

Bloom Where You're Planted!
By: Hon. Catherine Peek McEwen

That was the message a group of impressionable middle schoolers heard during a courthouse tour this past school year. In conjunction with the Tampa Bay Chapter of the Federal Bar Association and the George Edgecomb Bar Association, the Tampa Divisions of the District Court and Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Florida hosted approximately 40 young ladies from Ferrell Middle School.

Over the course of the tour, the students:

- Toured the civics displays and the U.S. Marshal's area with teacher and lawyer chaperones and Bankruptcy Judge Cathy McEwen,
- Heard a compelling story from Magistrate Judge Chris Tuite about a young woman who had been used as an inner-city drug-dealing enterprise's look-out and who made the right decision to cooperate in the prosecution of the dealers,
- Learned about what pretrial services officers do, from Joely Andrews, a Supervisory Pretrial Services Officer,
- Watched a part of a jury trial in a criminal case that District Judge Mary Scriven was presiding over (and the alleged perpetrator was a woman!),
- Enjoyed a pizza lunch while Magistrate Judge Julie Sneed visited from table to table, and
- Then wrapped up the tour by hearing some words of wisdom from Judge Scriven and District Judge Charlene Honeywell.

When Judge Scriven mentioned the adage "bloom where you're planted," she added that, "you have to make the very best of what you are given at the time. Strive for the best and not just adequate!" She also told them what skills are necessary to become a good lawyer or judge, such as loving to read, to write well, to be a good listener, to be able to grasp a lot of information and synthesize it quickly, and to have the temperament to relate to all people and treat them with dignity and respect.

Judge Honeywell shared what she called her "two pearls: Set a goal and look what you need to do to meet that goal." She also warned that the girls will face obstacles in life, "but just keep your goal front and center and have the tenacity to get around the obstacles." She summed up with a short story about how she dealt with an adverse event in her life: "I didn't let adversity stop me. It made me a better person and a better judge."

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At the end of their time at the courthouse, the students and their teacher each left with a pocket Constitution and a new appreciation for the federal judiciary!



FBA tour coordinator Michelle Moretz-Smith, law clerk to Eleventh Circuit Judge Charles Wilson, looks on as District Judges Mary Scriven (l) and Charlene Honeywell (r) talk about life lessons with the visiting students from Ferrell Middle School.



Approximately 40 students from Ferrell Middle School gather in Judge Scriven's courtroom for a group photo prior to watching a segment of a jury trial in a criminal case before the judge.



Ferrell Middle School teacher Alarice McDonald-Brown and Judge McEwen, holding one of the pocket Constitutions she gave each student.