

Court Hosts Franklin Boys Prep Academy

By: Judge McEwen

In coordination with the George Edgecomb Bar Association's Role Model Committee, Judge McEwen's chambers arranged a courthouse visit early this month for 15 young men from Franklin Boys Prep Academy, a public single-gender, college preparatory middle school. The group was comprised of 6th through 8th graders.

The kids started their courthouse tour with a sentencing hearing before District Court Judge Charlene Honeywell. The defendant had been convicted of cocaine possession. The students watched intently as they learned that the defendant had at least three prior convictions for various crimes in another state. Because the attorneys were not prepared to tell the judge how the other state categorized the crimes for purposes of sentencing enhancement, she brought the attorneys up to sidebar to gently "fuss" at them (a good lesson for the students about being prepared) and continued the sentencing hearing to another day. After the hearing, Judge Honeywell stepped into the well of the courtroom to talk to the students about the dangers of drugs and other issues that could lead to failure. She also emphasized behaviors that could lead to success, such as staying in school and studying, and she spoke on what it takes to be a lawyer.

The next stop was the U.S. Marshal video command post followed by the 16 historical and civics displays located in the building's atrium and on the third-floor. After that, the kids went to Judge McEwen's courtroom for a meeting with District Judge Mary Scriven, who reinforced the life lessons imparted by Judge Honeywell. Judge Scriven spoke about how to grow up the right way, never to give up, and to choose a future in which "your vocation should be your avocation --- which means if you do something as your job, that 'something' you are truly passionate about, your work should feel like your play." Judge Scriven was particularly persuasive in advising the students about how imprudent conduct, including using drugs and even poor judgment in social media posts, can eliminate career choices. Judge McEwen then gave the kids a two-pronged civics lesson on the judiciary, stressing the importance of judicial independence and that we are a co-equal branch of government that should be defended against attacks from the other branches. (She also fielded questions about the array of sports stuff on her bench.)

The students' final two stops were equally interesting and satisfying. What middle school boy doesn't want to see (and be locked up in) a courthouse holding cell --- so long as it's not for the real reason lock-ups exist? The students grew a little pensive, though, when they asked where the prisoners slept while there, noticing the absence of beds. "They don't," was the Court Security Officer's answer. If you've never seen a holding cell in our building, it's furnished with immovable metal

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benches and one molded-metal, integrated sink-toilet combination with no rim or lid. The only moveable item in the cell is a roll of toilet paper.

The last stop was a pizza lunch in the jury assembly room, with a twist: presentations regarding some non-lawyer jobs within the court system. We heard from Pamela Thompson, District Court Jury Administrator; Dario Pavic, our Facilities Coordinator, whom we share with the District Court (and who speaks five languages fluently, after having come to the U.S. with \$40 in his pocket from former Yugoslavia, not knowing English, and starting out as a dishwasher); Brian Harrison, District Court IT Project Manager; and Joely Andrews, Pretrial Services Supervisor, who caught the students' attention with her urine-test kit and ankle monitor. Along the course of the half-day, the students also learned about the career path of Court Security Officers Eddie Watts and Nona Dyess.

Each student took home a glossy AO publication titled Understanding the Federal Courts (now out of print, so perhaps they qualify as collectibles!). Hopefully they flipped through the booklet on the bus back to school instead of rolling them up to bop each other on the head, as some did as they headed out to the bus. Boys will be boys.

The Court thanks the GEBA and other volunteers who chaperoned and helped organize the event, especially Assistant State Attorney Travis Coy, Judge Honeywell's law clerk Joseline Hardrick, and Chambers 8B J.A. Dedra Gann, for providing a memorable experience for the young fellows.

If anyone is interested in planning a courthouse tour or an in-school visit for other school kids, please feel free to contact Judge McEwen for tips, including an introduction to the many civics resources located at the Federal Judges Association Civics Education Toolkit website, a collaboration of the FJA, the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges, and the Federal Magistrate Judges Association.

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Judge Honeywell and Franklin teacher Cindy Davis (back row far right) take a seat with the students.



Judge McEwen talks to the students about our historical exhibits, including one about how it took a federal judge to stop our state's governor from frustrating integration of the Manatee County School District some 16 years after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.



Judge Scriven enjoys her visit with the students.