Chief Justice Lewis explained the reason for the program— to better educate the youth of Florida on the inner workings of the American Government, each person’s rights as an American, and how the law applies to each person. Recent studies show that the youth of today are lacking knowledge in the area of civics. Lewis praised the technology in Florida’s schools, but remarked that it “does not teach us how to live together.”

Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis, along with Annette Pitts, executive director of Florida Law Related Education Association Inc., gave demonstrations of different activities that could be used when speaking with a class. To reassure the volunteers, “Each time you do it (give a presentation), it gets easier.”

Upon hearing the program outlined, Judge Fensom knew the Fourteenth Circuit was just the place to set the standard for all the other circuits in the state. Fensom approached Chief Justice Lewis, and the first training was set.

On November 4th over 40 members of the legal community met in Blountstown at the Calhoun County Courthouse to participate in the Chief Justice’s training. In a setting where there are usually two sides, all that came to participate were there for one common goal— to give back to the youth of their community. There were prosecutors side by side with defense attorneys and veteran judges along side newly sworn members of the Bar.

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There’s nothing like a good cause to bring people together. Such was the scene when Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis presented his Justice Teaching Initiative to a vastly varied group of legal professionals from the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit.

Chief Justice Lewis has long been a champion for the youth of Florida. He describes himself as having, “the passion of a Baptist minister and the aggression of a NFL linebacker,” when it comes the children of this state and their education. During the course of his two year administration as Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court, Lewis has the ultimate goal of pairing a judge, lawyer, or other law-related professional with every elementary, middle, and high school in the state to present materials on the Courts of this state and its Constitution.

Chief Justice Lewis laid out his plan to judges and attorneys from around the state this past September in a meeting held in Tampa. In attendance, as a representative of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit, was Circuit Judge James B. Fensom.

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The Fourteenth Judicial Circuit is set to begin presentations this month in many of the 85 schools located in the six county circuit.
The Fourteenth Judicial Circuit is proud to have two new members of the judiciary among its ranks.

On December 29, 2006, Investiture services were conducted at the Bay County Juvenile Justice Courthouse in Panama City, Florida where the Honorable Elijah Smiley was sworn in as the newest circuit judge for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit.

Judge Smiley is a graduate of Florida State University where he obtained undergraduate Bachelor of Science degrees in Government and Accounting. He received his Juris Doctorate from the Florida State College of Law in 1985. In addition, Smiley earned a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of West Florida in Pensacola, Florida.

Prior to being appointed to the Bay County Judgeship in 1995, Judge Smiley served as Managing Attorney for Legal Services of North Florida, Inc., Assistant Public Defender, and operated a private practice law firm in Panama City.

Upon taking office January 2, 2007, Judge Smiley and his judicial assistant, Darlene Cutler, were assigned to one of the circuit judgeships located in Jackson County, where his assignment includes all circuit court civil cases and juvenile delinquency matters.

When Bay County Judge, Elijah Smiley decided to seek a circuit judge position, he also made the decision not to seek reelection to his Bay County judgeship. Local Assistant State’s Attorney Shane Vann sought the position and was elected to a term beginning January 2007.

Vann's Investiture is planned for Thursday, January 18, 2007 at the Bay County Courthouse in Panama City, Florida.

The Circuit and County Judges of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit, along with staff, wish to extend a sincere welcome to both judges, Smiley and Vann, and to their staff.
So often we have heard the old adage that says, “It is better to give than to receive,” but in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, this is often times forgotten, but not here in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit!

All across the circuit, judges and staff alike were opening their hearts (and wallets) to provide for those less fortunate. Whether it’s dropping money in the Salvation Army’s red kettle, donating to the Coats for Kids drive, or sponsoring a needy family, it seemed everyone was in the spirit of giving.

Two of the courthouses in the circuit spearheaded major charitable projects. In Bay County Court Operations Manager, Joel Booth was the contact person for the “Santa is a Senior” project. This drive has been conducted at the Bay County Courthouse for several years. The project is a fundraiser that collects a variety of items for elderly individuals that reside in local nursing homes. The facilities provide a list of wish items from the residents, and staff are asked to donate from these lists. Some of the items requested included clothes, slippers, sugar free candy, cologne, coloring books, and bubble bath.

The “Santa is a Senior” drive was a huge success this year, as in years past. Two very large boxes of donated items were picked up at the beginning of December to prepare for distribution to the local nursing homes in time for Christmas.

Another project aimed at providing holiday cheer to the elderly was a joint effort between staff in the Jackson and Washington County Courthouses. Chief Judge William L. Wright and Washington County Judge Colby Peel collaborated on the idea of bringing cheer to residents of the Washington Rehabilitation and Nursing Center by donating holiday wreaths.

What better way to celebrate the season than to gather together in fellowship and create beautiful decorations to brighten the rooms of the facility which is located in Chipley, Florida. On December 18th around 20 employees and spouses gathered together and had a great time decorating the wreaths. There was friendly competition on who created the most attractive wreath, but the true winners were the residents who received the unexpected gifts the following morning.

On Tuesday, December 19, 2006, Washington County Judge Colby Peel and his Judicial Assistant Lora Fisher delivered the wreaths to the Nursing Center. The excitement was evident. Staff and residents alike were ecstatic as they decked the halls of the facility.

Director of Nursing Terry Brown (sister of Debbie Burch, Judge Wright’s Judicial Assistant) was thrilled with the donation. She said, “there is no better medicine than that of kindness.”

While the holiday season may be over, the season of giving has not ended here in the Fourteenth Circuit. Court Administration Staff in the Jackson County office continue a year-long drive to collect small toiletry items to be given to children who are removed from their homes during an emergency shelter situation. The staff collect donated items such as travel size shampoo, lotion, toothpaste, toothbrushes, hair gel, and other personal hygiene items. The items are gathered into brightly colored canvas drawstring bags and taken to the local Department of Children and Families offices where they are given to the children who are removed from their homes on an emergency basis.

Many times the children leave with nothing; this bag gives them something that is theirs- not something borrowed from someone else. While the travel size items quickly get used, the bag is something that is uniquely theirs. In times of crisis it is important for a child to have something of their own.

Those wishing to donate to this project may contact Robyn Hatcher at 850-718-0026 or Amber Baggett at 850-482-9844 in Court Administration.
On Friday, December 15, 2006, judges and staff gathered together to celebrate the holiday season with a catered luncheon at the Comedy Club Restaurant in Panama City, Florida. Attendees enjoyed fellowship, a wonderful meal, and entertainment by Neysa Wilkins, news anchor for WJHG TV and local singing celebrity.
Birthdays

January
7 Judy Duncan
10 Susan Diltz
11 Fred N. Witten
15 Lora Fisher
21 Amber Baggett

February
4 Robin Owens
5 Laura Jones
18 Sherrie Lee-White
18 William L. Wright
21 Michael C. Overstreet
22 Erica Jackson
23 Randy Jordan
24 Betty Carol Spooner
25 James B. Fensom
27 Sherri Lessig

March
3 Mona Brannon
3 Eletha Cobb
5 Mary Johnson
8 Glenn L. Hess
10 Marie Bazzel
10 Cary Godwin
13 Pam Smitherman
16 Linda Burd
19 Richard Albritton
21 Douglas Williams
25 John D. O'Brien
26 Woodrow W. Hatcher
30 Michael J. Hauversburk
31 Dedee S. Costello
31 Robyn Hatcher

Holidays for the Quarter

New Year's Day
Monday, January 1, 2007

Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday
Monday, January 15, 2007