



COURT CONNECTION

Special Edition



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TRIBUTE TO THE HON. MICHAEL G. WILLIAMSON

On November 3, 2022, the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Florida suffered a profound loss with the passing of the Hon. Michael G. Williamson. Not only was Judge Williamson a great friend and devoted family man, but he was also a brilliant judge and a wonderful colleague to all with whom he served on the bench. To honor his memory, the Court has compiled in this Special Edition of the Court Connection various photos, articles, remarks, and other writings that capture Judge Williamson's essence as a friend, family man, and judge.

Bankruptcy Court's Memorial Tribute to the Hon. Michael G. Williamson

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Florida is deeply saddened to announce that the Hon. Michael G. Williamson passed away on November 3, 2022. For more than two decades, Judge Williamson, a brilliant writer and thinker with a keen sense of humor, served the Middle District of Florida with honor and distinction, including as its Chief Judge from 2015 to 2019. Judge Williamson will be greatly missed by his friends and colleagues in the Middle District of Florida.

A 1976 graduate of Georgetown University Law Center, Judge Williamson practiced law in Orlando for two decades. As an attorney with a state-wide Chapter 11 practice, he was known for his professionalism and civility.

In 2000, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals appointed Judge Williamson to the bankruptcy bench in Tampa. As a judge, Judge Williamson fulfilled his vocation as a writer, speaker, and educator. During his 22 years on the bench, Judge Williamson authored more than 220 reported decisions, spoke at more than 280 seminars, and authored a Practical Evidence Manual, a go-to resource for Middle District bankruptcy practitioners. Judge Williamson also served as a co-author of West's Bankruptcy Law Manual since 2013 and as an Adjunct Professor at Stetson University College of Law since 2014. Judge Williamson's influence on the practice of bankruptcy law in the State of Florida, and nationally, cannot be overstated.

All the while, Judge Williamson maintained his commitment to the attorneys who practice in the Middle District of Florida. For over two decades, Judge Williamson was a Master in the J. Clifford Cheatwood American Inn of Court, serving as the Inn's President in 2004. From 2016 to 2019, Judge Williamson served as a Judicial Board Member of the Tampa Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. And he continued to serve on the Executive Council of the Business Law Section of The Florida Bar.

Judge Williamson is a Fellow in the American College of Bankruptcy. He was the first recipient of The Florida Bar Business Law Section's Distinguished Lifetime Service Award. And in October 2022, Judge Williamson received the Judge William L. Norton, Jr. Judicial Excellence Award, a national award presented annually by the American Bankruptcy Institute in recognition of a bankruptcy judge's dedication to the insolvency community.

Judge Williamson was also instrumental in developing the Rule of Law abroad. He has assessed commercial laws in Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. And he has taught principles of insolvency law to lawyers and judges in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Georgia, Bahrain, and Ukraine. But Judge Williamson is perhaps best known for his work in Afghanistan, where, over the course of a decade, he drafted a new bankruptcy law from scratch and oversaw its enactment into law.

Judge Williamson's passing is a great loss to his wife, Linda, their family and friends, and to his colleagues and the attorneys who appeared before him. In his honor, the United States flags at the Middle District's courthouses will be flown at half-staff this week.

Judge Williamson's Obituary



Judge Williamson was born on February 22, 1951, to Col. John "Jack" Williamson and Alice (McAniff) Williamson in West Point, New York. As the son of a decorated veteran who served as Army Attaché to Spain and later Chief of Staff to the Commanding General of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (Republic of China), Judge Williamson spent his early childhood living in Spain and Taiwan.

After his father retired from the U.S. Army, Judge Williamson's family settled in Melbourne, Florida, where he attended Melbourne High School. At Melbourne High, Judge Williamson was a scholar-athlete: as a senior, Judge Williamson won the state science fair; he was also the only sophomore on the Melbourne High Bulldogs' 1966 state championship football team, whose championship run is chronicled in Edward Mussler's "A Glorious Season."

After graduating from Melbourne High in 1969, Judge Williamson attended West Point for two years before transferring to Duke University to pursue his dream of becoming a lawyer. He earned a bachelor's degree magna cum laude from Duke in 1973 and then enrolled at Georgetown University Law Center. In 1976, he graduated from Georgetown, where he served as Editor of Law and Policy in International Business.

After graduating from Georgetown, Judge Williamson went into private practice in Orlando, Florida. He spent most of his career at Maguire, Voorhis & Wells, where he was an associate from 1978 to 1982 and a shareholder from 1982 to 1998. From 1997 to 1998, he served as the firm's President and Managing Partner and oversaw the firm's merger with Holland & Knight.

Early on in private practice, Judge Williamson embarked on a career as a bankruptcy lawyer almost by happenstance. At a party one day, a prospective client asked Judge Williamson if he could handle a bankruptcy case. Judge Williamson, who at that point had not handled a single bankruptcy case, said "yes." As they say, the rest is history.

Judge Williamson quickly became an expert on the new bankruptcy law that had just passed in 1978, and it was not long before he earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the go-to Chapter 11 debtor's lawyers in the state. Along the way, he became board certified in Business Bankruptcy Law by the American Board of Certification and was inducted as a Fellow in the American College of Bankruptcy.

In addition to earning a reputation as one of the state's go-to Chapter 11 lawyers, he also earned a well-deserved reputation for professionalism and civility. As a lawyer, Judge Williamson made it his goal to leave every case with a new friend by treating the other side with respect and congeniality.



It was in private practice that Judge Williamson also embarked on his vocation as a prolific writer, speaker, and educator. During his two decades in private practice, Judge Williamson authored more than 20 publications and served as a panelist or moderator at more than 100 seminars, which was ironic for someone who proudly boasted that he made it through three years of law school without speaking in class once.

In 1983, Judge Williamson was the driving force behind the creation of the View From the Bench seminar, an informal panel discussion of recent case law by the bankruptcy judges of Florida's Northern, Middle, and Southern Districts that is now in its 40th year. In addition to serving as the program chair, which he has done since the program's inception, he regularly served as a moderator. And Judge Williamson is the only non-judge to ever sit on the panel at the View From the Bench.

But if you asked Judge Williamson, he would say that his most notable accomplishment during his time in private practice was marrying the love of his life, Linda Cappelli, who was a judicial assistant for a state court judge in Orlando. After the couple married in 1980, they had two children, Michelle and Scott. As busy as he was in private practice, Judge Williamson always made time for Linda, Michelle, and Scott—whether it was taking motorcycle rides, ski trips, or sailing trips on the family boat.

On March 1, 2000, Judge Williamson was appointed as a United States Bankruptcy Judge for the Middle District of Florida, where he served for more than two decades, including as its Chief Judge from 2015 to 2019. As a judge, Judge Williamson enjoyed the same reputation he had as a lawyer for his civility and congeniality.

He also earned a reputation for being somewhat of a creature of habit. Each morning, you could find him eating breakfast at the downtown First Watch (usually sitting at the same table and eating the same breakfast) by 7:00 a.m. As befitting the son of a West Pointer, he took the bench precisely at 9:30 and efficiently worked his way through busy (and complex) hearing calendars, insisting lawyers adhere to his "3-3-3 Rule" (routine matters should require no more than three pages of written argument; three citations to case law; and three minutes of oral argument). Regardless of the complexity of the matters before him, Judge Williamson was known for his uncanny ability to issue oral rulings from the bench (which always began with his signature line, "Very well, the Court has before it...") that sounded like they had been scripted and rehearsed in advance. And by noon, he would already be changed into his running clothes and

jogging the streets of downtown Tampa, after which he would drink his protein shake for lunch, play a few hands of bridge on the computer, and be back to work by 1:30 p.m.

Although Judge Williamson relished preparing for and presiding over his daily hearings, what he enjoyed most about being a judge was educating lawyers and writing decisions, which allowed him to influence and develop the law. And boy did he do both. During his two decades on the bench, Judge Williamson taught at nearly 300 seminars and authored more than 220 reported decisions (and more than 30 unreported decisions), earning him national acclaim as a scholar, writer, and educator.

Over the years, he also authored his Practical Evidence Manual, which is a go-to resource on the Federal Rules of Evidence for lawyers practicing in the Middle District of Florida; co-authored West's Bankruptcy Law Manual; and served as an adjunct professor at Stetson University College of Law.

Judge Williamson's development of bankruptcy law, however, was not limited to the United States. Judge Williamson made his first foray into international consulting work when he traveled to Azerbaijan to assess the country's business and legal climate. Over the years, he performed similar assessments in Macedonia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. He also taught principles of insolvency law to lawyers and judges in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Georgia, Bahrain, and Ukraine.

But, when it comes to developing the Rule of Law abroad, Judge Williamson is perhaps best known for his work in Afghanistan. Judge Williamson made his first trip to Afghanistan in 2007, when he assessed the country's secured transactions and insolvency laws for the U.S. Agency for International Development. Over the course of the next decade, he would travel back to Afghanistan eight times as he drafted a new bankruptcy law from scratch, oversaw its enactment into law, and trained Afghan judges on the new law.

Judge Williamson was the first recipient of The Florida Bar Business Law Section's Distinguished Lifetime Services Award. And in 2022, Judge Williamson received the Judge William L. Norton, Jr. Judicial Excellence Award, a prestigious national award presented annually by the American Bankruptcy Institute, in recognition of his dedication to the insolvency community—both here and abroad.

Judge Williamson was a devoted husband and father. He was an avid boater, skier (both water and snow), and runner. And he was known to enjoy a cigar and a good book after work at the Tampa Yacht and Country Club.

Judge Williamson will be greatly missed by his family, friends, colleagues in the Middle District of Florida, and all those who had the privilege to appear before him.











Things Judge Williamson Loved

1. His family.
2. His Tilley hat.
3. Surfing and lifeguarding in Melbourne Beach.
4. Dark chocolate and ice cream.
5. Boating/sailing. His favorite sailing trip was to charter a sailboat in the BVI. Mike was the captain.
6. Reading, learning, and teaching.
7. Organization. Spreadsheets. To-Do Lists. Packing guides. Indexed binders.
8. Doing dishes because it reminded him of when he was young. He and his mother did dishes together, and that was their bonding time.
9. Reading about WWII and watching WWII series in color. He was an avid World War II history buff.
10. Favorite movie: "Patton."
11. Scuba diving in caves as a high school student.
12. Being a swim instructor at Duke. Knowing how to swim was a requirement to graduate from Duke.
13. Dinner. No matter what was served, after dinner he always said, "good dinner, honey."
14. Music of all types, from Bocelli to Billie Eilish. He had 663 songs on his Spotify playlist. And he loved to watch American Idol!

Judge Williamson's Favorite Quotes

1. Winston Churchill: "Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."
2. "Even a broken watch is right twice a day."
3. J. Paul Getty: "If you owe the bank \$100, that is your problem. If you owe the bank \$100 million, that is the bank's problem."
4. Al Capone: "You can get much further with a kind word and a gun than with a kind word alone."
5. "Gossip and lies takes the elevator, and truth takes the stairs."
6. Publilius Syrus: "Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm."
7. Mark Twain: "Never argue with stupid people. They will drag you down to their level and beat you with experience."
8. Gene Wilder: "I want to thank you from the heart of my bottom."
9. "Sometimes you're the windshield and sometimes you're the bug."
10. Bill Levens, state court judge: "I am the referee, not the coach."
11. "I was born in the morning, but not this morning."
12. Alexander Hamilton: "The first duty of society is justice."
13. John Adams, Boston Massacre Trials (in defense of the British soldiers): "Facts are stubborn things and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of the facts or evidence."
14. Jimmy Dean: "I can't change the direction of the wind. But I can adjust my sails to always reach my destinations."

Getting to Know the Chief Judge

Reprinted from April 2016 Issue of Court Connection

Normally, the Chief Judge is supposed to write the lead article for the Court Connection newsletter. For his inaugural article, Judge Williamson paid a fitting tribute to Judge Jennemann's legacy as Chief Judge and explained how, as Chief Judge, he intended on building on her legacy by continuing the work she started. For this edition, he planned on explaining the progress being made on that front. But since Judge Williamson just gave his "State of the District" speech, we decided to hijack this article and use it to tell you some things you may not have known about your new Chief Judge. So here goes....eight things you may not have known about Judge Williamson:

1. Judge Williamson initially followed in his father's footsteps at West Point, which could explain his obsession with punctuality. His father was a Colonel in the United States Army. When Judge Williamson was born, his father was stationed at West Point, where he graduated from 16 years earlier. As a child, Judge Williamson lived in Spain for three years (and later Taiwan) before his family ultimately settled down in Melbourne, Florida. In fact, because he lived in Spain, the first language Judge Williamson spoke was Spanish (but after listening to him practice his Spanish for Judge May's wedding, it's probably fair to say he hasn't used it in a while). After graduating from high school, Judge Williamson attended West Point for two years before deciding to pursue his dream of becoming a lawyer. Serving as a bankruptcy judge allows him to serve the public like his father—just in a different way.





2. Speaking of big shoes to fill, he is the sixth Chief Judge of the Middle District, which was established by Congress in 1962. Not surprisingly, Judge Paskay was the district's first Chief Judge. He served from 1979 to 1999. There was no "chief judge" from 1962 to 1979 since there were no bankruptcy "judges" until 1979. Most recently, of course, Judge Jennemann served as our Chief Judge from 2011 to 2015. In between Judge Paskay and Judge Jennemann were Judge Proctor, Judge Baynes, and Judge Glenn. We are confident Judge Williamson will carry on the legacy of his predecessors.

3. There are ten official court holidays. Although the court is closed on those days (and weekends), it is not unusual to find Judge Williamson in chambers working. About the only time he is not in the office is when he is traveling for a Bar, NCBJ, or FJC event (or a speaking engagement) or visiting family. Judge Williamson and his wife, Linda, do travel a couple of times a year to see their kids. In fact, they just got back from a trip to see their daughter, Michelle, son-in-law, Nathan, and their three grandchildren. We hear Michelle and Nathan are skilled and disciplined parents who keep the kids well-behaved, happy, and on a routine, even when it comes to bedtime. Judge Williamson and Linda also saw their son, Scott, recently when they met up for a ski trip in Park City. Scott lives in L.A. and works as an editor for Seismic Productions. Scott has been in L.A. since he graduated from FSU. We know Judge Williamson and Linda are proud that Scott has not given up on his dream as he has worked his way through the ranks in the industry. We constantly remind Judge Williamson that he can actually take days off now that he no longer has a billable hour requirement to meet and doesn't get year-end bonuses like in his old law firm days. Obviously, he just loves what he does!

4. Speaking of law firms, serving as Chief Judge is not Judge Williamson's first management job. Before being appointed to the bench, he served as the President and Managing Partner of

Maguire, Voorhis & Wells, where he led the firm's merger with Holland & Knight. The merger was necessitated because the legal market was moving from "niche" firms like Maguire, Voorhis & Wells to larger, full-service firms like Holland & Knight. At the time, Maguire, Voorhis & Wells had 67 attorneys. As Chief Judge, he is now responsible for overseeing 110 employees, who process approximately 35,000 bankruptcy cases annually.

5. Judge Williamson is definitely a creature of habit. He eats the same thing for breakfast every day....at the same place....at the same table. Oh, and he goes for a run every day at noon and has a protein shake for lunch before getting ready for his afternoon hearings. Although it's easy to find him breakfast and lunch time, we don't suggest frequenting a local breakfast eatery or taking up jogging as a way to get ex parte hearings.

6. While perhaps a tad bit obsessive compulsive about his daily routine, if we had to describe Judge Williamson's management style, we would say he is a delegator. Of course, delegating only works when you are surrounded by people who have the knowledge, skills, and motivation to get the job done. In chambers, he requires each of us to sign our Chamber's Team Commitments. The 3rd Commitment is "Excellence." It reads: "We are the best. That is why we are here. Our work product reflects that excellence."

We know he believes that is true district-wide, too. He has told us how fortunate he is to get to work with the best Clerk of Court in the country; the brightest and most collegial group of bankruptcy judges of any district; and as talented, dedicated, and hard-working group of case managers, chambers staff, IT staff, and other support staff as you'll find.



7. As a sophomore in high school, Judge Williamson was a running back on the state champion Melbourne High Bulldogs football team. They beat the Ft. Lauderdale Flying L's to win the state championship 31 to 12 on December 9, 1966. As one of the youngest kids (the only sophomore) on the team, we're sure he learned the importance of each player performing their role to form a cohesive team because he was named a team captain his senior year.

8. Speaking of great teams, as Chief Judge, his motto is "One Court. One Team." During her term as Chief Judge, Judge Jennemann encouraged us to think district-wide as she embarked on an ambitious goal of streamlining our procedures and making it easier for attorneys to practice throughout the Middle District. Thanks to her "Think Bottom-Up, Not Top-Down" approach, Judge Jennemann was able to make incredible progress moving toward a unified district in such a short period. Since Judge Williamson views his role as finishing what Judge Jennemann started, he chose "One Court. One Team."



Remarks by Law Clerk

Chief Judge Corrigan, Chief Judge Delano, members of the judiciary, and members of the FBA:

I want to thank the Federal Bar Association for inviting me to say a few words about Judge Williamson. I know Judge Williamson thought very highly of the FBA and was very proud to be part of it.

Whenever Judge Williamson was ready to enter a big opinion, I would jokingly remind him that I had a Word document with a list of adjectives to describe him—esteemed jurist, brilliant, thoughtful—and that I'd be happy to provide that list to the press if they called—or to the district court if there was going to be an appeal. And he would always tell me that was exactly what he had in mind when he included “other duties as assigned” in my job description. So I feel like it's only fitting I get the chance to make use of those adjectives to describe him.

Judge Williamson was an esteemed jurist, brilliant, and thoughtful. And he was unbelievably accomplished. As proof, I brought along a copy of his CV, which includes his 20 or so publications, the nearly 400 seminars he has spoken at, all the committees he has served on, all the consulting work he has done abroad, and all the awards he has won. It is 46 pages long! So, needless to say, I could talk about him all day.

But since I only have a few minutes, and I know Chief Judge Delano is going to say a few words about him, I want to focus on just one of his professional accomplishments: the View From the Bench.

Many of you know that each year, the Business Law Section of the Florida Bar puts on the View From the Bench Seminar. Historically, the seminar—an informal discussion of current caselaw by Florida's bankruptcy judges—has been the Florida Bar's most-well attended and most profitable seminar, with between 300 and 400 attorneys attending each year.

You may not know that Judge Williamson, as an attorney, was the impetus behind creating the View From the Bench in 1983 or that, ever since, he has served as the standing chair of the seminar's steering committee.

Sadly, last month's presentation of View From the Bench was the first time that Judge Williamson did not call the seminar to order. But we are very pleased that the Business Law Section's Executive Council voted unanimously to rename the seminar the Judge Michael G. Williamson View From the Bench Seminar, and that we were able to tell him that before he passed away. It's only fitting that his legacy will be carried on through the View From the Bench.

Now, if you'll indulge me for just another minute or two, I'd like to share some personal thoughts about Judge Williamson. It's hard for me to put into words just how much I admired him. But I can tell you that my admiration had as much, if not more, to do with the person he was than it did with his brilliance or professional accomplishments.

Delivered at December 6, 2022 Annual Membership Meeting
of the Tampa Bay Chapter of the Federal Bar Association

Chamber's Team Commitment

❖ 1st Commitment: Public Service.

We are public servants. Everyone that is not in chambers is the public. We enjoy working for them.

❖ 2nd Commitment: Confidentiality.

We maintain strict confidentiality of the business that occurs in Chambers. Nothing that is said in Chambers is to be discussed outside of Chambers. No paper is to leave Chambers other than with permission or officially.

❖ 3rd Commitment: Excellence.

We are the best. That is why we are here. Our work product reflects that excellence.

❖ 4th Commitment: Teamwork.

We are a team. No task is beneath any of us. Our collective goal is to get the work of Chambers done.

Among the many reasons I admired him, two in particular stand out.

First, Judge Williamson was a dedicated public servant. When he first took the bench, he prepared his Chamber's Team Commitment. The first commitment was to public service:

"We are public servants. Everyone who is not in chambers is the public. We enjoy working for them."

Everyone who worked for him had to sign it. He signed it too. But more than that—he lived that commitment out each and every day. I can tell you that Judge Williamson loved coming to work and serving the public. Each day he walked into chambers, he had a big smile on his face and an infectious positive attitude toward the work he did and the people he served. In my eleven plus years with him, I never saw him have a bad day. It was truly remarkable.

Second, Judge Williamson loved his family. I will never forget all the times he would come down to my office to brag about his son, whether it was a promotion at work or the latest movie trailer he produced. Or how, how no matter what we were doing, when Linda called, he would stop everything and take her call, with a twinkle in his eye and a big smile on his face. As a husband and a father myself, I had so much respect for his love for his family.

A few years back, I found a tribute that Judge Williamson and his siblings wrote about their dad, who was a colonel in the Army. The tribute included a letter that one of the men in Col. Williamson's regiment wrote to Col. Williamson. It read:

"To me you're the most brilliant, understanding and good human officers I've ever met! And let me tell you something, Sir you can ask any enlisted man here in the regiment and they will tell you the same. In our gossip, Sir, we talk things over, and every one of your men, including me, think the world about you."

I can confidently say that if you ask any of Judge Williamson's colleagues, those of us who worked with him, and those who appeared before him, all of us, including me, would say we thought the world of him.



Presentation of the Judge William L. Norton Jr. Judicial Excellence Award Delivered by Chief Judge Caryl E. Delano

October 21, 2022 Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges

Good afternoon!

It is my honor to present the 2022 Judge William L. Norton, Jr., Judicial Excellence Award to the Middle District of Florida's Judge Michael G. Williamson.

Judge Williamson's career embodies the dedication shown by Judge Norton to the insolvency community, as demonstrated by his contributions to legal education, his written opinions and scholarship, his commitment to the improvement of the Bankruptcy Courts, his international insolvency work, and his judicial and bar association involvement.

My colleague, Judge Cathy McEwen, and I were talking about Judge Williamson the other day, and we struggled to come up with a word that best describes his impact on the Florida bankruptcy courts and members of our bankruptcy community. We decided that Judge Williamson is an "influencer," that is, a person who has the ability to influence the behavior or opinions of others.

Let me tell you a little about Judge Williamson and why he is an influencer. First, he is one of the smartest people you will ever meet. But he's not just smart, he's also a quick study, a born leader, a gifted writer, and a natural teacher.

Judge Williamson loves to travel, and nothing makes him happier than loading up his Kindle with books and his iPad with movies for a long flight, preferably with an overnight stay in Dubai.

Judge Williamson is also devoted to his wife Linda and their family, he's a good friend, and he has been a mentor to dozens of attorneys and judges in Florida, many of whom are here today. It's fair to say that a number of us have succeeded and accomplished far more in our careers than we ever would have without Judge Williamson's support, encouragement, and influence.

Judge Williamson received his JD from the Georgetown University Law Center in 1976. He likes to say that when he was at Georgetown, he was so fearful of public speaking that he managed to graduate without ever answering a professor's question.

Despite this, in the early days of his law practice at a small Orlando law firm, Judge Williamson volunteered to speak at a seminar on the Uniform Commercial Code. A public speaker was born, and over his next two decades in private practice, Judge Williamson was a speaker or a moderator at more than 100 seminars. And in his 22 years as a judge, Judge Williamson has spoken at more than 280 seminars. He is a frequent lecturer at ABI and Southern Bankruptcy Law Institute seminars.

In 1983, Judge Williamson was the driving force behind the creation of a new seminar for the Business Law Section of the Florida Bar. The View From the Bench seminar is an informal panel discussion of recent case law featuring all of Florida's bankruptcy judges. This four-hour seminar proved so popular that it is presented annually in Tampa and Miami with over 200 attorneys attending at each location. Since the inception of View from the Bench, Judge Williamson has continued to serve as its standing program chair.

As an attorney, Judge Williamson was considered one of a very small group of preeminent Chapter 11 attorneys in the State of Florida. He was certified in business bankruptcy by the American Board of Certification, and he was inducted as a Fellow in Class IV of the American College of Bankruptcy.

When Judge Williamson was appointed to the bankruptcy bench in 2000, his influence became more strongly felt. I practiced before Judge Williamson, and in his first few months on the bench, it was clear that he was the smartest person in the courtroom and the most knowledgeable about bankruptcy law. Those are important qualities in a judge, but Judge Williamson also knew how to run a case, he was practical, he treated lawyers and parties fairly, and he had a sense of humor.

In his 22 years on the bench, Judge Williamson has authored 207 reported decisions. He frequently says that he likes to get out in front of an interesting issue, and he likes his opinions to give guidance to attorneys for future cases.

An example is his Tropical Sportswear ruling on critical vendor motions. According to Westlaw, Tropical Sportswear has been cited 525 times. And in his Fundamental Long Term Care case, he relied on the All Writs Act to enjoin probate estates from litigating claims against third parties that could have been brought in the bankruptcy court. In Judge Williamson's Safety Harbor decision, entered before the Supreme Court's ruling in Wellness, he foresaw the bankruptcy court's authority to enter final judgments in non-core matters if the parties consent. And after the Wellness ruling, there was nothing that Judge Williamson liked to lecture about more than the Stern Trilogy.

Judge Williamson authored a Practical Evidence Manual, which he updates every year. As a lawyer I referred to the Manual every time I prepared for trial and now, I keep a copy of it on my bench. The Practical Evidence Manual is available, free of charge, on our Court's website.

Judge Williamson has been very active in NCBJ. He has served as the chair of the NCBJ Education Committee, and as a member of the Endowment Committee, the Bylaws Committee, the Finance Committee, the Elections Committee, and the Federal Rules Advisory Committee. He is currently a member of NCBJ's International Judicial Relations Committee.

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With Judge Joan Feeney, Judge Williamson served as a co-author of West's Bankruptcy Law Manual. And he previously served as the Business Manager and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of NCBJ's American Bankruptcy Law Journal.

If you thought Judge Williamson was busy at home, wait until I tell you a little about his international work. For over twenty years—interrupted only by COVID—Judge Williamson traveled extensively, including to Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Georgia, Bahrain, and Ukraine. And he made an amazing nine trips to Afghanistan. In these countries he taught principles of insolvency laws to lawyers and judges and conducted workshops on adjudicating bankruptcy disputes. Judge Williamson even drafted a bankruptcy law for Afghanistan, that, before recent events, was enacted into law.

Some of you may know that Judge Williamson has been battling cancer for the past several months and is unable to be here today. When I met with Judge Williamson to tell him that the selection committee had chosen him as this year's recipient of the Norton Award, I was glad to tell him that the Middle District's judges actually nominated him last year and that our nomination had nothing to do with his being ill. We nominated Judge Williamson because we couldn't imagine a more deserving judge for the Award.

To say that Judge Williamson was overwhelmed is an understatement. On behalf of the Middle District of Florida, I would like to thank ABI, Thomson Reuters, and the Award selection committee for selecting Judge Williamson as this year's recipient of the Norton Award.

ABI generously offered to record this presentation, so Mike, when you watch the recording, I hope you know how much we respect you and admire you, and how much we appreciate your influence on our court, the bankruptcy practice, and our lives. Mainly, Mike, we hope you know how much we love you.

And now, to accept the Award on Judge Williamson's behalf, I would like to introduce my colleague, Judge Cathy McEwen.



Hon. Michael G. Williamson's Acceptance Remarks for the Judge William L. Norton Jr. Judicial Excellence Award

Delivered by Judge Catherine Peek McEwen at the October 21, 2022
Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges

I am honored to receive the Judge William L. Norton Jr. Judicial Excellence Award. I've often said that whenever I wanted to learn about a complicated legal issue, I would write about it. As a lawyer, I would write an article or present on the topic at a seminar. As a judge, of course, I would write an opinion. So the fact that I have spoken at nearly 400 seminars and written more than 200 reported decisions just means that, over the years, I had a lot to learn!

In all seriousness, if there's one thing I've learned from my international insolvency work, including in countries like Afghanistan, it's that we often take for granted the "rule of law," particularly when it comes to having a stable insolvency system. For that reason, I'm humbled to be recognized for helping contribute to the development of our insolvency system here in the United States.

When I was first appointed to the bench, I insisted that I, along with my chambers staff, sign our Chamber's Team Commitment. The Chamber's Team Commitment includes four specific commitments. One is a commitment to public service. In my chambers, we recognize we are public servants—and that we enjoy working for the public. Another commitment is to excellence. We strive to be the best because we owe that to the public. I'd like to think that receiving the Judge William L. Norton Jr. Judicial Excellence Award is the result of trying to live up to those commitments day in and day out for my twenty-two years on the bench.

In closing, I'd like to thank the ABI and Thompson Reuters for recognizing me with this award. It is truly an honor to receive an award named after Judge William Norton and to join past recipients—including my friends and colleagues Alexander Paskay, Jay Cristol, Mary Walrath, and Barbara Houser, to name just a few. And it is equally special to be nominated by my colleagues—and friends—with whom I serve in the Middle District of Florida.



CONGRATULATIONS,

Judge Michael G. Williamson

RECIPIENT OF THE 2022 JUDGE WILLIAM L. NORTON JR.
JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

About the Award

The award – named after the founding member of both the American Bankruptcy Institute and the American College of Bankruptcy – is given to a judge whose career embodies the same kind of continued dedication and outstanding contributions to the insolvency community as the award's namesake.

The selection committee is made up of three representatives of the ABI and three editors/contributing editors of the *Norton Bankruptcy Law and Practice* library.

Each year, a check in the recipient's name is presented by Thomson Reuters to the education endowment funds of ABI and NCBJ (National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges).

About Judge Michael G. Williamson

- United States Bankruptcy Judge for Middle District of Florida, 2000 – present; Chief Judge, 2015 – 2019
- Private practice of law, Orlando, Florida, including 20 years with Maguire Voorhis & Wells PA, 1976 – 2000
- Fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy (Class IV) and Member, International Insolvency Institute (since 2006) and American Law Institute (since 2007)
- Author, *Practical Evidence Manual* (2003 – present) and co-author, *Bankruptcy Law Manual* (2014 – present)
- Founding moderator and steering committee chair, *View From the Bench* seminar
- Extensive international insolvency work, including drafting and overseeing the enactment of a new insolvency law in Afghanistan, and research and educational work in Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Georgia, Bahrain, and Ukraine
- National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges: Editor-in-Chief, *NCBJ News* (2002 – 2004); Chair, NCBJ Education Committee (2005 – 2006); Manager and Member of the Editorial Advisory Board, *American Bankruptcy Law Journal* (2007 – 2012)
- ABI Commission to Study the Reform of Chapter 11's Advisory Committee on Multiple Debtor Cases, 2012 – 2014
- American Bar Association, Past Chair, Committee on Creditors' Rights of the Section of Litigation
- Federal Bar Association, Judicial Board Member, 2016 – 2019
- The Florida Bar, Past Chair, Business Law Section; Past Chair, Bankruptcy/UCC Committee; Past Chair, UCC Revision Committee; Business Law Section's Distinguished Lifetime Services Award
- Adjunct professor at Stetson University College of Law, Gulfport, Florida
- J.D., Georgetown University Law Center, 1976
- B.S., magna cum laude, Duke University, 1973



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Thank you

MICHAEL G. WILLIAMSON

February 22, 1951 - November 3, 2022

Thank you for the cards, flowers, and many kind expressions of sympathy. We have been comforted by your love and support at this tender time.