Feinberg. "You've accomplished a great goal."

Kirshy had been in private practice at Russell T. Kirshy, Esquire, P.A. since 2001. Previously, he served as an Assistant State Attorney. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts and his law degree from Suffolk University.

Although he sits on the bench in Collier, Kirshy decided to hold his Investiture in Charlotte since that is where he holds his families roots.

"He has a way of making people feel heard without shaming or judging them. While also empowering them to do better," said Wade Kirshy, Judge Kirshy's brother. "That is exactly how I expect people to feel when they come before the honorable Russell Kirshy."

Our Circuits' Bar Associations and the Conference of Circuit Court Judges also recognized Judge Kirshy for his contributions to the legal community with presentations.



Judge Kirshy speaks at his Investiture

Speeches were delivered by Judge Kirshy's brothers, fellow attorneys, and his two children.

"Behind the robe is a guy who always knows the right thing to say when you need advice," said Judge Kirshy's daughter, Abigail. "We always knew this was going to be the next chapter in our parent's lives. We were beyond excited and it was always our dad's dream."

The ceremony, attended by family, friends, and colleagues, featured the Honorable retired Judge Donald Mason administering the oath. Judge Kirshy's mother then helped with the official enrobing.

"I commit to you and the people of this beautiful state that I will always consider cases with the utmost respect and without bias or prejudice," said Judge Kirshy. "I have loved serving the 20th Circuit as a Circuit Judge so far and I will put all of my effort into effectively executing the responsibilities for as long as I am lucky to hold this position."

Judge Kirshy serves on the bench in Collier County presiding over the Unified Family Court docket.

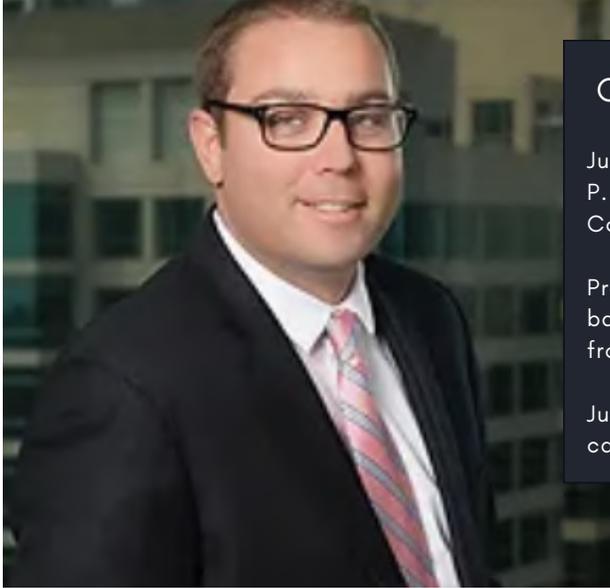


Investiture for Judge Kirshy at the Charlotte County Courthouse



Judge Kirshy is sworn in by retired Charlotte Circuit Judge Donald Mason

CONGRATULATIONS TO...



CIRCUIT JUDGE ANDREW MARCUS

Judge Marcus was a Managing Shareholder at the Law Office of Andrew P. Marcus, P.A. since 2018. His practice focused on Criminal Defense, Consumer Protection, and Civil Litigation.

Previously, he was a Shareholder at Gray Robinson, P.A. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and his juris doctor from the University of Miami. He was admitted to the Florida Bar in 2006.

Judge Marcus currently presides over Juvenile and United Family Court cases in Lee County.

LEE COUNTY JUDGE KIMBERLY DAVIS BOCELLI

Kimberly Davis Bocelli was born and raised in Lee County, Florida. After graduating from Fort Myers High School, she attended the University of Florida and earned her Bachelor of Arts, with honors, and Juris Doctor, magna cum laude. After law school, she returned to Fort Myers and practiced civil litigation at a local law firm for ten years. She then served as General Magistrate for the Circuit Civil Division in Lee County from 2015 to 2023.

Governor Ron DeSantis appointed her as County Court Judge in November 2023. Judge Bocelli is honored to serve this community, where she resides with her husband and two children and near her extended family. She also serves on various committees dedicated to judicial education and is involved in local nonprofit organizations, including the Rotary Club of Fort Myers-Downtown and the Fort Myers Track Club.

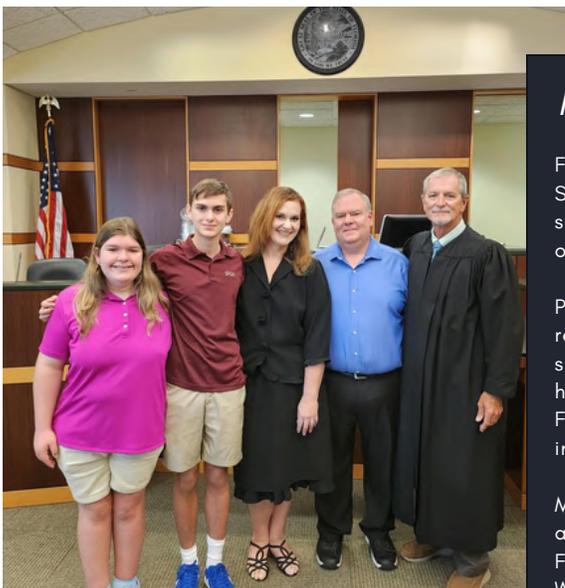


MAGISTRATE AMY NEAHEAR

Fort Myers Attorney Amy Neahear earned her undergraduate degree from Shippensburg University in 1992, majoring in government and minoring in sociology in just three years. She later obtained her law degree from the District of Columbia School of Law in 1996.

Post-law school, Magistrate Neahear handled international contracts representation with Northrop Grumman. She then transitioned to Florida where she served as District Counsel for the Department of Children and Families, handling child abuse/neglect cases from inception to the appellate level. Following a successful tenure in various distinguished law firms, she ventured into private practice, eventually establishing her own firm.

Magistrate Neahear is the recipient of the Laurie Flick Humanitarian Award and is actively involved in legal associations, including the Lee County Bar Association, Florida Association of Women Lawyers, National Association of Professional Women, and the Cape Coral Bar Association.



COALITION OFFERS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PRIMER FOR THE JUSTICE PROFESSIONAL

Written by: Hon. Janeice T. Martin

On December 8, 2023, the Collier Coalition for Healthy Minds took a major step toward advancing Collier County's Mental Health and Addiction Services Five-Year Strategic Plan (2020-2024). Two of the Plan's six Priorities were implicated when the Coalition presented its inaugural Behavioral Health Primer for the Justice Professional. Specifically, the training advanced both Priority 4: Increase the Capacity and Effectiveness of Justice System Response for Persons Experiencing Serious Mental Illness and/or Substance Use Disorders, and Priority 6: Improve Community Prevention, Advocacy, and Education Related to Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders.

A total of 50 professionals completed the one-day, core competency training on behavioral health, including judges, clerks, prosecutors, public defenders, private attorneys, guardians, guardians ad litem, and others. Hosted right in the Courthouse, the professionals were instructed on the most common mental and substance use disorders, on their signs and symptoms, and on the effective treatments for each. Attendees also learned about Baker and Marchman Act proceedings, Trauma and Resiliency, De-Escalation and Effective Communication, Mindfulness and Self Care, and much more. The content-rich day culminated in the group hearing the personal story of a young woman/mother/professional who successfully completed Drug Court, Dependency Court and Family (Custody) Court. Her impactful testimony left everyone understanding just how critical it is to have a justice system that understands and responds appropriately to the behavioral health needs of the persons and families we aim to serve here.

The training was a collaboration of several Coalition members, including the David Lawrence Centers, the Collier County Sheriff's Office, and the 20th Judicial Circuit. The training was produced by several area experts, each of whom volunteered to build and conduct the training, at no charge to the attendees. Continuing education credits were provided, along with food and beverage throughout the day, thanks to the generous support and assistance of the Collier County Bar Association, and its charitable Foundation.

The training borrowed heavily from the Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) that our Sheriff and area Police Chiefs have committed to having all of their deputies and officers, along with several civilian staff, complete. While CIT is 40 hours, this training for justice professionals was distilled to just 8 hours, over the course of a single day. The group looks forward to conducting the training twice more in 2024, and on an ongoing basis, with the goal of having all professionals who interact with the public in any capacity in the Courthouse receive the training. Presentation dates for 2024 are tentatively set for June 14 and December 6. For more information, please contact Judge Martin's office at ashotwell@ca.cjis20.org.

Curriculum Committee:

Hon. Janeice T. Martin, Collier County Judge, 20th Judicial Circuit
Lt. Leslie Weidenhammer, MS MHC, Collier County Sheriff's Office, Behavioral Health Bureau
Nancy Dauphinais, LMHC, MCAP, COO, David Lawrence Centers for Behavioral Health

Faculty (in addition to the above):

Mary Ellen Frazier, PsyD
Magistrate Pam Barger, J.D.
Maggie Baldwin, LMHC, MCAP, CRRA, Dir. of Crossroads Continuum, DLC
Janice Toledo, MSW, Office of the Public Defender
Andy Solis, J.D. (former County Commissioner)

Special thanks for tremendous support from:

Administrative Office of the Courts
Court Technology
Collier County Bar Association
Collier County Bar Foundation

COLLIER DRUG COURT SUCCESSES

Written by: Hon. Janeice T. Martin

The Guam Drug Court Team joined us the day before Hurricane Idalia, proving they're the MOST committed PSC Team ever! Despite tornadoes, everyone hunkered down together at the David Lawrence Center due to the courts being closed and even caught a pic during the storm. A few weeks later, they pulled an "all-nighter" to join our staffing and status hearing Zoom session that ran from midnight to 7 am for them. Dedication at its finest!

We also hosted the Honolulu Team, which included a mix of Drug Court, Mental Health Court, Women's Court, and Veterans Treatment Court members. One night, they even ventured to Miami for dinner - because why not? Distance is just a concept!

Judge Martin says the Collier Team benefited immensely from these meetings, exchanging ideas and solutions. Hosting these dedicated professionals was an honor, and we can't wait to collaborate with more visiting teams during our term as a Mentor Court!



Judge Martin with the Guam Drug Court Team



Judge Martin with the Honolulu Team

OPIOID AND STIMULANTS AWARENESS MONTH IGNITES CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

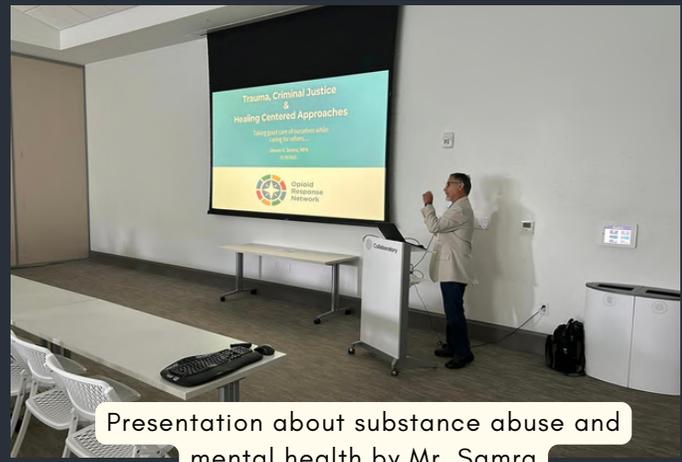
For Opioid and Stimulants Awareness Month, the 20th Judicial Circuit hosted an Opioid & Stimulants Awareness training at the Collaboratory in Fort Myers!

The awareness and training event began with a U.S. DEA Agent In Charge from the Fort Myers Office presenting on their "One Pill Can Kill" campaign. Participants then heard from Steven Samra, MPA, who has expertise and lived experience in substance use and mental health recovery, harm reduction approaches, promotion of lived experience as critical experiential knowledge, developing and leading peer advisory councils, peer leadership, cultural competence, criminal justice, and effective outreach and engagement for challenging populations. He serves in leadership capacities for multiple recovery, substance use, mental health, peer involvement, and homelessness focused initiatives.

Thank you to Chief Judge Porter, Judge Gagliardi, Judge George, Judge Martin and our Trial Court Administrator, Scott Wilsker for attending!



Judge Martin, Judge Gagliardi, Judge Porter, Judge George, and Scott Wilsker.



Presentation about substance abuse and mental health by Mr. Samra

TRACKING OUR TREATMENT COURTS



Lee County Criminal Division Director Amy Kinsey, Treatment Courts Manager Bridget Washburn, and Veterans Treatment Court Mentor Coordinator Stephanie Neurock recently took part in the SWFL Veterans Expo on behalf of the 20th Judicial Circuit Administrative Office of the Courts. Hosted by FGCUVets at Florida Gulf Coast University, the expo aimed to provide veterans with career opportunities, educational benefits, and support services.

During the event, attendees had the chance to learn about job openings and roles within the court system. Additionally, opportunities to become a mentor with the Lee County Veterans Treatment Court Program were highlighted, offering veterans a chance to give back to their community while supporting fellow veterans in need.

Some members from our Lee County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) helped out at a Habitat for Humanity Veterans Build. VTC Grad/Mentor Robert, Treatment Courts Manager Bridget Washburn, VTC Participant John, Fort Myers Mayor Kevin Anderson, and VTC Mentor Coordinator Stephanie Neurock were in attendance.



Greg, a former combat medic, is the first to have a home built in Lee County through Habitat's new Veterans Build program.

Congratulations to Greg on his new home!



In August, we celebrated a significant milestone with the Lee County Drug Court graduation, presided over by Lee Circuit Judge Leigh Hayes. Among the participants, Felicia's journey stood out as particularly inspiring.

During her time in Drug Court, Felicia resided at Jill's House, a long-term residential placement facility. Now, she continues her journey as a peer mentor, extending support and guidance to newer participants entering the program.

Congratulations to Felicia on her graduation and her remarkable achievement as she continues to make positive strides in her life and gives back to the community as a peer mentor!

#TREATMENTCOURTS



Every week in November we salute our veterans during the annual Lee County Veterans Treatment Court celebration. Veterans Court is designed to promote public safety and provide support for those who've served our country and are battling mental health and substance use disorders. It diverts cases from the traditional court system and offers a path to recovery and healing. The event was led by Lee County Judge Josephine Gagliardi.

We were honored to have Attorney Michael Corso as our guest speaker. He's not only an accomplished attorney but also a former Air Force pilot with a strong background in aerospace engineering services. Mr. Corso made a significant impact on the USAF JAG program as a special prosecutor with the rank of Captain. And, a special surprise guest joined us for the occasion - Dog the Bounty Hunter! He came to celebrate and show his support for our veterans, adding a touch of star power to this memorable event.

A big thank you to our Treatment Courts team, our community supporters, mentors, and treatment services.



The Lee County Criminal Division, along with the Florida Department of Corrections, hosted an on-site visit from the Idaho Department of Corrections/State Probation. District Manager Jimmie Gentry observed pretrial supervision processes, county and state probation and Felony Drug Court in order to bring back new initiatives to the state of Idaho for their courts and state probation. Mr. Gentry commended the agencies for model operations, collaboration with criminal justice partners, high level of professionalism and how well we work with those that we serve. It was recognized how staff go above and beyond in trying to help their defendants/probationers be successful by linking to needed resources, utilizing motivational interviewing and encouraging positive change.

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.



Court Interpreters Millie Rutkiewicz and Elisa Avellana headed to the 10th Circuit for a Court Interpreters Workshop



Our HR team attended the SHRM SWFL Supervisors Conference! They delved into the PUMP Act (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Market Stabilization Emergency Support Act), explored Emotional Intelligence, and learned how to nurture E.I. skills.



The Department of Corrections has implemented a program called F.A.C.E. I.T. The Lee County Criminal Division attended a presentation on the program.



Members from our Lee County Criminal Division attended the Lee County Crisis Intervention Team training with a dedicated focus on Autism Spectrum Disorders



Our Chief Information Officer, Stephen Childs, attended the Southwest Florida District Meeting of the Florida Local Government Information Systems Association (FLGISA).

IN THE COMMUNITY

JUDGES AND STAFF OUTSIDE OF THE COURTROOM



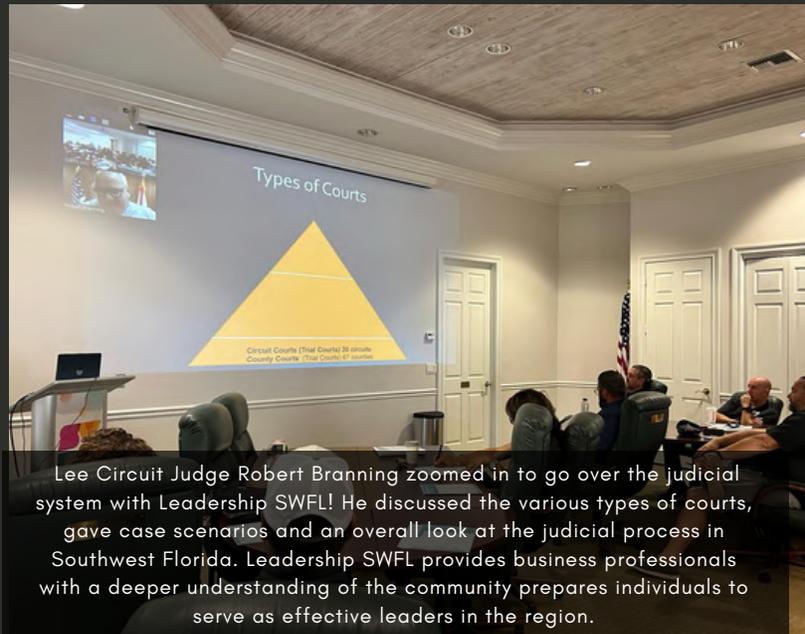
Hendry County Judge Darrell Hill was in the Swamp Cabbage Festival in LaBelle.



Judge Foster participates in the AMELEA Speaker Series at Ava Maria. He led a discussion on probate/trust litigation and other legal issues he sees in his courtroom



Judge James Sloan also participated in the Swamp Cabbage Festival. The annual festival celebrates the Florida State Tree, the Sabal Palm.



Lee Circuit Judge Robert Branning zoomed in to go over the judicial system with Leadership SWFL! He discussed the various types of courts, gave case scenarios and an overall look at the judicial process in Southwest Florida. Leadership SWFL provides business professionals with a deeper understanding of the community prepares individuals to serve as effective leaders in the region.



Collier County Judge Blake Adams took to the skies, accompanying FHP Trooper Sgt. Edgardo "Eddie" Cruz on an air patrol ride-along over Alligator Alley. Together, they observed speeders from the air, directing FHP troopers and CCSO deputies on the ground to maintain road safety.



Our Chief Deputy TCA, Liza King, ignited 4th grade students imaginations at Ray V. Porttolf Elementary by sharing her inspiring journey as a Hispanic female making a difference in the community and also read a book to the students.



Lee County's Deputy Criminal Division Director of Probation, Ashlee Whitewood, read to students at Patriot Elementary School and also talked about her position within the Criminal Division in Lee County.

AROUND THE COURTS



Lee Circuit Judge Carolyn Swift held six adoptions in August 2023 uniting children with their forever families! We also joyfully welcomed our newest Therapy Dog, Gio.



The recent Junior Achievement Day at the Lee County Courthouse was a great success! We were thrilled to host high school students from East Lee County High School who are currently studying law and justice as part of their curriculum. The event provided them with valuable insights into real-life court proceedings through an engaging mock trial where both teachers and students got involved. Thank you to Lee Co. Judge Andrew Swett for also answering the students questions about types of court cases, the judiciary, and practicing law.

Celebrating Success & Innovation!
Our Electronic Court Reporting, Court Technology, and CJIS teams came together for a special luncheon in Lee County to honor the incredible accomplishments we've achieved so far.



We welcomed the Honorable Judges Mize, Smith, and Gannam from the 6th District Court of Appeals for Oral Arguments at the Hendry County Courthouse. They presided over three cases.



Did Goldilocks commit crimes when she went into the Bear Family home? Students with Upthegrove Elementary in LaBelle participated in a Mock Trial with Hendry County Judge Hill. Attorneys also assisted. Students acted as the jury and also assisted the attorneys and judge.

AROUND THE COURTS



After a combined eleven years of serving as a Judge for the Lee County Adult Drug Court, the Honorable Leigh Frizzell Hayes held her last Drug Court docket on Monday, December 18, 2023. In addition to all current participants, several past graduates were present to honor and recognize Judge Hayes and her contributions to their lives as part of the program. Judge Hayes has left a lasting impact on the team and the participants of the Drug Court program and will be missed!



Lee County Judge Nicole Mirra held a mock trial for 80 8th graders from Babcock Neighborhood School. The students acted as the jury, defendant, witnesses, and even got to sit with the Judge! She also answered questions about the judiciary, different types of court cases, and what it is like being a judge.

Circuit Judge Hawthorne recently welcomed Classical Conversation groups from Fort Myers and Naples to her courtroom to answer questions ahead of their Mock Trial in April. Her bailiff and a local attorney were also present to answer questions about court procedures and the justice system.



Collier County Judge Robert Crown and Circuit Judge Joe Foster hosting 7th grade students in their courtrooms. Local public school classes made regular visits to the Collier County Courthouse on Thursdays and Fridays throughout February and March.



Our 20th Circuit Human Resources team hit the road, journeying to Hendry and Glades County courthouses to connect face-to-face with judges and staff. HR is excited to continue their circuit tour, answering everyone's questions about Benefits, Retirement, FMLA, Payroll, and more.



THE CIRCUIT TIMES

Official Newsletter of the 20th Judicial Circuit of Florida



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



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