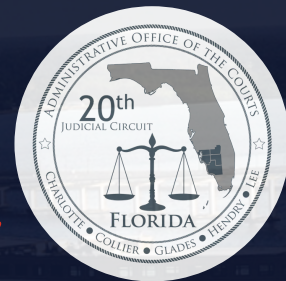


# CIRCUIT TIMES

## *Newsletter*



January to June 2026

NEWSLETTER OF THE 20TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



**A LEGACY THAT ENDURES**  
**HONORING SERVICE. INSPIRING GENERATIONS.**

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# HONORING JUDGE JOHN S. CARLIN

Thirty-Five Years. Forever Remembered.



Some judges are remembered for the decisions they make. Others are remembered for the lives they touch.

For more than three decades, Circuit Judge John Carlin was both.

To those who appeared before him, he was a fair and thoughtful judge who earned the reputation as a fair, steady, and principled judge who respects the Constitution, the rule of law, and every individual who enters his courtroom. To his colleagues, he was a trusted mentor whose advice was always thoughtful and whose door was always open. To the countless attorneys, judicial assistants, court staff, and members of the legal community, he was a friend whose humor and generosity left a lasting impression.

The Twentieth Judicial Circuit mourns the loss of Judge Carlin, who passed away in March 2026 after suffering a cardiac event. While his passing leaves an immeasurable void, the legacy he leaves behind is reflected in the people he mentored, the lives he influenced, and the rulings he made from the bench.

Judge Carlin dedicated more than 35 years to serving the citizens of Lee County and the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. He was first elected as a Lee County Judge in 1990 and then in 1996 was elected without opposition to serve as a Circuit Court Judge.

Attorneys and litigants knew his courtroom to be well-run, orderly, and guided by common sense.

That reputation extended well beyond those who entered his courtroom. Beth Nichols, Judge Carlin's Judicial Assistant, recalled her first impressions of working with him: "Like many others, I was intimidated by his presence and reputation. At the same time, I was fascinated by the way he handled each case with confidence and efficiency. It quickly became clear that if you worked in his courtroom, you needed to bring your best every day."

Before taking the bench, Judge Carlin served as an Assistant State Attorney in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit before entering private practice. His commitment to public service continued throughout his judicial career and reached beyond his judicial duties. In 1993, he was



Judge Carlin swears in Judge Bocelli as an attorney

recognized as Florida Judge of the Year by the Florida Law Related Education Association. He also chaired Law Week in Lee County, helping bring appellate court proceedings and civic education opportunities to students and the local community. Judge Carlin's passion for legal education made him one of Lee County's strongest advocates for law related education in the public schools. Through his involvement with Teen Court, Mock Trial, Law Week, and other educational initiatives, he inspired generations of young people to learn about the justice system and even consider careers in law.

One of those students was Circuit Judge Kimberly Bocelli. What began as an introduction through Teen Court and Mock Trial grew into a lifelong mentorship that helped shape her legal career.

"Judge Carlin was a family friend and mentor throughout my education and career," Judge Bocelli said. "He encouraged me to attend law school, introduced me to respected attorneys in our community, and supported me through every step of my judicial career. He administered my oath as an attorney in 2005 and, 18 years later, my oath of office as a County Court Judge. He cared deeply about legal education, mentoring young attorneys, and promoting professionalism. His legacy will continue through the lasting impact he had on our lives and our community."

Former Family Court Services Case Manager Myron Bancroft shared similar sentiments, reflecting on more than two decades of friendship that began while developing the Juvenile Drug Court program and continued during their years working together in Family Court.

"I was fortunate to consider Judge Carlin my boss, my mentor and, most importantly, my friend," Bancroft shared on Judge Carlin's tribute wall.

For Nichols, what began as a professional relationship grew into something much deeper.

"Some people leave an impression because of their accomplishments. Others leave one because of who they are," Nichols wrote. "Judge Carlin did both."



Judge Carlin swears in Judge Bocelli as a Judge



Judge Carlin and a family in Court



Judge Carlin swears in his wife, Denise, as Superintendent

Nichols described working alongside Judge Carlin as both an honor and a privilege. She recalled a judge who expected excellence but never stopped encouraging those around him to grow. Behind the bench was a man with a quick wit, a generous heart, and a genuine interest in the people around him. Whether sharing stories in his office, offering guidance, or celebrating the accomplishments of others, he created an environment where people felt supported and valued.

"Judge Carlin's legacy will undoubtedly be measured by his years of service, his legal mind, and the countless lives he touched from the bench," Nichols wrote. "For those of us fortunate enough to know him personally, however, his legacy is also found in his friendship, generosity, loyalty, and kindness."

She concluded with words that reflect what so many in Southwest Florida are feeling today.

"I consider myself truly blessed to have known him, learned from him, laughed with him, and called him family. His absence leaves an immeasurable void, but the memories he gave me will remain forever."

Outside the courthouse, Judge Carlin found joy in spending time with his wife, Denise, their sons, John and Tyler, family and friends. He enjoyed tennis, traveling, attending Broadway musicals, and giving back to the community he loved.

Judge Carlin's impact cannot be measured solely by the thousands of cases he presided over or the decades he served on the bench. It lives on in every attorney he mentored, every colleague he impacted, every member of the court family he made feel valued, and every person who left his courtroom knowing they had been treated with kindness and respect.

His legacy will endure in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit for generations to come.



Judge Carlin with Beth Nichols and former JA, Joanne Atkins

***"The atmosphere he created around him spoke volumes about his character. His longtime assistant, Joanne, was a reflection of that environment. Joanne was wonderful, and I knew that reflected the positive atmosphere he had created."***



## CONTINUING HIS LEGACY THROUGH LAW WEEK

Each year, Law Week celebrates the importance of the rule of law while recognizing the individuals whose dedication strengthens our courts and legal community.

This year's 33rd Annual Lee County Bar Association Law Week Awards carried special meaning as colleagues, friends, and community leaders gathered not only to celebrate excellence, but also to honor the legacy of the late Judge John Carlin.

For many years, Judge Carlin served as Chair of Law Week, helping transform the annual celebration into a central part of civic education in Lee County.

Through partnerships with local schools, attorneys, judges, and the District Court of Appeal, he started programs that introduced thousands of students to the judicial system.

In recognition of his extraordinary contributions, Judge Carlin was posthumously awarded the Liberty Bell Award, one of the highest honors a bar association can bestow. His wife, Dr. Denise Carlin, and sons, Tyler and John Jr., accepted the award on his behalf.

The event also marked the introduction of a new award recognizing the vital role Judicial Assistants play in the administration of justice. Congratulations to Beth Nichols, who became the inaugural recipient of the Judicial Assistant of the Year Award in recognition of her professionalism and dedication.

The event brought together county and circuit judges, judges from the Florida Sixth District Court of Appeal, elected officials, community leaders, members of the Lee County Bar Association, and guests to celebrate the people whose work strengthens our justice system every day.

As 2026's Law Week demonstrated, Judge Carlin's legacy continues to inspire. His passion for legal education, mentorship, and public service lives on through the programs he helped build and the countless lives he influenced.



# INVESTITURE OF JUDGE LOUKONEN

On January 16, the Twentieth Judicial Circuit proudly held the investiture ceremony for Judge Rachael Loukonen at the Lee County Courthouse in Courtroom 1A.

Chief Judge J. Frank Porter presided over the ceremony, which marked Judge Loukonen's formal installation to the bench. The event was attended by members of the judiciary, court staff, members of the legal community, family and friends. The ceremony opened with the Lee County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard and the Pledge of Allegiance, led by students from Gospel Baptist Christian School alongside Judge Loukonen's children. Ben Bridges, President and CEO of St. Matthew's House, Inc., also performed God Bless America. The program also included a presentations from our local bar associations.

Guest speakers Attorney Kimberly Swanson, Rick Fumo of St. Matthew's House, and Judge Loukonen's husband, John Loukonen, shared heartfelt reflections on her character and dedication to serving others. "She just wants to be a humble servant," her husband said. "She would rather give the accolades to all of you for her development." Swanson echoed those sentiments, saying, "Her heart, faith, and generosity have shaped the lives of many in our community and especially my own. She encouraged me to rise to challenges that at times felt far too big for me."



Judge Loukonen with her husband and children

Former Judge Hugh Hayes administered the oath of office before Judge Loukonen's family participated in the enrobing ceremony.

In her remarks, Judge Loukonen reflected on the values that have guided her throughout her life and career by saying, "Humility gives you kindness. Kindness gives you patience. Patience gives you understanding. Understanding gives you wisdom, and wisdom gives you gratitude."

The ceremony celebrated not only Judge Loukonen's professional accomplishments, but also the character and commitment to service that she brings to the Twentieth Judicial Circuit.

"Rachel has always been a hard worker and she likes to surround herself with people who like to work hard, too," said John Loukonen



Retired Judge Hugh Hayes swears in Judge Loukonen



Judge Loukonen gives remarks

# INVESTITURE OF JUDGE OSTROV

On February 13th, the 20th Judicial Circuit celebrated the investiture of our newest Hendry County Judge, Robert Ostrov.

The ceremony opened with Chief Judge J. Frank Porter presiding as the Hendry County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard presented the colors. Gary Weiss led the Pledge of Allegiance, and Judge Ostrov's daughter, Charlotte, then performed "This Land Is Your Land."



Judge Ostrov gives remarks



Judge Ostrov's daughters participate in the enrobing ceremony



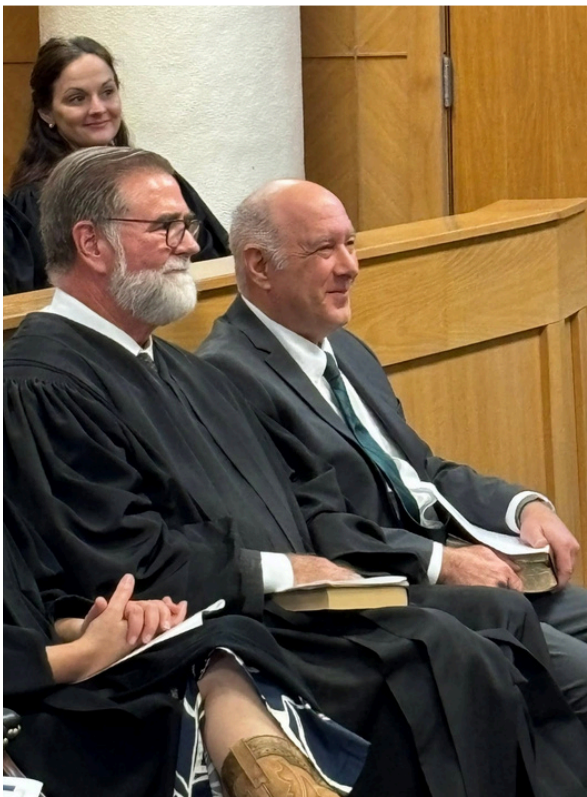
After an invocation by Hendry County Commissioner and Pastor Mitchell Wills, judges, magistrates, judicial assistants, and community dignitaries were recognized. Judge Ostrov received presentations from local bar associations along with the Florida County Court Judges. Then we heard meaningful remarks from Attorney Andrew Schroth, Attorney Timothy Scandurro, and Judge Darrell Hill.

Speakers reflected on Judge Ostrov's character, integrity, and dedication to Hendry County. "That says a lot for his character because he's committed to Hendry County, and now he's your Hendry County Judge," Chief Judge Porter said.

Attorney Andrew Schroth described him as "a perfect adjudicator for any situation," while Attorney Timothy Scandurro noted, "He's going to call balls and strikes because he is a principled person, and principled people make principled judges."

Circuit Judge Darrell Hill administered the oath of office as Judge Ostrov's wife, Kathleen, stood beside him. The ceremony concluded with a special family moment as his daughters, Hannah and Charlotte, assisted with the enrobing.

In his remarks, Judge Ostrov shared the principle that will guide his service on the bench. "Not everyone is going to agree with my decisions, but my goal is to have everyone leaving this courtroom feeling like they have been treated with dignity and respect," said Judge Ostrov.



Judge Ostrov looks on as friends give remarks

# INVESTITURE OF JUDGE PACHECO



Judge Pacheco gives his remarks

On March 27, the 20th Judicial Circuit celebrated the Investiture of our newest Lee County Judge, Javier Pacheco at the Lee County Courthouse in Courtroom 1A.

The ceremony opened with the procession of the judiciary and a presentation of colors by the Lee County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard. Judge Pacheco's daughter, Adriana, then led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chief Judge J. Frank Porter delivered opening remarks and invited Bronson Taylor to provide the invocation.

The Court also paused to honor the life and service of the Honorable John Carlin, with special remarks from Judge Pacheco and a moment of silence in his memory.

We then heard thoughtful remarks from his former partner, Atty. Marve Ann Alaimo. She reflected on his journey, saying, "There is no better example to me right now than a person who is living the American dream than Javier Pacheco."

Atty. Jamie Schwinghamer also shared remarks on behalf of Attorney Chris Donovan and Lee County Judge Devin George then shared what it's been like working with Judge Pacheco.

"From the beginning, he hit the ground running," said Judge George

The ceremony continued with the Oath of Office by Circuit Judge Joe Foster, followed by the enrobing by Judge Pacheco's son, Leandro.

In his remarks, Judge Pacheco spoke about the responsibility of judicial service and the principles that will guide his time on the bench. "I will treat everyone who comes before me with patience, dignity, and courtesy," he said. "I'll apply the law as written and not legislate from the bench. I will always remember that the only power and authority I have comes from the Florida Constitution, its statutes, and its rules. I am honored by the trust placed in me, and it is truly the honor of a lifetime."



Attorney Alaimo gives her remarks to Judge Pacheco



Judge Foster prepares to perform the Oath of Office

“

*I will always be on time, always be prepared and always work to uphold the integrity of this office.”*

*- Judge Javier Pacheco*

# INVESTITURE OF JUDGE ROUSE

Charlotte County Judge Turner A. Rouse was officially sworn in during his investiture ceremony in Charlotte County on May 15, joined by fellow judges, court staff, family, friends, local bar associations, and community leaders.

Circuit Judge Russell Kirshy administered the oath of office before Judge Rouse's wife and daughter participated in the traditional enrobing ceremony. Guests also heard remarks from Major General Arthur Jackman and Judge Rouse's wife, Attorney Laura Rouse, while local bar associations from across the circuit presented commemorative gifts.

Reflecting on Judge Rouse's character, General Jackman said, "He'll make decisions with wisdom and fairness and treat everyone with respect. You wouldn't know it from Turner because he is such a humble individual, so to the judiciary I think you can't be more pleased than having him as one of your members."

Judge Rouse brings decades of legal and public service experience to the bench. Before his appointment by Governor Ron DeSantis in February,



Judge Kirshy performs the Oath of Office

he served as a Charlotte County Assistant State Attorney, practiced extensively in state and federal courts, and completed more than 20 years of military service before retiring from the U.S. Army Reserve as a Colonel. He fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Burns.

In his remarks, Judge Rouse reflected on the opportunities that shaped his life and the responsibility of serving the public. "I realize that many people who come before me in court do not have the opportunities that I have had," he said. "I do not want to add to their misery."

Judge Rouse concluded by saying, "Every day I will treat anyone who comes before me with respect and kindness. They deserve no less."



Laura Rouse speaks at her husband's Investiture



Judge Rouse gives remarks at his Investiture

# Future Court Leaders

7th grade Civics students from Gulfview Middle School in Naples visited the Collier County Courthouse where they met with Judge Amanda Levy Reis and Judge James Stewart. During their visit, students learned about the role of the courts and the importance of fairness and impartiality in every case.

Students also explored the meaning behind the symbolism of Lady Justice and gained a deeper understanding of what happens inside a courtroom.

From learning the names of different courtroom areas to seeing spaces like the holding cell, students asked thoughtful questions and engaged fully in the experience!



Students from the Forensic Science and Law Studies classes at Lehigh Senior High School stepped inside the courtroom at the Lee County Justice Center for a firsthand look at the justice system. During their visit with Judge Josephine Gagliardi, they observed live court proceedings and participated in an engaging Q&A with the Judge and local attorney Keri Armpriester. Students asked thoughtful questions and gained real-world insight into the legal profession.

The experience did not stop there! Students also had the opportunity to sit on the bench and explore the courtroom from a new perspective.

Bishop Verot Catholic High School law studies students got a hands-on look at the justice system during a visit with Circuit Judge Robert Branning.

From an interactive mock trial featuring Lightning McQueen vs. Ricky Bobby over a stolen car, to a Q&A session in the courtroom, students took on roles to experience how a case goes to trial.



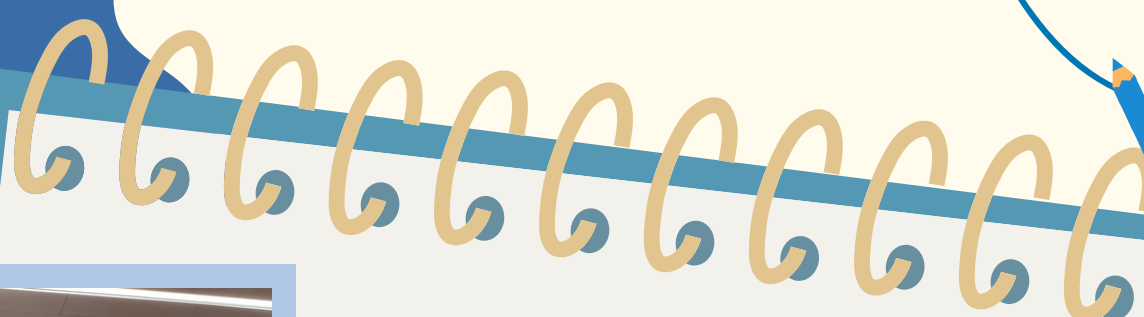


PHOTO COURTESY OF JUDGE NICOLE MIRRA

Southwest Florida's brightest young legal minds went head-to-head during the Circuit Mock Trial competition.

The Honorable Kimberly Bocelli presided over the final round and is pictured with the competing teams. Also pictured is the Honorable Javier Pacheco, who presided over rounds during the Lee County Competition.

The results?

- 🏆 1st Place – Fort Myers High School
- 🥈 2nd Place – Gulf Coast High School
- 🥉 3rd Place – Florida Southwestern Collegiate High School, Charlotte Campus



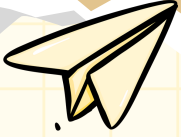
PHOTO COURTESY OF JUDGE NICOLE MIRRA

### Guilty or not guilty?

Civics students from Mid Cape Global Academy stepped into the courtroom for a hands-on lesson in the legal system with Lee County Judge Nicole Mirra. Students took on the roles of attorneys, witnesses, and jurors in a lively mock trial: *The Big Bad Wolf vs. Curly Pig*. Along the way, students put their civics knowledge to the test while gaining a real-world look at how our courts operate.

After the verdict was delivered (It was NOT GUILTY), Judge Mirra shared insight into the judicial process and answered questions about her role on the bench.





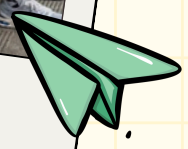
Circuit Judge James Stewart and Collier County Judge Deb Cunningham welcomed students from Royal Palm Academy into Judge Cunningham's courtroom to help them gear up for their mock trial.



Students from De LaSalle Academy in Fort Myers got a firsthand look at how courts operate experiencing both civil and criminal court proceedings.

During their visit to the Lee County Justice Center, students observed a virtual hearing with Lee County Judge Lindsay Garza and then attended first appearance with Lee County Judge Maria Gonzalez, giving them a unique opportunity to see how different parts of the court system operate.

The visit provided an engaging, real-world learning experience for students with special needs and learning challenges, helping build understanding and connection to the work of the courts in their community.

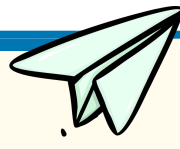


Hendry County Judge Robert Ostrov visited the Children's Garden Of LaBelle where he read The Color Book from Dr. Seuss to their preschool class. That was followed by an engaging activity where the kids colored their own special color book. The children also received a book about numbers to take home and read with their families and friends.



What do judges do and how does the law shape our everyday lives? Students at East Elementary in Punta Gorda found out when Charlotte County Judge Michael Powell visited several 5th grade classes for Career Day.

Thank you to Judge Powell for inspiring the next generation of leaders in Charlotte County!



More than 70 eighth grade students from Canterbury School in Fort Myers visited the Lee County Courthouse for a firsthand look at juvenile court with Circuit Judge Gil Perez.

Students observed detention hearings and dispositions before having the chance to ask questions directly to His Honor and the attorneys about what they saw and how the process works.



Judge Robert Ostrov welcomed the Caloosa Creativity Camp students to the Hendry County Courthouse for a special behind-the-scenes experience!

Students enjoyed an exclusive tour of the courthouse, a fun Q&A with Judge Ostrov about the judicial process, and even participated in a mock courtroom case involving a missing red lollipop. The group also explored the history of the courthouse.



Collier County Judge Rob Crown spent three days speaking with more than 200 7th grade civics students from Gulfview Middle School. From sharing insights about the court system to answering thoughtful questions, it was a great opportunity to connect with the next generation of informed citizens.





Avalon Elementary 3rd graders stepped into the courtroom at the Collier County Courthouse for a fun and interactive mock trial of State v. Goldilocks, but this was no fairy tale ending. Goldilocks was on trial for trespass, criminal mischief, and theft. She was found guilty by the jury on all counts!

Collier County Judge Deborah Cunningham presided over the case alongside a team who brought the story to life... including defense attorney Adam Carney, prosecutor ASA Marisa Mahoney from The State Attorney's Office, Mama Bear ASA Sabsina Karimi, Papa Bear ASA Nick Morlock, Deputy Panther Cmdr. Chris Goldhorn, and ASA Amanda Krause as Goldilocks. Dale Lively from Children's Advocacy Collier assisted with the jury, and Cpl. Tom Archer from Collier County Sheriff's Office served as bailiff.

The courtroom also welcomed special guests Cpl. Jeff Perry from Naples Police Department and Crisis Canine Max!



Students from Innovation Preparatory Academy of South Fort Myers stepped into the courtroom for a mock trial featuring none other than the Big Bad Wolf and Curley Pig. The students presented arguments and experienced firsthand how the justice system works in a fun and interactive way.

After the trial, students had the opportunity to meet with Lee County Judge Devin George along with attorneys from the Public Defender's Office and Office of the State Attorney for a Q&A session about the justice system.



# JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT 2026



From Collier County to Lee County, students participating in Junior Achievement stepped beyond the classroom and into the world of the courts through hands-on experiences and conversations with our judges.

In Collier County, Circuit Judges Amanda Levy-Reis and James Stewart met with students to share insight into the judicial system, answer thoughtful questions, and discuss the many career opportunities available both on and off the bench.

Meanwhile, approximately 50 students from Ida Baker High School and East Lee County High School visited the Lee County Courthouse for Junior Achievement Day, where they took on the roles of judge, jury, bailiff, and witnesses during a mock trial led by Lee County Judge Javier Pacheco. Students also learned about the important work of the Lee County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller and visited the Lee County Sheriff's Office Juvenile Assessment Center, making for a full morning of learning and discovery.

Experiences like these help students connect what they learn in the classroom to the real-world work of our justice system while introducing them to the many professionals who help our courts serve the community every day.



# Problem Solving Courts: *Second Chances Start Here*

Every recovery journey starts with someone believing change is possible.

Lee County Drug Court participants heard an encouraging message from City of Fort Myers Mayor Kevin Anderson about perseverance and second chances as part of our Treatment Court Month celebrations.

"The fact that you are here today matters. Showing up matters. Trying again matters, and choosing not to quit matters," he said. He also reminded participants that "real courage looks like getting up for treatment when you don't feel like going. Real courage looks like taking responsibility instead of making excuses."

The event highlighted the impact of Lee County Drug Court, which continues to change lives by helping participants address substance use disorders. So far this year, 16 participants have graduated from the program. Drug Court currently serves 79 participants and maintains a 75% success rate, exceeding the national average of approximately 60%.

Presided over by Judge Josephine Gagliardi, Lee County Drug Court gives participants the opportunity to overcome addiction, rebuild relationships, and create healthier futures for themselves and their families.

"Your past does not have to be your permanent identity," said Mayor Anderson

The Twentieth Judicial Circuit extends its appreciation to Mayor Anderson for sharing his time and encouragement with participants and to Judge Josephine Gagliardi and the entire Drug Court team for their dedication to helping participants achieve lasting recovery.





## Charlotte County Celebrates First Veterans Treatment Court Graduations

Charlotte County reached an exciting milestone in February 2026 by celebrating the first two graduates of its Veterans Treatment Court. The graduations marked an important achievement for the program, which launched on October 27, 2025, under the leadership of Charlotte County Judge Sean Lux.

Graduates of veterans treatment courts successfully complete programs designed to help veterans involved in the criminal justice system by addressing underlying issues such as substance abuse and mental health. These programs often lead to reduced or dismissed sentences and have shown high success rates, with many graduates not returning to the justice system.

In May, three veteran mentors joined the Charlotte County Veterans Treatment Court team and were presented with certificates of service for their commitment to supporting fellow veterans. As peers who have shared similar experiences, mentors provide encouragement, guidance, and a connection that extends beyond the courtroom.



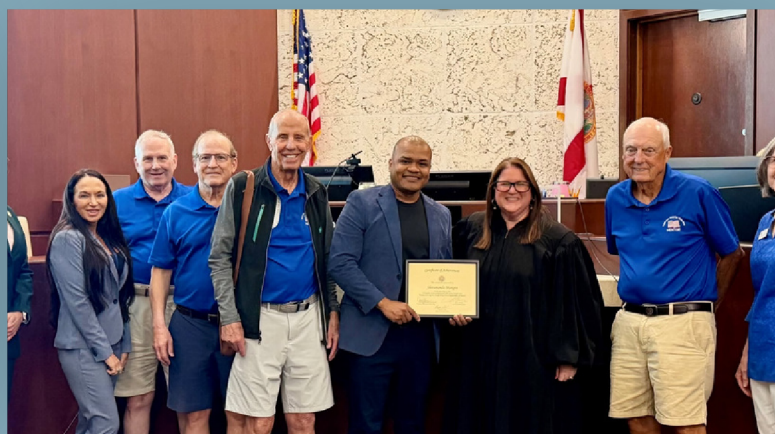
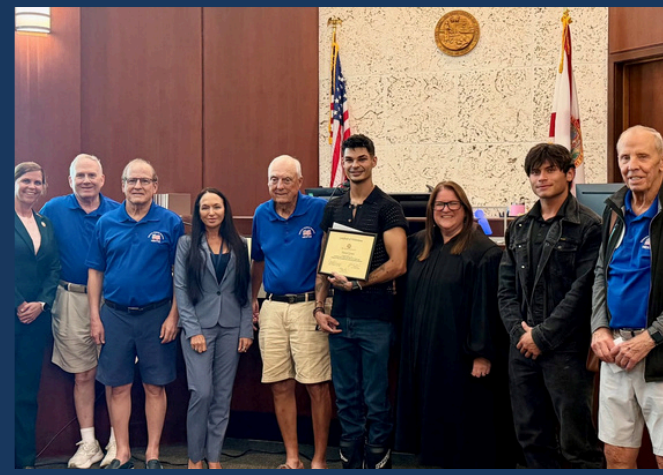
# CHANGING LIVES THROUGH PROBLEM-SOLVING COURTS

Collier County's Veterans Treatment Court has celebrated four graduations so far this year! Each graduation is a reminder of what is possible when those who have served our country are met with the support they deserve.

Presided over by Judge Deborah Cunningham, Veterans Treatment Court gives eligible veterans an opportunity to address the challenges that brought them into the justice system while receiving treatment and support tailored to their unique experiences. Throughout the program, participants are encouraged by veteran mentors and a dedicated team that helps guide them toward lasting success.

Every graduation tells a different story, but they all have one thing in common: Determination.

Their success reflects not only their own commitment, but also the encouragement of the people who stood beside them throughout the process.



As part of National Problem-Solving Court Month, Hendry County held a special event on May 11, 2026.

The No Longer Bound Recovery Group from Christ Central Church provided an inspiring presentation to Drug Court participants and Judge Darrell Hill, sharing information about the recovery support services available through the church and the impact those services can have on individuals working to rebuild their lives.

The presentation was both motivational and informative, especially for the graduates, reminding everyone in attendance that recovery is possible with the right support system and community connections.





Pretrial Officer and Veteran Mentor Coordinator Nicole DiPaola attended the Charlotte County Veteran Resource Fair in Port Charlotte where over 30 organizations offered support with housing, healthcare, employment, and education.

She joined Joslin from Charlotte Behavioral Health Care to share information on Treatment Court and Veteran Mentor programs. Judge Sean Lux, who currently presides over our Charlotte County Veterans Treatment Court, was also in attendance.



Lee County Judge Josephine Gagliardi and Collier County Judge Janeice Martin toured the Miami Center for Mental Health and Recovery as part of the Florida Supreme Court's Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts.

The visit offered an opportunity to learn more about innovative approaches to treatment and recovery while continuing conversations about how courts and community partners can work together to improve lives and strengthen communities.

Following a stakeholders roundtable, members of our Treatment Courts team visited Hearts and Homes for Veterans, Inc. to learn more about the resources available to veterans in our community. Lee County's Senior Probation Officer Felicia Watts joined Veterans Treatment Court & Mental Health Court Coordinator Sarah Debes along with Treatment Courts Manager Bridget Washburn for the visit. Hearts and Homes for Veterans provides meaningful support to those who have served, including furnishing apartments, transportation to medical appointments, a food pantry, household essentials, bicycles, and gifts for children during the holidays.



Stepping forward for mental health.

The Lee County Case Management Unit and our Problem-Solving Court team, Justice in Motion, participated in the 8th Annual NAMI Walks Southwest Florida in support of NAMI Southwest Florida.

This event goes beyond the miles. Funds raised support free mental health education, peer-led programs, crisis support, and critical community resources. Participants walk to honor personal journeys, remember loved ones, and stand together for a stronger, more connected community.

Each step helps raise awareness, reduce stigma, and reinforce an important message: no one has to face mental health challenges alone.

# INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION!

Lee County's Criminal Division was proud to participate in National Bring Your Kids to Work Day on Thursday, April 23, giving children a behind-the-scenes look at how their parents and court staff serve the community each day.

The day began with a welcome and introductions before participants toured the Department of Juvenile Justice, enjoyed a K9 demonstration, and visited the courthouse Security Control Room to learn how safety and security are maintained behind the scenes. They also spent time with their parents, observing their daily responsibilities and gaining a better understanding of their roles within the court system.

In the afternoon, the children met with members of the Lee County Sheriff's Office STET Team and Threat Assessment Coordinators before observing Drug Court with Judge Josephine Gagliardi. They wrapped up the day with another exciting K9 presentation from the Fort Myers Police Department, giving them the opportunity to learn about the many agencies that work alongside the courts to serve the community.

The event concluded with a recap of the day's activities and the presentation of participation certificates.



## *Countdown to Pretrial and Probation Week 2026!*



A big thank you to the Lee County Board of County Commissioners for recognizing the important work of our Pretrial and Probation professionals with a proclamation declaring July 19–25, 2026 as Pretrial and Probation Supervision Week!

Behind every case is a team of dedicated professionals working to support accountability, connect people with resources, and help individuals make positive changes that can last a lifetime. Their work often happens behind the scenes, but its impact is felt throughout our community every day.

Please join us in celebrating our pretrial and probation professionals this July, but also each and every day for their service to the community.

# CONGRATULATIONS TO...



## MAGISTRATE RYAN DUGAN

Please join us in welcoming our newest General Magistrate! A longtime Southwest Florida resident, Magistrate Dugan brings more than 22 years of legal experience to the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. Throughout his career, he has handled hundreds of trials and cases across multiple areas of law, including criminal, family, civil, and personal injury matters. He also previously served as an Assistant State Attorney. Mr. Dugan earned his Juris Doctor from Florida State University College of Law. He attended the University of Dubuque in Iowa for undergrad where he completed dual majors in just five semesters all while playing both baseball and football.



## MAGISTRATE ED LARSEN

After more than 16 years of dedicated service to the Twentieth Judicial Circuit, Magistrate and Civil Traffic Hearing Officer Ed Larsen is retiring! Ed has served primarily in Hendry and Glades Counties throughout his time with the Court, while also supporting Lee County along the way. His commitment and service have made a lasting impact across our Circuit and the communities we serve.



## JUDGE TARA PALUCK

Congratulations to the Honorable Tara Paluck on being honored by the Lee County Association of Women Lawyers at their annual Judicial Reception as the recipient of this year's LCAWL Judicial Appreciation Award! Judge Paluck's exemplary leadership, along with her profound dedication to the community, is an inspiration to us all.



## ERVIN GILL AND HENRY ROSARIO

Congratulations to Probation Supervisor Ervin Gill and Pretrial Officer Enrique "Henry" Rosario as they retire from Lee County's Criminal Division. With 38 years of service from Ervin and nearly 27 years from Henry together they made a lasting impact on our organization and have touched the lives of countless people along the way. Thank you both for your commitment and leadership to the courts!

# CONGRATULATIONS TO...



## STEVEN GOLDEN

Congrats to Steve Golden on his promotion from Sergeant to Court Security Manager in Lee County! Steve steps into this role following the retirement of Leigh Rawson, who served in the position for eight years. As Court Security Manager, Steve will oversee court security operations in Lee County, supervise staff, and work with our partner agencies to help ensure the safety and security of the Lee County Justice Center Complex.

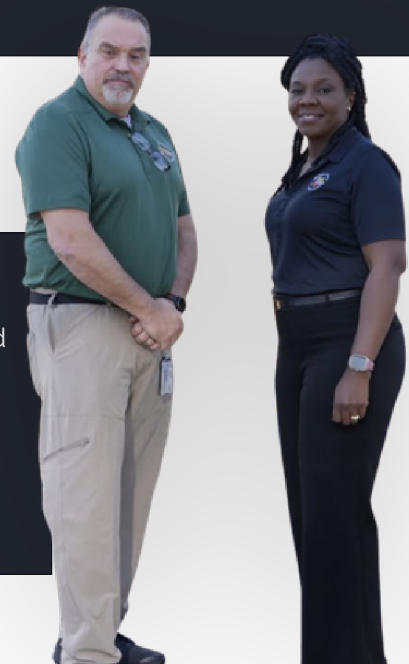
## IVY SILVA

Please join us in recognizing Lee County Probation Officer Ivy Silva on becoming one of the first professionals in the country to earn the Certified Community Supervision Professional (CCSP) certification!! The CCSP is a new national certification focused on equipping probation professionals with practical, research-informed tools that can be applied in everyday supervision.



## TAYLOR HALPERIN

Please join us in recognizing Lee County Probation Officer Taylor Halperin on becoming a Certified Community Supervision Professional (CCSP)!! This self-paced certification combines best practices in supervision and behavior change science to help professionals apply evidence-based strategies in real-world settings.



## CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING CLASS 72!

Crisis Intervention Training Class 72 is in the books and we are proud to celebrate Thomas Humann and Felicia Watts for completing this impactful, week-long program! With their completion, 36 members of the Lee County Criminal Division are now CIT certified. That growing number reflects a strong commitment to serving our community thoughtfully and responsibly.

# CONGRATULATIONS TO...

## Judge Elizabeth Krier



Congratulations to Circuit Judge Elizabeth Krier! Her honored retired June 30th after more than years on the bench.

On behalf of Chief Judge J. Frank Porter and Court Administration, Circuit Judge Joe Foster presented Judge Krier with a retirement plaque as judges stopped by her chambers in Collier County throughout the day to wish her well.

Judge Krier began her legal career in Naples in 1985, serving as a prosecutor before spending 21 years practicing marital and family law. After serving as a magistrate for two years, she was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006.

We wish her a happy and well-deserved retirement!

## Lee County Criminal Division

Congratulations to our Lee County Criminal Division on their re-accreditation as an Excelsior Agency by the Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission.

In March, following a successful assessment with the FCAC, assessors recommended the division for re-accreditation with Excelsior status. The division has been accredited since June 2009.

The Excelsior designation is reserved for agencies that demonstrate a long-standing commitment to accreditation and consistently achieve the highest standards without receiving conditions during their reaccreditation reviews.

Accreditation is the certification by an independent reviewing authority that an entity has met specific requirements and prescribed standards. For the public, that means greater accountability, consistency, and confidence in how criminal cases are managed within the court system.



# IN THE COMMUNITY



## *An Evening with the Sixth District Court of Appeal*

Members of our judiciary headed to Hendry County for the 6th DCA BBQ Dinner held in advance of the District Court of Appeal's oral arguments at the Hendry County Courthouse. Our judges joined colleagues, attorneys and community members for an evening of fellowship and meaningful conversation ahead of the court's session with 6th DCA Judges Chief Judge Dan Traver, Judge Joshua Pratt, and Judge Mary Alice Nardella.

Opportunities like this help bring the appellate process into the community and strengthen public understanding of how our courts work.



## *Judges Strike Up Some Fun*

Split Decision has reached a verdict... bowling is harder than it looks.

These Collier County and Circuit Judges traded the courtroom for the lanes at the Collier County Bar Association Bowling Tournament and while the team may not have taken home the trophy... they definitely won in team spirit and fun!! Better luck next frame!

## *Safety starts with preparation*

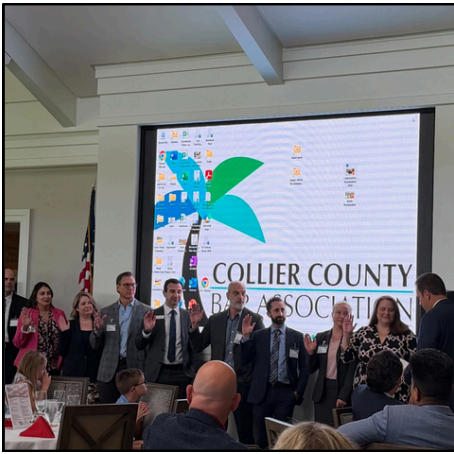
On May 16<sup>th</sup>, the Lee County Sheriff's Office for hosted a Judicial Safety Day. From classroom discussions on concealed carry and situational awareness to hands-on range training, the event was informative, thoughtfully planned, and exceptionally well executed. Special thanks to Sheriff Carmine Marceno and the entire LCSO team for their commitment to judicial safety, and to Judge Javier Pacheco for coordinating this valuable training opportunity.



## *Bridging Perspectives in Hendry County*

Hendry County Judge Robert Ostrov served as moderator for a G.A.P. (Gaining Appreciation by Adjusting Perspectives) discussion in Clewiston, bringing together community members, youth, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and law enforcement for an impactful conversation. Participants engaged in honest dialogue around important topics like community trust, perceptions of policing, and how decisions are made in the field.





## Collier County Legal Community Celebrates Leadership

Circuit Judge James Stewart administered the oath of office to the incoming officers and board members of the Collier County Bar Association. While, Circuit Judge Lauren Brodie administered the oath of office to the Collier County Women's Bar Association Board of Directors.



## Luncheon Focuses on Child Witnesses

Collier County Judge Deborah Cunningham spoke at the Collier County Women's Bar Association luncheon on the important topic of child witnesses. She was joined by Meghan Greene of the Children's Advocacy Collier and Jackie Borchers of the Collier County Sheriff's Office, along with her partner, Crisis Canine Reddington.



## Lee County Bar Association Hosts Annual Shrimp Boil

The Lee County Bar Association welcomed members, families, and friends to its annual Shrimp Boil at the IMAG History & Science Center. Guests enjoyed barbecue, shrimp, face painting, and family-friendly activities while supporting the Lee County Bar Association Foundation through its popular Dunk Junk fundraiser.

The event provided a great opportunity to connect outside the courtroom and celebrate the strong sense of community shared throughout the Lee County legal profession.



## Celebrating Character Through Laws of Life

Judges James Stewart, Amanda Levy-Reis, and Janeice Martin attended the annual Laws of Life event in Collier County, where students were recognized for their winning essays and speeches.

The program encourages young people to reflect on the values that shape strong character, including honesty, respect, responsibility, courage, perseverance, and kindness. Congratulations to all of the students whose thoughtful work earned recognition and to everyone who supports this meaningful program.

## Judges Celebrate Local Traditions



Judges Robert Ostrov, Darrell Hill, and James Stewart proudly represented the Twentieth Judicial Circuit at the 2026 Swamp Cabbage Festival Parade in LaBelle, celebrating this year's "Denim & Diamonds" theme alongside thousands of community members.

The Swamp Cabbage Festival has been a Hendry County tradition since 1966, when the newly formed LaBelle Jaycees created the event as a community-wide celebration. Nearly six decades later, it continues to bring residents together while showcasing the area's rich history and hometown spirit.



## Judicial Service Beyond the Courtroom

Lee County Judge Javier Pacheco served as Chairman of the Canvassing Board for the February 10, 2026 Captiva Island Fire Control District Bond Referendum Special Election. The Canvassing Board plays a vital role in reviewing and certifying election results, helping uphold the integrity of the electoral process in our community.

Thank you to Judge Pacheco and all members of the Canvassing Board, including Lee County Government Commissioner Brian Hamman, for their commitment to public trust and accountability!

# Around the Courts &



Every year on May 1<sup>st</sup> we recognize Law Day. This year came with a special milestone at the Lee County Justice Center.

For the first time since 2019, the District Court of Appeal of Florida held oral arguments in our courthouse. We were honored to welcome a distinguished panel from the 6th DCA: Mary Alice Nardella, Paetra T. Brownlee, and Roger K. Gannam.

Circuit Judge Michael McHugh opened the session with welcoming remarks. In the courtroom, we were joined by a legal studies class from Florida Gulf Coast University and community members who observed this meaningful proceeding.

A fitting way to celebrate Law Day and highlight the importance of the rule of law in action!



## Leadership through Learning

What happens when leadership meets the juvenile justice system? Insightful conversations and a closer look at the work happening behind the scenes in our courts!

Circuit Judge Gil Perez spoke with Leadership Lee about juvenile justice, sharing how the courts work to balance accountability and rehabilitation for young people. Thank you to Leadership Lee County for your interest in learning about the local justice system.

## Inside Our Courts

Participants from Leadership Charlotte, a program by the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce, got a firsthand look at how the justice system works.

From a conversation with Charlotte County Judge Michael Powell to touring a courtroom and the State Attorney and Clerk's Office, the group connected with key parts of the court system. They also stopped at the Sheriff's Office and the jail. Giving them a full look into law.



## Welcoming new Guardian ad Litem volunteers!

Judge Gil Perez and Judge Tracey Redd had the honor of swearing in the latest class of Guardian ad Litem volunteers in Lee County. These individuals will serve as a voice for children in our court system, advocating for their best interests when it matters most.



# Across the Circuit



Some special four-legged visitors stopped by the Collier County Courthouse! Crisis Canine Max of the Naples Police Department and Golden PAWS stopped by with Corporal Jeff Perry, spending time with Judge Deborah Cunningham and Judge Joe Foster. Max also brought plenty of smiles while showcasing the positive impact crisis canines have on those they serve.



Golden PAWS Assistance Dog Readington also visited Judge Cunningham's courtroom alongside Collier County Sheriff's Office Victim Advocate Jackie Borchers for courtroom training focused on procedures and victim support services. Together, these remarkable canine teams help provide comfort and compassionate support to individuals both inside and outside the courtroom.

## *A Closer Look at the Courts*

Every visit to the courthouse is an opportunity to build a better understanding of the justice system.

Judge Lindsay Garza welcomed a small study group to the courthouse for a Q&A and presentation about the judicial system. Participants learned more about court operations, the role of the judiciary, and how the courts serve our community, while asking thoughtful questions and gaining insight into the work that happens every day in our courts.



## *Connecting the Community to the Courts*

Judge Amanda Levy-Reis welcomed members of the Women's Cultural Alliance of Naples to her courtroom at the Collier County Courthouse for an educational visit and conversation about the judicial system. The group learned more about the role of the courts, asked thoughtful questions, and gained a better understanding of how the judicial branch serves our community.



## *Crime and Justice Day in SWFL*

Leadership SWFL got an inside look at the courts during Crime and Justice Day 2026! Judge Javier Pacheco welcomed the group to the Lee County Justice Center, where he shared an overview of the judicial system and the role the courts play in our community. Participants also visited the jury assembly room to learn about the jury process and what to expect if they are ever called to serve.



# STRENGTHENING SKILLS. SERVING COMMUNITIES.



## Court Interpreters Sharpen Skills

Our Court Interpreting team traveled to the 10th Judicial Circuit in Bartow for the 2026 Court Interpreter Workshop, where they sharpened their skills through engaging sessions like “Don’t Get Catfished into an Ethical Violation” and “Let’s Be Civil, Shall We?” From expanding their legal vocabulary to exploring new interpreting techniques, the conference offered valuable opportunities for professional growth. It was also a chance to connect with interpreters from across Florida, exchange ideas, and reunite with colleagues and friends.



## First Impressions Matter

Great conversation at the Collier County Bar Association Young Lawyers Ethics Seminar!

Judge Rachael Loukonen spoke about impressionism and how first impressions can shape credibility, professionalism, and the practice of law.

Judges Javier Pacheco, Deborah Cunningham, and James Stewart then joined her for a candid and engaging panel discussion.



## Driving the conversation

Charlotte County Judge Sean Lux and Collier County Judge Blake Adams took part in the 2026 Traffic Adjudication Lab in Melbourne Beach, Florida. Judge Adams served on the faculty for several sessions covering topics from civil infractions to sentencing issues, while Judge Lux participated alongside court professionals from across the state.



## Judicial College Success

The Twentieth Judicial Circuit had a strong presence at Florida’s Judicial College in Orlando, with several judges and magistrates attending Phase II and Fundamentals programs. Judge Sean Lux and Judge Kimberly Bocelli also participated as they prepared for their new judicial assignments, while Judge Gil Perez served as faculty, mentoring fellow members of the judiciary. The Florida Judicial College provides required education for new judges and specialized training for those transitioning to new divisions, helping ensure continued excellence on the bench.



## Checking all the Boxes!

Judge Joseph Foster and Judge Lauren Brodie participated in the Collier County Bar Association’s annual Checking All the Boxes seminar, which brought together attorneys for a day of continuing legal education. The event also featured a special Law Day presentation by Carlos Muñiz, providing attendees with valuable insight on current issues affecting Florida’s legal community.



## Judges Share Family Law Expertise

Judges Amanda Levy-Reis and Kyle Cohen, along with Magistrate Maria Dente, participated in a family law program hosted by the Collier County Bar Association. The educational session gave legal professionals the opportunity to hear directly from members of the judiciary on current family law topics, while encouraging meaningful discussion and continued professional learning.

# BUILDING A BETTER HR EXPERIENCE

The Human Resources team is excited to be transitioning to a new HRIS platform that will enhance internal processes and support more efficient HR operations. This investment reflects our commitment to continuous improvement and equipping our team with modern tools to better serve the organization. Key benefits of the new system include improved reporting and analytics capabilities, as well as enhanced records management, helping HR maintain accurate employee data, generate meaningful workforce insights, and operate more effectively. Stay tuned for more information!



## Celebrating Administrative Professionals!



Every year we celebrate our Administrative Professionals on the Wednesday of the last full week of April.

Behind every smooth docket, organized file, and well-run office is a team making it all happen. Their professionalism, attention to detail, and steady support keep everything moving forward each and every day. From helping those navigating the court system to keeping operations running seamlessly. We are grateful for your dedication, organization, positivity, and the care you bring to your work.

## Celebrating Employee Milestones!

Congratulations to Collier's Criminal Division Director Jeff Nichols who celebrated 30 years of service. He's pictured here with Collier County Administrative Services Manager Chuck Rice.



Congratulations to Magdelis Rodrigues for 5 years of service and Nancy Mandujano for 20 years of service. They are pictured along with Lucy Torres who is the clerical supervisor.

# Welcome **NEW HIRES**

**Samantha Piper** – Staff Attorney

**Jason Heintz** – Program Specialist

**James Monroe** – Pretrial Officer

**Ava McCormick** – Docket Specialist

**Thomas LaGrasta** – Pretrial Supervisor

**Ruth Doland** – Program Specialist

**Cherall Cabrera-Sangalang** – Pretrial Officer

**Ava Diamond** – Facilities Coordinator

**Hope Zapata** – General Magistrate Assistant

**Julie Farnan** – Administrative Assistant

**Lisa Rossi** – Administrative Assistant

**Kizzie Fowler** – Administrative Assistant

**Emily Burnham** – Staff Attorney

**Sarah Wolfe** – Program Specialist

**Selia Ortiz** – Secretary

**Toni Doub** – Accountant

**Ryan Dugan** – Magistrate

**Heather Day-Beachy** – Program Specialist

**Taylor Filaski** – Staff Attorney

**Patricia Ma Karthe** – Secretary

**Rachel Daniel** – Staff Attorney

**Raquel Orta** – Secretary

**Jessica Haehnel** – Court Program Specialist

**Ellen Gilbert** – Judicial Assistant

**Caitlyn Traxler** – Administrative Assistant

**Yaneth Jimenez-Medina** – Facilities Coordinator

## & INTERNS



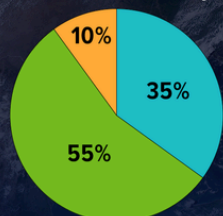
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# 2026 HURRICANE OUTLOOK

## 2026 Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook

### Season Probability



■ Above Normal
 ■ Near Normal
 ■ Below Normal

### Named Storms

8 - 14

### Hurricanes

3 - 6

### Major Hurricanes

1 - 3

Be prepared: visit [hurricanes.gov](https://hurricanes.gov) and follow NOAA's @NWS and @NHC\_Atlantic on X. May 2026

## 2026 Atlantic Tropical Cyclone Names

Arthur  
 Bertha  
 Cristobal  
 Dolly  
 Edouard  
 Fay  
 Gonzalo

Hanna  
 Isaias  
 Josephine  
 Kyle  
 Leah  
 Marco  
 Nana

Omar  
 Paulette  
 Rene  
 Sally  
 Teddy  
 Vicky  
 Wilfred

Be prepared: visit [hurricanes.gov](https://hurricanes.gov) and follow NOAA's @NWS and @NHC\_Atlantic on X. May 2026

## STAY CONNECTED. STAY INFORMED. STAY PREPARED.

Both [Colorado State University](https://www.colorado.edu) and the [U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](https://www.noaa.gov) have predicted below-average seasons for the 2026 Atlantic hurricane season.

An El Niño is expected to develop and strengthen during the summer and fall. El Niño typically brings stronger wind shear across the Atlantic that can rip apart developing tropical systems. While Atlantic waters are slightly warmer than normal (which favors storms) the El Niño effect is forecast to dominate.

NOAA is forecasting a total of 8-14 named storms (winds of 39 mph or higher). Of those, 3-6 are forecast to become hurricanes (winds of 74 mph or higher), including 1-3 major hurricanes (category 3, 4 or 5 with winds of 111 mph or higher). NOAA has a 70% confidence in these ranges. An average season has 14 named storms with seven hurricanes, including three major hurricanes.

### Court Operations and Employee Safety

Our top priority is the safety of employees and their families. We also aim to keep the courts open and operational to the greatest extent possible. In the event of closures, we work to resume mission-critical operations as soon as safely possible.

When storms develop, we monitor the progress closely. In the event that a Hurricane Warning is issued for all or part of our area, the Chief Judge will decide whether the affected courts should be closed.

Should one threaten our area, employees will be notified of actions to be taken in a number of ways: email, social media, direct communications from Court managers and supervisors, and information releases through the media (TV, radio, newspapers). We have also implemented the Send Word Now emergency notification system. This will allow Court Administration to contact employees and court partners via email, text, and phone.

After a storm, updates about reopening and returning to work will be shared using the same methods. The public should monitor our website, local media, and social media accounts.

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](https://www.ready.gov)

[NATIONAL HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS](https://www.nhc.noaa.gov)

[FL DEPT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT](https://www.fldepm.com)

[AMERICAN RED CROSS](https://www.americanredcross.org)

[FLORIDA SUPREME COURT EMERGENCY ORDERS](https://www.flcourts.org)



# 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](mailto:smiles@ca.cjis20.org)

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