



## Clerk's Message By: Sheryl L. Loesch, Clerk of Court

I hope everyone had a safe and happy holiday season, and I wish everyone a Happy New Year.

I want to take a moment and acknowledge our Chief Deputy, Johnnie Prophet, who retired at the end of the calendar year after 40 years of service to the United States – 18 years working in both our Bankruptcy Court and District Court here in the Middle District of Florida, and 22 years serving in the Air Force. Johnnie was a beloved member of our Court family and is one of those people who “never knew a stranger.” Johnnie will always be remembered for the positive impact he had on both Courts. His expertise in the administrative side of the house—areas such as internal controls, budget and finance, and space and facilities—gained him a national reputation as a subject-matter expert, and other courts would routinely seek out his wise counsel. Aside from the “work side” of Johnnie, what I will always remember him for is his friendly, outgoing demeanor and his smile that would light up a room whenever he entered. Not many people know this about Johnnie, but he is a published author, and he is already well into the writing of his second book! We thank Johnnie for his years of service, and we want him to know that he will be missed.



Johnnie Prophet Receiving His Retirement Certificate – December 16, 2021  
*Left to right: Clerk Sheryl Loesch, Chief Judge Delano, Johnnie Prophet,  
Judge McEwen, Judge Colton, and Judge Williamson*

I want to introduce you to Jose Rodriguez, our Court's new Chief Deputy. Jose came to our Court after serving in the same position in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Florida, where he served as the Chief Deputy for seven years and as Director of Administrative Services for 11.5 years. We are so fortunate to have Jose join our Court family. Not only is he just an all-around great person, but he has strong experience in the position and will seamlessly be able to take over and carry on Johnnie's good work.



*Jose Rodriguez, Chief Deputy*

Who would have ever thought that we would still be talking about COVID as we enter 2022! In spite of COVID, our Court has just completed another year of accomplishments. I am so pleased to report that we had a successful transition to NextGen, our new case management system.

As with any new change, it came with some anticipated hiccups and some unanticipated hiccups, but our staff handled them with hard work, dedication, and finesse. I hate to sound cliché, but this change really did “take a village” to accomplish.

I want to personally thank Gull Weaver, who in addition to performing her regular job duties as Jacksonville Division Manager, served as our NextGen Project Manager. Gull did a fantastic job leading us through a structured and organized process to prepare for and implement NextGen. Our IT staff worked tirelessly alongside Gull, and I want to acknowledge the two programmers who worked on this project—Bill Miguenes and Tamami Sugimoto. Bill and Tamami worked their magic behind the scenes to make the transition happen. Our Director of IT, Richard (Rick) Jarrell, kept all the pieces of the puzzle moving and in place. Our two CM/ECF administrators, Christine Baker and Michael Schumpert, also worked to test the events and other aspects of the programming in NextGen. Kim Osment, our Systems Project Manager,

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and Marco Eguia, our Webmaster, stayed on top of sending out communications and updating our website. Sara Mason, our Data Quality Analyst/Trainer, was there to assist filers with problems as the transition was underway. Laurie Ellwood, our Tampa Systems Administrator and IT Security Specialist, was there to assist in trouble shooting problems and assisting project team members as needed. Laurie regularly brought forth solutions to issues when problems were discovered. She kept the team on track during the daily Scrum Meetings and review of outstanding issues. Laurie's contribution to the discussions and the solutions she proposed were a valuable asset to the team.

To let you know exactly what had to happen to make this transition possible, I want to refer you to the "Middle District of Florida's NextGen Story" that Gull and Rick put together for this edition of *Court Connection*. For any of you interested, it will give you a real sense of the effort that had to go into this transition.

Our Court has always been known for its team approach. You all have heard of our Court's motto, "One Court One Team." That approach, that philosophy, that mindset—whatever you wish to call it—is truly embedded in each and every one of our Judges and staff.

I recently read a book called, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, by Patrick Lencioni. Mr. Lencioni has written several books on business management. This book was actually recommended to me by a hedge fund manager friend of mine of all people! The book is written in a story form about a struggling technology company trying to grow its customers. The senior level leadership/managers were not working as a team, and the result was negative morale. The book goes on to describe the various dysfunctions that built on each other and ultimately resulted in the negative morale.

To give you an idea of the essence of the highlighted dysfunctions, they are presented in a hierarchy form, with the absence of trust being at the base of the hierarchy pyramid (similar to Maslow's Needs Hierarchy). Next comes the fear of conflict, followed by lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and, finally, inattention to results at the top.

What hit home for me when reading this book was how our staff have avoided these dysfunctions thanks to the focus on the Court's "One Court One Team" mission. Our Court also listened to staff from the "bottom up," which gave our judges insight into the practicalities of how different practices impact staff. The adage that leadership is bound for failure without followship is well practiced in our Court.

Again, I wish each and every one of you all the best in this new year. Let's hope we can be mask free before the end of 2022 (yes, I am forever the optimist!).