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OBITUARY

*Michael G. Williamson*

FEBRUARY 22, 1951 - NOVEMBER 3, 2022



IN THE CARE OF

Blount & Curry Funeral Home-MacDill Avenue

*The Hon. Michael G. Williamson, 71, of Tampa, Florida, passed away on November 3, 2022, surrounded by family and loved ones.*

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 by 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 twenty 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.

He is survived by his wife, Linda Cappelli Williamson; son, Scott Williamson of Van Nuys, CA; daughter, Michelle (Nathan) Criser of Raleigh, NC; five grandchildren; brother Jonathan (Hayden) Williamson of Camden, ME; brother Peter (Margaret) Williamson of Williamsburg, VA; sister Kathleen (Ward) Barmon of Bethesda, MD; mother-in-law Palma Cappelli of Pinellas Park, FL; brothers-in-law Dino Cappelli (Don Culpepper) of Safety Harbor, FL, and Richard Homa of Nokomis, FL; and ten nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his father, Col. John Williamson; his mother, Alice (McAniff) Williamson; father-in-law, Massimo Cappelli; and sister-in-law, Gina (Cappelli) Homa.

A celebration of life will be held on Sunday, November 20, 2022, at 1:00 p.m., at the Tampa Yacht & Country Club. In lieu of flowers, a donation may be made in Judge Williamson's honor to Bay Area Legal Services, Inc., 1302 N. 19th St., Suite 400, Tampa, FL 33605 ([www.bals.org](http://www.bals.org)).