

Benchmarks

Newsletter for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit

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Passing the Torch

Chief Judge Elect Feels Honored

Contributed by Judy M. Pittman, Chief Judge

After eight years serving as this circuit's chief judge, it is time to pass the torch to another interested circuit judge. On February 24, 2005, the circuit and county judges of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit elected Circuit Judge William L. Wright as our next chief judge. Judge Wright will begin his two-year term on July 1, 2005. I want to personally congratulate Judge Wright on his upcoming role as our circuit's newest chief judge.

The chief judge, as outlined in the Rule 2.050, Rules of Judicial Administration, "shall exercise administrative supervision over all courts within the judicial circuit...shall be the chief judicial officer of the circuit, shall maintain liaison in all judicial administrative matters with the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and shall develop an administrative plan for the efficient and proper administration of all courts within the circuit". Many more tasks and responsibilities fall to the chief judge who provides administrative leadership to the circuit, and is ultimately responsible for managing the personnel and financial resources allocated to the circuit.

During my past eight years as Chief Judge, I have tried to serve this circuit to the best of my ability ensuring that we administer justice fairly, efficiently and effectively. We have had many struggles, especially as we forged through Article V/Revision 7 legislation and budgetary constraints. The collective bench has remained supportive, as I know they will be for Judge Wright. I will continue to serve as the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit's representative to the Trial Court Budget Commission, as appointed by the Chief Justice. I am very proud to be a part of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit and to have served as this circuit's Chief Judge.



" I feel very honored to have been selected as our next Chief Judge," says Circuit Judge William L. Wright, a Marianna native. "It is both humbling and exciting."

Judge Wright, who has been the Administrative Circuit Judge for Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson and Washington Counties for the last four years, assumes the office of Chief Judge for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit on July 01, 2005. Wright will be the first Chief Judge from outside the Bay County area since the late Circuit Judge Robert L. McCrary.

"It will be very difficult to follow a class act like Judge Pittman. She has done an excellent job leading our circuit for the past eight years." Judge Wright added, "I am looking forward to a smooth transition, and I hope to earn the respect and trust of all the circuit judges, county judges and staff."

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Spring Has Sprung!

Contributed by
Jennifer D.
Wells
Trial Court
Administrator

Did you ever wonder why you fertilize your garden or lawn during the spring? I suppose the answer is pretty basic...after a harsh winter, the ground needs food to grow. In order to wake up the grass and scrubs from their dormant status, they need to be replenished with appropriate nutrients. That makes sense to me.

I think court administration in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit was once a neglected garden. We suffered through a very harsh winter season the year before Revision 7 was enacted. We lost positions and basically moved to a dormant state – we did just enough to survive.

Then, after Revision 7, we were able to reestablish our bearings – set down roots with new employees. We have started to expand our services. However, like a garden, we need to ensure that we “feed” staff with the proper education and training so that our programs serve the judges and our citizens to the fullest potential.

Since hiring our new staff, everyone has been involved with shifting job responsibilities which has resulted in “on the job” training. Those of us who have been here for a while have had to learn to give up some of our tasks or take on different tasks. We have also found ourselves training new staff to take over where we had previously ended. I think this process – of changing our roles and training our staff – has been an enriching process.

I am excited about our plans for formal training. While “on the job” training has been occurring every day with all our employees – new and existing – we will be redeveloping a more formal human resource training program for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit. First on the formal training agenda is an updated course on Sexual Harassment, a critical course which should be offered and taken on a yearly basis. See the article written by Larry Lyons for a more thorough explanation of what is to come related to this topic. Other training opportunities include in-house courses and training opportunities provided at conferences or outside training courses.

We can only provide excellent service if we are a well-trained, professional staff. It is my goal to ensure the judges of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit

and our citizens a professional staff who is well-trained in their area of expertise and knowledge in other areas so that we can serve everyone to the best of our abilities.

Like a garden after a harsh winter, the warming of spring brings a wonderful opportunity for growth and development. We are experiencing this opportunity here at the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit and taking advantage of each sunny day!

From the Personnel Desk

Contributed by Larry Lyons
Administrative Services Manager

The State Courts System (SCS), like other organizations, requires employees to attend recurring training to maintain currency, adopt new techniques, or become knowledgeable on current local, state, and federal laws and policies. The subject of sexual harassment is one of those areas in which all court employees must receive initial and recurrent training.

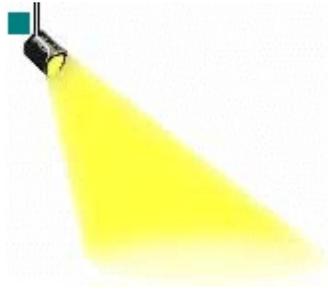


We are in the process of scheduling such training for court employees in the near future. The objectives of sexual harassment training remain the same; to eliminate or at the least minimize incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace. It is the policy of the State Courts System to provide a workplace free from any and all forms of illegal discrimination, and to provide equal employment to every employee and applicant for employment based solely on his or her qualifications to perform the job.

The Fourteenth Judicial Circuit’s Sexual Harassment and Discriminatory Policy has been revised to include procedures for handling complaints against judges as mandated by the Supreme Court of Florida. Even with clear policies and procedures for Court personnel, questions remain about unlawful harassment and how to report and handle situations. These questions are natural and important, and point to the need for this refocused training initiative.

This Circuit, as well as the entire State Courts System, promotes a workplace that is free from discrimination including sexual harassment. Please do not hesitate to contact either Jennifer Wells, our Court Administrator, or me if you have any questions concerning these policies and procedures or the anticipated training.

Highlights From Around The Circuit



Renovations Under Way in Holmes County

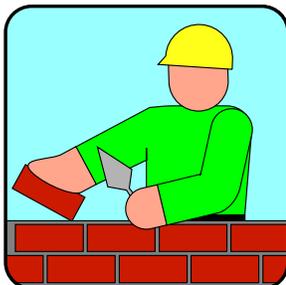
As citizens enter the Holmes County Courthouse the sights and sounds of progress are evident. Currently, the facility's interior is undergoing a major renovation.

Holmes County was appropriated \$200,000 from the Small County Courthouse Facility Grant-in-Aid Fund by the 2004 Florida Legislature in order to complete the much needed updates.

Included in the renovations are the addition of a mini courtroom located adjacent to the Holmes County Judge's Office, the relocation of the Circuit Judge's Chambers to allow for a jury room, installation of a security keypad system to the Circuit Judge's Office, and the addition of a conference room on the second floor of the courthouse.

In addition to other renovations, the State Attorney's Office has been relocated to the first floor of the building; space has now been made available for the Public Defender's Office to be located in the courthouse; and the Clerk of the Court's Office has now been able to expand office space alleviating the need for staff to be located in a vault area.

All in all, the renovations to the Holmes County Courthouse are well on the way to better serving the judiciary and citizens of Holmes County and the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit.



Elements of the Court System Court Reporting

Contributed by Susan Diltz, Court Reporter Manager

A major component of due process under the elements of the court system is court reporting. Court reporting ensures due process rights by creating a verbatim record of words spoken in court, allowing for the preservation of those words, and when necessary, their timely and accurate transcription for trial court and appellate review.

You may ask, "How do six court reporters cover court proceedings for seventeen judges, two magistrates, and two hearing officers in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit?. It's all about numbers. Maybe you want to know how many pages of transcripts are generated from the courtrooms of this circuit. The answer to that question is what determines how a court proceeding is reported.

Some proceedings are reported by a digital recording system (CourtSmart). Other proceedings are recorded on audio tape, video tape, or by handheld digital recorders. Proceedings that have the highest transcription rate are reported by a live court reporter.

The court system is taking every advantage of new technology available today. CourtSmart is presently being used in the Juvenile Courthouse in Bay County and, most recently, in the courtroom located in Gulf County. As proceedings are in progress, the recording can be monitored by a digital court reporter (a new breed of court reporter) from a computer in a remote location. If a transcript is requested, a court reporter can retrieve the recording and create a transcript from that recording. In addition, the Holmes County Clerk installed FTR Gold, a similar but older digital recording system. While it cannot yet be monitored by a remote location, the circuit is hoping to make that possible in the near future with the installation of a T-1 line. Another way to transport the record is to "burn" a CD from a recording captured on a small handheld digital recorder used in hearings outside the formal courtroom.

Although audio recordings serve many purposes, there remains a need for transcripts. For proceedings that generally produce a high volume of transcripts, there is a live court reporter present. Currently the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit employs one court reporter manager, four court reporters, and one digital court reporter.

As new technology develops in the area of court reporting, the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit will strive to remain on the cutting edge to provide this element of the court system in the most efficient manner.



Holidays for the Quarter



Birthdays

May 30

Memorial Day

April

- 01 Stacy Meadows
- 04 Hayes Baggett
- 07 Jennifer Wells
- 08 Kara Berlin
- 11 Suzanne Cox
- 17 Julie Armstrong
- 19 Stephanie Gordon
- 20 Robert Sombathy
- 23 Marilyn Nelson
- 30 Thada Rehberg

May

- 06 Tim Mims
- 09 Jerry Edwards
- 11 Sue Ann Murray
- 17 Myra Paxton
- 31 Larry Lyons

June

- 02 Gary Hagan
- 02 Diane Crawford
- 02 Terry Thompson
- 25 Syntha Alvarez
- 28 Gene Morris



CHIEF JUDGE: HON. JUDY M. PITTMAN
COURT ADMINISTRATOR: JENNIFER DYER WELLS

Editor: Amber Baggett, Senior Court Program Specialist

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