

# The 17th Circuit Collective

May 2025







## Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips Speaks Out:

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The 17th Judicial Circuit has had a busy first quarter in 2025 and I would like to share just a short overview of the hard work within the 17th and our community. The Community Courts were featured in the news and the Hollywood Community Court celebrated its one year anniversary. Court Administration employees formed a Health and Wellness Committee and you can see them and join them taking walks along the Riverwalk to promote mental and physical health.

Our First Florida Problem-Solving courts Month event kicked off with a packed house. We heard from judges of the specialty courts and multiple organizations that provide support and resources.

We have welcomed and hosted multiple elementary, middle and high school students to the Courthouse with many judges, stakeholders, and many others educating students as to our justice system and presiding over Mock Trial Competitions. Take Your Child to Work Day was a big success, along with a law book giveaway event and a driver license clinic.

Along with our community efforts, each and every day you may observe jury trials, bench trials, evidentiary hearings, case management and short hearings in all divisions in the Courthouse and some via zoom.

We welcome Judge Keathan Frink as the Administrative Judge of the Circuit Civil division.

We congratulate Sunil "Sunny" Nemade (Our IT Specialist) in receiving the Chief Judge Award for Excellence for his hard work and dedication dating back to 1987.

We thank Army Major General Edward H. Merrigan (known to us as Judge Merrigan) for his more than three decades of military service. All of us in the 17th Judicial Circuit have great admiration and appreciation for his many years of service to our nation and service to our state. Although he is retiring from the military, Judge Merrigan will continue his hard work in the Circuit Criminal Division and Veterans Court.

Lastly, I join my colleagues and the legal community in thanking Chief Judge Jack B. Tuter for his leadership and perseverance and wish him much success in his future endeavours. Judge Tuter's two decades of service and commitment in the community and State has led the 17th Judicial Circuit through enduring times. We will miss him.

I wish everyone a great second quarter of 2025 and keep up all the Great Work!

~ Carol-Lisa Phillips



# A Message From Trial Court Administrator Joe D'Amico:



To all the hardworking judges and employees of the 17th Judicial Circuit: As I sit here writing this newsletter message, the Florida Legislature remains in session negotiating next year's budget and the session has been extended from its original ending date of May 5th to June 30th.

From information that has been shared with me, much remains uncertain and it is unclear what items from the judicial branch's legislative budget requests will receive funding.

The Trial Court Budget Commission will meet in late June and again in July to discuss specific allocations across the Circuits.

At the same time, we recently finalized our County budget requests. Chief Judge Phillips and I, along with Judges Bristol and Alperstein, recently made a presentation to the County Commission highlighting various proposals.

Recently, Chief Judge Phillips and I also recently met with County Administration and members of the County's Construction Management Division to discuss the ongoing work to demolish the old courthouse and ultimate construction of a secure parking garage for our judges.

Based on the timeline provided to us by the County, interior demolition of the old courthouse began in April, with structural demolition anticipated to begin this October. It is anticipated that the secure parking garage will be completed by the end of 2026, and the construction of the outside public plaza to continue through the summer of 2027, barring any unforeseen circumstances.

The month of May is Problem-Solving Court Month and Court Administration staff has been busy organizing events and securing speakers to mark the occasion. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, Court Administration staff organized a Resource Fair highlighting our 13 Problem-Solving Courts and various service providers that make these initiatives possible.

The Resource Fair was a resounding success with more than 100 people in attendance. Staff also secured several outside speakers and organizations to present on various topics relevant to Problem-Solving Courts, including Bikers Against Trafficking.

I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to recognize the recent retirement of Chief Judge Jack Tuter. A judge for nearly 20 years, Judge Tuter was instrumental in many changes in the Circuit during his tenure as Chief Judge, especially in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am especially grateful and thankful for his many years of leadership and the mentorship he provided.

With this being said, Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips officially assumed the role of Chief Judge on May 1<sup>st</sup>, and from my experience working with her, I know the 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit is in great hands. I look forward to what the future holds under her leadership.

As I have said many times before, our Circuit would not run as smoothly as it does without all of the dedicated public servants who diligently provide behind-the-scenes support to our judges each day. I am especially grateful for your hard work and dedication to furthering the mission of the Circuit and the judicial branch.

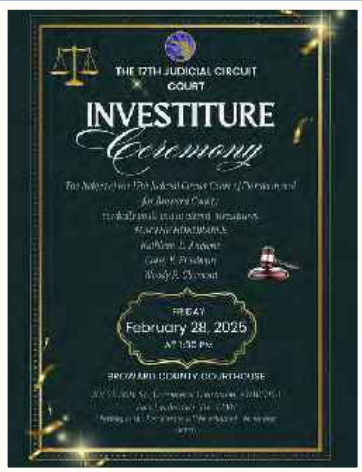
~ Joe D'Amico



# Breaking News:



## Five Investitures for Five New Judges



- Judge Johnathan D. Lott
- Judge Corey B. Friedman
- Judge Kathleen Angione
- Judge Woody R. Clermont
- Judge Lauren N. Pepper

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Press Release  
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February was an exciting month for the 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit with the investitures of five new judges: The Circuit officially welcomed Circuit Court Judge Johnathan D. Lott and County Court Judges Corey B. Friedman, Kathleen Angione, Woody R. Clermont and Lauren N. Pepper.

Judge Lott is assigned to Family, Judge Friedman handles First Appearances, Judge Angione presides at the North Regional Courthouse, Judge Clermont presides at the South Regional Courthouse and Judge Pepper presides at the West Regional Courthouse.

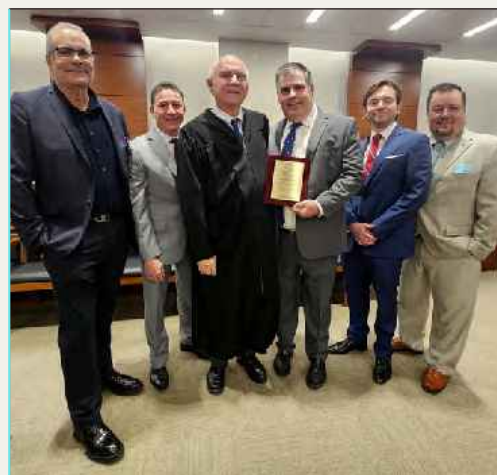
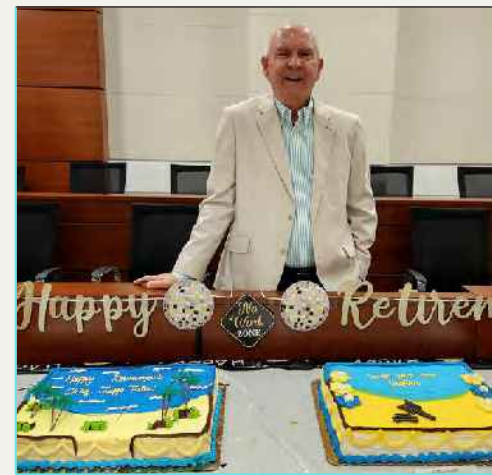
# WELCOME ABOARD!





# A Stellar Career ... A Bittersweet “Goodbye”

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## Good Luck in Your Retirement Judge Tuter!

Wishing Chief Judge Jack Tuter a wonderful and much-deserved retirement after nearly two decades on the bench, eight of them as Chief Judge.

Judge Tuter announced in mid-February that he would officially retire on May 1, 2025. Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips is now our new Chief Judge.

Gov. Jeb Bush appointed Judge Tuter to the bench in 2005. He was elected in 2008, then re-elected in 2014 and 2020.

Honorable. Reliable. Shrewd. Fair. An avid golfer. A dog lover. An Oklahoma Sooners fan. Forward-thinking. Resilient. Committed. A man of his word. Decisive. Calm. Productive. Wry.

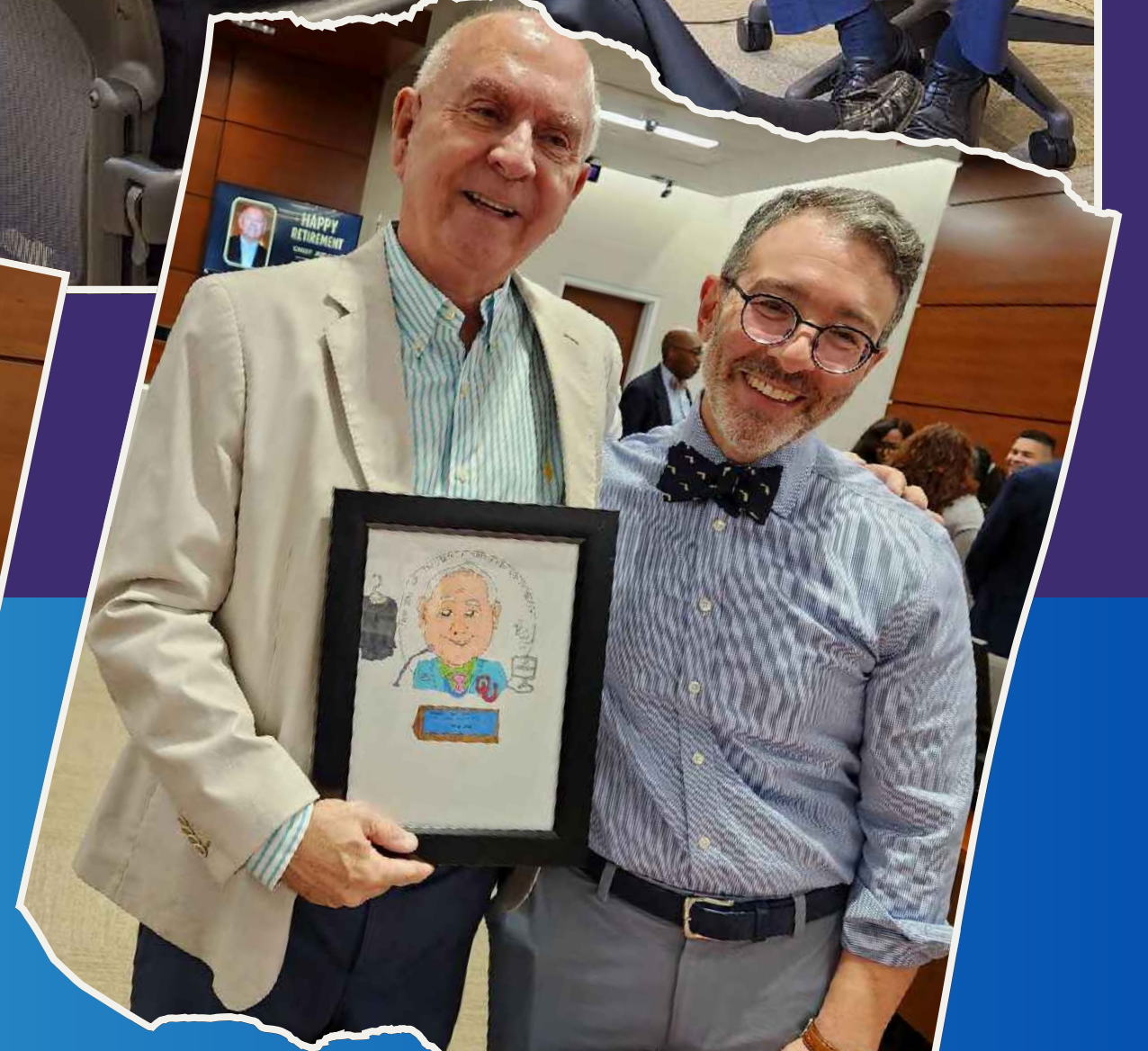
Just a few ways those who knew Judge Tuter well described him ...

We will miss your sense of humor, your wisdom, your calm & your smile, Judge Tuter. We will see you around!





# Best Wishes in Your Next Chapter!





# Say “Cheese!”

Muñoz Photography did what most would believe to be impossible: Successfully arranged two group photos of our 90 judges - County and Circuit - in two separate sittings in a cool 60 minutes. It was a sight to behold ...

Their photo staff set up special lighting equipment and benches ahead of time, then, in a no-nonsense exercise, arranged their subjects by height and sometimes shoes, moving some to the back and others to the front with a speed that was astonishing to watch.

No matter that one judge arrived too late for the photo. The crew simply photographed him separately at the end of a row, to be photoshopped in later during post production. The final proofs are still to come!





# Hilary Creary Becomes the Second Jamaican Magistrate to Take the Bench



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**Magistrate Hilary Creary**

## Meet Our Newest Magistrate

The 17th Judicial Circuit is delighted to introduce our newest Magistrate: Hilary A. Creary, who officially took the bench in March. Magistrate Creary is widely known for her pro bono work with legal aid programs in Broward County.

“I am honored to have been sworn in today as the newest Magistrate in the 17th Judicial Circuit's Domestic Relations Division,” Magistrate Creary said. “I have been passionate for many years about assisting the children and families of Broward County in my private family law practice, and now I have been given the opportunity to be of service to even more families from the Bench.”

Magistrate Creary is the Circuit's second magistrate of Jamaican-American descent. Magistrate Stephanie Matalon, also a Jamaican-American, took the bench in January 2020.

Welcome aboard!



Sunil “Sunny” Nemade, Chief Judge Award for Excellence:



Congratulations to Sunil "Sunny" Nemade, the Chief Technology Officer for the 17th Judicial Circuit, for being chosen as recipient of the Chief Judge Award for Excellence! Judge Tuter presented Sunny with this prestigious award in January 2025 during his State of the Circuit presentation.

Sunny was hired by Court Administration in 1987, after working in Broward County’s IT Department for three years. He has played a pivotal role in modernizing the court’s IT systems, transitioning from IBM mainframe terminals to advanced systems, while creating statewide networks and specific programs tailored to serve our judges.



Sunny's tireless devotion to the job and his desire to modernize and update aging technology has positioned this court as the most progressive in the state of Florida. Astoundingly, Sunny makes himself available 24/7 to handle IT emergencies and updates of any kind, even when he travels overseas to visit family in India and has to work remotely. And on top of it all, he delivers top notch service - always - with a smile. Well-deserved, Sunny. We are fortunate to have you on our team!

Judge Jackie Powell, Stephen R. Booher American Inn of Courts Achieves Platinum Status:



The Stephen R. Booher American Inn of Courts has achieved Platinum status for the first time in 33 years under the leadership of County Judge Jackie Powell, organization president.

The National American Inns of Court determines status levels by evaluating the local Inn’s administration, communications, program development, mentoring and outreach activities. For the last four years, the Inn attained and maintained gold status.

In recognition of this accomplishment, the Stephen R. Booher Inn of Court has been invited to attend the Inn of Distinction gala in July at the United States Supreme Court.

Congratulations Judge Powell! Amazing accomplishment.

***Read Our  
Press Release  
HERE***

A red curved arrow pointing upwards and to the left, positioned below the text "Read Our Press Release HERE".

**Click the links above to read our press releases!**



# Judge Edward H. Merrigan, a 2-Star General, Retires from Army after 31 Years



Broward Circuit Judge Edward H. Merrigan Jr., a highly decorated two-star general in the U.S. Army, officially retired this month from the military after 31 years of service.

Judge Merrigan's military career was wide-ranging. He enlisted in the Army in 1994. In 1999, he began his Army Reserve career, initially serving as the International Law Officer of the 478th Civil Affairs Battalion in Perrine, FL. His tenure in the Army included a tour in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

Judge Merrigan most recently served as commander of the 84th Training Command in Fort Knox, KY, sometimes traveling around the country as many as three weekends a month. His story appeared in the Florida Bar News, in the Caribbean National Weekly and WPLG's website!

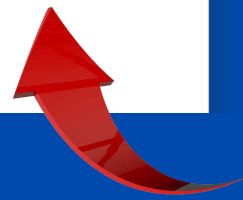
Judge Merrigan also presides in Veterans Court, one of the 17th Judicial Circuit's problem-solving courts. Thank you for your service!

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**Click the link above to read our press release!**

 **U.S. ARMY**

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Press Release  
[HERE](#)







# Law Book Giveaway

A Friday morning law book giveaway in the lobby of the Broward County Courthouse was so popular that every single book was snapped up before noon.

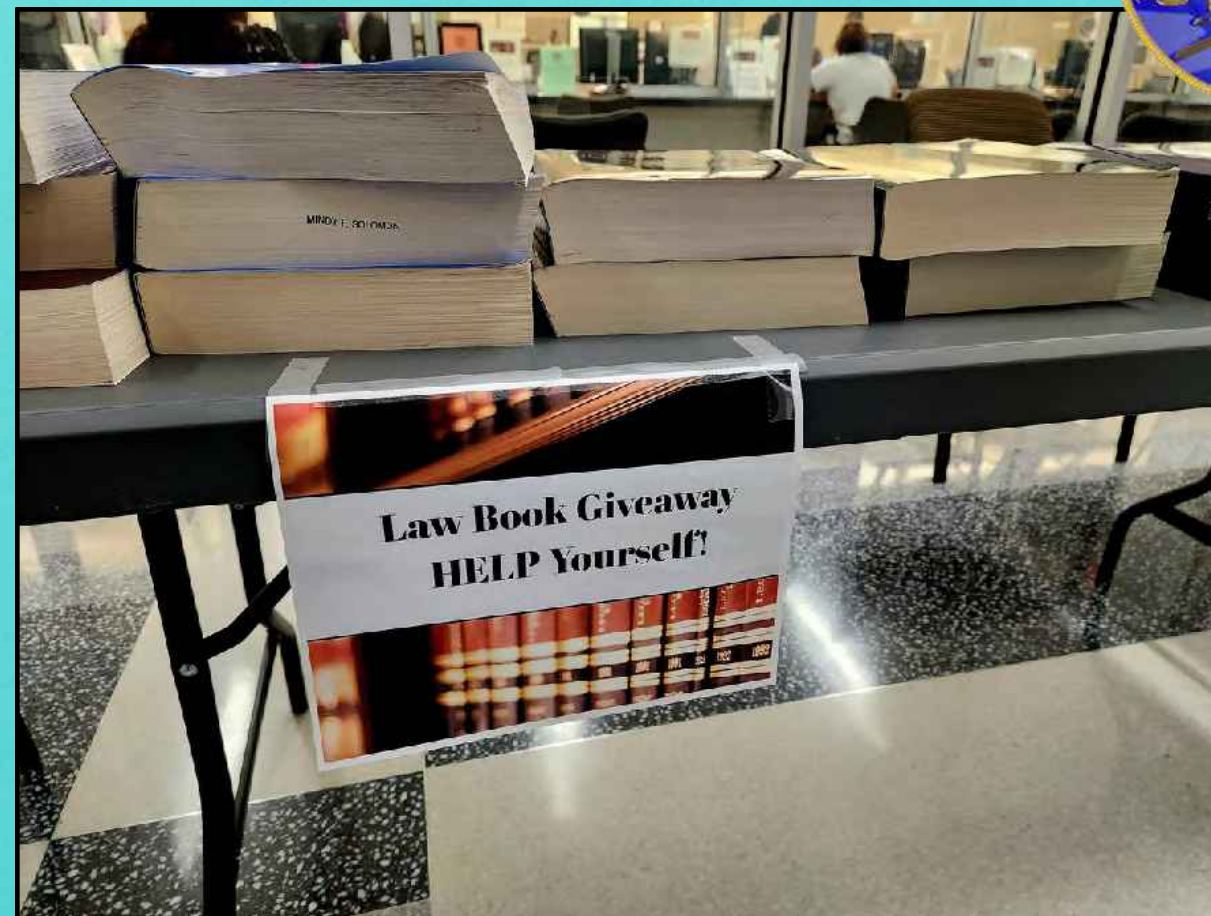
Court Administration collected a wide range of gently used legal books from judges and other courthouse staff, then offered the books to the public so they would be put to use.

The books flew off the table.

Among the most popular donations? Six-volume sets of Florida statutes, in high demand despite their weightiness.

Takers ranged from law school students, court employees, passersby and those who simply love to read.

The empty boxes got snapped up too!





# Take Your Child to Work Day



**Take Your Child to Work Day at the Broward County Courthouse was filled with adventure: A mock trial in a real courtroom. A visit from two pet therapy dogs with the patience of Job and bottomless levels of love and affection.**

**A chance to witness in-progress Delinquency proceedings with a real judge and real defendants. A mock trial. Riding the elevators all the way up to the 20th floor to look at the ocean, then back down so you can walk to the criminal wing and peer at the Broward County jail. New experiences all the way around.**

**Understanding what happens inside a courthouse can be difficult to imagine until you see it for yourself. A fun day for employees and their loved ones!**

**The event was a huge success. The 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit partnered with the Public Defender's Office for this special day.**





# RINOKINALK



## Health is Wealth!

As part of a new Health and Wellness initiative, Court Administration employees have begun taking group walks along the New River. The goal is to stretch your legs, breath some fresh air and get better acquainted with your co-workers. The 15 to 20 minute walks are short and sweet but effective in promoting camaraderie, exercise and mental health.

Come join us and get a close-up look at the back of the Broward County jail, wave to the Jungle Queen as it navigates the New River and waits for the bridgetender to raise the drawbridge, and count the very large iguanas that sun themselves on the yachts and catamarans docked in the waterway!

Thank you Trial Court Administrator Joe D'Amico for signing off on this great idea!



# Employee Milestones



**A new campaign to recognize employee milestones kicked off this month with the recognition of 15 employees with five years or more tenure in Court Administration. It's something Trial Court Administrator Joe D'Amico will do on a regular basis to show employees they are valued. Thank you for your years of dedicated service! You are what make the 17th Judicial Circuit a success!**

**Pictured back row left to right are Dylan Sercy, standing in for his mother La'Kita O'Donnell, Michele Anderson, Heather Abel, Trial Court Administrator Joseph D'Amico, Chief Deputy Court Administrator Diana Sobel, Geovanna Morgan and Magistrate Yves Laventure. Front row, left to right: Gloria Trujillo, Rosalee Walker, Solange Saenz, Martine Pelissier, Lisa Peart and Teri Renaud. Not pictured are Danny Gutierrez, Renee Straub, Shannon Campbell and Ashly Martin.**

**Congratulations to all!**



# Problem-Solving Courts Resource Fair

Florida Problem-Solving Courts Month kicked off earlier this month at the Broward County Courthouse with a standing-room only crowd at a specialized resource fair that featured a range of providers who support the important work of these unique courts.

Our problem-solving courts include Adult Drug Court, Mental Health Court, Early Childhood Court and Veterans Court to name a few. Several judges from the 17th Judicial Circuit attended, including Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips, Judge Michael Davis, Judge Stacy Ross, Judge Stacey Schulman, Judge Ari Abraham Porth, Judge John D. Fry & Judge Elijah H. Williams. Others appeared by video.

And there is more to come! Later this month Bikers Against Trafficking are coming to present, as is Guy Wheeler, a renowned consultant known for his experience with drug treatment programs. Get ready for more amazing learning opportunities!

Shout out to Russell Edwards, Yolanda Brown, Linda Brooks, Malikh Williams, Trent Baker & Beth Plotkin for organizing these fantastic events!





# Courthouse Tours

Our Courthouse tours continue to be wildly popular. Between August 2024 and April 2025, approximately 800 students have passed through our courtrooms on tours.

Many thanks to the judges, interpreters and other Court Administration employees who make this such a great experience for these young people. These tours are so popular we are booked solid into August 2025.

We also have a new procedure for requesting tours. Our website now includes a detailed description of how our tours work, how many students we can accommodate and includes a downloadable form for requesters to fill out, to streamline the request process. Click [HERE](#) to view our updated tour request process!





# “BIKERS AGAINST TRAFFICKING” VISITS DURING PROBLEM-SOLVING COURT MONTH

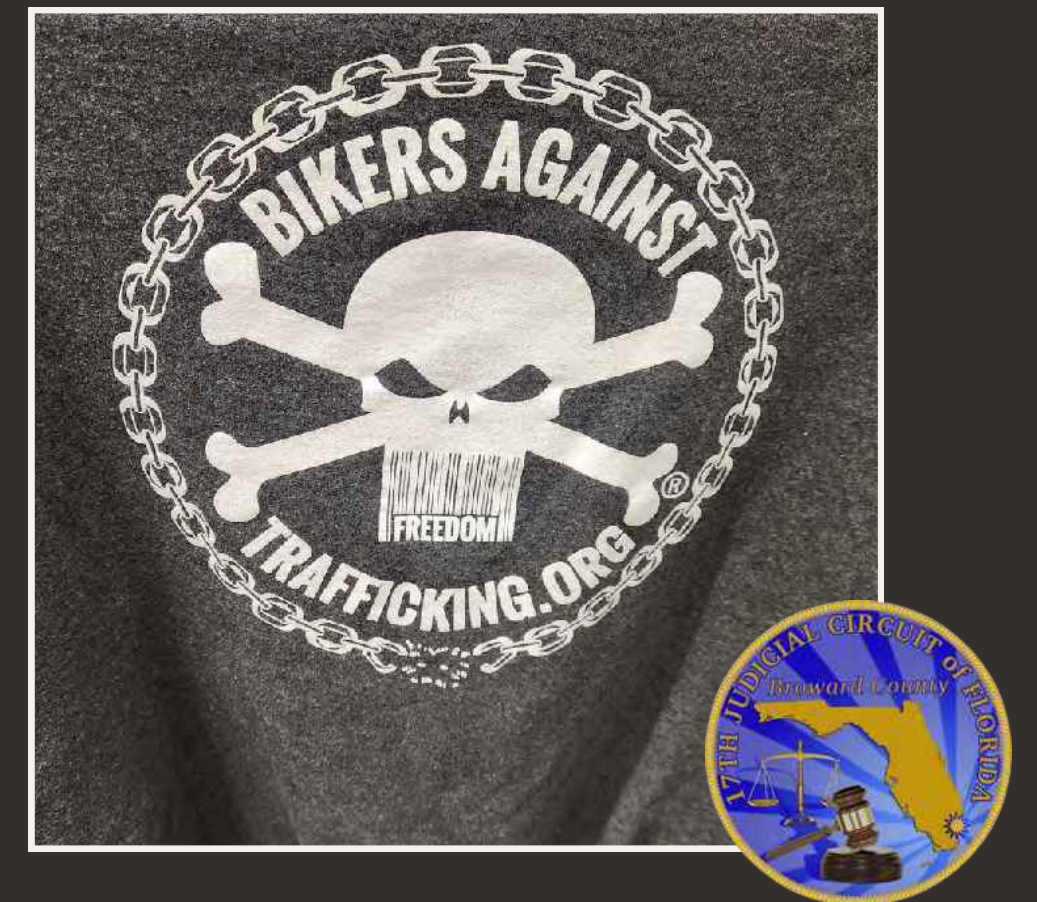
Discussing the long-term effects of human trafficking, the often-missed red flags and learning about what can be done to help was the focus of a inspiring May presentation by Patrick “Doc” Nave and his wife Dena “Rainey,” the founders of Bikers Against Trafficking (BAT). The organization - headquartered in St. Mary, FL - is a non profit whose mission is to eradicate human trafficking.

The couple, both trafficked as children, visited the 17<sup>th</sup> as part of a series of planned activities in observance of Problem-Solving Courts Month (May). Doc has a Doctoral degree in therapy, is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, a Masters Certified Addiction Counselor and is a Diplomate in Trauma Counseling. Rainey is the Business Manager and Trauma Counselor at Sojourners Recovery & Wellness Center AND Family4Today and an addiction counselor.

Determined to shine a light on human trafficking, the couple founded the nonprofit BAT in January 2016. Their goal: to restore hope and healing to those who have been trafficked. BAT provides education and awareness training, clinical trauma counseling, job placement and housing assistance and mentoring.

The Naves explained that traffickers seek to prey upon vulnerable people in every community. They likened the practice to modern day slavery, noting that the average age of trafficking victims is 11 to 14 years old, with approximately 18,000 persons being trafficked into the U.S. annually from more than 50 countries.

Kudos to Beth Plotkin and her team for making this amazing event possible!





# Hollywood Community Court Turns One!

Hollywood Community Court marked its one-year birthday in February with an impressive celebration at The Caring Place, where court is held. The guest of honor? County Court Judge Corey Cawthon, who presides over the court at 2056 Scott Street every other Tuesday.

The Community Court was created to provide alternatives to jail for low-level misdemeanor crimes while connecting the homeless with services. County Court Judge Florence Taylor Barner presides over Community Court in Fort Lauderdale and shares judicial duties at Community Court in Pompano Beach with County Court Judge Betsy Benson.

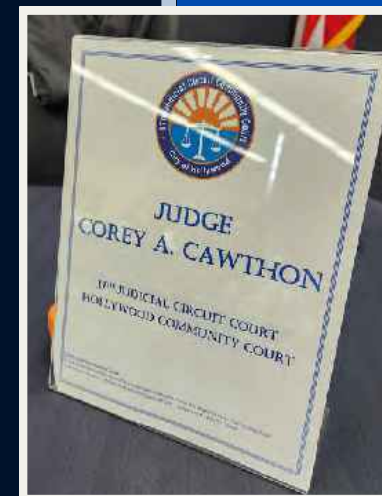
Judge Cawthon's impact on the community is evident: the one-year event was packed with scores of service providers and the unhoused, who lauded Judge Cawthon's work with praise, applause and cheers.

Here are the court's statistics to date:

- Total Number of Individuals seen: 458
- Total Number of Families Seen: 39
- Total Number of Hearings: 821
- Total Number of Graduates: 15

The City of Hollywood weighed in with a proclamation which stated, "By focusing on compassion and tailored solutions, the court has strengthened community cohesion and reaffirmed the City's commitment to public safety, social justice and resilience."

The 17th Judicial Circuit Court's two other Community Court's are held at 18 NW First Ave. in Fort Lauderdale and at the Annie L. Weaver Health Center, 2011 NW Third Ave., Pompano Beach.



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# 17th Circuit Memories





# Thank You

For Your Attention

17th Judicial Circuit