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## **Judge Anthony Rondolino Wins Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence**

CLEARWATER - Former Chief Judge Anthony Rondolino was presented the Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence by Florida Supreme Court Justice John Couriel on Jan. 31, 2023. The award is one of the most prestigious in the state to be given a Florida jurist, and it was given to Judge Rondolino at the Conference of Circuit Court Judges in Naples.

Born in Lexington, Kentucky, Judge Rondolino has been a longtime resident of Pinellas County, where he attended St. Petersburg High School and what is now St. Petersburg College before matriculating at Florida State University College of Business and then graduating, with honors, from FSU's College of Law in 1974.

That same year, he passed the Florida bar examination and commenced his career as an assistant public defender in the Sixth Judicial Circuit. He also went into private practice in St. Pete Beach, so as to familiarize himself with types of law other than crime. He became the chief assistant public defender in only five years, and was named Outstanding Public Defender in Florida two years before he was appointed a circuit judge by then-Gov. Bob Martinez in 1990.



Judge Rondolino

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As a judge, Judge Rondolino would preside over cases in a range of divisions, from probate and family to criminal and civil, so that by the time he decided to retire next month, he had played a role in more than 400 trials, either as a judge or assistant public defender, and he had become one of the longest serving jurists in the circuit.

Judge Rondolino was especially drawn to complex civil cases, such as those involving medical malpractice or tobacco litigation, and he acquired, along the way, a reputation as a researcher extraordinaire. He also, along the way, amassed a slew of awards from various bar associations and inns of court, as well as the Florida Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates (FLABOTA).

At the time he was given the prestigious Jurist of the Year award by FLABOTA just last year, Chris Schulte, then the president of the Tampa chapter, noted Judge Rondolino was one of the first judges to preside over so-called Engle progeny cases, which touch on, among other things, the type of illness a cigarette smoker has to have had to sue a tobacco company, and how damages are to be determined.

Judge Rondolino was drawn to these cases by their complexity, Mr. Schulte said. He was aware that some matters in such cases had already been decided and needed no more litigating.

Judge Rondolino has also taught courses as an adjunct professor at Stetson University College of Law, and served on several boards and committees, including the Child Support Enforcement Coordinating Council, and the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force, and three times, the Florida Supreme Court appointed him an associate judge, to serve on the Second District Court of Appeals.

Judge Rondolino was unanimously elected chief judge in 2015, and in this position, to which he was reelected three times, becoming, with eight years under his belt, the longest serving chief judge in circuit history, he grappled with the administration of justice during a pandemic, helped devise the procedures for risk protection orders and advocated for better pay for circuit employees.

As chief judge, Judge Rondolino was constitutionally responsible for the administrative supervision of the courts and court staff within the Sixth Judicial Circuit, which serves more than 1.5 million residents in a geographically and constituent diverse two-county circuit.