

Circuit Judge Lynn Tepper Honored For Compassion for the Mentally Ill

NEW PORT RICHEY – Sixth Judicial Circuit Judge Lynn Tepper, who presides over Family Court cases in East Pasco County, will be honored by the Pasco County chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) during the chapter’s annual award banquet next week.

Tepper, a judge in Pasco County since 1985, was selected for the NAMI Humanitarian Hope Award because of “her ever-evolving dedication to bring life, hope and guidance to the fallen society around her.” The Hope Award recognizes individuals “who have demonstrated courage, innovation and resiliency” in dealing with persons with mental illness.

Awards to Judge Tepper and other Pasco NAMI 2009 honorees will be presented during the annual banquet at 6 p.m. Sunday (Oct. 11) at Spartan Manor, 6121 Massachusetts Ave., New Port Richey. Featured speaker at the banquet will be Patrick T. Grady, a motivational speaker and author of *Who Packs the Parachute*.



Judge Lynn Tepper

The banquet is the local group’s conclusion to Mental Illness Awareness Week, observed annually during the first full week of October. NAMI is the nation’s largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness.

Vasilios Major, disposition specialist in the office of Public Defender Bob Dillinger, said that “In today’s world, hurting people across the country are coming before a judge on a legal matter, and so often what is addressed is the end result of a wound with punishment.” He said Judge Tepper “does her best to address the root cause and offer healing, rather than punishment.”

Judge Tepper’s career on the bench began after she won a 1984 election to become a Pasco County judge. After one term, she was elected unopposed to a seat on the circuit bench and has held that position since 1989. She is a graduate of Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, and earned her Juris Doctorate degree at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport. Prior to election as a judge, she was in private practice, clerked in U.S. Bankruptcy Court and was an assistant public defender.

As a Family Court judge in Dade City, she presently oversees dependency, delinquency and domestic violence cases. Prior to the funding and formal establishment of Pasco County Drug Court in 2007, Judge Tepper – without financial support or staff –began and presided over a similar, scaled-down and successful version of the specialty court that emphasizes treatment for people with drug problems. She also had informally presided over a “One Court–One Family” concept for about a decade before the Florida Supreme Court began establishing Unified Family Courts in circuits around the state.

Her innovative handling of domestic relations matters has lead to televised appearances on *Nightline* (“Is Abuse an Excuse”), *CNN’s Crier & Co.* (“Norplant: Is It Constitutional?”), *Oprah Winfrey* (“Shame: Does it work?”), and *Montel Williams* (“Troubled Teens”).

She serves or has served on the Florida Gender Bias Study Commission, the Florida Bench/Bar Commission, Florida Domestic Violence Implementation Task Force, Florida Bar Legal Needs of Children’s Commission, Steering Committee on Families and Children in Courts, Supreme Court Committee on Alternative Dispute

Resolution, Task Force on Treatment Based Drug Courts, Gov. Lawton Chiles' Domestic Violence Clemency Review panels, the Pasco Family Law Advisory Group, the American Bar Association's Law and Literacy Committee, New Port Richey Marine Institute and the Board of PEG/PAC (a family literacy organization).

Last year, the Florida Association of Community Corrections (FACC) – a professional organization whose members include federal, state, county, and juvenile probation officers – presented her with the 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award for her “dedication to providing fair and equal justice and her willingness to instruct the criminal justice community.”

Previous awards have included “Public Citizen of the Year” from the Florida Literacy Coalition; the ACE (Adult and Community Education) of Florida's Public Official of the Year; “Humanitarian of the Year” from the Florida Animal Control Association; and the Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice's Commendation in 2003 for exemplary public service for a program she and Judicial Assistant Connie Ashmore created to distribute books and toys to children as they wait inside the courthouse.

ATTENTION EDITORS & ASSIGNMENT MANAGERS: Judge Tepper can be made available for interviews if you would like to profile her.