



INTER ALIA

NEWSLETTER OF THE MANATEE
COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

JANUARY FEBRUARY 2026

*News, invitations,
photos and more*

**CELL PHONE VIDEO AS
THE SILENT WITNESS**

TRIBUTE TO A GREAT CHIEF JUDGE

**PUT THE BANANA PEEL
BACK WHERE IT BELONGS:
WHY FLORIDA MUST
RESTORE THE OWENS
BURDEN-SHIFTING
DOCTRINE**

***THE NAVY SEAL MINDSET: The
Intangibles with Navy Capt. Tom
Chaby (Ret.)***

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CELL PHONE VIDEO AS THE SILENT WITNESS

By Brian A. Iten, Esq.; MCBA Secretary

Imagine that as you prepare for trial, fortune smiles upon you. A determined investigator locates a witness who used his cellphone camera to capture an event on video which will prove crucial to your case. The investigator even took custody of the cellphone, so the evidence could be successfully extracted by a digital forensics expert. Unfortunately, your elation evaporates when you find yourself unable to secure the witness' testimony for trial, sadly knowing that there was no one else present at the scene who is competent to testify that the video "fairly and accurately" depicts the critical event. How will you be able to lay the necessary foundation to introduce the crucial footage at trial? The answer can be found in an unpublished Illinois appellate court opinion, *People v. Brown*, 2019 WL 384563 (Ill. App. Ct. 2019).

At the conclusion of a jury trial, Markel Brown was found guilty of criminal sexual abuse. On appeal, Brown challenged the trial court admitting into evidence two cell phone videos recorded by Joseph Cotton, because Cotton – who had become uncooperative with law enforcement during the course of the criminal investigation – did not testify at trial to lay the required foundation. The trial judge ruled that the absence of Cotton did not preclude the State from presenting the videos to the jury, finding that the footage was admissible under the "silent witness" theory. The appellate court ultimately concluded that the circuit court did not abuse its discretion by admitting the two videos.

What is the "silent witness" theory and is it recognized in Florida?

Let us answer that two-part question in the reverse; yes, the "silent witness" theory is alive and well in the Sunshine State. Simply put, it is a legal theory by which a photograph or video can be admitted at trial upon a showing of the reliability of the production process. When there is an adequate foundation assuring the accuracy of the process that produced a recorded image, the image should be received as silent witness to the depicted event. *See R.V. v. State*, 388 So.3d 952 (Fla. 3d DCA 2024). The silent witness theory is commonly utilized when a party desires to introduce a surveillance video that was recorded at a time when no individual affiliated with the person or entity utilizing the surveillance system was physically present. A prime example is the video footage from an automatic teller machine recorded when an ATM is molested after business hours by a criminal defendant.

"Florida courts have developed a non-exclusive list of guiding factors for use in determining the reliability of the production

process. Relevant factors include: (1) whether the evidence establishes the date and time the image was captured; (2) evidence of image manipulation; (3) the condition and capability of the equipment that produced the image; (4) procedural consideration relating to the preparation, testing, operation, and security of the equipment involved; and (5) testimony identifying any participants depicted in the image." *Id.* at 955.

The analysis in *People v. Brown* tracks that adopted by Florida jurists. The *Brown* court explained that the prosecution's witnesses testified that the videos did not appear to be altered, edited, or corrupted; that the cell phone used to record and store the videos appeared to work as designed; and the videos' metadata confirmed the videos were recorded on the date and time alleged. *See Brown*. In addition, one of the officers who responded to the apartment depicted in the videos personally observed the very room that was captured in the recorded footage, confirming that the room "matched" the videos. *See id.*

In light of the foregoing, what type of testimony will you need to elicit from your forensics expert – after the digital analysis is complete – to introduce the cell phone video at trial? At a bare minimum, you should ask:

- a) Is the cellular telephone in question capable of accurately recording video and sound?
- b) Do the recording features of the phone function properly?
- c) Was the video in question stored on the cell phone you examined?
- d) Was the video in question recorded by the cell phone that you examined?
- e) Is there any geolocation information embedded in the video?
- f) Have you found any metadata which reveals when the video was recorded?
- g) Does the video have embedded security features to prevent alteration?
- h) Do you see any indication that the video in question has been altered, edited, or corrupted?

Your success in supplying the necessary foundation lies at the intersection of law and technology. Having a working knowledge of each is essential to ensuring the factfinder will consider all of the relevant evidence – including digital evidence – when determining the outcome of your case.



Wednesday, January 28, 2026

Manatee Performing Arts Center- Kiwanis Hall

11:30 - Noon Lunch & Networking

Noon Meeting Start

Navy Captain Tom Chaby, (SEAL, Retired)
Leadership, Team Effectiveness and Performance Optimization

Captain Tom Chaby served as an active-duty US Navy SEAL for 26 years. Throughout his career, Tom spent over 12 years deployed or stationed to over 70 countries around the world leading special operations at every level. Shortly after 9/11, Captain Chaby deployed to Afghanistan leading a Task Unit of 50 SEALs and support personnel conducting special operations in support of the initial stages of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. During the latter part of the most critical fight in Fallujah, Tom led a Task Force of over 400 personnel conducting full spectrum special operations in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Outside of the operational realm, Tom worked relentlessly with developing and ensuring performance optimization for the SEAL community and developing resilience for the entire 67,000 members that comprise the Special Operations community. During his five-year tenure as Deputy Commanding Officer of the SEAL Training Command and as a SEAL Instructor, Tom was integral in developing the current generation of SEAL operators.

In addition to his work with special operations, he has collaborated with dozens of corporations, sports teams and universities by bringing his extensive experience and insights through speaking engagements and consulting. Tom has been a guest lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania; Stanford University, the University of Michigan, for the American Medical Association (AMA) and at multiple "The Ortho Biologic Institute" annual conferences. Other noteworthy people and organizations Tom has worked with include: Bill Gates, Dennis Washington, DEX Imaging, Globus Medical, Fratarcangeli Wealth Management, CBRE leadership, Intuit leadership, Coach Nick Saban, Coach Jim Harbaugh, Coach Cooper and the Tampa Bay Lightning, the New York Mets, and the New York Yankees coaching staff along with dozens of other high performance organizations.

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MCBA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Wed., January 14, 2026MCBA YLD Board of Directors Meeting
- Friday, January 23, 2026 Judge Leaf Investiture
- Wed., January 28, 2026Membership Luncheon
- Wed., February 4, 2026..... MCBA Board of Directors Meeting
- Wed., February 11, 2026MCBA YLD Board of Directors Meeting
- Wed., February 25, 2026Java with the Judges
.....Membership Luncheon
- Wed., March 4, 2026..... MCBA Board of Directors Meeting
- Wed., March 11, 2026.....MCBA YLD Board of Directors Meeting
- Thurs., March 12, 2026 Online Ethics CLE
- Wed., March 25, 2026.....Membership Luncheon
- Wed., April 1, 2026 MCBA Board of Directors Meeting
- Wed., April 8, 2026MCBA YLD Board of Directors Meeting
- Fri., May 1, 2026 Annual Beach Social
- Wed., May 6, 2026 MCBA Board of Directors Meeting
- Fri., May 8, 202612th Circuit Bench Bar Conference
- Wed., May 27, 2026Law Day Membership Luncheon
- Wed., June 3, 2026 MCBA Board of Directors Meeting
- Wed., June 10, 2026MCBA YLD Board of Directors Meeting
- Wed., June 24, 2026 Annual Membership Luncheon

*dates are subject to change

Welcome New Members

Brian S. Chambers, Esq.

Stetson University College of Law
Date Admitted to The Florida Bar, 2005
Firm/Office: State Attorney’s Office
Area(s) of Practice: Criminal, Trial

Juliana G. DaSilva, Esq.

Date Admitted to The Florida Bar, 2024
Firm/Office: State Attorney’s Office
Area(s) of Practice: Criminal

Adria M. Jensen, Esq

University of Florida
Date Admitted to The Florida Bar, 2005
Firm/Office: Shumaker Loop & Kendrick, LLLP
Area(s) of Practice: Litigation/Trial Advocacy/Advocacy,
Mediation, Probate & Trust Litigation

Amy Sophia Pietrowski, Esq.

Mississippi College School of Law
Date Admitted to The Florida Bar, 2024
Firm/Office: Pietrowski Law Practice, PLLC
Area(s) of Practice: International Law

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Put the Banana Peel Back Where It Belongs: Why Florida Must Restore the *Owens* Burden-Shifting Doctrine

By Spencer Heintz, Esq., YLD Director

Anyone who has ever litigated a slip-and-fall case in Florida knows the familiar script:

The plaintiff falls.

The liquid or debris is obvious.

The business swears it “just wasn’t there a moment ago.”

And every inspection log, cleaning schedule, and camera angle needed to verify that claim is—conveniently—locked behind the defendant’s doors.

Yet somehow, it’s the injured customer who must prove what only the business can possibly know.

This wasn’t always the case. And it shouldn’t be anymore.

The Banana Peel That Changed Florida Law

The modern fight over foreign transitory substances began with a banana peel—one left on a Publix floor long enough to discolor and collect dirt. In *Owens v. Publix Super Markets, Inc.*, 807 So. 2d 315 (Fla. 2001), the Florida Supreme Court acknowledged a reality all trial lawyers know: businesses exclusively control the evidence of their own inspections, cleanings, and safety practices.

Recognizing this imbalance, the Court created a **burden-shifting framework**. If the plaintiff proved they fell because of a foreign substance, a rebuttable presumption of negligence arose. The business then had the opportunity—indeed, the obligation—to show it exercised reasonable care.

Simple. Logical. Fair.

Owens didn’t give plaintiffs a free pass. It just required the party with the **knowledge, control, and documentation** to come forward with it.

Enter the Lobbyists: Goodbye *Owens*, Hello Statute

Businesses hated *Owens*. Not because it caused unfair results, but because it forced transparency.

Not long after the *Owens* Doctrine was established, the lobbying money started flowing. The business interest won, and the Legislature passed §768.0710 (later incorporated into §768.0755). The statute eliminated the *Owens* burden-shifting rule and placed the entire burden back on the plaintiff to prove the business had **actual or constructive knowledge** of the hazard.

Ironically, this was done in the name of “fairness”—while the businesses still controlled every piece of evidence needed to answer that question.

The result? A predictable avalanche of discovery gymnastics:

- Inspection logs “don’t exist”...until an adverse inference instruction is requested, and suddenly they do
- Surveillance footage “wasn’t saved”...except when a court orders a hearing
- Corporate designees “aren’t aware” of cleaning policies... until the cross-examination gets uncomfortable

When the same pattern repeats for a decade, it stops being anecdotal. It becomes systemic.

Why It’s Time to Shift the Burden Back

The core problem in premises cases is not complexity—it’s **information asymmetry**.

Plaintiffs don’t have access to the cleaning logs.

They don’t have the cameras.

They don’t have the employee schedules, the corporate policies, or the sweep-sheet timestamps.

Businesses do.

Owens recognized this imbalance and corrected it by requiring the party with exclusive control to produce proof of reasonable care. That rule:

Promoted fairness

A plaintiff shouldn’t have to prove the unprovable. A business should have to produce the evidence it already has.

Incentivized safety

If a store knows it must show proof of inspections, the safest response is obvious: maintain and preserve them.

Reduced gamesmanship

Owens made it harder for defendants to deny or “misplace” records essential to the truth.

Reflected common sense

Continued on Page 9



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**It's
Java with the Judges
2026**

With Members of the 2nd DCA & 12th Circuit Judiciary

**Wednesday, February 25, 2026
8:00 - 9:00 AM**

Layon F. Robinson, II Law Library
Manatee County Judicial Center - First Floor

FREE FOR MCBA MEMBERS

[CLICK HERE TO RSVP](#)

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*Pictured from the Manatee County Appraiser's Office,
Patricia McClintock and Scott Tussing with MCBA Director Joe Battaglia*

If you're the only one with the evidence, you shouldn't be rewarded for losing it.

The "Frivolous Lawsuit Flood" Myth

When *Owens* was decided, businesses predicted a tidal wave of frivolous claims. It never happened.

Even under *Owens*:

- Plaintiffs still had to prove causation.
- Plaintiffs still had to prove damages.
- Plaintiffs still had to prove a foreign substance actually caused the fall.

Owens simply required businesses to show what every responsible business should already be doing: documenting inspections and maintaining safe premises.

A burden-shifting rule does not create fraudulent claims. It creates accountability.

And accountability is not bad for business—unless the business is cutting corners.

Stop Rewarding the Ostrich Defense

Under the current statute, Florida plaintiffs are required to prove what they cannot access, while businesses are rewarded for not documenting or producing what they exclusively control.

This is not balance. It's an evidentiary sandtrap.

Restoring *Owens* would:

- Correct the one-sided burden created by §768.0710
- Prevent defendants from hiding behind missing or "unavailable" records
- Promote safer practices across industries
- Restore public confidence in premises liability outcomes

Most importantly, it would return Florida to a system that recognizes a simple truth: **the party with the evidence should bear the burden of producing it.**

Conclusion: Restore the Fair Fight

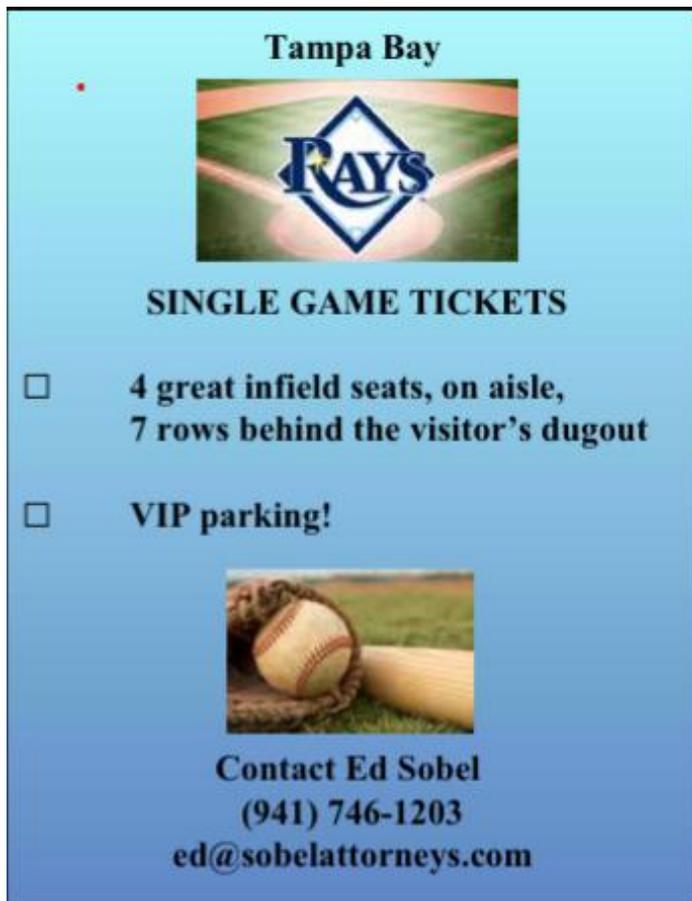
Florida's current premises framework places an almost insurmountable burden on injured parties—one that doesn't reflect reality, law, or basic fairness. Restoring burden shifting under *Owens v. Publix* wouldn't tilt the scales; it would level them.

The truth is straightforward:

When a business controls the evidence, the law should require that business to come forward with it.

It's time for Florida to stop rewarding missing records, resurrect the burden-shifting doctrine, and put justice—and public safety—back where it belongs.

DISCLAIMER: The views and opinions expressed in each Inter Alia article are solely those of its respective author and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the MCBA or its Board of Directors.



Tampa Bay

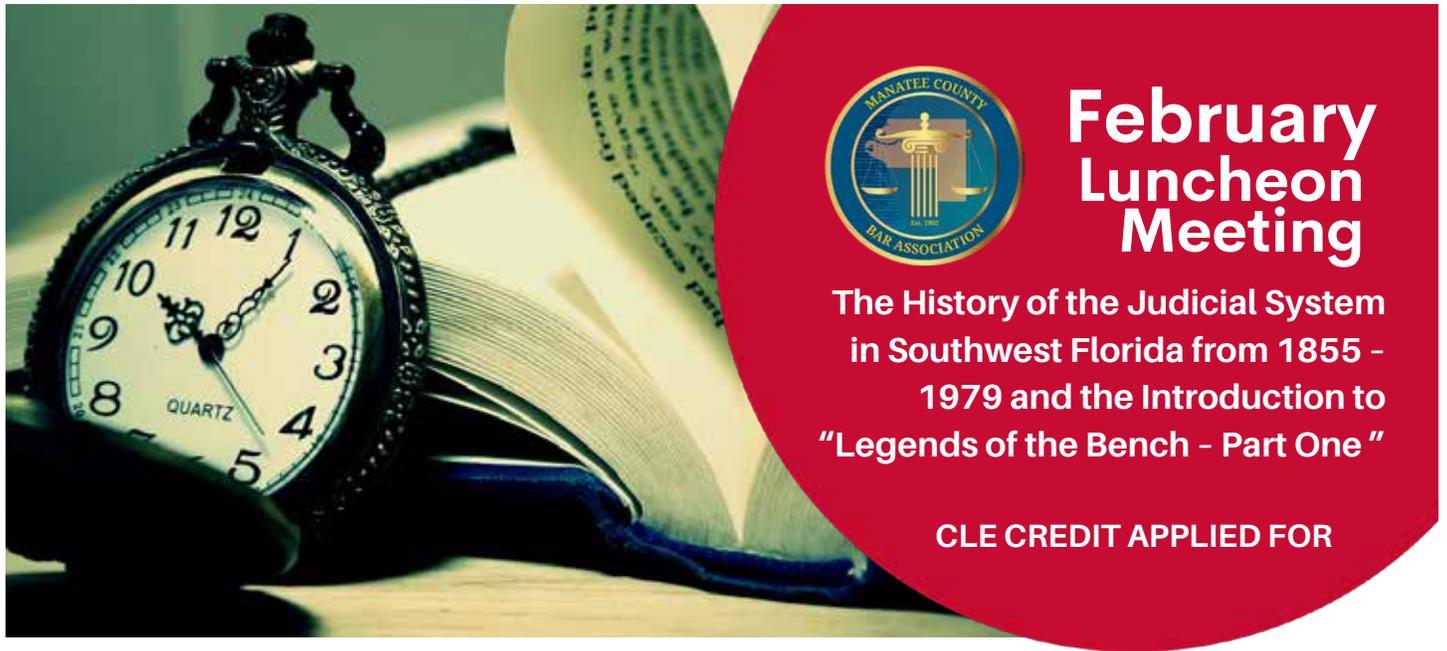


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February Luncheon Meeting

The History of the Judicial System in Southwest Florida from 1855 - 1979 and the Introduction to "Legends of the Bench - Part One"

CLE CREDIT APPLIED FOR

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

**Manatee Performing Arts Center- Kiwanis Hall
11:30 Networking & Lunch, Noon Meeting Start
Hon. Gilbert Smith, Jr. & Hon. Diana Moreland**



How many Legends of the Bench do you know?

From the uninhabited wilderness in 1855 to the urban communities in 1979, the 12th Judicial Circuit in Manatee, Sarasota and DeSoto counties developed into an important branch of government. The first men who served were colorful characters who knew how to ride a horse, handle a gun and sleep overnight in the wilderness as they traveled the circuit. The men and women who followed as judges were all dedicated to the administration of justice. Join us as we board the history train for this entertaining ride to learn about those colorful characters who laid the foundation of a strong judiciary in the 12th Judicial Circuit.

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NEWS OF NOTE:



WILLIAM S. GALVANO JOINS MCBA YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William S. Galvano is an Associate Attorney at Grimes Galvano. William has a general civil practice including commercial, construction, and constitutional law.



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"We are proud to announce that Attorney Rose Kasweck has been named a Partner at Hale Law. Rose's dedication to her clients, leadership within the firm, and commitment to excellence exemplify our core values. We are grateful for her contributions and excited to celebrate this well-deserved milestone."

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Young Lawyers Division Update: Connection, Conversation and Community

Since our last issue, the Young Lawyers Division has been busy creating meaningful opportunities to connect, learn, and build community—both inside and outside the courtroom.

The YLD recently hosted a Table for Ten dinner at Westminster Communities, where ten young lawyers enjoyed an evening of great conversation and mentorship over dinner with Judge Charles Sniffen. The intimate setting encouraged thoughtful questions, candid discussion, and invaluable insight from the bench, making it a memorable and impactful experience for all who attended. The star of the evening was, of course, the delightful dinner created by Westminster's Chef and culinary team!

The momentum continued with Beyond the Bar, a New Lawyers event held at Harlee & Bald. Designed to bring members together in a relaxed and social atmosphere, the evening gave new attorneys a chance to network, share experiences, and strengthen relationships beyond the practice of law.

From mentorship to meaningful connections, the Young Lawyers Division continues to foster growth, camaraderie, and engagement—stay tuned for more exciting events ahead! The YLD is open to all members up to 40 years old, or those new to the practice of law during their first five years of practice. Contact Chad Manausa, Tyler Dixon, or any member of our YLD Board of Directors for more info!

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Celebrating Together:

Highlights of Our 2025 Holiday Party

As the year came to a close, members, sponsors and friends of the MCBA gathered to celebrate another successful year at the **2025 Holiday Party**, an evening filled with connection, gratitude, and festive cheer. The event brought colleagues together to reflect on accomplishments, strengthen relationships, and enjoy a well-earned evening of celebration.

Held at Kiwanis Hall, in the Manatee Performing Arts Center, the party captured the spirit of the season from the moment guests arrived. Seasonal décor, music, and thoughtful details created an atmosphere that was both fun and welcoming. It was a chance for everyone to step away from day-to-day responsibilities and simply enjoy being together.

One of the highlights of the evening was the opportunity to win fabulous prizes at the Heritage Process game table! From finding sleigh bells, to mini corn hole, to spin and win – oh what fun we had!

Guests enjoyed great food from Curated Catering & Events, lively conversation, and lots of laughter. Whether reconnecting with colleagues from different departments or strengthening bonds within teams, the evening encouraged meaningful interaction and celebration. Activities and entertainment added an extra layer of fun, keeping the energy high and the smiles constant.

The holiday party also served as a moment to look ahead. As we prepare for the opportunities and challenges of the coming year, the event reinforced a sense of optimism and camaraderie. It was a reminder that while goals and strategies matter, people are at the heart of everything we do.

As the night ended, guests left with full hearts, great memories, and renewed excitement for the year ahead. The 2025 Holiday Party was more than just a celebration—it was a reflection of our shared values, our strong community, and the positive momentum carrying us forward into the new year. Thank you to all who helped in making this event possible!



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Cliff Walters Receives the Florida Patriot Award, Honoring Legal-Leader Veterans Throughout Florida



We are proud to share that Cliff Walters has been selected as a recipient of the Florida Patriot Award—an honor presented in partnership with The Broward Bar to recognize legal-leader veterans whose service, integrity, and dedication have strengthened both the legal profession and the State of Florida.

The award presentation was held online on Wednesday, November 19th, bringing colleagues and supporters together virtually to celebrate this meaningful recognition. The award was presented to Cliff by Daniel Van Etten, President-Elect of the Manatee

Bar, who spoke warmly about Cliff's leadership, professionalism, and long-standing commitment to service.

This award honors individuals who not only served our nation but who continue to exemplify the values of dedication, courage, and civic responsibility through their legal careers. Cliff's work reflects exactly that—his decades of steady leadership, his unwavering respect for the rule of law, and his remarkable commitment to mentorship and community involvement have made an enduring impact across Florida.

Cliff's recognition highlights the profound contributions veterans bring to our legal community and the many ways they continue to serve long after their military careers.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Cliff Walters on this well-deserved honor and thank him for the legacy of service he continues to build within our profession and our state.

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TRIBUTE TO A GREAT CHIEF JUDGE

By Hon. Gilbert Smith, Jr., Guest Contributor

Every judge who served with Judge Robert B. "Bob" Bennett, Jr. became a fan. That was also true of judicial assistants, court administrators and everyone working in the 12th Judicial Circuit. Judge Bennett was always a southern gentleman, and that trait showed in the way he treated people. When I became the



president of the Manatee County Bar Association, Judge Bennett was the Chief Judge of the circuit. He could not have been more supportive of the MCBA and its mission. He was an avid reader of history and loved the programs the MCBA presented – *Legends of the Bar and Legends of the Bench*. As Chief Judge, Judge Bennett spoke many times at the MCBA luncheons including as the 2006 Law Day speaker. He also supported and took part in many MCBA programs including the *Brown v Board of Education* program.

If you have not read the article posted on the 12th Judicial Circuit website, you should. Judge Bennett was admired and loved by his colleagues. The story of his life was interesting and might be the plot for a movie. Bob Bennett was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and moved south with his family to

Louisiana. His father eventually became the warden of Louisiana State Prison, known as Angola, the Alcatraz of the South. Bob's family lived on prison grounds in a modern house with indoor plumbing and eventually an air conditioner. Living within the prison was an education itself for him. Bob observed firsthand the harsh realities of prison life. By that time, his uncle Hayton Deese was captain of the guards. At 15 years old, Bob participated in the first of many manhunts for an escapee using the blood hounds. He attended St. Francisville High School in Francisville, Louisiana. Bob was a natural athlete and played football, baseball, basketball and ran track. He was the tailback and cornerback for the school football team. Bob also had a passion for baseball. In his senior year, he was asked to play left field on the prison baseball team at Angola during the summer season.

All his teammates were inmates in prison. Bob accepted and had one of the most memorable summers of his life. He was not only the sole "white" boy on the team but was also the only player who had the right to go home after the game. The team had their own baseball field at the prison and played other prison institutions as well as some American Legion teams. Bob's experience playing on the prison baseball team gave him a new perspective on



life. He graduated from St. Francisville High School and began college at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. When his family moved to Venice, Bob followed them and graduated with his bachelor's degree in education from the University of South Florida. After teaching at Riverview High School, he returned to school to become a lawyer graduating with his law degree from Florida State University. Bob began his legal career serving as an assistant state attorney of the 12th Circuit. Later he established his own firm where he practiced civil trial work for over 19 years before being appointed to the bench. Judge Bennett became a great Chief Judge and as said by Chief Judge Diana Moreland led with "quiet authority." After many years of service to his state and community, he died on December 11, 2025, at 80 years old. He will truly be missed.

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**IN THE CIRCUIT AND COUNTY COURTS OF THE TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
IN AND FOR MANATEE, SARASOTA AND DESOTO COUNTIES**

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 2025-13a.4

(Amends 2025-13.4)

AMENDED JUDICIAL ASSIGNMENTS 2026

The following judicial assignments are effective January 2, 2026.

Chief Judge	Honorable Diana L. Moreland
Acting Chief Judge (in absence of Chief Judge)	Honorable Frederick P. Mercurio
DeSoto County Administrative Judge	Honorable Don T. Hall
Manatee County Administrative Judge	Honorable Frederick P. Mercurio
Sarasota County Administrative Judge	Honorable Hunter W. Carroll

CIRCUIT COURT ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGES

Civil Division

Honorable Hunter W. Carroll (Sarasota County)
Honorable Charles Sniffen (Manatee County)

Unified Family Court (DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota counties - has operational authority to implement UFC policy and procedures circuit-wide)

Honorable Edward Nicholas

Family Division

Honorable Andrea McHugh (Sarasota County)
Honorable Edward Nicholas (Manatee County)

Hague Convention Cases (pursuant to AO 2025-19.12)

Honorable Andrea McHugh (Sarasota and DeSoto Counties)
Honorable Edward Nicholas (Manatee County)

Criminal Division

Honorable Danielle Brewer (Sarasota County)
Honorable Frederick P. Mercurio (Manatee County)

Probate/Guardianship Division

Honorable Charles E. Williams (Sarasota County)
Honorable Diana L. Moreland (Manatee County)

CIRCUIT CIVIL – MANATEE & SARASOTA COUNTIES

Civil Division B	Manatee County	Honorable Charles Sniffen
Civil Division D	Manatee County	Honorable Stephen Matt Whyte
Civil Division A	Sarasota County	Honorable Dana Moss
Civil Division C	Sarasota County	Honorable Hunter W. Carroll
Civil Division H	South Sarasota County	Honorable Kevin Bruning
Civil Division R	Manatee and Sarasota Counties	Honorable Diana L. Moreland

CIRCUIT CRIMINAL – MANATEE & SARASOTA COUNTIES

Felony Division I	Manatee County	Honorable David Ryan Felix
Felony Division III	Manatee County	Honorable Frederick P. Mercurio
Felony Division V	Manatee County	Honorable Teresa K. Dees
Felony Division II	Sarasota County	Honorable Donna Padar
Felony Division IV	Sarasota County	Honorable Thomas W. Krug
Felony Division VI	Sarasota County	Honorable Danielle Brewer

UNIFIED FAMILY COURT – MANATEE & SARASOTA COUNTIES**A. FAMILY DIVISION- MANATEE & SARASOTA COUNTIES**

Family Division 3	Manatee County	Honorable Edward Nicholas
Family Division 4	Manatee County	Honorable Kennedy Legler
Family Division 1	Sarasota County	Honorable Rochelle T. Curley
Family Division 2	Sarasota County	Honorable Andrea McHugh
South County Family Division 1	Honorable Kevin Bruning	
South County Family Division 2	Honorable Andrea McHugh	

B. JUVENILE DIVISION - MANATEE & SARASOTA COUNTIES

Division J	Manatee County	Honorable Gilbert A. Smith, Jr.
	<i>Dependency cases</i>	
Division K	Manatee County	Honorable Susan B. Maulucci
	<i>Delinquency cases, crossover cases</i>	
	Sarasota County	Honorable Maria Ruhl
	<i>All Dependency and Delinquency cases</i>	

PROBATE & GUARDIANSHIP DIVISION -MANATEE & SARASOTA COUNTIES

Manatee County	Honorable Diana L. Moreland
Sarasota County	Honorable Charles E. Williams
South County Probate & Guardianship	Honorable Charles E. Willaims

CIRCUIT COURT – DESOTO COUNTY

All Circuit Civil (other than Division R), Unified Family, Circuit Criminal, Juvenile Dependency and Delinquency, Probate and Guardianship Civil Division R	Honorable Don T. Hall Honorable Diana L. Moreland
---	--

PROBLEM-SOLVING COURTS – DIVISION P

Division P Administrative Judge		Honorable Stephen Walker
Comprehensive Treatment Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Stephen Walker
Drug /Opioid/ Veteran’s Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Stephen Walker
DUI Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Stephen Walker
Health Care Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Stephen Walker
Community Care Court	Manatee County	Honorable Stephen Walker
CTC Manatee	Manatee County	Honorable Stephen Walker
Drug Court, Veteran’s Court	Manatee County	Honorable Stephen Walker
Early Childhood Court	Manatee County	Honorable Stephen Walker

All problem-solving courts are assigned to Division P. The problem-solving courts listed below are presided over by the following judges:

DeSoto Drug Court	DeSoto County	Honorable Guy Flowers
TYLA Court	Manatee County	Honorable Susan B. Maulucci
Community Care Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Kennedy Legler
Early Childhood Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Maria Ruhl
OPTIONS Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Maria Ruhl
Truancy Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Andrea McHugh
TYLA Court	Sarasota County	Honorable Shannon Hankin

COUNTY COURT ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGES

DeSoto County Honorable Guy A. Flowers
Manatee County Honorable Renee L. Inman
Sarasota County Honorable Maryann Olson Uzabel

DESOTO COUNTY COURT

All County Civil and Criminal Honorable Guy A. Flowers

MANATEE COUNTY COURT

Civil Division 1 Honorable Renee L. Inman
Civil Division 2 Honorable Heather Doyle
Criminal Division 3 Honorable Jacqueline B. Steele
Criminal Division 4 Honorable Melissa Gould

SARASOTA COUNTY COURT

Criminal/Civil Division A Honorable Maryann Olson Uzabel
Criminal/Civil Division B Honorable TBD
Criminal/Civil Division C Honorable Shannon Hankin
South County Criminal/Civil Division E Honorable Erika N. Quartermaine
South County Criminal/Civil Division F Honorable Megan Leaf
(effective January 5, 2026)

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Michael L. King, Rebecca L. Mockovciak, Medisa M. Turner, Edward C. Wilson

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT HEARING OFFICERS

Laura M. Hale, Lawrence Jacobs, Michael L. King

TRUANCY COURT GENERAL MAGISTRATES

Nicole Cameron, Linda Lorrier

CIVIL TRAFFIC INFRACTIONS HEARING OFFICER

Matthew K. Peters

DONE AND ORDERED in Bradenton, Manatee County, on December 18, 2025.



DIANA L. MORELAND, CHIEF JUDGE
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT STATE OF FLORIDA

Original: Clerk of Court, Sarasota County
Copy to: All Judges, Twelfth Judicial Circuit
 Kimberly Miller, Court Administrator, Twelfth Judicial Circuit IT Dept.
 Clerk of Court, Manatee County Clerk of Court, DeSoto County
 All Law Enforcement Agencies, Twelfth Judicial Circuit Sarasota County Bar Association
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2026 12TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT BENCH BAR CONFERENCE



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**NOTICE OF MEETING OF TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
JUDICIAL NOMINATING COMMISSION**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 9, 2026

Contact: Hunter Norton, Chair
Twelfth Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission

Notice is hereby given under Florida's "Government in the Sunshine Act" (Florida Statute 286.011) of a procedural Meeting of the 12th Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission.

During the meeting there will be discussion of the action items in response to the Governor's General Counsel, Ryan Newman's letter of January 7, 2026, regarding the Circuit Court and Manatee County Court vacancies created by the enactment of Senate Bill 2508 and the Circuit Court vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Lon Arend.

The purpose of the Meeting will be to establish a timeframe for selection to fill these vacancies, establish future meeting dates, provide for publication of vacancy notice, and take up any other business of the Commission. The meeting will be held January 12, 2026 at 9:00 via Zoom Meeting.

Meeting ID: 837 9175 5772
Passcode: 169001

Sincerely,
/s/ Hunter G. Norton, B.C.S.
Hunter G. Norton, B.C.S.

HGNB/krb



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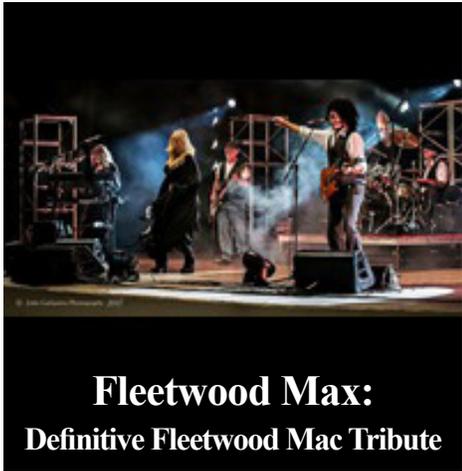
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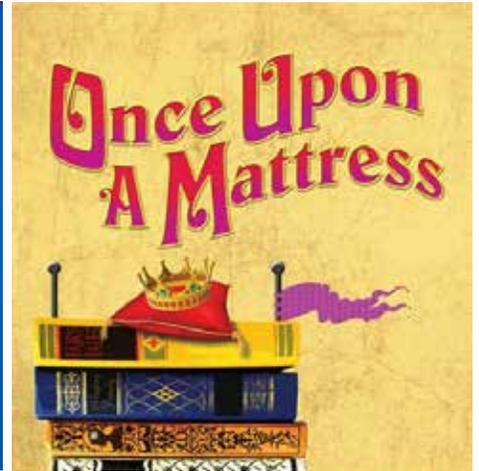


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