



INTER ALIA

MARCH 2019

NEWSLETTER OF THE MANATEE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION



Welcome!



WELCOME, JUDGE MARIA RUHL!

By Aaron Crittenden, YLD President



The Manatee County Bar Association warmly welcomes Judge Maria Ruhl to the 12th Judicial Circuit Bench. We are thrilled to share a brief background and introduction of our new Judge for our membership.

Judge Ruhl was born in Venezuela where she was the youngest of seven sisters. Her family moved to Broward County, Florida when she was three years old in the hopes of securing a more stable future. Although no one in her family spoke English when they arrived, they adapted quickly and got to work. Judge Ruhl started at Cooper City High School and graduated from Florida Bible Christian School in Miramar, Florida. A good learner who was able to capitalize on life lessons earned by watching her older sisters' successes and failures, Judge Ruhl excelled in school and maintained multiple jobs throughout her childhood. She started working when she was 12 years old as a babysitter, moved on to sales at JCPenney, and worked as an administrative assistant.

Judge Ruhl earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Florida International University and minored in Mass Communications. She chose this major because she knew she wanted to go to law school. As a child at career day, when most kids were saying they wanted to be a ballerina or astronaut, Judge Ruhl would confidently state that she wanted to become a lawyer. This sentiment was memorialized in an elementary school yearbook as well as a fifth-grade class photo that shows her posing in front of a backdrop made up of the U.S. Constitution (unfortunately, this delightful photo is strictly off limits and not available for Inter Alia circulation). Throughout undergrad, Judge Ruhl continued to work and pay her way through college by waitressing, bartending, and working as the personal assistant for a local radio personality. Her responsibilities as a personal assistant included marketing, grant writing, and event planning. This allowed her to meet the likes of Dan Marino, Don Shula, and Lenny Kravitz.

Our New County Court Judge – Dana Moss

By Charles Telfair, IV, MCBA President Elect



Judge Moss has an amazingly diverse background. She was born and raised in Martinsburg, Pennsylvania, an Amish community with a population of under 2000. Her middle-class working family instilled a strong work ethic requiring her to earn any perks, like cars, evenings out or college tuition. Like many youths in Pennsylvania, during harvest season she picked tomatoes, strawberries and dug potatoes to earn extra income. She was such a hard worker in the fields that an old local farmer offered to pay her by the hour rather than by the bushel. Judge Moss took this as a compliment but quickly realized that the farmer was simply saving money – the hourly rate didn't compete with the wages she would have earned given the number of bushels she picked in an hour.

She excelled academically in high school and earned a full scholarship to Penn State University. It was not her first option, but she could not afford to turn it down. She studied political science with an eye toward law school at Penn State and spent two semesters abroad on scholarship bolstered by money earned during harvest season at home – one in Athens, Greece (where she managed to also visit Crete, Italy and Santorini (her favorite) and one in San German, Puerto Rico where she put the final touches on her second language, Spanish.

Following graduation from Penn State, she moved to Raleigh, North Carolina to pursue her dream of attending law school at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. To obtain in-state tuition, she needed to reside in North Carolina for a year. She also needed a year to earn money to pay tuition. She found an ad in the local newspaper for the Raleigh Police Department and thought it would be a great way to start learning the law. She trained for a full year and then became a beat cop in a tough neighborhood. As a rookie, she received the least desirable car – she could literally see through the floor board and had no computer access in the vehicle. Worse,

(continued on page 6)

(continued on page 6)

President's Message



by Alexandra St. Paul, Esq.

We were so fortunate to have our Florida Bar President, Michelle Suskauer, in Bradenton with us on Wednesday February 27th. She is remarkable and a great leader for our Bar. She has an intense practice as a criminal defense attorney, yet gives an extraordinary amount of time to her volunteer job as our Bar President. She has numerous speaking engagements all over the state every month and has appeared on many network broadcasts as a speaker and consultant on legal issues.

Our day with Michelle began at 7:45 with JAVA with the Judges. Several of our Second District Court of Appeal Judges were in Bradenton for the day and we hosted them at the best attended JAVA in memory. Tellers, a new restaurant in downtown Connect Bradenton, provided a delicious breakfast, which included oatmeal, scones, muffins and lots of coffee. It was held in the Judge Gilbert A. Smith, Sr. Jury Assembly Room. At 9:30 in the same room we hosted a Criminal Justice Summit, which was moderated by our Chief Judge, Charles E. Williams. The panel consisted of Michelle Suskauer, Larry Eger and Ed Brodsky. It was a dynamic meeting and very informative.

Our Bar Lunch followed at Pier 22, where Michelle was our guest speaker. She is eloquent and very knowledgeable. She updated us on many new programs the Bar has established recently to help us in our practices, including Legal Fuel and our ability to take credit cards as payment from clients and have them responsible for the charges. Please go online to the Florida Bar for details. Thank you to everyone who joined us and participated. Graceann Frederico and your Board spend many hours working on programs for you and we really appreciate your support and attendance at our events.

March 27, 2019 General Membership Luncheon

Registration is now open for the upcoming March 27, 2019 General Membership Luncheon at Pier 22.

Our guest speaker will be
BrynneAnne Besio, CEO of the
South Florida Museum.
Please RSVP to now to MCBA@
ManateeBar.com

COMMUNITY SERVICE

AWARDS: UPDATE!

For the past 20 years, we have recognized the wonderful volunteerism of MCBA members through the Community Service Awards. This year, we'd like to hear from you about the organizations you're helping. We'd like to recognize those charities and give you an opportunity to share why you care about them. This will help raise the profile of your charity with our members and will hopefully result in that charity receiving more support from our community.

If you'd like your charity to receive this recognition, please email MCBA@ManateeBar.com with your name and the name of the organization(s) you support. Also include a brief summary about the program, your involvement (if any), and a photo (if possible).

Deadline to submit all information is April 15, 2019.

The Manatee County Bar Association supports diversity and inclusion in our membership and welcomes lawyers of all backgrounds, ethnicities, races, religions, cultures, sexual orientations and abilities. As part of this initiative, the Manatee County Bar Association has created the Diversity and Inclusion Committee (DAIC) and fully supports its mission to increase the diversity of our membership and the local legal community.



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Family Section CLE: What's the Difference?

Recently, the Family Section held a very informative CLE entitled "What's the Difference? Know the Differences Between a Parenting Coordinator, Guardian Ad Litem, Attorney Ad Litem, and a Social Investigator". Lead by Judge Moreland and Judge Maulucci, attendees heard from panelists Dr. Debra Carter, Dr. Christine Profito, Pam Fields, Esq., and Kevin Bruning, Esq. who explained the definition and criteria for each. Special thanks to Family Section Chair Faith Brown and CLE Sponsor, Laura Lynch, Financial Advisor with Edward Jones.



JA Tess Lulli, Sponsor Laura Lynch, Kevin Bruning, Judge Diana Moreland, Dr. Debra Carter, and Dr. Christine Profito.



Sponsor Laura Lynch and Judge Susan Maulucci

Spotted . . . MCBA Members Out and About!



*Recently, Joe Battaglia was seen reading *The Lorax* to 3rd graders at Abel Elementary. Joe was celebrating Embracing Dr. Seuss's Differences Day on March 1, 2019.*



Retired Judge Scott Brownell, MCBA Executive Director Graceann Frederico, and MCBA Director Lori Dorman were seen teaching 6th graders at SUGG Middle School.



WELCOME TO “BABY COURT”

By, Hon. Teresa Dees

How often have you heard “the system is broken” when discussing child welfare in our state and around the nation? How often have you heard about the team of child welfare experts actively working to improve that very system, right here, in our backyard? Have you heard about Early Childhood Court? If you have not, please, read on.

Following a successful national model established by ZERO TO THREE (www.zerotothree.org), Florida’s Early Childhood Court (“ECC”) emerged in 2014. ECC (also affectionately referred to as “Baby Court”) addresses child welfare issues for children primarily under the age of three, involved in the Dependency Court system. ECC is a problem-solving court designed to (1) improve child safety and well-being, (2) heal trauma and repair the parent/child relationship, (3) promote timely permanency for children and (4) stop the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment. The vision of ECC is to ensure infants and toddlers reach their full potential, through educating and supporting the adults who touch their lives. Research shows, during the first three years of life, emotionally nourishing relationships lay the foundation for a lifetime of success. Neuroscientists have found that by age three, 80 percent of a child’s brain has been “wired” and early experiences have set the stage for life. If adults responsible for providing care for young and vulnerable children, can be properly supported and educated, a child can achieve healthy attachments and early brain development, which are both crucial to children between the ages of zero to three, and their future physical, mental, and emotional health. Otherwise, these children will be at extremely high risk for developmental delays, behavioral challenges, educational delays and significant difficulties developing and maintaining appropriate and healthy relationships.

ECC is intended to streamline judicially-involved families, by offering parents, children and caregivers intensive wrap-around case management services, trauma-informed therapy, frequent access to ECC family team members and monthly oversight by the judiciary. Children in ECC receive child-parent therapy using evidence-based interventions designed to heal trauma and repair a child’s relationship with his parent or caregiver, and infant mental health therapy. Parents are provided additional visits with the child, thus promoting healing and bonding. Joining ECC is voluntary, as the legal and therapeutic family team members recognize the process is time-consuming and intrusive. In addition to regular therapeutic, educational and medical appointments, families will engage in monthly family team meetings and monthly court reviews. The Manatee ECC courtroom is structured in an informal manner. The parents, children and family team members are seated together, with the ECC Judge and attorneys, at a large table designed to facilitate open and transparent communication. Caregivers are invited to attend and share input. The children are present, and are able to play with toys, games, stuffed animals and books; or spend time with a number of our pet therapy program’s canine friends who regularly

attend ECC hearings with the families.

Our Manatee ECC team was established in October 2017, through a collaboration with Manatee County Government, the 12th Judicial Circuit, the Florida Center for Early Learning, Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, and the Sarasota YMCA. To date, Manatee ECC has served fifty children in twenty-eight families, and has reunified twenty-five children with their parents. Earlier this year, Manatee ECC was designated as an “implementation site” with *ZERO TO THREE*, providing an opportunity for national training and technical assistance.

The Florida Office of Court Improvement conducted an analysis of 356 ECC children, ages 0-3, to a comparable group of non-ECC children from 2014-2018. The average number of days from removal to closure for reunification for ECC children was 477. The average number of days from removal to closure for reunification for non-ECC children was 736. This data shows a difference of 259 days, meaning ECC children attained permanency through reunification 8.5 months sooner than non-ECC children. The average number of days from removal to overall permanency (through reunification, adoption or permanent guardianship) for ECC children was 552. The average number of days from removal to overall permanency for non-ECC children was 695. This data shows a difference of 143 days, meaning ECC children attained overall permanency 4.75 months sooner than non-ECC children.



David A. Miles, a legally blind, 96-year-old man, built the children’s book and toy cart, by hand. Mr. Miles’ son, Dave, is along-time member of the Court Administration I.T. department. The cart was finished with the assistance of Court Administration’s Judith Plescia; and painted and designed as a community service project, by Judge Dees’ daughter, Taylor.



Judge Dees and Ruby Begonia, 12th Judicial Circuit Therapy Dog.



Scout, a 12th Judicial Circuit Therapy Dog, with a friend in court.

EXPERIENCED ATTORNEY WANTED!

Goodis Thompson & Miller, P.A., an established, AV-rated Tampa Bay defense firm is seeking an experienced associate attorney for its Lakewood Ranch office. Qualified candidates will have 3+ years' experience in general civil defense litigation and/or medical malpractice defense litigation. Candidates should possess the ability to manage a high-volume workload, thrive in a team environment, recognize essential deadlines, and work well under pressure. Experience with medical records review and summarization is required.

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(Welcome Judge Ruhl, continued from page 1)

After graduating from FIU, she then attended St. Thomas University School of Law, where she was a member of Law Review, secretary of the Moot Court Board and interned as a law clerk for a federal judge in the U.S. District Court, Southern District of Florida. Further, she was a Research Assistant for her Contracts professor and clerked for a civil attorney.

Following graduation from law school in 2005, Judge Ruhl moved to Lee County where she was hired instantly by a small private firm and prospered practicing criminal defense. Thereafter, she moved on to Port Charlotte and then to Bradenton where she hung her own shingle and practiced criminal defense, immigration, family law, and personal injury. She met her husband, attorney Rick Ruhl, in 2008 and they were married in 2010. They then went into practice together after founding Ruhl Law, P.A. with offices in Port Charlotte, Sarasota and Bradenton. She lives in Venice with her husband and 3 children, aged 8, 9, and 13.

Judge Ruhl started her time on the Bench on January 8, 2019 after winning the contested August 2018 election. Upon her swearing in, she became the 12th Judicial Circuit's first Hispanic judge. Her time on the bench thus far has been fantastic and everyone has been extremely helpful to her. She looks forward to her time in Circuit Civil and is enjoying the challenge involved with the breadth and scope of the civil realm.

Members of the Manatee County Bar Association are encouraged to introduce yourselves to Judge Ruhl if you have not had the pleasure of meeting her yet. We look forward to her continued service to the 12th Judicial Circuit and know that she is, and will remain, a fantastic addition to the bench of our circuit.

IF IT INVOLVES FOOD



(New County Court Judge Moss...continued from page 1)

every day she was provided with a "beat pack" that required her to go door to door alone, arresting suspects. She never knew what to expect when she knocked – some suspects would not hurt a female police officer; others had no such restraint. She worked 12 hour shifts with 25-30 calls a day and 5-6 arrests. There were a few upsides – she learned great people skills on the beat and, more importantly, through the police department, she met and married her husband.

Following marriage, her husband received an offer to be Chief of Police in Yuma, Colorado, which they decided to accept. Pregnant with their first child, Judge Moss worked for a year at the West Yuma Chamber of Commerce and following birth, returned to police work, this time at the University of North Colorado, Greeley.

Never one to sit idle, she applied and was admitted to the Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville, again with a full scholarship. There, she vowed to her law school classmates that she would never practice criminal or family law. While at Florida Coastal, she clerked with Spohrer, Wilner, Maxwell & Matthews, a very well-known and respected firm. The Florida Supreme Court also invited one person from Florida Coastal to be a full-time student intern working 40 hours a week in Tallahassee. Judge Moss was selected to fill that role and worked on a myriad of interesting matters including the Jimmy Rice case and casino gambling issues. As an aside, Judge Moss said there is red telephone at the Florida Supreme Court which is a direct line to the Whitehouse – the rule was to never allow that telephone to ring more than once. While at Florida Coastal, she also worked as a Victim Advocate for Compassionate Families located in Jacksonville.

Following graduation from law school, Judge Moss moved to Sarasota where she worked at various times as a private practice criminal defense and family law attorney (so much for law school vows), a 12th Circuit Law Clerk and as the 12th Circuit Public Defender, Felony Division Chief. She also remained involved in her local community as a member, among others, of the Manatee County Supporters of Local Law Enforcement, Women on the Go with Grace Community Church (working with foster children) and as a Girl Scouts of America Troop Leader (a "hard core business especially regarding cookie sales.")

She has two daughters, age 12 and 18 and a rescue dog, Misty. Her oldest daughter started college at 15 and had finished her associates degree by age 17. Her husband worked as a stay at home parent for a brief period but quickly returned to law enforcement, first, part time and now full time, in Manatee County.

Through the JNC process, Judge Moss became a new County Court Judge at the beginning of 2019. If you haven't met her yet, you should make an effort to do so. She is a welcome addition to our already excellent bench.

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Highlights from February 27th, 2019

Java with the Judges



February General Membership Luncheon



Criminal Justice Summit



What a busy day we had on February 27th, 2019.

It began in the Gilbert Smith Sr. Jury Assembly Room where the Young Lawyers Division hosted the 2019 Java with the Judges. Early birds arrived at 7:45 am to a delicious breakfast of scones, muffins, gourmet coffees and even a Make Your Own Oatmeal Bar. Judges from the 2nd DCA and the 12th Judicial Circuit, Florida Bar President Michelle Suskauer and Court Administration staff enjoyed their early morning breakfast with our members. Thank you to Harlee & Bald for sponsoring the event and Teller's for the catering.

While the 2nd DCA heard Oral Arguments, the MCBA held its first Criminal Justice Summit. Chief Judge Charles Williams moderated a panel consisting of Florida Bar President Michelle Suskauer, State Attorney Ed Brodsky and Public Defender Larry Eger discussing the topic: "Criminal Justice Reform".

At noon, Pier 22 was host to the February General Membership Luncheon. Florida Bar President Michelle Suskauer gave a dynamic State of the Florida Bar report, updating our members on various Florida Bar news and topics.

Thank you to all involved for making the day a success!

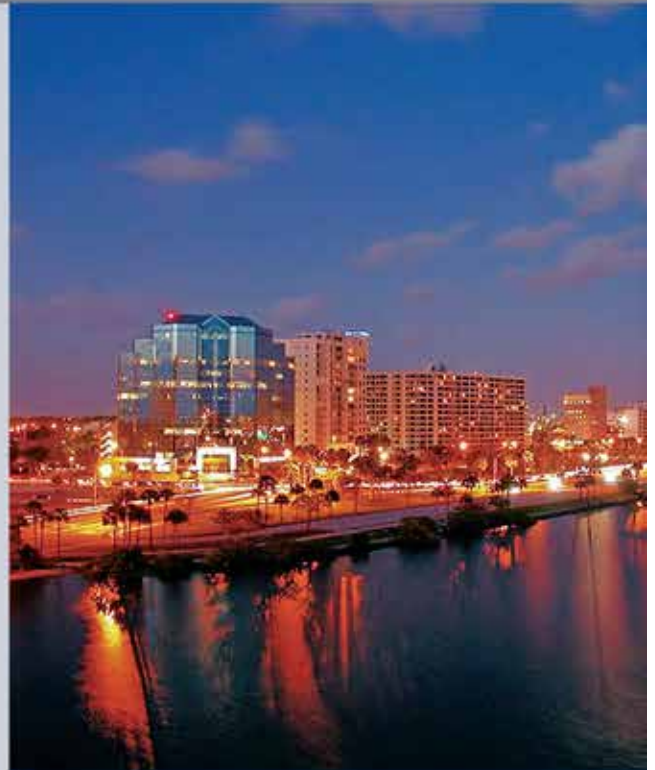


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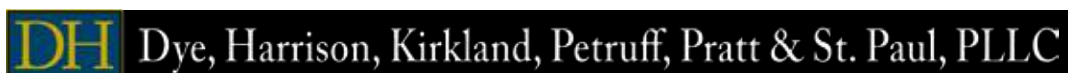
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Past Presidents Luncheon 2019



Recently, MCBA Past Presidents met at O'Bricks for their annual appreciation luncheon. Approximately 30 Past Presidents attended, spanning 6 decades of MCBA leadership. Special thanks to this year's sponsors:



5 Things You Didn't Know About Me:

Marisa Powers, MCBA Director

1. I was born and raised in Bradenton.
2. I performed in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade when I was in high school.
3. I have never been to Council's (I know, can I even say I'm from Bradenton if I've never been there?).
4. My music preference is hip hop or rap.
5. I have the most amazing, sassy, strong-willed 5 year old daughter who keeps me in check most days.



Judge Teresa Dees

1. I was born and raised in Manatee County. I moved away to attend the University of Florida (undergraduate and law school – GO GATORS!) and returned to pursue my career and raise my family.
2. I am married to a farmer.
3. I love kids and dogs. Working in the juvenile division fulfills both of those passions (thanks, in part, to the 12th Judicial Circuit's Pet Therapy Program).
4. I began working in the legal field when I was in middle school. I worked for my father's law firm, Kaklis, Venable & Witt, as the document runner, copy maker, and general errand girl. I was lucky enough to meet many clerks, court deputies, judges and judicial assistants – many of which I still call friends to this day.
5. I accepted my first "real job" in the legal field when I joined Jon Weiffenbach at his law practice in 1997.

I believe he hired me because I spelled his name wrong on the cover letter I penned, in my misguided attempt to make a good first impression. (Really, Jon...no "h"?)

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DATES TO REMEMBER:

March 14, 2019	Diversity & Inclusion Committee Meeting
March 15, 2019	MCBA Scavenger Hunt
March 27, 2019	General Membership Luncheon
March 28, 2019	Guardianship/Probate and Solo/Small Firm Networking Social
April 11, 2019	Diversity & Inclusion Committee Meeting
May 9, 2019	Diversity & Inclusion Committee Meeting
May 17, 2019	BEACH PARTY SOCIAL – Details to Come
May 29, 2019	General Membership Luncheon - LAW DAY
June 26, 2019	General Membership Luncheon – Annual Meeting

*dates are subject to change

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- Veteran's benefits
- Guardianship.



Jeffrey S. Goethe, Esq.

- Admitted to the Florida Bar in 1990
- Florida Bar Board-Certified in Wills, Trusts & Estates
- Fellow, American College of Trust and Estate Counsel
- AV-rated by Martindale-Hubbell
- Current member and past chair of the Florida Probate Rules Committee
- The Florida Bar's RPPTL Section Executive Council, Homestead Committee Co-Chair, Bar Journal Co-Chair
- Past Director and President of the Manatee County Bar Association



Lawrence W. Thomas, Esq.

- Admitted to the Florida Bar in 1985
- Past Director and Secretary of the Manatee County Bar Association
- Practice areas include wills, trusts, estates, guardianship and elder law



M. Brandon Robinson, Esq.

- Admitted to the Florida Bar in 2015
- United States Department of Veteran's Affairs Accredited Attorney
- Executive Board Member, Thomas E. Penick, Jr. Elder Law Inn of Court
- Combat Veteran, United States Marine Corps
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YLD News & Happenings

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Dominique Shephard is an associate attorney with a practice area concerning a spectrum of elder law issues, primarily focusing on Medicaid asset protection, Medicaid eligibility, and long-term care counseling. She is a member of the Florida Bar Young Lawyer's Division, Sarasota County Bar Association and Manatee County Bar Association. Dominique graduated magna cum laude from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and received her Juris Doctor from Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center in Baton Rouge.

Dominique was born and raised in Berkeley, California. She moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to attend college where she spent time volunteering with a local ministry that focused on homeless outreach and advocacy. Upon graduating from law school, Dominique joined the Peace Corps and spent two years in the sub-Saharan African country of Botswana. During this time, Dominique was able to work in HIV/AIDS related prevention programs with the Ministry of Local Government and Women's Affairs. This was a character-building experience that deepened Dominique's passion for advocacy and social outreach.

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Associate attorney Slade V. Dukes is a Florida native who has practiced law for over twelve years throughout the state of Florida, including Tallahassee, St. Petersburg, Daytona, and Jacksonville. He received his Juris Doctor from Stetson University College of Law, and his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from the University of Florida. Slade has worked for the Florida Office of the Attorney General, the state and federally funded Elder Consumer Protection Program at Stetson University College of Law, the Florida Department of Children and Families, and the Wounded Warrior Project veteran's non-profit organization.

Slade is a former member of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Florida Consumers' Council, and a former board chair and current member of the Florida Office of the Attorney General's Seniors versus Crime Board. Additionally, Slade is a proud and active supporter and member of the LGBTQ community. In February of 2019, Slade moved back to southwest Florida to join Boyer & Boyer, P.A., where he is building upon his work in elder law and guardianships, as well as continuing his work in probate and estate planning.



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Welcome New Members

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University of Florida, 1999 and 2001
 Stetson University College of Law, 2004
 Year Admitted to The Florida Bar, 2006
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 Year Admitted to The Florida Bar, 2006
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Justin T. Mooney, Esq.

Emory University, 2011
 University of Florida, 2015
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Florida State University, 1998
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Dominique Shephard, Esq.

Spelman College, 2007
 LSU Law Center, 2011
 Year Admitted to The Florida Bar, 2018
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News for Immediate Release

February 13, 2019

Media Release# 2019-01

Contact: Dennis Menendez

Office: 941-861-7817

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Election of the new Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court Chief Judge

The Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court is pleased to announce that on Friday, February 8, 2019 the Honorable Kimberly C. Bonner was unanimously elected to serve as the next Chief Judge of the 12th Circuit for the two year term beginning July 1, 2019. Judge Bonner will be the first woman to serve as the Chief Judge in the history of the 12th Circuit. She received her BA Degree from Stetson University in 1986, her Masters Degree from the University of West Florida in 1987, her Juris Doctorate from Pepperdine University in 1990 and her Masters of Judicial Studies from the University of Nevada, Reno in 2017. Judge Bonner was first appointed as a County Judge in 2002 and in 2013 was appointed to the Circuit Court bench.

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SPEAKER

Gilbert King

6-9 p.m. Thursday, March 28, 2019

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In 1949 four black men were wrongfully convicted of rape in Groveland, Florida. Pulitzer Prize winning author, Gilbert King, explains why the case of the Groveland Four, who were all recently pardoned, serves as an enduring symbol of racial injustice in Jim Crow Florida.

About the Speaker


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