

# Benchmarks

**Newsletter for the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit**

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## Class Is In Session

Chief Judge and Administration Staff attend Course



Chief Judge William L. Wright, along with Trial Court Administrator Jennifer Dyer Wells and Court Operations Consultant Robyn Hatcher, recently attended classes at the National Judicial College located on the University of Nevada's Reno Campus in Reno, Nevada.

Since 1963, the National Judicial College (NJC) has awarded more than 70,000 professional judicial education certificates. With courses held onsite, across the nation and around the world, the college offers an average of 90 courses annually with more than 2,700 judges enrolling from all 50 states, United States territories, and more than 150 foreign countries.

The group from the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit participated in the NJC course titled, "Court Management for Judges and Court Administrators," which was held August 29, 2005 through September 01, 2005. Seminar attendees included judges and administration staff from eight different states, ranging from Washington state to north Florida.

The course offered a hands-on, team approach to judges and court administrators for managing the courts today. Judges and administrators were encouraged to attend as teams, as the focus was on the "team" concept. While at the conference, members of the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit's team worked to develop an administrative plan for the circuit.

Individual sessions focused on such topics as how preferences enhance and inhibit working relationships, managing human resources, considerations for problem solving courts, cultural competency in the workplace, and budgeting in the new millennium.



Pictured left to right: Jennifer Wells, Trial Court Administrator, Chief Judge William L. Wright, and Robyn Hatcher, Court Operations Consultant.

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## Talking and Technology – the Team Approach

Contributed by Jennifer Dyer Wells  
Trial Court Administrator

Technology can be very exciting and useful. I would be lost without it when I need to send emails to staff in Jackson County or send a reminder email to multiple individuals. There are times, though, when it can create an obstacle to getting things done. Joel Booth, Court Operations Manager, made a comment at a managers' meeting when the topic of communication came up that we often forget about some "technologies" that we have always had – our ability to talk to one another. He stressed the need to improve our communication among ourselves and with our customers -- the judges, judicial assistants, citizens, and other employees of other entities such as the Clerk's and Sheriff's Offices. Joel said that he thought that we sometimes rely too much on the latest technology – that we send an email when the person we need to talk to is "just next door." Or, we send an email to avoid talking to the person we need to truly have a heart-to-heart conversation. Email becomes our shield, and it keeps us from making positive relationships.

For example, I asked Darlene Barker, the newest addition to the Court Administration staff who joined us in August as the Senior Secretary, to work on an Access database for the Indigent Services Committee. The need for such a database was paramount and the funding was nil. She had experience with this program and went to work. She talked with Erica Jackson, who was in the previous position, and helped maintained the simple "table" I had set up to understand the relationships of the data found in the table. She then got stuck. I had asked for a fairly complex formula to be conjured up with this program and she struggled with it. I then remembered Wendy Schlesinger, our Program Assistant in Jackson County, had just finished an Access database for Washington County's Misdemeanor Probation Office. Darlene and Wendy began talking – some by email and some by phone, trouble shooting the problem. Then, Wendy was down in Panama City last week and she and Darlene met face-to-face. Their relationship is now established because they are working as a team, using their strengths together to solve the problem. The wonderful thing is they used technology – email, phone, and their brains to communicate. We can do amazing things when we work together!

Technology is great, but our ability to build relationships and communicate can be even more powerful. It is so important that Court Administration continually strives to build positive RELATIONSHIPS with the people we serve. To do so, email works when we need to send out a message to the masses or a quick reminder. To really develop our working relationship with each other, however,

I agree with Joel. Put down the mouse, get up and go talk. Call a meeting – brainstorm – share resources. So much more can get accomplished from the team approach.

## From the Personnel Desk

Contributed by Larry Lyons  
Administrative Services Manager

The 2006 Open Enrollment for the State Group Insurance Program 2006 Plan Year began at 7:30 AM, October 03, 2005 and continues through 4:30 PM (central time), October 28, 2005. It is strongly recommended that everyone complete their election, changes, or cancellation of benefits prior to October 28<sup>th</sup>.

For those wishing to use the online enrollment system to enroll in, make changes to, or cancel their benefits election, the People First website can be accessed from the link located on our website [www.jud14.flcourts.org](http://www.jud14.flcourts.org), under Human Resources. You will need your employee ID number and a password to access the People First system. If you had a password and have forgotten it, please contact their Customer Service Center at 1-866-663-4735 and a representative will assist you. If you have never accessed the system and would like to do so, please contact me.



Larry Lyons, Administrative Services Manager giving a presentation at a recent benefits fair in the Jackson County Courthouse.

For those choosing to use paper enrollment forms, these forms may be downloaded from the People First website, requested from their Customer Service Center, or obtained from Court Administration.

Paper enrollment forms may be submitted by facsimile (904) 828-6092 or mail to People First Service Center. Should you choose to submit completed enrollment forms through Court Administration, do so in sufficient time to ensure we meet the deadlines. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 850-747-5338 on benefits issues.

# Spotlight on Our Circuit

Contributed by Robyn Hatcher, Court Operations Consultant



## Jackson County Citizens Group Aims to Redesign Courthouse Facade

Over the past few years, Jackson County has undertaken the monumental task of renovating and updating the Jackson County Courthouse located in Marianna. Like many older courthouses, the present facility was never designed to address future needs such as security, space, technology, and ADA. Jackson County has been fortunate to receive some grant-in-aid monies from the Legislature to help offset the enormous expense to help meet these needs.

For the past couple of years, there have been local citizens who have taken those efforts a step forward and proposed to the Board of County Commissioners the idea of totally redesigning the facade. The project took on shape when the Board appointed an ad-hoc committee, comprised of business and community leaders, to determine the feasibility of such a project.



Alterations to the Jackson County Courthouse  
Marianna, Florida  
WAID PARRISH & ASSOCIATES  
ARCHITECTURAL FIRM

Proposed alterations to the outer facade of the Jackson County Courthouse.

Since that initial meeting, the committee members have volunteered numerous hours in meeting with the architect to design a building that addressed issues such as space, security, and ADA. In June 2005, the design was presented to the Board of County Commissioners and was approved. The Board also gave the committee permission to work with a local non-profit to raise money to help bring the \$4.6 million project to fruition.

Among the many benefits, the new design will add approximately 9,000 square feet of needed space. In addition, the proposed scheme would enclose all of the offices so that the only public access is via the front entrance. Currently, there are several offices, including the County Judge, that have exterior entrances for the public to use. While some security features have been added to these offices, security would be greatly enhanced with the new design. The proposed redesign would also help establish the courthouse as an emergency shelter.

In addition to community support of the redesign project, the County will continue to seek funding from the Legislature. The grant-in-aid funds have been instrumental in helping to make the courthouse a more functional, secure, and safer building, and it is hoped that additional funding will help successfully address the needs of today as well as the future.

## Key Elements of the Court Judicial Assistants



Judicial Assistants play a vital role in the day to day operations of the court system; therefore, they have been appropriately identified as a key element of the court system. Currently the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit has 17 Judicial Assistants serving as personal staff to the circuit or county judges they were hired to assist. In the coming months two new JA's will be coming on board with the addition of a circuit and county judge for the Fourteenth Circuit.

The role of a judicial assistant is very complex. They act as a liaison to assist and inform litigants, attorneys, law enforcement personnel, witnesses and the general public concerning court procedure and policy. JA's act as a front line employee; they are the first contact with the court system, and in many instances resolve issues thereby ensuring the timely flow of the Court's schedule.

The reach of a judicial assistant's network extends far beyond the office he or she occupies into a state network organized by the Judicial Assistant's Association of Florida. This association has bi-annual conferences where JA's from around the state attend and are given the most up-to-date information to aid them in their positions. Recently, Patricia Moore, judicial assistant to 14th Judicial Circuit Judge Dedee S. Costello, attended the Summer Conference held in Key West, Florida. Topics of discussion included the Jimmy Ryce and Jessica Lunsford Acts, Lexis Nexis access, travel vouchers, safety and self defense. Ms. Moore reports the conference was very informative and became exciting with the untimely arrival of Hurricane Katrina!



## Holidays for the Quarter



## Birthdays

### October

02 Judy M. Pittman  
22 Rebecca Akins  
29 Lisa Edenfield

### November

06 Elijah Smiley  
21 Deborah Trew  
22 Allen Register

### December

05 Susan Rabon  
06 Debbie Crayton  
10 Jerry Riddle  
12 Jason Guettler  
16 Trish Riemer  
17 Owen N. Powell  
19 Carol Dunaway  
28 Brantley Clark  
29 Wendy Schlesinger

October 13, 2005

Yom Kippur

November 11, 2005

Veteran's Day

November 24 & 25, 2005

Thanksgiving

December 23 & 26, 2005

Christmas

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

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