

## **Giving Back**

**By: Sheryl Loesch, Clerk of Court**

I cannot believe that more than a year has passed since I became the Clerk of Court. It has been a fun and rewarding year for me.

Of all the wonderful attributes I have discovered about our Court, one attribute that stands out to me is the kind and giving spirit of the judges and staff. Seeing this spirit memorialized in the Court's Mission Statement is one thing; however, seeing it modeled by our people regularly is exemplary. Community service and concern for others is seen at every level of our court. It is easy to "talk the talk" but it is more important to "walk the talk." The Middle District of Florida Bankruptcy Court "walks the talk."

I want to share one of my passions in the spirit of giving back. In my early years serving as the Clerk in the District Court, I was asked by a clerk colleague to assist on a rule of law project in Egypt. I assisted a team from the Department of Justice, tasked with reviewing the serious backlog of cases that country experienced. Although I had traveled internationally before on vacation, this was by far the most "foreign feeling" country I had visited. I remember being both excited and nervous. This was my first time traveling to assist on a rule of law project.



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Since my first trip to Egypt all those many years ago, I have been on numerous trips abroad and have seen the dire situations courts face, especially in developing parts of the world. I quickly learned what we take for granted, many courts only dream of. It is a humbling experience.

After participating on several rule of law project teams and also participating in hosting foreign delegations of court personnel from other countries, a few of my colleagues and I realized there was a need for a follow up resource in order to help the court personnel in these countries stay engaged with those of us in the United States. This contact allowed us to continue to be a resource and sounding board to help them. Our government funds many rule of law projects throughout the world, however, once the project term ends and the project team leaves the country, the local court personnel left behind need a way to stay in communication with other court colleagues in both the United States and in other countries with independent judicial systems. It was this need that caused several of us to form a new association we called the International Association for Court Administration, or “IACA” for short. IACA was officially formed back in September 2004 because of the vision of several of my colleagues. We planned to hold our first conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia. This was truly a leap of faith as we had no idea if anyone would attend! To our relief, the first conference was a huge success with over 150 judges and court personnel in attendance from over 30 countries.

Here is a picture of the group attending the President’s Reception at the first conference in Slovenia:



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Over the years, IACA continued to thrive and grow. It lived up to the adage, “If you build it, they will come.” The following global conferences were held:

2006 – Verona, Italy  
2008 – Dublin, Ireland  
2009 – Istanbul, Turkey  
2012 – The Hague, Netherlands  
2013 – Dubai, UAE  
2014 – Sydney, Australia  
2015 – The Hague, Netherlands  
2016 – Washington, DC, United States

A conference is scheduled for this September in Iguazu Falls, Brazil. I have recently been elected as the incoming President-Elect of IACA and will assume this role at the conference in September. If you are interested in learning more about IACA, feel free to visit the IACA website at [www.iaca.ws](http://www.iaca.ws).

Whether it is involvement in putting on a conference or serving on a team on a rule of law project in a specific country, I have always felt I have received far more than I have given. In many places I have been, the court systems are in dire need of both organization and skilled management. Sadly, the problem lies in the long established culture of corruption in some countries. Salaries tend to be very low so payoffs are common. I always try to approach these trips with an open mind, with every hope that some small tidbit of advice or sharing some of our procedures will prove helpful to the court at some point in time, even if it is years down the road. It is personally rewarding to see the expressions of enthusiasm and hope on the faces of judges and court personnel in countries who need our help.

The Middle District of Florida Bankruptcy Court is a special court. It is a court with heart. It is a court with a giving spirit. It is a family. I am so proud to now be a member of this family.