17TH
JUDICIAL
CIRCUIT

COURT NEWS

NOVEMBER 2026



WINTER ISSUE

Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips Speaks Out:



As we approach the holiday season, I want to take a moment to reflect on the past year and, most importantly, express my sincere gratitude to the judges, staff, and every employee of the 17th Judicial Circuit.

The work we do is important, but the people who do that work truly make our Circuit special. Every day, in courtrooms, and throughout our courthouse, you bring professionalism, compassion, dedication, and a genuine commitment to serving others. Whether your role is visible to the public or takes place behind the scenes, your contributions matter.



Each of you plays an important part in ensuring that we serve our Broward County community with fairness, dignity, and respect. I am proud of what we accomplish together, and I am grateful for the privilege of working alongside such a dedicated group of people.Thank you for your hard work, your commitment, and for the heart you bring to this circuit every day.

Wishing you and your families a very happy holiday season, filled with peace, joy, good health, and a New Year filled with happiness and success.

With sincere appreciation,

CLP

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A Message from Trial Court Administrator Joe D'Amico:

As we enter the final months of another year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the purpose of our work and organization. At the heart of our work is service. Each day, we have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the people who come to our courts—often during some of the most challenging moments in their lives.

Our mission is about more than cases, procedures, and operations. It is about ensuring that justice is accessible, that people are treated fairly with dignity and respect, and that our courts remain worthy of the public's trust.

The values that guide us—fairness, integrity, service, accountability, and respect—reverberate through our daily work. No matter which role you serve, each of us shares a responsibility to serve with compassion, professionalism, and purpose.

I am deeply grateful for the commitment you bring to this work. Together, through the everyday actions we take, we help make our courts stronger, more responsive, and better able to serve our community.

Thank you for all that you do.

As I close, I want to express my immense gratitude for the work everyone does daily to ensure the administration of justice.

Governor Appoints Judge Marlon J. Weiss to Fourth DCA



Congratulations to Judge Marlon J. Weiss, who was-appointed to the Fourth District Court of Appeal on Sept. 4, 2026.

The elevation comes 16 months after Gov. Ron DeSantis appointed Judge Weiss to the Circuit Court bench on May 19, 2025 to fill a vacancy created by the retirement of Chief Judge Jack Tuter. Judge Weiss is a graduate of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Judge Weiss earned his Juris Doctor from Emory University School of Law in Atlanta. He is a longtime resident of Hollywood, Florida, with deep ties to South Florida. Born in Canada and raised in North Dale and South Broward, he is a graduate of North Miami Beach Senior High School.

Judge Weiss is the second judge from the 17th Judicial Circuit to recently be elevated to the Fourth DCA. Judge Johnathan D. Lott was appointed in October 2025 to serve on the Fourth DCA after just over a year on the Circuit Court bench.
“I am deeply honored and humbled to have the opportunity to serve the people of the Great State of Florida on the appellate court,” Judge Weiss said. “I am profoundly grateful to Governor Ron DeSantis for entrusting me with this tremendous responsibility.

The

Appointment of Judge David J. Arthmann



Welcome to the 17th **Judicial Circuit** Judge David J. Arthmann! We are delighted to have you on our team. Judge Arthmann will preside in the Family Division.

Judge Arthmann previously serve as General Counsel for the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles in Taliahassee.

Governor Ron DeSantis announced the appointment on August 20th.

Judge Arthmann is a graduate of Nova Southeastern University and the Florida State University College of Law. He has worked more than 20 years for the State of Florida, with tenure at the Florida Department of Corrections, the Department of Children and Family Services and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Human Services before joining the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles as General Counsel. Judge Arthmann is also a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

> “I am humbled and honored to have been selected to serve the people of the 17th **Judicial Circuit**. Judge Arthmann said.”

Moving Up: Judge Jeremy I. Franker is Elevated to Circuit Court







JUDGE JEREMY I. FRANKER

Judge Jeremy I. Franker doesn't stay in one place for long.

In August, Governor Ron DeSantis elevated Judge Franker from County to Circuit Court, marking the first time a judge in the 17th Judicial Circuit has been elevated to another court before the investiture for the first judicial appointment. Gov. DeSantis appointed Judge Franker to County Court on Feb. 25th.

The news meant plans for Judge Franker's Aug. 28th formal robing ceremony for County Court had to quickly be revised to also include an investiture for Circuit Court

"I am deeply honored and humbled to serve the citizens of Broward County, and I look forward to upholding the principles of justice and fairness in the Circuit Court," Judge Franker said.

Judge Franker comes to the 17th Judicial Circuit from the U.S. Department of Justice where he served as Deputy Director of Joint Task Force Vulcan, leading a national prosecution team on foreign terrorist organizations that included Tren de Aragua (TdA) and MS-13. Judge Franker served in the Department of Justice for seven years and prosecuted complex organized crime and racketeering cases for the Violent Crime and Racketeering Section.

Meet Judge-Elect Veronica N. Walker



WELCOME TO THE BENCH

Meet our newly-elected County Court Judge: Veronica N. Walker!

Judge-Elect Walker currently is an Assistant State Attorney in the Broward State Attorney's Office where she has worked since 2017.

She is the lead prosecutor in the Hate Crimes Unit and is also assigned to the Public Corruption Unit. Judge-Elect Walker is a graduate of Tennessee State University and the Barry University School of Law.

Judge-Elect Walker will be sworn in next January.



"I am deeply humbled and grateful to the people of Broward County for placing their trust in me to serve as their next County Court Judge," Judge-Elect Walker said.

"Throughout my career as a prosecutor, I have had the privilege of serving this community and seeing firsthand the profound responsibility that comes with our justice system.

"I look forward to continuing that service from the bench and to treating every person who enters my courtroom with fairness, dignity, and respect."



Elected!

Meet Judge Tamar Hamilton



WELCOME TO THE BENCH

Meet our newly-elected Circuit Court Judge: Tamar Hamilton!

Judge-Elect Tamar Hamilton is an experienced attorney, Special Magistrate, and Adjunct Professor of Law at St. Thomas University College of Law.

A graduate of St. Thomas University School of Law with honors, she brings more than 12 years of legal experience, including civil litigation, real estate, and probate matters. Born in Jamaica and a Broward County resident for more than 25 years, she is also the Immediate Past President of the Jamaican American Bar Association.

"I am deeply humbled and honored by the trust the people of Broward County have placed in me. This victory is not simply a personal achievement; it is a testament to faith, perseverance, and the power of community," Judge-Elect Hamilton said.

Judge-elect Hamilton will be sworn in next January.

Welcome to the bench!







Elected!

Enjoy Your Retirement Judge Steven P. Deluca



Judge Steven P. DeLuca is retiring after 26 years on the bench.

A lunchtime farewell celebration on Oct. 28 at the North Regional Courthouse was packed with judges and attorneys from across Broward County who attended the heartfelt sendoff wish the judge well.

Everyone at the celebration wanted to let Judge DeLuca know how much he will be missed.

Appointed to the bench by former Gov. Jeb Bush in 2000, Judge DeLuca has served the judiciary for more than two decades. He is also a longtime member of the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission, an independent agency responsible for investigating allegations of judicial misconduct and disability involving Florida state judges.

Judge DeLuca's term expires in December, and he did not seek re-election.

Thank you, Judge DeLuca, for your years of service to the 17th Judicial Circuit. We wish you well in your next chapter!





A Family Affair ...

Law students who passed the July 2026 Florida Bar Examination were sworn in by judges throughout the courthouse in the days that followed.

But for Judge Shari Africk-Olefson, the occasion was exceptional. Her daughter Brooke passed the Bar and Judge Africk-Olefson administered the Oath of Attorney to her daughter in her own courtroom.

Brooke attended the Shepard Broad College of Law at Nova Southeastern. She plans to specialize in Intellectual Property and Corporate work.

An amazing accomplishment. Congratulations to the Africk-Olefson family!









National Adoption Day







National Adoption Day was celebrated in style on Nov. 21 with the adoption of 21 children at the Broward County Courthouse.

Judge John B. Bowman, a former dependency judge, has been organizing the joyful event for years.

“It’s always a big deal when a child gets his or her forever family. This is probably the most important day of their life,” Judge Bowman said.

The event featured cake, cookies, therapy dogs, games, balloons and lots of tears of joy.



Grin and Bear It!

Hearing officers and magistrates spent a lunch hour stuffing teddy bears to help make the court experience a little less scary for children.

The bears will find a home in Dependency Court, where they will be given to children whose families are involved in the court system.

The cuddly companions are meant to provide a little comfort and reassurance during what can be an uncertain and difficult time.

The volunteer bear stuffers assembled nearly 20 teddy bears for young children.







In the News: Jury Duty No Shows

Judge Keathen B. Frink spoke with a reporter from WPLG Channel 10 in October about the pervasive problem of jury duty no shows.

The story highlighted the cascading problems that occur when too few jurors show up for duty. Judge Frink explained that cases get delayed because there are too few jurors for the required juries.

Judge Frink told the reporter that as few as 30 to 47 percent of those jurors who are summoned actually report for jury duty.

Since June 2026, anyone who is summoned for jury duty and does not show up can face a fine of up to $100 and possibly be held in contempt of court.







SHINING STAR AWARD



CONGRATULATIONS

Paulette Melendez-Reyes

Digital Court Reporter Paulette Melendez-Reyes was the recipient of Court Administration's Shining Star Award for the second quarter of 2026!

"Paulette is one of our superstars," said her supervisor, Marta Prieto.

Paulette earned this well-deserved recognition for her outstanding work ethic, exceptional transcription skills, and willingness to go the extra mile by stepping in when court proceedings run late and require after-hours support.

She is also a valued trainer, known for her easy-going personality, thoughtful approach, and ability to adapt her teaching style to meet the needs of both visual and hands-on learners.

"I like seeing someone grow in their confidence," she said.

Congratulations, Paulette, and thank you for your dedication, professionalism, and commitment to helping both your colleagues and the courts succeed!

We are so fortunate to have you on our team!

Courtroom Dedication

Susan F. Greenhawt

in memoriam

Hearing Room 11174 was recently dedicated in memory of longtime Family Division Judge Susan F. Greenhawt, who passed away on March 10, 2026.

A beloved friend, mentor and source of wisdom, Judge Greenhawt touched the lives of countless colleagues and members of the community throughout her career. Appointed to the Circuit Court bench in 2003 by then-Gov. Jeb Bush, she served exclusively in the Family Division until her retirement in 2012. She later became a mediator and returned to the bench as a Senior Judge during the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Nov. 6, 2026 dedication ceremony included a judicial procession and heartfelt reflections from county officials, members of the Judiciary, and Judge Greenhawt's friends and family, honoring her legacy and the lasting impact she made on so many.



Behind the Gavel

Congratulations to Judge Lorena V. Mastrarrigo, recipient of the Gavel Award. Judge Mastrarrigo was among the 17th Judicial Circuit's Hispanic judges who came together on Oct. 1 at Nova Southeastern University to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month and recognize the many contributions of Hispanic members of our judiciary.

We are proud to recognize Judge Mastrarrigo and to celebrate all of our Hispanic judges whose service, leadership and dedication strengthen our courts and the communities we serve.

The Gavel Award is presented during the annual Behind the Gavel celebration, hosted jointly by the Broward County Hispanic Bar Association (BCHBA) and the Broward County Bar Association (BCBA). The award recognizes a distinguished member of Broward County's Hispanic judiciary or a past president for outstanding service, leadership and dedication to the legal community.

Held annually during Hispanic Heritage Month, Behind the Gavel celebrates the accomplishments and contributions of Hispanic judges and magistrates in Broward County's 17th Judicial Circuit.

Judge Lorena V. Mastrarrigo





Judicial Accolades ...



Congratulations Judge N. Hunter Davis & Judge Jackie Powell

TJ REDDICK BAR ASSOCIATION HONORS 2 JUDGES FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE

Judge N. Hunter Davis received the Rising Jurist Award, which honors a newer member of the judiciary who demonstrates exceptional promise, exemplary judicial temperament, and an unwavering commitment to the principles of the bench.

Judge Jackie Powell received the Judge Zebedee Wright Judicial Award, recognizing a member of the judiciary who exemplifies fairness, integrity, intellectual rigor, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Congratulations to you both!

Rising Jurist Award

Zebedee Wright Judicial Award



Congratulations Judge Ari Abraham Porth!

Judge Porth is the recipient of the Judge Steven Leifman Mental Health Champion Award at the Florida Problem-Solving Court Conference, held Nov. 4–6 in Orlando!

Judge Porth described receiving the award as an “immense honor,” emphasizing that it is a recognition he shares with his dedicated team. He credited the collaborative efforts of peer specialists, pretrial services staff, caseworkers, court administration employees and others who work together to help participants find a path toward recovery and stability.

The award recognizes individuals who demonstrate extraordinary leadership, advocacy and dedication to supporting people facing mental health and substance use challenges.

The award is named in honor of retired Miami-Dade County Judge Steven Leifman, whose groundbreaking work to divert individuals with serious mental illnesses from the criminal justice system and connect them with community-based treatment has earned national recognition.

Congratulations to Judge Porth and his dedicated team on this well-deserved recognition!



Judge Jose Izquierdo

Vice Chair of Judicial Qualifying Commission





CONGRATULATIONS JUDGE JOSE IZQUIERDO

The 17th Judicial Circuit proudly congratulates Judge Jose Izquierdo on his unanimous election as Vice-Chair of the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission (FJQC), effective January 2027. Judge Gary Flower will assume the role of Chair at that time.

The FJQC is an independent agency charged with investigating allegations of judicial misconduct and disability against Florida state judges. The Chair of the Commission selects nine members to serve on the Investigative Panel and six members to serve on the Hearing Panel.

Congratulations Judge Izquierdo on this honor. We are proud of your commitment to the important work of the FJQC and the integrity of Florida's judiciary. Judge Izquierdo was first elected to the FJQC in 2024.
We are fortunate to have you on our team.

INFORMED VOTERS PROJECT







Students from three high schools faced off in a lively game of Civics Jeopardy! at the 17th Judicial Circuit, putting their knowledge of government and the courts to the test.

The event was part of the Informed Voters–Fair Judges Project, a nonpartisan public education campaign launched by the National Association of Women Judges to protect judicial independence and educate voters about the constitutional role of the courts.

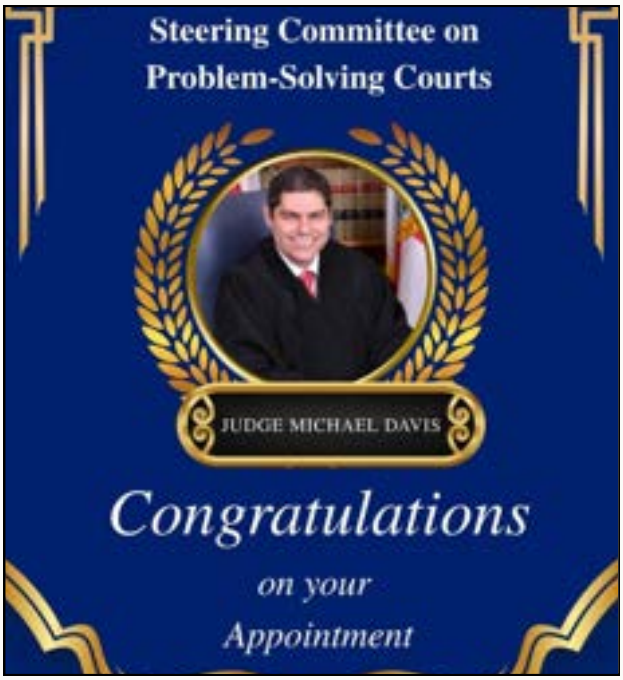
Judge Jose Izquierdo was Jeopardy! game show host extraordinaire!

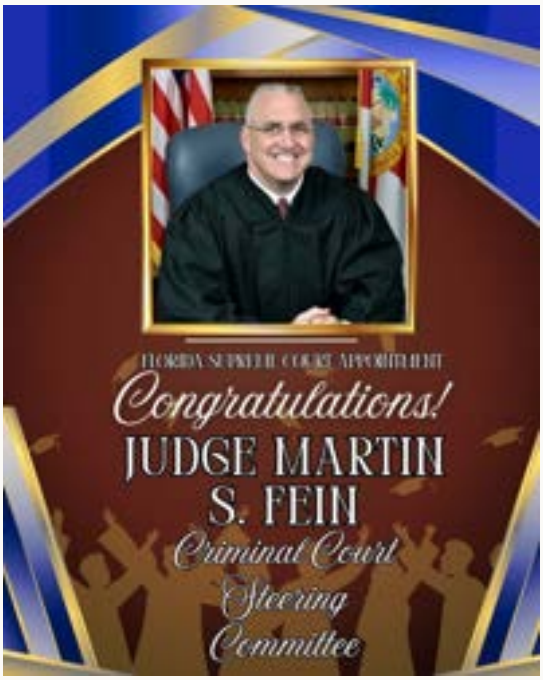
The students also took part in a question-and-answer session with a panel of judges, giving them an opportunity to ask questions and learn firsthand about the judicial system.

Great way to bring civics lessons beyond the classroom and help students better understand the courts, voting and their role as informed citizens.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS






















TOURING THE COURTHOUSE!

2026
PUMPKIN PATCH
&
POPCORN BASH







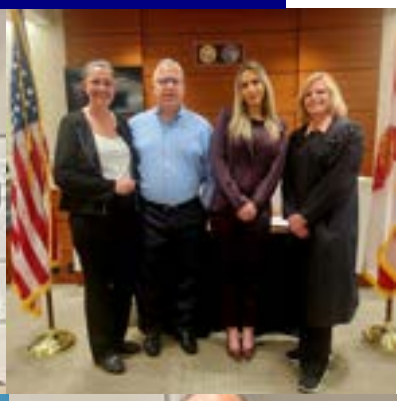




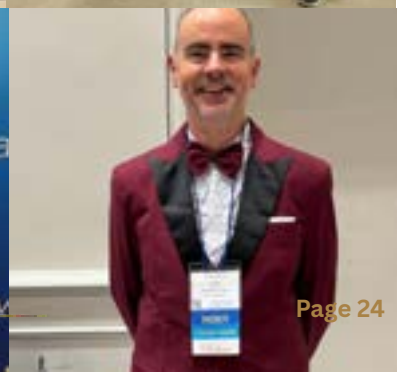

Around Town

Judicial Happenings







Proactive







Community





Recognition














Around Town

Courthouse Happenings










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