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Judge Peter R. Ramsberger Wins Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence

CLEARWATER - Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Judge Peter R. Ramsberger has been awarded the 2017 Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence, arguably the most prestigious distinction granted to a Florida jurist in the state each year.

Jorge Labarga, the chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court, announced that Judge Ramsberger had won the award on July 24, 2017, at this year's Florida Conference of Circuit Judges in Orlando. Interestingly enough, the only other judge to be nominated in the state was Judge Shawn Crane, who, like Judge Ramsberger, hails from the Sixth Judicial Circuit.

What separates Judge Ramsberger's nomination from many others is that it did not germinate at the circuit level, with local stakeholders, such as a chief judge, sheriff or state attorney, nominating him or supplying letters of support.

In Judge Ramsberger's case, the nomination appears to have emerged as the result of statewide admiration. The nomination was made by Carroll Kelly, the administrative judge of the county domestic violence division in the 11th Judicial Circuit, in Miami, and letters of support came from, among other people, judges in the 2nd, Ninth, 12th, and 15th judicial circuits.

During his 26 years on the bench, Judge Ramsberger has become an expert on family law generally, and on domestic violence in particular. He and the aforementioned Judge Kelly have spent the last several years travelling throughout the state to give two-day presentations to judges on the different aspects of domestic violence, ranging from the cycle of violence to victims' seemingly illogical decisions to what's required before an injunction is granted. By taking the course on tour — rather than have the judges in the state travel elsewhere for the equivalent — the two jurists are believed to have saved tens of thousands of dollars.



Judge Peter R. Ramsberger

Judge Ramsberger has also distinguished himself within the Sixth Judicial Circuit. He has served as the administrative judge of the circuit's Family and Unified Family court divisions, and, in fact, helped design and establish the circuit's Unified Family Court division, better known as the one-family, one-judge section, within which all the various troubles affecting a family, be they juvenile delinquency or neglectful parents, are handled at the same time.

Due to his leadership and administrative acumen, procedures and protocols have been put in place in the circuit which streamline cases, give families a sound understanding of what's occurring in court, and better safeguard victims of domestic violence. He also started a program in the circuit to train local attorneys to serve, for free, as guardians ad litem in family cases. These attorneys provide detailed reports which help judges make the best decisions when it comes to children and families, and the effort has proven so successful, it has been adopted or expanded by other circuits, including the Twelfth, which comprises Sarasota, Manatee, and Desoto counties.

Whatever task he's performing, his colleagues write, Judge Ramsberger always maintains the same estimable attitude, one that is marked by professionalism, integrity, fairness, open-mindedness, knowledge of the law, and two other qualities not always associated with judges — humility and a sense of humor. "He works tirelessly and always deflects praise to others," Judge Kelly wrote in her nomination letter. "This is a rare quality in our profession that deserves special mention."

Judge Ramsberger grew up in St. Petersburg, graduating from Boca Ciega High School in 1971. He was recruited to play football at the United State Military Academy at West Point, New York, where he was a starter for the Army football team until a neck injury in his junior year brought his athletic career to an end. After graduating from West Point in 1975, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, and served five years of active duty, rising to the rank of captain and earning, along the way, a master's degree from Golden Gate University.

After his service, Judge Ramsberger attended Florida State University College of Law, graduating in 1983. He practiced law in Pinellas County until he was elected a county judge in 1990. In 1994, he was re-elected, and in 1997 he was appointed a circuit judge. He has been re-elected without opposition ever since. In 2007, he was the recipient of the St. Petersburg Bar Association's Judicial Appreciation Award, which is given to a judge noted for, among other qualities, his professional courtroom demeanor and willingness to help lawyers and litigants.

Though Judge Ramsberger has served in the family division for the last 15 years, often giving presentations on the various aspects of family law and domestic violence at the Florida Judicial College, among other places, he handled criminal, civil and traffic cases as a county judge, and as a circuit judge, he presided over a probate and guardianship division, as well as a juvenile division, becoming, at one point, the juvenile administrative judge.