



Courthouse Tour for Middle Schoolers Features Life Lessons by Judges By Hon. Catherine Peek McEwen

During National Judicial Outreach Week in March, the Tampa Division hosted a courthouse tour for approximately 30 young ladies from Ferrell Middle School. The tour was a collaboration between the George Edgecomb Bar Association, the Tampa Bay Chapter of the Federal Bar Association, and our Court.

Judge McEwen started the day's activities in her courtroom and welcomed the students and their teachers and chaperones with a short civics lesson on the importance of the Third Branch and how it operates independently and acts as a check against the other two branches from taking action contrary to our constitutional rights. Inasmuch as the primary election was later in the month, Judge McEwen also stressed that it is important that the students remind their parents to register to vote and vote if they are eligible to do so.

The students then left to tour three areas of interest in the courthouse—the civics kiosks on the third floor, the U.S. Marshal's office on the fourth floor, and the historical kiosks on the first floor.

Next up on the agenda was a talk with Magistrate Judge Chris Tuite, who had been a federal prosecutor before his judicial appointment. He kept the girls spellbound with his story about a case he prosecuted involving a drug ring operating out of the Central Park area in Tampa. A young lady had been used by the ring leaders to sit in the hot sun as a lookout. She later had the courage to do the right thing and inform on the ring leaders. The girls asked many good questions about the case, so many, in fact, that Judge Tuite barely had time to address them all.

The last stop was lunch, which the girls enjoyed while sitting through some talks about the career paths and jobs of others in the legal system. Our own Ellen Morton spoke about her path to becoming an intake clerk. The girls also heard from Joely Andrews, who is Supervisory Pretrial Services Officer, and RoseMarie Quiles Simon, an Investigative Analyst with the Marshal's office. These three speakers no doubt helped the girls learn that being a lawyer or a judge is not the only way one can work in the legal field.

The last speaker was Magistrate Judge Julie Sneed, who layered life lessons onto her personal back story. The values she spoke about—everything from hard work to a good spiritual life—were so compelling that we all could have heard a pin drop. Judge Sneed really brought her role-model "A-Game" with her that day.

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In reflecting on her audience, Judge Sneed said, “I truly enjoyed speaking with the girls from Ferrell Middle School. I know among them is a future lawyer, judge, teacher, nurse, or doctor. If they continue to work hard and make good choices, they can achieve any goal they set for themselves.”

All in all, the tour was an experience that the girls likely will not forget.



Ferrell Middle School students visit during National Judicial Outreach Week in March



On Left: Magistrate Judge Christopher Tuite summarizes an interesting case



Magistrate Judge Julie Sneed
inspiring the students



Ellen Morton, US Bankruptcy Intake Clerk
describes a normal workday