

Judicial Profile-Thomas H. Barkdull III

By: Thomas Hoadley

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In June, 1980, the whine of a speeding car crept through the early morning. The crash occurred at 5:30 a.m. The new 450 S L Mercedes ended up almost on the front lawn of the Barkdull home in Coral Gables. College student Tom heard the explosion, jumped out of bed, and ran to the burning car. He pulled out two young car thieves through flames so intense that the driver's tennis shoes had melted. Honors and accolades poured in from the City, State, and the Carnegie Hero Commission. This one act of heroism mirrors his general desire to save (or make better) our country's social fabric. In discussing his recent election as our newest Circuit Judge, he exudes a vision. A utopian cooperation between social agencies, families, law enforcement, the Courthouse, churches, private groups, and governmental units. He can deliver this vision with fervor; he hopes and believes that he can make a difference.

The Barkdull family, moving from the North, became farmers near Pensacola in the 1800's. His great grandfather and grandfather left the farm to move to Dade County in 1918. They were like a lot of other people, land developers in what would become the biggest land boom in the history of the Century. Tom's great grandfather was on the first Board of Realtors in Dade County. Tom's father was born in Miami in 1925, a year before the Bust. Miami was devastated in 1926 by a brutal hurricane, and a ship carrying relief supplies sunk and blocked Government Cut.

After graduation from the U. of F., Tom's father started practicing mainly appellate law in 1949. Governor Farris Bryant appointed him to the Third District Court of Appeal in 1961. Judge Barkdull is the longest sitting Judge in Florida. It is believed that he is the longest sitting Appellate Judge in the Nation. He will retire on January 7, 1997, shortly before swearing in his son as circuit Judge. Tom III will be taking over Judge Kroll's family division as she moves to take over Judge Sholts' civil division.

Tom's mother was a graduate of FSU when it was a women's college. She was a social worker in Dade County placing adopted children through the 50's. She has more than one Master's Degree, and in the 70's, worked in the health care field as a renal dietician.

Tom was born in 1959. An only child, he graduated from high school in 1978, and from FSU in 1981 with honors, majoring in political science and business. He always planned on being a lawyer, and graduated from the FSU law school in 1984. During college, he had clerked for a Miami Beach law firm, and at Holland & Knight in Tampa and Tallahassee. He interned at the Florida A.G.'s Office, and with the ranch manager for Judge John Rawls' cattle ranch. (He says he learned how to bush-hog, drive a tractor, and dig fence posts).

After graduation, Tom worked briefly for the A.G.'s Office in Tallahassee, and then accepted an appointment as one of two clerks for then Chief Judge James L. King, U.S. District Court Judge in Miami. He was offered several job opportunities, but selected Steel, Hector & Davis. When asked why this firm, he replied that it was a firm

committed to public service. They allowed him to spend approximately 10% of his time on pro bono work.

When Tom was a senior in law school, he met and dated a freshman from West Palm Beach, Jayne Regester. They dated six years before their marriage in 1990. Both Tom and Jayne spent a lot of time in evaluating the place they wanted to raise their children. They selected North Palm Beach. Jayne came to work with Levy, Kneen in 1986, as a corporate transactional and real estate lawyer. Tom moved here when Steel, Hector sent up two litigators to West Palm Beach. For the next ten years, Tom was a civil commercial litigator, and partner with the firm.

Tom has been very active as the Vice Chair of the Real Property Litigation Committee of the Florida Bar. He has been very active with Legal Aid; the City of West Palm Beach's Renaissance Program, and several other local groups helping the disadvantaged. Tom had always wanted to be a Judge, and considered it a natural step for him to run in the last election, even though it meant a substantial cut in pay.

He loves the outdoors. Camping, fishing in the Keys and Everglades, hunting, flying an airplane, and sailing. And of course, his main love, Savannah, age 3. He is now a very much devoted family man. In fact, he is a "Man for all seasons." Eight trips to Europe, reading 3 or 4 books a week, he is continually exercising his intellectual curiosity. He is young, 37, about the same age as his father was when he went on the Bench. We know he will be just as successful in his own way.