

Getting to Know the Chief Judge

By: Judge Williamson's Chambers Staff

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

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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 at 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."