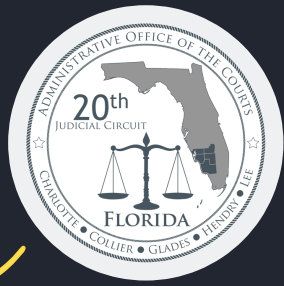


CIRCUIT TIMES

Newsletter



Vol. 1 2025

NEWSLETTER OF THE 20TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



HONORING JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE
Seven Judges Leave Behind Legacy of Justice

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Decades of Dedication: 20TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT BIDS FAREWELL TO SEVEN JUDGES

The 20th Judicial Circuit recently said goodbye to seven incredible judges who have left a lasting impact on our community. From heartfelt celebrations to bittersweet goodbyes, their retirements mark the end of an era for the Circuit. Let's take a moment to celebrate their careers and contributions!



JUDGE MARGARET STEINBECK

After an extraordinary 26 years on the bench, Judge Margaret O. Steinbeck was honored on November 15th with a heartfelt retirement celebration in Lee County. Judges, attorneys, court administrators, family, and friends came together to reflect on her incredible career.

Speakers, including Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Carlos Muñiz, Judge Robert Branning and 4th Circuit Judge Mark Mahon, shared stories about her journey—from her military service as a JAG officer to her countless contributions to the Circuit. Her wisdom and leadership will be deeply missed, but her legacy will continue to inspire.

She was presented with a Judicial Service plaque by our Chief Judge and TCA, while Chief Justice Muñiz presented a proclamation from the Florida Supreme Court.

Congratulations, Judge Steinbeck, and enjoy your well-earned retirement!

“I FEEL LIKE I WAS IN THE RIGHT PLACE FOR 25 PLUS YEARS AS A JUDGE. I FEEL AS THIS WAS MY CALLING AND MY VOCATION,” SAID JUDGE STEINBECK

JUDGE LEE ANN SCHREIBER

The Circuit celebrated Judge Lee Ann Schreiber's 14 year career as she retired at the end of November. Friends, colleagues, and court staff came together in her hearing room at the Lee County Courthouse to share sweet treats and bid her a fond farewell.

She was presented with a Judicial Service plaque by the Chief Judge and TCA, and her fellow judges surprised her with a proclamation recognizing her outstanding contributions to the family law division.

Appointed in 2010 by Governor Charlie Crist, Judge Schreiber served in various roles and divisions across the Circuit. Her dedication to families and children has made a real difference, and we can't wait to see what's next for her in retirement.

Wishing you all the best, Judge Schreiber!



Congratulations



JUDGE JACK LUNDY

Judge Jack Lundy's retirement marked the end of 28 years of dedicated service to Glades County. Elected in 1996, Judge Lundy brought not only his legal expertise but also a commitment to his hometown of Moore Haven and the people of Glades County.

From his days as a State Attorney to nearly three decades as Administrative Judge in Glades County, Judge Lundy made a big impact.

Thank you for your service, Judge Lundy. Wishing you all the best in retirement!



JUDGE JAMES SLOAN

After 32+ years of service, Judge James Sloan officially retired in November 2024. He first took the bench in May 1992 as a County Judge for Hendry County and was elevated to Circuit Judge in 2014.

Judge Sloan's career was defined by a deep connection to the Hendry County community. Originally from LaBelle, prior to becoming a judge he practiced in LaBelle with Elver & Sloan from 1983-1992, and earlier with Massey, Alper & Walden from 1981-1983.

To honor his remarkable career, Judge Sloan's family, friends, and colleagues gathered on January 3rd for a celebration of his service and contributions to the judiciary. The event was a tribute to his decades of work and the lasting impact he has made on the Hendry County community.

Congratulations, Judge Sloan, and enjoy this new chapter in your life!

"I can't say how much it's been a wonderful experience being a judge," said Judge Fuller. "I hope that I have made everyone who has ever appeared before me feel as if they have had a full hearing, had their day in court, and had a fair and impartial hearing."



JUDGE JOSEPH FULLER

Judge Joe Fuller has retired after 17 years on the bench with the 20th Judicial Circuit. A retirement celebration in December brought together family, friends, and colleagues to recognize his dedication and service.

Chief Judge J. Frank Porter served as master of ceremonies, with remarks delivered by Senior Judge Gaston Fernandez, Judge Fuller's brother-in-law, and Attorney Kim Hart, a former colleague who honored Judge Fuller with a special song.

A graduate of the University of Florida and South Texas College of Law, Judge Fuller has been a member of the Florida Bar since 1978. He was first elected in 2006.

Thank you for your service to the community, Judge Fuller—enjoy retirement!

JUDGE PAUL ALESSANDRONI

Charlotte County Judge Judge Paul Alessandroni has retired after 17 years on the bench. He started as an assistant state attorney in Punta Gorda, later becoming a private practice lawyer and then a Family Law Magistrate before being elected to the County Court in 2006.

Judge Alessandroni presided over every category of Circuit and County Court except Capital Murder. He played a pivotal role in advancing court technology, serving as a pilot judge for transitioning probate and guardianship dockets to electronic submission of proposed orders. He also served on the Charlotte County Court Technology Committee and as Chair of the Justice Center Security Committee.

Beyond his work on the bench, Judge Alessandroni contributed to the community as Chair of the Charlotte County Elections Canvassing Board and created the Court Guardianship Monitor position with support from the Charlotte County Commission.

Happy retirement, Judge Alessandroni!

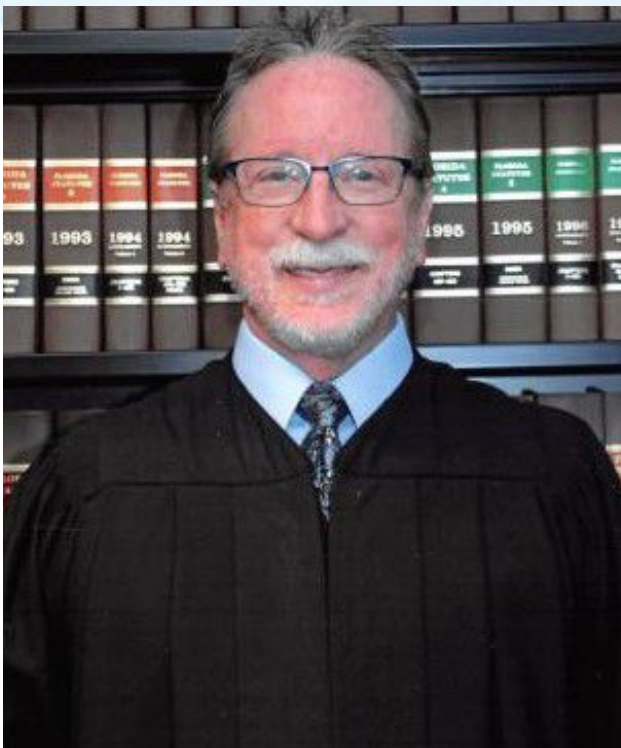


JUDGE PETER BELL

Judge Peter Bell served Charlotte County as a County Judge since January 2001, after being elected to the bench in 2000. He retired at the end of 2024. Over the years, he presided over a wide range of cases, from criminal misdemeanors to juvenile delinquency, and was a champion for civics education through the Florida Supreme Court's Justice Teaching initiative.

Judge Bell was born in New York and moved to Charlotte County in 1961. He was involved in Teen Court, a member of the Canvassing Board and various community programs. His dedication to justice and education made a real difference.

Best wishes for a relaxing and fulfilling retirement, Judge Bell!



INVESTITURE OF JUDGE ANDREW MARCUS

In November, the Honorable Andrew Marcus was officially sworn in as a Judge for the 20th Circuit Court! The investiture ceremony brought together many from our local legal community, including Circuit and County judges, members of the State Attorney's Office, trial attorneys, and distinguished guests. The ceremony was presided over by Chief Judge J. Frank Porter

Chief Judge Dan Traver of the Sixth District Court of Appeal, which serves Florida's Ninth, Tenth, and Twentieth Judicial Circuits, offered remarks on Judge Marcus's character. They had previously worked together as law partners at a statewide commercial litigation firm.

"I know that there is no challenge that he will not be able to complete and lastly there is a kindness, congeniality, and heart to him that will make everyone who appears in front of him feel like they have been heard and feel like their side of things has been carefully considered," said Chief Judge Traver.

We also heard from Assistant State Attorney Sara Miller, who worked closely with Judge Marcus at the State Attorney's Office on several high-stakes cases, including homicide trials. Her words highlighted Judge Marcus's commitment to justice and his skill as a trial lawyer.

"He knew the law inside and out, he worked incredibly hard and was always prepared for everything - whether it was a violation of probation case, a case management, or a trial he crossed all his t's and dotted all his i's," said Attorney Sara Miller.



Judge Marcus and his wife, Kristine

Judge Marcus was sworn in by Judge Margaret Steinbeck, with retired Judge Mark Steinbeck by her side. Judge Marcus credits both Judges Steinbeck for their mentorship, which has profoundly influenced his career. A symbolic gesture of this connection: since his appointment, Judge Marcus has worn the robe once belonging to Judge Mark Steinbeck.

"I promise all of you that each and every time I put on this robe I will never forget where I have been so I will always know where I am going," said Judge Marcus. "I promise that for as long as the citizens of this circuit will have me, I will remain prepared, professional, courteous, and fair to everyone that appears before me."

Marcus fills the judicial vacancy left by the retirement of Circuit Judge Donald Mason. He currently sits on the Felony Bench in Lee County over the docket last occupied by Judge Steinbeck.



Chief Judge Traver congratulates Judge Marcus



Judge Margaret Steinbeck swears in Judge Marcus with Judge Mark Steinbeck and Kristine Marcus

INVESTITURE OF JUDGE DEBORAH CUNNINGHAM



Judge Cunningham speaks at her Investiture



Judge Foster swears in Judge Cunningham with her son at her side.



Judge Cunningham's husband, Chayne, helps with her enrobing.

The Honorable Deborah Cunningham was officially sworn in as Collier County Judge—a milestone moment for both her and the 20th Judicial Circuit!

The ceremony featured remarks from Magistrate Amy Ellis, Chief Assistant State Attorney Rich Montecalvo, and Judge Joseph Foster, each sharing stories of Judge Cunningham's dedication to the law and professionalism.

"The one person who is passionate in her defense of the defenseless, fearless in the face of difficult evidence or traumatized victims, tireless in her work with law enforcement, someone devoted to her family and this community, that person is Debbie Cunningham," said Attorney Montecalvo.

Judge Cunningham brings nearly 25 years of experience as a prosecutor for the State Attorney's Office, where she prosecuted complex and high-profile cases involving homicide, sexual violence, human trafficking, and crimes against children. Her leadership as Circuit Court Chief for Collier County speaks to her ability to manage, educate, and inspire.

"Deb will always be there for her friends and colleagues and will never stop fighting for what and who she believes in," said Magistrate Ellis

Judge Cunningham was officially sworn in by Judge Foster, with her son holding the Torah and her husband assisting in the enrobing.

"I will do everything I can to maintain the trust and confidence you have placed in me," said Judge Cunningham. "To be sworn in as a Collier County Judge is an amazing honor and to be sworn in in Courtroom 2A is a little bit surreal."

Beyond the courtroom, Judge Cunningham has served on boards for organizations like the Florida Network of Children's Advocacy Centers and the Collier County Shelter for Abused Women and Children.

"Never stop using your voice and always speak up for those who can't speak up for themselves."

A proud graduate of Brandeis University and the University of Florida Levin College of Law, Judge Cunningham has been recognized for her excellence, earning awards such as Woman Lawyer of the Year (2023), Lion of the Law (2021), and Assistant State Attorney of the Year (2003).

Cunningham succeeds Judge Christopher Brown, whom Governor DeSantis elevated to the Circuit Bench.

Congratulations

JUDGES



Chief Judge J. Frank Porter

We are thrilled to announce that The Honorable J. Frank Porter will continue to lead our circuit as Chief Judge for a second term! His leadership will guide us for the two-year term commencing July 1, 2025. Congratulations on this well-deserved reappointment!



Judge Darrell Hill

Congratulations to The Honorable Darrell Hill on his elevation to the Circuit Bench! Since 2018, Judge Hill has served the people of Hendry County as a County Court Judge. He fills the vacancy created by HB 5401.

We are also excited to welcome four judges to our circuit who were elected to their positions:



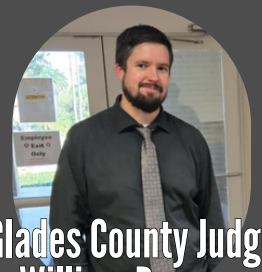
**Circuit Judge
Tracey Redd**



**Charlotte County Judge
Sean Lux**



**Charlotte County Judge
Michael Powell**



**Glades County Judge
William Dorman**

and to the Judges who were recently appointed by Governor DeSantis to fill Judge Steinbeck and Judge Schreibers positions.



**Circuit Judge
Rachael Loukonen**



**Circuit Judge
Trent Reichling**

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH



During National Adoption Month, Children’s Network of Southwest Florida (CNSWFL) hosted two mass adoption hearings, finalizing the adoptions of 27 children.

The first hearing took place on November 22 at the Collier County Courthouse, where 8 children were adopted by 7 families. The second hearing occurred on November 23 at the Lee County Courthouse, where 19 children joined 14 families. These hearings are part of National Adoption Month and National Adoption Day, which highlight the need for permanent families for children in the foster care system.

These adoption hearings were part of the annual National Adoption Month celebrations, which highlight the importance of adoption and the children awaiting their forever families. National Adoption Day on November 23 served as a key date for finalizing adoptions and celebrating the positive impact of family and community.

“The hearings were incredibly moving occasions, representing the fulfillment of the children’s journey through the child welfare system,” said Nadereh Salim, CEO of CNSWFL. “Every child deserves a loving forever family, and many people have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to help make these adoptions possible—this includes child welfare professionals, guardians ad litem, the judiciary, and the prospective adoptive parents. We are deeply grateful to them all.”

While reunification with biological families is the priority, if that is not possible, children become eligible for adoption. Once finalized, children gain the same legal rights and privileges as biological children in their new families.

Though 27 children found homes during these hearings, many more in the local community are still waiting for adoption. CNSWFL continues to support children in need of permanent homes.





"Twenty-five years of men and women turning their lives around-making amends and restitution to those they have harmed, reuniting with their children, parents, and loved ones. Twenty-five years of clients who transitioned from taking to giving, helping the next suffering soul find their way to wellness, hope, and joy," said Judge Martin.

The 25th Anniversary of the Collier County Adult Felony Drug Court was a powerful and inspiring event, held on September 17, 2024, in Courtroom 2A at the Collier County Courthouse. The celebration marked a quarter-century of life-changing work, initiated by the Honorable William L. Blackwell in 1999, to support individuals in overcoming addiction and rebuilding their lives.

"It's one of the most gratifying things that I personally ever did as a judge," said Judge Blackwell.

Inspiring words by Judge Blackwell and current Drug Court Judge Janeice Martin highlighted the court's dedication to the power of recovery, reflecting on the early days of the program and how it has evolved over time. Including being a national model for the last four years.

A highlight of the celebration was the testimonials from Drug Court graduates, sharing how the program transformed their lives.

"No matter how far down the hole I went, there is hope here, and there is recovery here. There is a process we live by, and so much help in our community. For me, it all started with Drug Court. Someone gave me a chance."

After the ceremony, a reception brought attendees together to celebrate the court's achievements and its impact.



PROBLEM SOLVING COURTS: MAKING AN IMPACT

Members of the 20th Judicial Circuit Problem-Solving Courts attended the 2024 Florida Behavioral Health Conference!



Those in attendance included Lee County Problem-Solving Judges Josephine Gagliardi and Nicole Mirra; team members from the Lee County Administrative Office of the Courts; team members from the Lee County and Charlotte County Public Defenders' Office; and community stakeholders. The conference, whose theme was IGNITE, was intended to ignite change, learning, healing, and commitment to Florida's mental health and substance use community!



Judge John McGowan and the treatment court team celebrated the hard work of this veteran who successfully completed the Veterans Treatment Court program in Collier County during National Recovery Month.

The program supports our veterans by providing them with the resources and guidance they need to overcome challenges and transition back to civilian life.

Lee County Judge Josephine Gagliardi and Collier County Judge Janeice Martin joined our dedicated Problem-Solving Courts staff to embrace this year's theme: "Riding the Wave to Excellence" (tropical shirts included).



Problem-solving courts are essential in addressing the needs of individuals with substance use and mental health disorders in the justice system. The conference focused on best practices, the latest trends, and tools for multi-disciplinary teams, from judges to treatment professionals, to ensure we serve our communities effectively.



Lee County Treatment Courts proudly celebrated National Recovery Month with Judge Gagliardi!

September marks both National Recovery Month and National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. The month also includes Patriot Day on 9/11, a day of remembrance for those lost and a reminder of why many of our Veterans chose to serve.

DCA Judges visit Fort Myers

Approximately 200 students from South Fort Myers High School's Student Government Association and government classes gathered for a recent assembly led by Judge Roger Gannam of the Sixth District Court of Appeal, joined by Sixth DCA Chief Judge Dan Traver and Judge Jeffrey Kuntz of the Fourth District Court of Appeal. The event provided students with insights into the legal system, the lawmaking process, and careers in law.

Judge Gannam's presentation provided students with an in-depth look at how Florida's laws are created, enforced, and interpreted by the three separate branches of government.

Using the Florida Ban on Texting While Driving Law as an example, he illustrated how the legislature, executive, and judiciary work together to shape and uphold laws. Judge Gannam also introduced students to the Sixth DCA, explaining its function in Florida's judicial system. Chief Judge Traver and Judge Kuntz joined Judge Gannam for a lively Q&A session at the end, where students asked questions about the legal process, the judges' roles, and paths to careers in law.



Judge Gannam remarked on the students' level of engagement: "Their questions were insightful, and they provided quality legal analysis of the various problems presented."

The event also highlighted the Lee County Bar Association's upcoming Law Week activities scheduled around the national recognition of Law Day on May 1st. The Sixth District Court of Appeal plans to return to South Fort Myers High School on May 1st to hold a live oral argument session, encouraging students and the surrounding community to engage with the legal process.

CELEBRATING *Pretrial and Probation Week!*

This July we celebrated the annual Pretrial and Probation Week in the Lee County Criminal Division with a Hawaiian themed summer luncheon. This week recognizes the incredible work done by community corrections professionals to restore trust and create hope and keep our communities safe. Mr. Stu Gooden, a representative from American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) also stopped by to thank the staff for the work that they do!



CONGRATULATIONS TO...



LUANNE WOLFF

After 30 years of dedicated service to Court Administration, Luanne Wolff is retiring today, January 6, 2025. Luanne's incredible journey began on December 15, 1994, when she joined the Charlotte County AOC as a Program Specialist Supervisor. Over the years, she advanced through roles such as Court Program Specialist I and II, Civil Division Manager, and ultimately, Civil/Family Division Director in 2016.

KELLY BRANTLEY

After a career spanning more than 30 years, Glades County Judicial Assistant Kelly Brantley is retiring! Kelly's journey began with the Hendry County Clerk's Office before she became an invaluable part of Judge Lundy's team as his Judicial Assistant.



JUDGE MICHAEL T. MCHUGH

Twentieth Circuit Judge Michael McHugh, who concluded his eight-year tenure as chief judge in 2023, has been appointed by the Florida Supreme Court to the Trial Court Budget Commission. He replaces 20th Circuit Judge Margaret Steinbeck, who retired November 29, and will serve the remainder of her term through November 30, 2026. Judge McHugh was highly praised for his leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ian.

DAWN WHITTINGTON

Congratulations to Dawn on 15 years of service with the Administrative Office of the Courts! Since joining Court Administration on October 1, 2009, as a Secretary III, she has advanced to Chief of Personnel Services, overseeing HR operations for the 20th Judicial Circuit's five counties. With over 30 years of experience in office management and HR, along with a CPM certification and expertise in organizational development, team building, and leadership, Dawn deserves congratulations on this milestone!



NEW APPOINTED AND ELECTED JUDGES

Our newly appointed judges have successfully completed Phase 1 of the Florida Judicial College, marking a significant milestone in their judicial service. This phase included a comprehensive orientation with trial skills workshops, mock trials, and other foundational classes designed to prepare them for judicial duties.



Around the Court & In the Community



Our Judges presided over the swearing in for some of our local elected officials!

- Glades County Judge William Dorman swore in Glades Co. Sheriff David Hardin.
- Circuit Judge Geoffrey Gentile swore in Charlotte Co. Sheriff, Supervisor of Elections, Property Appraiser, and the Tax Collector.
- Circuit Judge Darrell Hill gave the Oath of Office to Hendry Co. Sheriff Steve Whidden.
- Circuit Judge Joseph Foster officiated Collier Co. Sheriff Kevin Rambosk's swearing-in.
- Lee County Judge Josephine Gagliardi swore in the new board members of the Lee County Association of Women Lawyers.



We welcomed students from the Cape Coral Homeschool Co-op (ages 13-18) for a hands-on experience at the Lee County courthouse! The students observed Detention Hearings with Judge Gilberto Perez presiding, joined by ASA Martin Bowman, Mykisha Atisele from the Public Defender's Office, and JPO Stephanie Wise, who graciously answered questions and shared insights into their roles.



Our Lee County Treatment Courts Manager Bridget Washburn represented the 20th Judicial Circuit at the NW Vet Fest at the Northwest Regional Library. The event celebrated and honored current and former military service members. She shared information about our Lee County Veterans Court and opportunities to become a volunteer Veteran Mentor. Mentors aim to offer support, guidance, and friendship, and their role has proven priceless to participants.

We welcomed the Lee County Bar Association to the Lee County Courthouse for their August Luncheon!

Opening remarks were delivered by Chief Judge J. Frank Porter, setting the tone for the luncheon. Public Defender Kathy Smith and Judge Michael McHugh, Co-Chairs of the Mental Health and Wellness Mission, also introduced the LCBA's important new Mental Health and Wellness program.

We were honored to host The Florida Bar President Roland Sanchez Medina Jr. and Florida Bar President Elect, Attorney Sia Baker Barnes, who shared valuable insights with Lee County Bar members along with her vision as President.

The event was also attended by Office of the State Attorney - Amira Fox, Regional Counsel Ita Neymotin, several of our esteemed judges, and many Southwest Florida attorneys.



Our Chief Deputy Trial Court Administrator, Liza King, and Lee County Probation Supervisor, Ervin Gill, recently had the opportunity to speak with Florida Gulf Coast University's Professional Development class! They shared insights on the justice system, the power of communication, and how teamwork plays a vital role in public service.



The Department of Corrections hosted the Lee County Criminal Division, Lee County Judge Kim Bocelli, Collier County Probation representatives, and Assistant Public Defenders for a powerful reentry simulation. Participants experienced the real-life challenges faced by individuals on probation or those released from incarceration.

This eye-opening exercise provided a firsthand look at the frustrations and obstacles these individuals encounter daily. It was an impactful experience that deepened understanding and strengthened our commitment to fostering successful reentry for all.

Welcome **NEW HIRES**



Myron Bancroft

Court Program Specialist II

Dorian Coar

Administrative Assistant

Josie Brown

Criminal Div. Secretary

Lisa Cote

Judicial Assistant

Cassidy Ruckel

Court Program Specialist II

Monica Kunz

Program Assistant

Alex Koth

Computer Support Specialist

Loree Heasley

County Judicial Assistant

Ivy Silva

Criminal Div. Secretary

Kathryn Long

Criminal Div. Secretary

Ashley Adams

Criminal Div. Secretary

Bethany Rouse

Criminal Div. Secretary

Dianna Allen

Pretrial Officer

Jaci-Ann Johnson

Criminal Div. Secretary

Collette Connolly

Court Program Specialist II

Jacqueline Grossi

Trial Court Staff Attorney

Yevheniya Krasynksa

Executive Assistant

Paula O'Brien

Program Specialist

Cynthia Kehoe

Court Security Administrative Asst.

Kinsell Lambert

Court Interpreter

Gabrielle Ontek

Pretrial Officer

Sherian Trask

Circuit Judicial Assistant

Darin Oswalt

Server Administrator

Kate Martinez-Grimaldo

Probation Officer

Kimberly Lahnemann

Digital Court Reporter

Yada Chavez

Pretrial Officer

Ricardo Pena

Computer Support Specialist

Reena Bozich

County Judicial Assistant

Jennifer Oliva

County Judicial Assistant

Julia Griner

County Judicial Assistant

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THE CIRCUIT TIMES

Official Newsletter of the 20th Judicial Circuit of Florida



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If you have pictures or a story to share, please email Sara Miles at smiles@ca.cjis20.org

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