

# Benchmarks

## Newsletter for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit

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### Passing Thoughts



**Contributed by  
William L. Wright,  
Chief Judge**

The time is finally here... I can barely imagine that I am now the chief judge of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit of Florida. Circuit

Judge Judy M. Pittman did a great job serving as our chief judge for the past eight years. Eight years... Almost half of our current judges have never served under any other chief judge.

Has anyone else noticed how happy Judge Pittman looks since the chief judge election? She can't seem to get that smile off her face. I hope that I can do as good a job as she did. I have some very big shoes to fill... high heels at that!

I know everyone has concerns anytime there is change. What will the new chief judge do differently? What things will he change? I intend to move slowly into this new position. If changes need to be made, I will make them after adequate review. I do adhere to the old saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it".

I am also aware that I am the first chief judge based outside of Bay County in a long time. I will strive to serve all counties of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit, not just the small rural counties. Although, I am considering making the first day of hunting season one of our legal holidays - not!

My judicial assistant, Debbie, and I are both very excited about our new assignments. We also appreciate everyone's confidence in us and we ask for your continued support. Thank you all.

### From the Personnel Desk

Contributed by Larry Lyons  
Administrative Services Manager

Over the next few months Management Advisory Group, a consultant firm contracted by the Trial Court Budget Committee, will be conducting a Compensation and Classification Study for the Florida State Courts System. To facilitate this study, they will be asking all State Court employees to complete an on-line job questionnaire; the questionnaire is detailed and should take approximately two hours to complete.

The firm will post an orientation guide to assist you in responding to the questions. It is extremely important the questionnaire be completed in a timely manner; it does not have to be completed in one setting, it can be accessed in several settings. In addition to the questionnaire, the consultants will also visit the circuits to collect data for use in the study. The report from the Compensation and Classification Study will be submitted to the Florida State Legislature. It will be used to identify and address any inequities in court employees' compensation.

We encourage all court employees to support and assist Management Advisory Group in completing this project.

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## Change is in the Air!

Contributed by  
Jennifer D. Wells  
Trial Court  
Administrator



Whew! We survived another legislative session! This year, the Trial Court Budget Commission worked hard to maintain the State Courts System budget and ensure that we did not suffer any cuts. That alone is quite a feat! In addition, the Trial Court Budget Commission, with the support of the Office of the State Courts Administrator, passed what we have dubbed, the "Son of the Glitch" bill which addresses several areas of the Article V/Revision 7 law which needed further adjusting. One of the most crucial areas dealt with the relation between the Chief Judge and the Clerks of Court.

While we enjoy a very amicable relationship with our six Clerks of Court, such is not the case in a few of the circuits in the state. Therefore, legislation was needed to provide the authority to the Chief Judge to set the priorities of the court as to what functions should be covered by the Clerk's Office. This is particularly important during financially tight times when the Clerk's Office may have to scale back operations. With this new language, the Clerk will have to confer with the Chief Judge as to what operations are to continue, rather than making a unilateral decision as to what functions will be dropped from servicing the court.

Of course, we are all excited about the prospects of two new judges coming to our circuit. On November 1, 2005, we hope to have a new Bay County Judge appointed by Governor Bush. Then, on January 2, 2006, a new circuit judge should come on board. This circuit has been certified by the Supreme Court of Florida for the past three years for each of these judgeships. Therefore, it is nice to finally see these resources come our way.

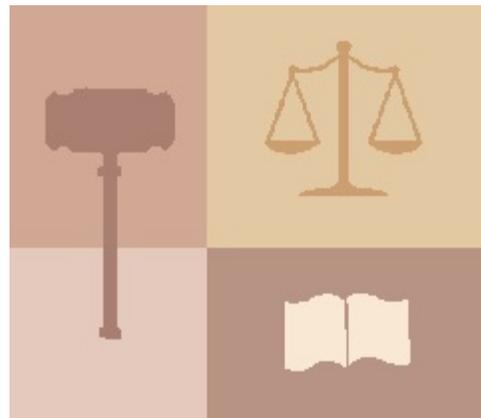
In order to prepare for these judges, changes will be occurring to the Bay County Courthouse. Beginning in October, renovations to the second floor will begin on a new county judge chambers and staff offices. During this same time, renovations to the third floor will begin to provide for office space for those who have been placed in various cubby holes. Finally, in January, work will commence on the Jury Assembly Room to remove the pole that causes line of sight issues. Hopefully, if all goes well, the renovations will be completed sometime around the end of March

(Keep in mind, this is a best case scenario!).

Big changes are also occurring in the area of court reporting. Effective July 1, 2005, the State Court System will no longer provide deposition services for the State Attorney, Public Defender, or court appointed attorneys. Our circuit, for example, provided this service last year to these groups as part of our "shared-employee model". However, we now will concentrate on court proceedings and appellate transcripts only.

Another big change related to court reporting will be happening throughout our circuit over the next several months. With end of the year state funds, we purchased digital court recording equipment to install in each and every courtroom throughout our circuit. Court Smart systems will be installed in 15 court rooms and will replace ailing analog tape systems which have been repeatedly failing, breaking, or providing sub-standard recordings for our in-court proceedings. The new technology will provide superior coverage for many of our low transcript proceedings and allow our stenographers to concentrate on those proceedings which typically result in a higher incident of transcripts. See the related article on this new development on page 3.

I am sad to leave the comfort of working beside Judge Pittman as Chief Judge. At the same time, I am excited about working with Judge Wright as our incoming Chief Judge. Change can be a daunting challenge but one which makes us grow and develop into a more complete professional. I hope that I can rise to the challenge and continue to serve the circuit admirably. Changes are definitely in the air!



## Spotlight on Our Circuit



Governor Jeb Bush and Chief Justice Barbara Pariente congratulate a drug court graduate.

Photo courtesy of Mr. Terry Barner, The News Herald.

### Bay and Jackson County Drug Courts Host Statewide Graduation

Contributed by Linda Burd  
Drug Court Manager

In recognition of National Drug Court Month, The Bay and Jackson County Drug Courts of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit hosted this year's statewide drug court graduation on May 12, 2005.

The ceremony took place at the Juvenile Justice Courthouse located in Panama City, Florida. Chief Judge Judy M. Pittman, Chief Judge Elect William L. Wright, and former Chief Judge Don T. Sirmons hosted this year's graduation ceremony, which was broadcast live through the Court's video-conferencing network to 23 other graduating drug courts in Florida. To show statewide support of drug courts, Governor Jeb Bush, Chief Justice Barbara Pariente, and Justice Peggy Quince of the Florida Supreme Court and James McDonough, Director of the Florida Office of Drug Control addressed the graduates at the ceremony.

National Drug Court Month is celebrated nationwide to increase awareness in the community of the existence and success of drug courts. Florida was the pioneer in the

development of treatment-based drug courts starting in 1989 with the first program in Miami-Dade County. The goal of drug court is to rehabilitate drug offenders with addiction problems, prevent recidivism and reunite families. In contrast, to the traditional "revolving door" approach, drug courts provide an effective solution to drug and drug-related crime.

There are currently 88 operational drug courts in Florida and 15 in the planning stages. Bay County Drug Court has been providing treatment for adults and juveniles since 1997. Jackson County Drug Court has been in operation since 2002 and provides treatment for all of the rural counties in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit.

During the ceremony, over 200 graduates statewide were recognized for completing a rigorous treatment program. Governor Bush, Chief Justice Pariente, and Justice Quince assisted Judge Wright and Judge Sirmons in presenting bricks to Bay and Jackson County Drug Court graduates. "The Brick" symbolizes a solid foundation for their future.

### Technological Advances in Our Circuit

Contributed by Gary Hagan  
Court Technology Officer

The 14<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit recently accomplished the task of creating a circuit wide area network (WAN) with the addition of T1 lines in Holmes and Washington counties. Now every courthouse and county jail within the circuit has the capability of sharing resources, video conferencing, and high speed internet access.

Another new advance in the way of technology includes the availability of the Judicial Inquiry System (JIS). Users in our circuit are in the process of being trained on the system. The system was developed to streamline information from a variety of Florida agencies into a single, central dashboard accessible by judges and other related personnel.

Also, the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit has recently contracted with CourtSmart Digital Systems Inc. to provide digital recording systems for each of the circuit's courtrooms. Once all systems are complete, there will be a total of 15 courtrooms being digitally recorded and remotely monitored. All, in all, the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit has made great strides in technology.

# Emergency Preparedness For the Fourteenth Circuit

Contributed by Joel Booth  
Court Operations Manager

## Let's Get Ready to Rumble

I recently visited our colleagues in Pensacola to get feedback from them on emergency preparedness. My visit was very productive and extremely humbling! The M.C. Blanchard Judicial Building incurred severe damage from Hurricane Ivan last September, and they are still recovering. Several judges' chambers were totally destroyed and they have been forced to temporarily operate out of trailers until their reconstruction is complete (Reconstruction is now underway).



Damage to the Pensacola area following Hurricane Ivan.

The First Judicial Circuit was forced to implement their Continuity of Operations Plan and perform mission essential functions at alternative sites while crews worked feverishly to make emergency repairs to their damaged courthouse. This scenario could have easily played out in our circuit if Hurricane Ivan would have veered just 70 miles to the east; we have to be ready for that actuality in the event that we are not so lucky in the future!

I encourage each of you to establish a family disaster plan and disaster supply kit, which can be downloaded from the State Emergency Response Team's website at [www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org). Additionally, please take the time to contact Court Administration to update your emergency contact list. We are encouraging people to leave numbers of relatives or loved ones that you will maintain contact with in the event that you have to evacuate. We are also pleased to announce that the 14<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit web page now has a link that can be accessed, which will provide up-to-date information regarding any storms that may be affecting the area.

Tropical Storms Arlene and Cindy, as well as Hurricane Dennis, remind us all that the 2005 Hurricane Season could be another wild one! It is important that we all stay alert and take a proactive stance as we batten down the hatches and prepare to weather another hurricane season on the Sunshine State! If you have any questions regarding emergency preparedness, please feel free to contact me at 850-747-5300; if I do not know the answer to your question, I will track it down and get back with you!

## Mark Your Calendars



## Hurricane Season

June 1<sup>st</sup> – November 30<sup>th</sup>

Below is a list of items to have in your Disaster Supply kit:

- Water – at least 1 gallon per person for 3 to 7 days
- Food – non-perishables, non-electric can opener, cooking tools and fuel
- Blankets/pillows/etc.
- Clothing – seasonal, rain gear, sturdy shoes
- First Aid Kits/Medicines/Prescriptions
- Special Items – for infants and elderly
- Toiletries / Moisture wipes
- Flashlight/Batteries
- Radio – battery operated and NOAA weather radio
- Cash – banks and ATMs may not be available
- Keys
- Toys/Books/Games
- Important Documents – in waterproof container
- Tools
- Vehicle fuel tanks filled
- Pet Care Items



## Holidays for the Quarter



## Birthdays

### July

01 Brenda Johnson  
03 Susan Diltz  
04 Judy Reese  
11 Suzanne Cox  
16 Diane Pate  
18 Cheryl Hammond  
21 Joel Booth

### August

02 Terri Wengert  
04 Don T. Simons  
06 David C. Johnson  
10 Frances Hall  
11 Colby Peel  
14 Sue Stanley  
16 Peggy Black  
18 Denise Hendrix  
19 Debbie Burch  
20 Thomas F. Welch  
21 Stacey Goodson  
24 Jane Sherrill  
27 Patricia Moore

### September

01 Kevin Grover  
11 Hentz McClellan  
21 Carol Hoots  
24 Kimberly Gibson  
29 Beverly McAllister  
30 Angie Johnston

July 04, 2005

Independence Day

September 05, 2005

Labor Day

**CHIEF JUDGE: HON. WILLIAM L. WRIGHT**  
**COURT ADMINISTRATOR: JENNIFER DYER WELLS**

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