



Circuit Courier

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NEWS BULLETIN OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

Leonard Hanser Appointed to County Court

Legislative Delegation

Bench/Bar Conference

And more...



On the Cover: Main Judicial Center, WPB

Photo by: Mary McLean

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SARA ALIJEWICZ SELECTED AS NEW MAGISTRATE

Chief Judge Peter D. Blanc is pleased to announce that the selection committee for the Magistrate position has chosen **Sara Alijewicz** for the vacancy created by Leonard Hanser's elevation to the county court bench.

Ms. Alijewicz began her duties in the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit on March 22, 2010. She is assigned as one of the Family Magistrates in North County, in the division previously handled by Magistrate Judette Fanelli.



Sara Alijewicz

Ms. Alijewicz, a graduate of Nova Southeastern Law School, was admitted to the Florida Bar in 1995. She has spent the majority of her career with the Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, where she most recently held the position of Supervising Attorney.

She brings to the Magistrate's role extensive experience in Family, Juvenile and Probate/Guardianship.

The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit extends a warm welcome to Ms. Alijewicz and wishes her a successful and rewarding tenure.

Magistrate reassignment:

Magistrate Fanelli will assume responsibility for judicial reviews in the Juvenile Division in the Main Courthouse.

LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION

The Fifteenth Circuit welcomed **State Representatives Joseph Abruzzo, Carl Domino, Maria Sachs and Mark Pafford** and their staff members, who visited the Central Courthouse on February 23, 2010, for the Circuit's annual Legislative Delegation.

The Legislative Delegation is a unique opportunity for legislators to visit the Circuit, to view daily court operations, discuss proposed legislation and hear from the judiciary on current priorities and areas of concern for the justice system.

The half-day event began at the Gun Club Criminal Justice complex with an early morning welcoming address and opening remarks from **Chief Judge Peter Blanc** and **Judge Krista Marx**. The delegates then observed first appearance proceedings in Judge Marx's courtroom.

After travelling to the main judicial center they had an opportunity to witness the courts at work, as they observed domestic violence injunction hearings before **Judge Sheree Cunningham**, foreclosure hearings conducted by **Judge Meenu Sasser** and juvenile delinquency court in front of **Judge Ronald Alvarez**.

The group then met with several judges and court staff for a question and answer session. **Chief Judge Peter Blanc** gave a presentation on issues and legislation affecting the courts. The following judges were present at this session: **Judge Catherine Brunson, Judge Jeffrey Colbath, Judge Sheree Cunningham, Judge Edward Garrison, Judge Kathleen Kroll, Judge Diana Lewis and Judge Meenu Sasser**.



L-R: Jamie Titcomb, Executive Director of the PB County League of Cities, Representative Joseph Abruzzo, Meredith Long, Judge Sheree Cunningham, Judge Peter Blanc, Representative Maria Sachs, Ed Chase, PBC Legislative Delegation, Pamela Whitmore, Becca Williams and Melissa Williams.

2010 BENCH/BAR CONFERENCE

The 2010 Bench/Bar conference was held on Friday, February 19, 2010, at the Palm Beach County Convention Center. Sponsored by the Palm Beach County Bar Association, this event provides a valuable opportunity for the judiciary, attorneys, judicial assistants and paralegals to meet and discuss topics applicable to several practice subject areas.

The morning program included a session for the young lawyer entitled "Making a Good Name for Yourself as a Lawyer," moderated by **Chief Judge Peter Blanc** and **Administrative Circuit Criminal Judge Edward Garrison**.

Meanwhile, more than 250 paralegals and legal assistants attended interactive break-out sessions intended to provide instruction on Court procedures. With the help of the judicial assistants, **Maria Giuliano**, UFC Operations Manager and **Cristy Altaro**, Juvenile Alternative Sanctions Coordinator facilitated the basic and intermediate family/juvenile sessions, **Amy Borman**, General Counsel, facilitated the basic civil and intermediate civil breakout sessions and **Michelle Spangenberg**, Criminal Court Operations Manager and **Mary Quinlan**, Mental Health Court Operations Manager facilitated the criminal presentation. Ms. Quinlan also presented a section for the probate/guardianship paralegals and assistants.



I-r: Judicial assistants Lori Noel, Rita Sinofsky, Jennifer Drewery, Stephanie Lee, Harriet Merlin and Devon Mugridge.



I-r: Amy Borman and judicial assistant Carol Hall



I-r: Mary Quinlan, Michelle Spangenberg and Paula Carvajal.



I-r: Maria Giuliano and Cristy Altaro

BENCH/BAR CONFERENCE: CONT.

During the lunch break, attendees were addressed by several speakers and annual awards were presented for pro bono service and leadership in the County's Bar association activities.

Chief Judge Peter Blanc presented the "State of the Court" address, recapping recent judicial appointments and the current budgetary challenges faced by the courts system. Ongoing challenges for the Circuit include the unprecedented volume of foreclosure cases. Chief Judge Blanc believes that timely processing of such cases is critical to a sustainable recovery in the local economy.

The afternoon sessions, attended by over 500 lawyers and over 70 judges and magistrates, included break out sessions in Family Law, a legislative update by **Magistrate Diane Kirigin**, and workshops focusing on Civil Law, Personal Injury and Commercial Litigation, Criminal Law, Worker's Compensation, Appellate Practice and Federal Practice.

In addition to meeting each other, attendees had the opportunity to view vendor booths displaying innovative products and services for the legal community.



Chief Judge Peter Blanc and Palm Beach County Bar President Michelle Suskauer



l-r: Scott Hawkins and Judges Leonard Hanser and Jack Cook



l-r: Judges Joseph Marx and Jeffrey Colbath



l-r: Judge Frank Castor, Judge Charles Burton and Sara Jones

CRIMINAL COURT

The Administrative Office of the Court was successful in obtaining grant funding through federal stimulus dollars, and by a vote of the Criminal Justice Commission to release the dollars, to fund two important positions: Court Analyst and County Criminal Case Manager.

David Simmons is the Court Analyst. Mr. Simmons has a law degree from the University of Dayton in Ohio. David brings to this position his varied experience with the court system: he was a Public Defender in the Nineteen Judicial Circuit; a law clerk in Ohio—including at the appellate level; and most recently worked in Broward County in probate law.

Mr. Simmons began working for the Fifteenth judicial Circuit on December 28, 2009. Since joining Court Administration, he has been working with the judiciary to gather information and data with regards to improving the efficiency of our system. This includes data relating to judicial caseloads, trial data and juror information.

For projects relating to data retrieval please contact Michelle Spangenberg at (561) 355-6396.



David Simmons

Stewart Saalfeld is the County Criminal Case Manager. Mr. Saalfeld has a bachelor's degree from Wesleyan University in Ohio. He majored in both political science and philosophy.

As County Criminal Case Manager, Mr. Saalfeld is facilitating the resolution of cases that are beyond the Supreme Court Time Standards for case disposition.

Thus far, approximately 150 cases have been closed due to Mr. Saalfeld's efforts. In addition, Mr. Saalfeld is monitoring the misdemeanor violation of probation hearings at Gun Club and the failures to appear.



Stewart Saalfeld

For further information about the criminal court program, please contact Michelle Spangenberg at (561) 355-6396 .

The Administrative Office of the Court would like to thank the **Criminal Justice Commission** for their assistance in obtaining the funding for these positions.

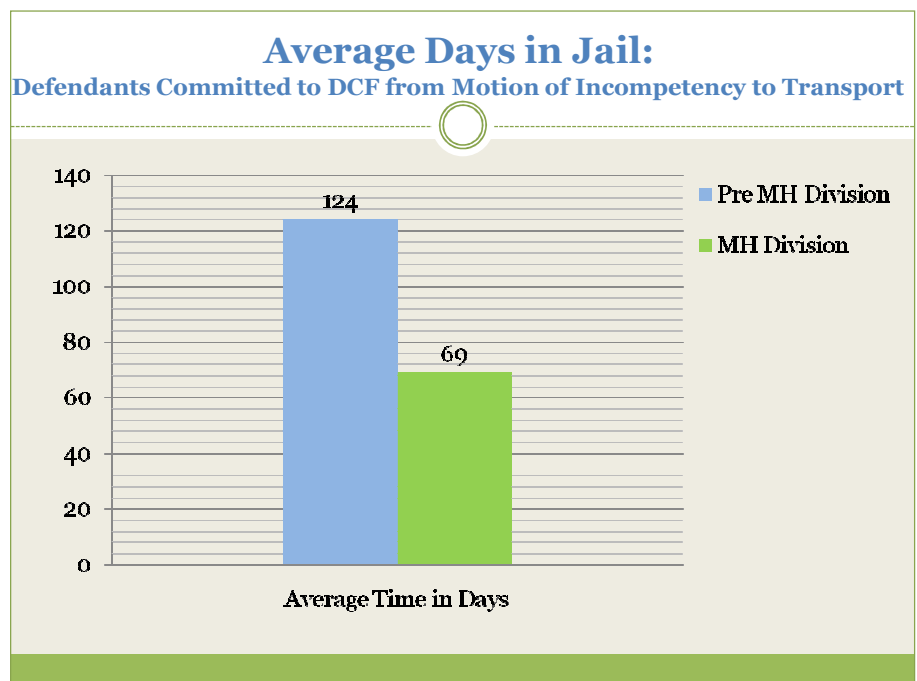
MENTAL HEALTH COURT

Since the commencement of the Mental Health Specialty Division on January 20, 2009, nearly 200 cases have been temporarily reassigned to Judge Krista Marx in order to expedite the process for defendants with “Competency to Proceed” issues. Throughout the past year, the Mental Health Specialty Division Team has worked diligently with the Judiciary, and all parties involved in implementing more efficient procedures to better serve defendants with mental illness.

To qualify for the division, the defendant must be charged with a felony and it must be the first time the issue of competency is being raised. The case is then temporarily reassigned to the specialty division until the determination of competency has been made. If the defendant is found competent, the case returns to the original division.

This effective collaboration among Court Administration, the State Attorney’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office, Court Psychology, contracted Expert Witnesses, the Clerk and Comptroller, and PBSO has allowed for cases in the specialty division to be resolved in about half the time as cases processed through traditional methods. Prior to the implementation of the Mental Health Specialty Division cases took on average 123 days to be processed from the time a competency motion is filed to the time competency is determined. As the data reflects, cases processed in the Mental Health Specialty Division on average took 67 days for a determination of competency.

The human cost savings are significant in that incompetent defendants are receiving treatment approximately two months earlier in the specialty division. Statistics also show that prior to the specialty division, 68% of defendants with competency cases were determined “Incompetent to Proceed” in comparison to 47% of defendants in the specialty division. Finally, on average, defendants stayed in jail 55 days longer in other divisions compared to the specialty division; thus resulting in a cost savings of approximately \$6875 per defendant housed in the jail.



As with all new programs, the Mental Health Specialty Division is still a work in progress and will continue to fine tune procedures to achieve even more successful numbers.

If you have any questions regarding the Mental Health Specialty Division, please contact Mary Quinlan, Mental Health Operations Manager, at 355-1925.

CASE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

Cristy Altaro and **Michelle Spangenberg** were successful in obtaining a grant to host a state-wide Case Management Conference in partnership with the Office of the State Courts Administrator's (OSCA) Office of Court Improvement. Through this grant opportunity, Chris Crawford, a nationally-recognized consultant, was brought in to lead the conference: "The Fundamentals of Caseflow Management."

The event was held February 16-17, 2010, in Orlando. Court personnel from throughout the State gathered to discuss topics including: defining case flow and differentiated case management, analyzing the effectiveness of a court's case processing in various case types, examining the importance of the fundamentals of caseflow management, as well as strategizing to create and begin implementing a caseflow management program.

Cristy Altaro facilitated a two-day workgroup tasked with activities relating to Drug Court, including: mapping out the case flow process and identifying points of entry, classifying and prioritizing obstacles in Drug Court, as well as creating strategies to address the obstacles .

Michelle Spangenberg facilitated a two-day workgroup tasked with identifying simple factors, complex factors, and how to establish a differentiated case management system relating to Unified Family Court case types.

The Fifteenth Circuit was well-represented at the conference. The following individuals attended the two-day event; **Paula Carvajal, Michelle Diaz, Eddy Dionne, Ruth Ann Kravitz, Laura Lavoie, Eric Levande, Jacquie Marshburn, Marcela Millett, Lisset Pino, Stewart Saalfeld, Kathy Sanchez, David Simmons, and Connie Thomas.**

A number of Court Administration staff actively participated by presenting their workgroup activities to all participants. The feedback was positive and the attendees reported a desire for future case management conferences.



Michelle Spangenberg and Cristy Altaro



David Simmons



Marcela Millett



Eric Levande



Jacquie Marshburn

DRUG COURT

The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit Palm Beach County Drug Court, led by Circuit **Judge Krista Marx**, currently has 999 graduates since its inception, and is proudly anticipating the milestone of **1,000** total graduates to be achieved at the next graduation ceremony which is scheduled for April 19, 2010 at 1:30 p.m. in Courtroom 2 of the Criminal Justice Complex.

Drug Court has recently implemented an addition to the “Drug Education” phase. First time offenders may now be eligible to complete Drug Court after six months if all conditions have been met and there have been no positive or missed drug tests. This allows the program to utilize its limited funding on participants who require more treatment.

Drug Court's Co-occurring Track, which in November 2009 began admitting participants with mental health disorders as well as substance abuse issues, has thus far identified 24 participants in need of expanded services and they are responding well to this unified system of care. The additional mental health component will increase the success rate of these participants, since it has been identified that individuals with co-occurring disorders fail to complete Drug Court at almost four times the rate of participants without identified mental illness. The Drug Court Team is very happy to be able to address this need.

For more information about the Drug Court program please contact Dorrie Tyng at (561) 688-4493

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

On Friday, February 12, 2010, **Rebecca Storow**, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Director and **Nathalie Gendron**, Mediation Services Coordinator, offered a 2-hour training on *Consumer Credit and Lending Issues in Mediation*. This training provided 2.0 continuing mediation education (CME) hours in county and family certifications to volunteer, family, and staff mediators.

To assist with this presentation, the ADR Office invited three guest speakers, who provided a wide perspective on these newsworthy subjects. The presentation by **Mr. Mark Brodi**, President of Resolve Financial, Inc. and radio host of “Debt-Free” on WEXY-AM 1520 Fort Lauderdale, represented the consumer-side of credit lending. **Ms. Diane Sands, Esq.** and **Mr. Lawrence “Larry” Taube, Esq.** offered a compelling viewpoint from the perspective of the banks and their attorneys.



Pro bono, contract, and staff mediators listen to Mr. Larry Taube's interesting historical perspective on banks' lending.

TRIAL COURT LAW CLERKS

On February 4, 2010, **Sonja Pica** started with the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit as the trial court law clerk assigned to the North County Courthouse. Sonja graduated magna cum laude from Bryn Mawr University in Pennsylvania after which she worked for Guardian Insurance, Morgan Stanley and Lucent Technologies. Sonja returned to law school attending the University of Miami where, in addition to receiving her JD, she is also a candidate for a Masters in Public Health. During law school Sonja was involved with the Community Health Rights Education Clinic. Sonja recently relocated to Jupiter from the west coast of Florida.



Also joining the circuit is intern **Belinda Arevalo**. Belinda is a second year student at Nova Southeastern University where she has been a board member for both the Black Law Students Association and the Public Interest Law Society. Prior to entering law school, Belinda obtained her degree in Psychology from Binghamton University, the State University of New York.



Trial Court Law Clerks Visit Judge Nelson Bailey in Belle Glade

On February 4, 2010, some of the law clerks and interns traveled to the West County Courthouse in Belle Glade, FL. They observed Judge Bailey presiding over court proceedings and then lunched with the Judge. The day concluded with a tour of the Eagle Academy and the Glades Correctional Institute.



l-r: Jeremy Dicker, Michelle Diaz, Belinda Arevalo, Judge Nelson Bailey, Sonja Pica, Santo DiGangi and Ari Bargil.

SELF-HELP WORKGROUP

In her capacity as president-elect of the Florida State Court and County Law Library Association, the Fifteenth Circuit's Law Library Manager

Linda Sims was selected to serve on a jointly sponsored Self-Help Workgroup of the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability (TCP&A) and the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (FCC). The **Honorable Dawn Caloca-Johnson**, Circuit Court Judge, Second Judicial Circuit is the chairperson.



L-r: Judge Josephine Gagliardi, Lee County; Judge Debra Roberts, Pasco County; Karen Nicolai, Clerk, Hernando County; Lori Holcomb, UPL Florida Bar; Dana Dowling, OSCA; Arlene Johnson, OSCA; Rose Patterson, OSCA; Sharon Bock, Clerk, Palm Beach County; Kimberly Rodgers, Community Law Program, St. Petersburg; Magistrate Susan Keith, Marion County; Chair, Judge Dawn Caloca Johnson, Second Circuit.

The Workgroup will be building upon efforts of two previously submitted reports by the TCP&A to the Supreme Court on the issue of self-represented litigants. A Supreme Court Administrative Order SC06-54, directed the commission to “make recommendations for a court-based service framework that will connect litigants with legal assistance” and “reliably provide the ministerial assistance and procedural information needed to ensure that litigants representing themselves have meaningful access to the civil justice system”.

Chief Justice Quince has asked the Workgroup to make recommendations regarding: improving the delivery of service, identifying possible funding streams, identifying stakeholder partnerships and to develop an infrastructure to support self-help programs. The deadline for the report to the Supreme Court is October 1, 2010. To that end, the Workgroup has participated in several telephone conferences and on March 8, met in Orlando.

PROCESS SERVERS SWORN IN

On February 23, 2010, **Chief Judge Peter D. Blanc** conducted the swearing-in ceremony for new process servers in the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit. The graduates recently completed instruction and passed an examination given by Court Administration. The addition of 111 new process servicers, the largest group yet, brings the total number of court-certified process servers in the County to 365.

After Judge Blanc administered the oath, **Amy Borman**, General Counsel, and **Crystal Dixon**, Legal Secretary, assisted by distributing identification badges to the successful applicants. A complete list of Certified Process Servers is available on the website at www.15thcircuit.com.



Chief Judge Peter Blanc swears in the process servers.

Circuit Staff Visit Orlando

The Court Administrator, Court Technology Officer, Digital Court Reporters, and a Facilities representative visited the Ninth Circuit on February 16, 2010. The goal of the visit was to observe and discuss the technology employed in the Ninth Circuit for the purpose of remote court interpreting and digitally recording court events.

The Fifteenth Circuit has future plans to implement systems more similar to those currently in place in the Ninth. The group also visited the Orange County Corrections facility to observe the glassed courtrooms utilized for first appearances.



l-r: Palm Beach County's David Roy, Court Technology Officer Noel Chessman, Court reporters Roland Tatum, Joe Larson and Carlos Santiso, Interpreter Irene Nocera, Court Administrator Barbara Dawicke, Interpreter Sean Logsdon.

Diversity Training

Wilhelmina Tribble of Lowe, Tribble and Associates in Orlando, FL, returned to the Circuit to present two full-day training sessions on January 29 and March 5, 2010. Entitled "Moving Beyond Diversity: Serving a Culturally Changing Community," the program teaches staff not only to respect and benefit from diversity in the workplace but also to develop skills for effectively dealing with multi-cultural court customers or self-represented litigants. Beginning with training in early 2008, almost all judges and Court staff have now completed this training, as mandated by the Florida Supreme Court.



Wilhelmina Tribble presenting diversity training program to court staff.

County Online Timesheet Training

On February 23 and 24, 2010, County-funded Court employees and their supervisors attended training in preparation for the conversion to online entry and processing of time sheets and payroll. The Human Resource Information System (HRIS) website provides a single location for checking pay history, requesting leave, advertising vacant positions and processing payroll and new hiring "paperwork." The HRIS expedites communication on various personnel processes and is gradually being expanded to all cover all County staff.



Ana Guevara and Ritesh Pahwa provide training on the county Human Resource Information System.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

LISA DORSEY

Lisa returned to us briefly as a volunteer at the main information desk. She graduated from Atlanta's Clark College and earned a second degree from Northwood University. Lisa was formerly employed by the Clerk's office as the taker of minutes at Board of County Commission meetings. We are grateful to have had her experience and dedication at the busy front desk.



JUNE GARSON

June currently wears two hats with Court Administration. As a retired teacher, she fits beautifully into our Courthouse Tour program as a guide for educational school tours. In addition, she covers the ADA line and is pursuing her notary designation so she may assist with the swearing-in tasks in Witness Management. She is a graduate of Ohio State, with a major in Education.



CHERYL HICKMAN

Cheryl (Cheri) came to the Circuit through volunteermatch.com. After retiring from a career in the consumer lending field, Cheri has contributed her talents by assisting with the ADA line and handling reception duties in Court Administration. Cheri's initiative and organizational skills make an essential contribution to the office.



JOHNNY KEMENA

With his background in the entertainment business, Johnny is perfectly suited for his role in manning the video camera for our monthly Juvenile Division meetings. Now semi-retired from a hectic work schedule that included dividing his time between NYC and Los Angeles, Johnny has now committed to volunteering in this capacity for the remainder of the 2010 schedule.



The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention.
~Oscar Wilde

CAROL SERPA

A native of New Bedford, CT, and a graduate of Colorado State University where she completed her B.A., Carol now divides her time between pursuing paralegal studies at Broward College and helping in Judge Sasser's foreclosure division. In addition, Carol has taken on a weekend shift as a monitor for the Supervised Timesharing program and works two afternoons per week on reception duties in Court Administration.



SHEILA SHAFFRAN

Sheila Shaffran hails from Philadelphia where she graduated from Temple University. Sheila fulfills dual roles as a volunteer, donating time at the info desk at our courthouse in Delray Beach and assisting James Montado with the South County Civic Center video traffic hearings. Sheila relates well with all members of public and enjoys the interactions with the visitors to the court.



HR HUDDLE

New Employees:

Carmen Sosa, Judicial Assistant to Judge Debra Stephens: February 3.

Keisha Nathaniel, Mediation Secretary: February 16.

Tara Kranz, Senior Secretary: March 15.

Andrew Ramdeholl, Administrative Secretary I: March 17.

Reassignment:

Miguel Baque has accepted the position as Magistrate Assistant in North County.

OPS (Temporary) Staff:

Torina Edwards (March 15) will assist the Magistrates in the main judicial center.

Cheryl Hickman and **Carol Serpa** will share afternoon reception duties in the Administrative Office of the Court until late May.

In Memoriam

The Circuit was shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Patrick Dodgin, husband of Judge Amy Smith, on Saturday, December 26, 2009.

Our deepest condolences go out to Judge Smith and her family.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDERS

For updates to the latest Administrative Orders (AO's) for the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, please see our website at:
<http://15thcircuit.co.palm-beach.fl.us/web/guest/ao>.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April

9 CME Training

20-22 Law Day Events

24 Judges/Attorneys Softball Game

May

1 Juror Appreciation Day

7 Law Day Luncheon

COURT HOLIDAYS APRIL-JUNE

April

2 Good Friday

May

31 Memorial Day

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