

# 15<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Palm Beach County Courthouse Tour Information

*Jeffrey Colbath, Chief Judge*

The Chief Judge of the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, Palm Beach County is responsible for the administrative oversight of the Circuit and County Court Judges. He is assisted with his responsibilities by the Trial Court Administrator, **Barbara Dawicke**.

- The first Palm Beach County Courthouse was built in 1916 across the street from this facility. It's now known as the Palm Beach County Historical Courthouse. Tours of the Historical Courthouse are available through the *Historical Society of Palm Beach County*.
- The current Main Judicial Courthouse was built in 1995 to accommodate the growing population in Palm Beach County.
- The number of Circuit and County Court Judges is determined by population. The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit has a total of 54 Judges:
  - 35 Circuit Court Judges
  - 19 County Court Judges
- There are also other judiciary staffs within the circuit. They include:
  - 9 Magistrates
  - 17 Civil Traffic Hearing Officers
- There are 5 Courthouse Locations:
  - Main - West Palm Beach
  - North – Palm Beach Gardens
  - South – Delray Beach
  - West – Belle Glade
  - Criminal Justice Complex - Gun Club

## **15<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Tour Guidelines**

The Court has established the following procedures to ensure a pleasant and productive visit of the Judicial Courthouse:

- Tours are only conducted at the Main Courthouse.
- All tours must be scheduled at least 3 weeks in advance.
- Guest under the age of 18 must have one chaperone for every ten guests.
- Groups of more than 10 may be broken up into separate groups at the discretion of the tour guide(s).
- Groups must arrive at least 15 minutes before the start of the tour to allow enough time to pass through security. The tour guide(s) will meet the group in the lobby.
- All electronic devices must be turned off during court observations.
- No eating or drinking in courtrooms.

- All guests must wear proper attire when visiting the judicial center. Shorts, hats, flip-flops, halters and tank tops are not suitable for the courtroom.
- Each tour is created to accommodate each group. A tour may consist of court observation, visit to the law library and jury room, K-9 demonstration and a visit to the PBSO Sally Port.
- The tour guide will attempt to arrange for a brief question and answer session with a Judge.
- Please remember that the judicial courthouse is a place of business where our community comes to address important legal matters. All tour groups must conduct themselves accordingly. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.

## **Judiciary**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**

**County Court Civil Judges** preside over lawsuits with damages up to \$15,000, in cases such as evictions and small claims. **Judges** preside over domestic violence, traffic and county criminal cases.

**County Court Criminal Judges** handle moving and non-moving traffic violations in cases such as speeding, seat belt, red light camera, handicapped parking tickets and more. Misdemeanors are offenses lower than felonies and generally punishable by fine, penalty or jail time for up to one year. Violations include petty theft, simple assault and battery.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Floor**

**County Court Civil Judges** preside over foreclosure hearings, along with probate cases, county civil cases.

**Circuit Civil Court Judges** handle lawsuits with damages of more than \$15,000, in cases such as foreclosures, medical malpractice, probate of estates, and marriage license

**Circuit Criminal Court Judges** handle felonies. Felonies are a serious crime that is punishable by death or imprisonment in excess of one year. Criminal appeals, sealing and expungement of records are also handled by this division.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Floor**

**Judges** preside over foreclosure and probate cases. **Unified Family Court Judges** handle family-related matters such as adoption, child support, divorce, domestic, guardianship, juvenile, mental health, name change, and paternity.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Floor**

**Court Administration** oversees all judicial and non-judicial matters arising within the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit. It serves as the operational hub for the Circuit.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Floor**

**Magistrates** are quasi-judicial officers who conduct formal court hearings, take testimony and evaluate evidence for child support and post-order family case matters.

**Mediation** is a process whereby a neutral and impartial third person acts to encourage and facilitate the resolution of a dispute without prescribing what it should do.

**Unified Family Court** handles family-related matters such as adoption, child support, divorce, domestic, guardianship, juvenile, mental health, name change, and paternity.

### **9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> Floor**

**Judges** preside over jury and non-jury trials in the Circuit Civil and Circuit Criminal cases.

**Clerk & Comptroller**

**1<sup>st</sup> Floor**

**Jury Duty** prospective jurors are randomly selected from the DMV's list of driver's license and identification card holders residing in Palm Beach County. Jurors must be a US citizen at least 18 years of age, and a legal resident of Palm Beach County.

**Self Service Center** provides resources to those representing themselves in cases such as divorce, evictions, small claims, etc.

