

Judge McGrady Elected Chief Judge Of Sixth Judicial Circuit

CLEARWATER – Circuit Judge J. Thomas McGrady has been elected Chief Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit, the courts for Pasco and Pinellas County.

McGrady, 60, was elected by the 68 other judges in the circuit to succeed Circuit Judge Robert J. Morris Jr., who was appointed by Gov. Charlie Crist to fill a vacancy on the Second District Court of Appeal. The term for McGrady, who has been a judge in the circuit since 1999, begins immediately and will last until June 30, 2011.

“I appreciate the confidence my fellow judges have shown in me,” Judge McGrady said. “I know that I am going to be working with an excellent group of judges and staff.”



Judge McGrady *Judge Morris*

The Chief Judge is constitutionally responsible for the administrative supervision of the courts and court staff within the Sixth Circuit, which serves almost 1.5 million residents in the two counties. Last year, new case filings totaled almost 391,000, an increase of more than 65% over the past 10 years. That increase in workload has caused the Legislature to grow the number of judgeships from 57 in 2001 to the current 69 – 45 circuit judges and 24 county judges. They preside over court proceedings in nine locations and are supported by an administrative staff of approximately 235.

Judge McGrady promised his fellow judges that “I will do my best to lead us through the challenges that lie ahead, and I am committed to properly serving the 68 other judges and the citizens of our circuit.”

Judge Morris predicted his successor “will make an excellent chief judge. I’m very excited about the choice, and I know he will have the support of the circuit’s judiciary and staff.” However, Judge Morris did point out some challenges facing the new chief judge. He particularly mentioned:

- “The continued transition to a paperless system, which is a big challenge not only in this circuit but for the whole state.
- “The total transformation of the funding methodology for the court system. As of July 1, the source of funds for operating the state’s courts will no longer exclusively be Florida’s general revenue fund. Instead, we now will receive approximately 70% of our funding from increased filing fees, fines and costs that will be directed into a state court trust fund. In today’s trying economic times, it’s difficult to project revenue streams that the new system will provide, and proper projections are so essential for proper planning.”

Judge McGrady has been on the bench in the Sixth Circuit since August 1999, when then-Gov. Jeb Bush appointed him to fill a vacancy as a County Judge in Pinellas. He was elected for a full term without opposition in September 2000, and in December 2001, Bush again chose McGrady, this time for a vacant Circuit Judgeship. In 2004, he was elected for a full six-year term, again without opposition. He currently presides over civil cases in St. Petersburg. He also has been assigned to the Family Law Division, where he was administrative judge for Family Law, and both misdemeanor and felony Criminal Divisions.

In May, the St. Petersburg Bar Association presented its Judicial Appreciation Award to McGrady.

Before becoming a judge, he practiced law in St. Petersburg for 24 years, beginning in 1974 with the law firm of Bradham, Lyle, Skipper and Cramer. In 1976, he established his own firm with Richard Stoneman and Rick Mattson and continued to practice civil trial matters with his partner, Rick Mattson, until becoming a judge. He also was a certified mediator in circuit and county courts. He earned a Martindale Hubbell rating of AV, the highest rating given by the leading organization that rates lawyers.

Judge McGrady is a member of the Florida Bar, has appeared and argued cases at all levels of courts in the state of Florida, is admitted in federal courts (including the U.S. Supreme Court), is involved with the Florida Bar Association, served as a member of the Florida Bar Grievance Committee and was its area chairman from 1988 to 1990, has been very active with the St. Petersburg Bar Association and has served two terms on its executive committee. He is a former president of and a master in the Barney Masterson Inn of Court, an organization dedicated to promoting the ethical and professional practice of law, and is a member of the Barney Masterson Inn of Court and the Canakaris Inn of Court.

In community activities, Judge McGrady has served St. Jude Catholic Church and School as a school board chairman, fall festival treasurer, president of the Moms and Dads Club and member of the parish council. He has served as chairman of the Indian Shores Code Enforcement Board, is a Legion of Honor member of Kiwanis International and has twice served as president of Midtown Kiwanis. Currently, he is a member of St. Jude Catholic Church.

He earned his Juris Doctorate Degree in 1974 from the University of Florida, where he had completed undergraduate work in 1971 with a Bachelor of Arts in education. While in college, he received the Metta Heathcote scholarship, and while in law school, he was awarded the "Book Award" in estate and gift taxation, was on the Dean's List four times and graduated in the top one-third of his class. He worked as a legal research assistant for Professor Gerald Bennett and as a legal research assistant for the Attorney General of Florida. In that capacity, he assisted in the research and writing of the *Prosecutors Manual on Organized Crime*.

A native of Indiana, he moved with his parents, sisters and brother to St. Petersburg in 1956, attended local schools and graduated from Bishop Barry High School. In 1970, he married his high school sweetheart, Mary Choquette, who is a retired teacher. They have two grown children and three grandchildren..

Judge McGrady expressed his "appreciation and thanks to Robert Morris for his outstanding leadership through some very difficult times."

Judge Morris, on the bench in the Sixth Circuit since 1997, has guided the local courts through a turbulent two years. His effect on the system actually began before his chief judge tenure. With overcrowding at the Pinellas County Jail at a critical stage, he worked with the sheriff, state attorney and public defender to effect new methods for dealing with offenders with less serious charges and to allow defense attorneys to get matters heard on a timelier basis.

The result has been that population in the jail has been lowered to a point where a proposal to rent space to other agencies is being seriously considered.

About two-thirds of the way through the first year of his term, state and county governments began to feel the serious effects of the declining economy, and for more than a year, Judge Morris has guided the local

courts through budget and staff cuts, duty re-alignments and increased caseloads, particularly in areas such as real estate foreclosures.

His term on the Second District Court of Appeal will begin around Aug. 3. Judge Morris said, “I will greatly miss the people of the Sixth Judicial Circuit – judges and staff alike – their dedication and commitment to the judiciary and the people whose lives are touched by the court system.”