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Benchmarks

THE FOURTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT WELCOMES NEW CIRCUIT JUDGES

The Fourteenth Judicial Circuit has welcomed two new Circuit Judges to the Bench in recent months. Both new Circuit Judges, Judge Ana Maria Garcia and Judge James Jefferson Goodman, Jr., were appointed by Florida Governor Rick Scott to fill vacancies left by the retirements of William L. Wright and Hentz McClellan.

Circuit Judge Ana Garcia is a 2002 graduate of the University of Florida College of Law. She previously practiced in the areas of construction litigation with the firm of Moye, O’Brien, Pickert & Martin, LLP and criminal law with the Office of State Attorney for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit of Florida. At the time of her appointment she was the Chief Assistant State Attorney in Jackson County for State Attorney Glen Hess.

On May 12, 2017, an Investiture Ceremony was held at the Jackson County Courthouse. Judge Garcia was born in Cali, Colombia. She and her family came to the United States when she was five years old. She became a naturalized citizen while in high school. She and her husband have three children and reside in Jackson County. Her current assignment is in Bay County covering 25% of Bay Domestic Relations Cases, Bay Contested and Non Title IV-D Child Support Cases, 100% Bay Shelter Hearings, and Bay County Dependency, Truancy and Infant Court proceedings.

Circuit Judge Jeff Goodman is a graduate of Florida State College of Law. He began his legal career with Balch & Bingham, LLP. He also worked for the Denver Broncos organization as the team’s Assistant General Manager. At the time of his appointment he was operating his own private practice based in Washington County where he represented numerous governmental entities, including Washington County, Holmes County, Washington County School District, Holmes County School District and Chipola College. He also served as an Assistant State Attorney for the Office of State Attorney for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit of Florida.

An Investiture Ceremony was held for Judge Goodman on September 8, 2017 at the Washington County Courthouse. He, his wife, and three children reside in Holmes County. His current assignment covers 100% of Circuit proceedings in Gulf County as well as 25% of all Bay County Domestic Relations cases.

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To get to this point, candidates have submitted an Application for Naturalization; the application has been approved; and they have also passed their U.S. Citizenship interview. Then they must recite the oath that will allow them to become a fully naturalized U.S. Citizen, making these ceremonies a truly momentous occasion. Once the Oath of Allegiance has been taken, candidates receive a Certificate of Naturalization that they can use to apply for a U.S. passport, register to vote in national, state, and local elections, and update their social security records.

During the ceremony following the Oath of Allegiance, the Pledge of Allegiance is performed, the National Anthem is sung, and a small U.S. flag is presented to each of the newly naturalized citizens along with two large flags that are given out – one to the youngest and one to the oldest of the newly naturalized citizens. Guest speakers also take turns speaking to and encouraging the new U.S. Citizens. Past ceremonies have enjoyed guest speakers such as Congressman Neal Dunn and Representative Jay Trumbull.

The United States has a long history of welcoming immigrants from all parts of the world. During the last decade, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) welcomed more than 6.6 million naturalized citizens into the fabric of our nation. Each year, USCIS welcomes approximately 680,000 citizens during naturalization ceremonies across the United States and around the world.

To learn more about the naturalization process, naturalization statistics, or to read the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance, please visit the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov.

**NATURALIZATION CEREMONIES HOSTED BY THE BAY COUNTY COURTHOUSE**

Each month since May, 2017 the Bay County Courthouse has hosted the naturalization ceremonies held by the United States District Court for the Northern District of Florida. These ceremonies are the process by which U.S. citizenship is conferred upon a foreign citizen after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress.

The ceremonies are presided over by The Honorable Elizabeth M. Timothy, Chief United States Magistrate Judge (pictured left with Chief Judge Elijah Smiley). The ceremonies are held in the County Courtroom of the Bay County Courthouse and typically last for one hour. The ceremonies are open to the public, and friends and family of the candidates are invited into the courtroom to witness the candidates swear the Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America. Until the Oath of Allegiance is recited at a naturalization ceremony, candidates are not yet a naturalized U.S. citizen.

“Until the Oath of Allegiance is recited at a naturalization ceremony, candidates are not yet a naturalized U.S. Citizen... making these ceremonies a truly momentous occasion.”
The Fourteenth Circuit hosted Law Day Celebration Events on May 4, 2017 in Bay County. The program was held in one of the new courtrooms located in the Circuit Annex of the main courthouse in Panama City.

The Circuit was honored to have Florida Supreme Court Justice C. Alan Lawson participating in the program.

The Circuit’s Larry G. Smith Professionalism Award was presented to this year’s recipient, Attorney Todd C. Brister. This award is presented by the Courts of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit and was established to honor those in the legal community who exemplify and advance professionalism in their field.

The program also recognized Senior Judge Thomas Ellinor for his many years of service to the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit—first as a Bay County Judge and in more recent years as a Senior Judge for the Circuit.

This annual event was well attending by both the Judiciary, members of the local legal community, and staff.
PATTERSON RECEIVES 2017 JUSTICE TEACHING SELECT COMMITTEE AWARD

Judge Christopher N. Patterson was among three honored at the Justice Teaching Awards on June 22, 2017 at the Florida Bar’s Annual Convention and was presented his award by Florida Supreme Court Justice R. Fred Lewis.

The awards honor a teacher, a volunteer, and a judge for their dedication in teaching Florida students about their government and the courts.

Justice Teaching is an effort that was initiated in 2006 by then Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice, R. Fred Lewis.

Frequently, state and national surveys suggest that Americans in general know little about the operation of the American justice system and they do not understand the basic principles underlying our constitutional institutions and structures. Chief Justice Lewis sought to further law-related education in the state of Florida through the Justice Teaching effort by pairing a legal professional with every elementary, middle, and high school in the state of Florida.

The program aims to benefit students by promoting an understanding of Florida’s justice system and our laws, developing critical thinking abilities, problem solving skills, and demonstrating the effective interaction of our courts within the constitutional structure.

Judge Patterson has volunteered his time to civics education since he became a member of The Florida Bar in 1985. First as an attorney, Judge Paterson was an active volunteer instrumental in the Bay County Teen Court and in helping with the Washington County Teen Court. As a judge, he has volunteered his time to train attorneys in the Justice Teaching program and has presided as a courtroom judge and assisted with mock trials. Most recently Judge Patterson was assigned to Roulhac Middle School, in Chipley, Florida, and is active with the youth there.

For a more in depth discussion of the Justice Teaching Initiative, Judge Patterson spoke about the program with Real Florida Magazine back in April 2015. The interview can be viewed on YouTube and highlights the way the program works, the need for volunteers, and the successes of the program. The title of the interview is “Circuit Judge Chris Patterson Discusses Florida’s ‘Justice Teaching Initiative’.

Congratulations to Judge Patterson and thank you for all you do for our educational (and judicial) system!
The Honorable Hentz McClellan retired from the bench on June 30, 2017. Most recently serving the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit as a Circuit Judge in Bay County, he had also served as Chief Judge from July 2007 to June 2015. He is a 1968 graduate of Blountstown High School and earned his law degree in 1976 from Florida State University and began practicing law, sharing an office with Phillip Knight in Blountstown. In 1981, he joined with Frank Baker and David House and became a part-time Assistant State Attorney handling felony criminal and juvenile cases in Calhoun County in 1987. Following high school, McClellan served a tour of duty in Vietnam before returning home to finalize his education. After two decades in private practice, McClellan was named Circuit Judge in 2002 when he ran unopposed. He then presided over cases in all six counties in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit. In 2007, Judge McClellan was elected Chief Judge, becoming the first resident judge of Calhoun County to be elected to this position. He married his wife Barbara in 1974 and they have three daughters, Angie, Missy, and Laurie. Nearing his retirement date Judge McClellan stated that he was looking forward to spending time with family, friends, and especially his grandkids. Judge McClellan’s Judicial Assistant, Mira Phillips, stated of Judge McClellan “He truly stood for all that is right about the judiciary. We wish him all the very best in his retirement.”

Diane Wright retired on August 31, 2017 after serving nearly 25 years in the legal field. Diane most recently served as Judicial Assistant to Bay County Judge Campbell, starting in 2009. However, she also worked for Judge Campbell as his legal assistant from 2005-2008 during his time in private practice.

Denise Hendrix, also retired on August 31, 2017 after many years in the legal field. Denise worked for Judge Sirmons as his Judicial Assistant until his retirement in late 2010, then continued as Judge Patterson’s Judicial Assistant after he was elected in May 2010 and was officially sworn in to office in January 2011.

Myra Paxton, County Judges’ Receptionist in Bay County, retired on May 18, 2017. She worked with the Bay County Judges and Judicial Assistants beginning in 1997. Their offices all agreed that Myra “always had a smile, and something funny to say. She made our workplace a pleasant place to spend the day.” We wish her the very best and a happy retirement.

Sue Ann Murray, Mediation Services Coordinator for the Circuit ADR Program, retired on May 31, 2017. Sue Ann began her work as a Mediation Services Coordinator in January of 2005. Prior to this she worked as a school administrator, a volunteer civil mediator, and worked in the Guardian Ad Litem Program. Carol Dunaway, ADR Director, added that “Sue Ann was a dedicated employee who believed and supported the mediation process. Her expertise will be greatly missed.”
FLORIDA SUPREME COURT DEPENDENCY MEDIATION TRAINING

The Fourteenth Circuit was honored to host a 40 hour training for participants to become certified to conduct dependency mediations. There is only one certified provider for this training in the state—Dr. Gregory Firestone. He traveled from Tampa to provide the course, which took place from May 4th-8th, 2017. Instruction was held in the Judicial Conference Room of the Bay County Courthouse Annex.

Participants included attorneys, mental health providers, and other master's level professionals. Topics included everything from the court process to infant mental health. Local attorneys with the Guardian ad Litem program and Children's Legal Services, as well as representatives from Big Bend Community Based Care were present and spoke to the group. Each participant was given the opportunity to participate in a role-play where they served as the mediator and then were given feedback from a certified mediator.

Fifteen individuals completed the course (with only 5 from outside the local area) and immediately began the mentorship process. Currently three participants have become certified, one is waiting certification, and six are still in the mentoring phase.

A special thanks goes out to Dr. Firestone, Chief Judge Smiley, Robyn Gable, Carol Dunaway, Gary Hagan, Michael Bonnin, Kendyl Sparkman and Big Bend Community Based Care for all they contributed to make this a successful event.