

COURTSIDE

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Court Administrator's Office

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CONSULTANTS VISIT EIGHTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

In September, Chang-Ming Yeh, consultant for the National Center for State Courts along with Wayne Drummond, Dean of the College of Architecture at the University of Florida, made his first site visit to the Eighth Judicial Circuit. The visit, the first of three, was a preliminary evaluation of each of the six courthouses in the circuit. The mission is to establish standards for courthouse construction.

The circuit is able to enlist the expertise of these two consultants through a technical assistance grant awarded by the State Justice Institute. The award is a timely one as four of the six county courthouses will either be undergoing major construction or are in the planning process for expansion of existing court facilities.



Chang-Ming Yeh of National Center for State Courts with Court Administrator, Ted McFetridge

Coinciding with Mr. Yeh's trip was a visit by Dan Wiley, a former Court Administrator, who now consults nationwide as a courthouse facility planner. Mr. Wiley is evaluating the space needs of the judiciary and staff in the Alachua County Courthouse, and will formulate a plan for our expansion either into the former County Administration building or a new building altogether.

The consultants and the two architects working on the Baker and Union County projects, Jim Rink and John Hudson, all had the opportunity to communicate their plans with one another and with several judges over dinner in the Grand Jury Room. Ideas were shared as well as preliminary designs for the Baker and



Wayne Drummond (left) and Jim Rink (middle) at the Baker County Courthouse with Al Fraser (right), Baker County Clerk of Court

Union County Courthouses. The meeting was a constructive one and the first of many to come as we take on the difficult task of evaluating our current needs and our needs well into the next century.

REGINA PARRISH, UNION COUNTY CLERK OF COURT, HONORED WITH 1997 PRESIDENT'S AWARD



*Regina Parrish,
Union County Clerk
of Court*

At their annual conference in Orlando, the Florida Association of Court Clerks and Comptroller chose the Honorable Regina Parrish, Union County Clerk of the Circuit Court, as Clerk of the Year.

Ms. Parrish serves as the Chair of the Education Committee, a committee integral to carrying out the mission of the Association. Parrish has worked with the Association and Florida Institute of Government to design an education program to inform newly elected Clerks of the duties of the job, and to provide many hours of credit toward the stringent certification criteria set forth in Florida state law.

In presenting the award, the Honorable Henry W. Cook, Clerk of Duval County, stated that "Regina Parrish has shown over the past years that she has the dedication it takes to run her office with excellence and lead the Association's education program. She has built up our program in the past year to a high level. We are all proud of her professionalism and hard work."

VOLUNTEER GUARDIANSHIP MONITORING PROGRAM

The guardianship monitoring program has been tremendously successful since its inception in October of 1996. With the help of 15 volunteer researchers, who put in more than 746 hours from October of 1996 through June of 1997, Alachua County's caseload of 950 cases was reduced to 850. The results were even greater in the other counties of the circuit. Researchers who put in more than 50 hours during this period were Richard Belz,

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ALACHUA COUNTY SPACE CRUNCH



Judge Curtin holds traffic hearings in the County Administration Building.

Court employees have known for a while that we are once again outgrowing our Courthouse. Now the public is beginning to feel the crunch. On Tuesday, September 2, Judge Curtin was pushed out of the Courthouse due to the multitude of court proceedings, and held traffic hearings in the 2nd floor auditorium in the Alachua County Administration Building. This locale is normally reserved for meetings of the Alachua County Commission, but on the busy day after Labor Day, it

served as a temporary courtroom for dozens of traffic cases. The problem was compounded by the shortened week and jury selection being pushed onto the Tuesday calendar. In addition, several trials which were expected to settle, did not.



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FLORIDA SUPREME COURT ADVOCATES EJC COURT REPORTING SYSTEM

Prompted by a recent Florida Supreme Court decision, Justice Overton, with support from Chief Justice Kogan, promoted the implementation of a court reporting system similar to that of the Eighth Judicial Circuit. He emphasized the substantial cost of court reporting services that is being paid primarily by the counties, and is a significant part of what is now termed "Article V costs."

Justice Overton wrote:

Comparatively, if postconviction relief proceedings had been conducted in Alachua County, where most court reporter services are provided by full-time county employees who use state-of-the-art computer-aided transcription, no per page or attendance costs would have been incurred.

In my view, the Alachua plan is a more cost-efficient, cost-effective method for managing court reporter costs than the methods being used in most other counties. Because the court has total control of how depositions, trials, and evidentiary hearings are reported and determines when hard-copy transcriptions are necessary, costs for court reporting services have been greatly reduced in that circuit.

I strongly believe that all judicial circuits should implement a plan similar to that being used in Alachua County. Equally as important, the state must provide substantial funds to aid and assist the counties in the payment of these Article V costs.

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Congratulations! Betty Sue Vincent has officially passed the Registered Diplomate Reporter examination given by the National Court Reporters Association. This certification is only available to reporters who hold a current Certificate of Merit (260 wpm and written knowledge test) and bestows a high recognition of excellence and accomplishment in the field of court reporting to the few reporters who hold this certification. We are very proud to have a reporter with Betty Sue's qualifications employed by Court Administration.

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Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success. Leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.

Stephen R. Covey

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• The Alachua County Board of County Commissioners •
• has approved a new Traffic Hearing Officer Position. •
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ADMINISTRATIVE ORDERS

- ✓ 3.1100 County Mediation in Alachua County:
- ✓ 6.100 Procedures for Settlements Requiring Court Approval:
- ✓ 4.001(B) Procedures and Responsibilities for Criminal Division for the Alachua County Court
- ✓ 7.510 Traffic Infraction Costs Where No Hearing is Held - Alachua County
- ✓ 7.511 Traffic Infraction Costs Where No Hearing is Held -Bradford County
- ✓ Amended General Assignment Order for July 31 through December 31, 1997.

All current administrative orders are available on the internet at <http://www.co.alachua.fl.us/~ctadmin> or they can be purchased on diskette for \$10.00 from the Law Library. Contact **Doris Morgan at 374-3659.**

COUNTY MEDIATION

The County Mediation Program continues to expand in all six counties of the circuit. The number of small claims cases mediated in the Eighth Judicial Circuit in the first nine months of 1997 increased more than eight percent, from 481 in 1996 to 521 in 1997. The increase is largely due to the inclusion of small claims mediation in Baker and Union Counties, and the growth of small claims mediation in Bradford and Levy Counties. 73 small claims cases were mediated in the neighboring counties as of September 30. The overall small claims settlement rate for the circuit is 71 percent. In addition to small claims, 18 county and landlord-tenant cases were mediated and 83 percent were settled. Ten new volunteers were trained in September, including eight from Bradford and Levy Counties. It is anticipated that the new volunteers will complete the mentoring process and be certified by the end of the year.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

- 10/30-10/31: County Judges Conference (Ocala)
- 10/31: Dependency Court Improvement Summit
- 11/11: Veteran's Day (court closed)
- 11/14: Administrative Judges Meeting (Grace Knight Auditorium)
- 11/30-12/3: Florida Conference of Circuit Judges, Marriot at Sawgrass Resort, Ponte Vedra Beach
- 12/10 Judges' Premise Class, OSCA, Tallahassee
- 12/25-12/26 Christmas (court closed)

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Marilyn Bloss, Janet Olsen, John Olsen, Ed Parker, Juanita Patterson, and Al Schilt (113 hours). Richard Belz compiled the time records so that this could be reported.

The other primary objective is to allow the court to see the ward, via a volunteer, in his or her environment. §§744.107 and 744.3735, *Florida Statutes*, authorize the court to appoint court monitors or require the annual appearance of a guardian. Both of these procedures are time consuming and cost-prohibitive for the court and the guardian, so the volunteers serve this function for the court. A visit from a monitor also provides the guardian greater access to the court in asking the court for assistance. The guardian or the ward's caretaker often feels more comfortable discussing the ward's unmet needs with a friendly visitor than at a court hearing which can be intimidating to the average guardian. The visitor can then relate the guardian's needs to the court in the visitor's report.

During a visit, visitors assume that the guardian or caretaker is doing an excellent job of meeting the wards' needs and have, thus far, been quite impressed with the wards' care. There have been a few cases where the residential facility or caretaker complained that the guardian did not visit much or was not available to make decisions for the ward. Since this does not show up on the annual written reports, it has been useful information.

Three visitors contributed a total of 97.3 hours through June of 1997. The AARP recently helped recruit 15 more visitors (selected from 35 who applied), who were trained on August 21-22, 1997. The visitors were selected and trained for their ability to be neutral in their observations and reports. These visitors have been gracious and respectful in conducting their visits in Levy, Union and Alachua Counties. In addition to the visitor function, they have also discovered that even though the files were reviewed by researchers, some basic information about the file is still incorrect, therefore, they provide a research function.

The volunteers meet for lunch at the courthouse on the third Thursday of each month to discuss problems and progress. Attorneys or members of the public are welcome to attend.

GUARDIAN AD LITEM

A MESSAGE FROM MAG McGAULEY

The Guardian ad Litem Program is happy to announce that it will be expanding its services to children in the Eighth Judicial Circuit. We have received a VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) Grant which will allow us to hire a case coordinator who will recruit, train and supervise volunteers.

Thanks to a newly funded position from the State, we will be also be adding a part-time attorney to our staff. The new attorney position will be focused on representing the Program in the five outlying counties in the circuit, and is very much needed and appreciated.



MOCK TRIAL PROGRAM LOSES FUNDING

The Mock Trial Program offered to Alachua County 5th graders will be severely cut back this year due to lack of funds. In previous years, funds were provided to each school for transportation to the courthouse. This year the legislature cut back these funds, and only those schools who can afford their own transportation will be able to attend. Through participation in mock trials, students gain an insider's perspective on courtroom procedures. Local attorneys volunteer their time each week to stage a simple demonstration of typical proceedings in court, followed by a question and answer period.

Anyone willing to help with creative ideas for funding is urged to contact **Kathie Partridge** at 374-3689.



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