

# Juror Appreciation Month

## Judges Serve Breakfast to Citizens in Jury Pool

The month of May has been designated nationally as Juror Appreciation Month. As part of showing appreciation for those who answer the call to jury service, judges in the Sixth Judicial Circuit paid for and served breakfast to approximately 70 citizens who had been summoned for jury duty at the Criminal Justice Center on May 10. Here, Chief Judge David A. Demers offers fruit and conversation to potential jurors, who seemed to enjoy the opportunity to meet judges.



Chief Judge David A. Demers, right, and his successor-to-be, Circuit Judge Robert J. Morris, Jr. chat with some of the day's potential jurors. Circuit Judges Dee Anna Farnell and Tim Peters and County Judge Edwin Jagger also assisted in serving pastry, fruit, juice and coffee. Judges who had jury trials scheduled were asked not to participate in the symbolic "thank you." In addition to conversation with judges, the hit of the morning was the tea rings (on table by Judge Morris), a pastry baked by Paul Inskip, husband of Trial Courts Administrator Gay Inskip.

## Jury duty is highest duty of all American citizens

By Judge Robert J. Morris, Jr.

It has been well documented that fewer and fewer Americans who are eligible to vote exercise their right to do so. As our population continues to swell, we feel evermore removed from the officials we elect and empower to decide the issues of the day for us. In a representative form of democracy, such as ours, it is comforting to have some connection with the person you must trust to advocate for you on taxes, national security, education, crime and punishment, and other such weighty matters. However, very few of us have this privilege.

Unfortunately, it is not realistic in such a populous nation to actually know or be able to communicate directly with the elected officials who are charged with considering our best interests when voting on issues of critical importance to us. All too often the American voter feels betrayed by elected officials. Voters believe (whether correctly or not) the officials often vote the wrong way because they didn't really know how the voters felt. This disenfranchisement naturally leads to mistrust, apathy and indifference.

The constitutional mandate of separation of powers provides that laws are made in the legislative branch of government, enforced in the executive branch of government and interpreted and applied in the judicial branch of government. While we are required to have faith in our duly elected representatives in the legislative and executive branches to make the right call, ordinary citizens are the decision-makers in the judicial branch. Each week, thousand of citizens report for jury service in courthouses in the cities, villages and towns all across America. Those citizens are empanelled in juries for both criminal and civil trials with one clear mission: to decide whether the defendant is guilty or not.

While the judge instructs the jury on the law, it is the jury – and the jury alone – that decides what witnesses were telling the truth and which ones weren't, what evidence was believable and which wasn't, and whether the ultimate verdict is to be guilty or not guilty. The jury, not the judge, makes the ultimate call in a trial. The genius of our nation's founders was, and is, that while we may be willing to trust others to make and enforce our laws, we trust no one, except a jury of our peers, to deprive a person of life, liberty or property. If you don't like what is happening in the

This article by the Chief Judge-elect of the Sixth Judicial Circuit appeared in various editions of the St. Petersburg Times and Tampa Tribune. It was written by Judge Morris as part of the courts' tribute to jurors during Juror Appreciation Month.

trial courts of America, you have no one to blame but yourself if you have dodged the call of jury duty. If you want a direct hand in the functioning of government, respond to the call for jury service. You can be the decision-maker.

An informed electorate is vital to the proper functioning of a democracy. It is crucial that large numbers of informed citizens report to polls every election to vote so that the will of the majority can truly be ascertained. However, responding to the call of jury service has been said to be the highest duty of an American citizen. Without jurors, the judicial branch of government would come to a standstill. Not only would civil and criminal cases of vital interest to litigants remain unresolved, the judicial branch would be unable to perform its critical function of acting as a check and balance on the legislative and executive branches. It is the courts that strike down an unconstitutional law passed by the legislature, and it is the courts that halt the executive branch from unconstitutionally enforcing laws against individuals in violation of their civil liberties. Therefore, a free and independent judiciary is the vital life blood of our uniquely American way of life. It is the courts – which can only function with juries made up of citizens – that are, in many ways, the last bulwark against tyranny.

Indeed, it is a rare privilege to observe first hand the determination and commitment many prospective jurors bring to the task at hand. It is clear from their sense of purpose that they grasp the gravamen of the assignment. While most trials last a day or two, some can last for days or even weeks and go well into the night and on weekends. Undaunted, and ever-patient, the typical jurors will remain steadfast in their mission to hear and see all the evidence, listen to the instructions on the law and ultimately decide the case. In all but the rarest of cases, what the jury decides cannot be wrong. A judge can make an incorrect ruling on the law, which can cause the case to be reversed on appeal, but the jury's verdict is what justice in America is. The people have spoken.

The month of May has been set aside to honor and pay tribute to those who have served on juries this past year. Accordingly, the sixty-nine judges of the Sixth Judicial Circuit (Pasco and Pinellas counties) hereby salute, with gratitude, the women and men who have selflessly responded to the call of duty to serve on a jury.