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Hearing Officer Joseph Flannery and Administrative Secretary Jadonn Sowell.



Hearing Officer Mark Chancey and his former assistant Kathy Cordier, now the judicial assistant for Judge Susan Bedinghaus.

Hearing Officer Bama Finocchi, front, and Administrative Secretary Beate Buegler.

Sixth Judicial Circuit Employees Recognized With Productivity Award

CLEARWATER – Six employees in the Sixth Judicial Circuit’s Child Support Hearing Office have been named as a team winner for the 2007 Prudential Financial-Davis Productivity Awards, which recognize state employees whose innovation significantly improves the delivery of state services and saves money for Florida’s taxpayers.

The annual statewide competition attracted 503 nominations for improvements worth an estimated \$332 million in cost savings, cost avoidances and increased revenue for the State of Florida. The local employees were one of just three court groups to be recognized around the state. They will receive a cash award at a regional awards ceremony, to be held in Tampa in late June.

The team that earned the recognition includes Hearing Officers Mark Chancey, Joseph Flannery and Bama Finocchi and their assistants – Beate Buegler, Kathy Cordier and Jadonn Sowell. Over a six-month period, they all but eliminated a 2800-case backlog that was created when the State Department of Revenue stepped up its process for initiating court action against parents who haven’t fallen behind in their legally required financial support for dependent children.

Without additional funding or employees, the Support Enforcement employees creatively designed court dockets with the intent of eliminating what had been projected as a nine-month wait to get cases on a hearing officer’s docket. The hearing officers’ findings are referred to judges for orders designed to get money transferred from the defendants to the custodial parents. Sixth Judicial Circuit Chief Deputy Courts Administrator Michelle Bourrie said the employees’ dedication and innovation help “litigants to receive the aid their children are entitled to by law. Less waiting time for litigants means less strain on their financial resources, more faith in the judicial system and better care for the needs of children.”

Of Florida’s 20 judicial circuits, only two – the urban areas of Tampa and Miami – have more child support enforcement cases brought before hearing officers. Ms. Bourrie said the Sixth Judicial Circuit team worked with the Department of Revenue and the State Attorney General’s office to restructure the court calendars “in a manner that did not sacrifice due process protections and can inspire other jurisdictions suffering such backlogs.”

Ms. Bourrie calculated savings in hearing office personnel costs at more than \$56,000, but she added that the “value to citizens is not estimateable. Timeliness of scheduling has enabled the Department of Revenue to avoid great costs associated with legal delays and the difficulty of noticing older cases. It also has allowed the court to avert the increased cost of continuing cases with insufficient notice, which happened in an estimated 25% of the cases prior to undertaking the backlog reduction project.”

She added that Florida’s taxpayers have been well served by Mark Chancey, Joseph Flannery, Bama Finocchi, Beate Buegler, Kathy Cordier and Jadonn Sowell.