



Judicial Profile: Judge Charles Burton
By Lynn Whitfield, PBCBA Director
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Thrusted into the national spotlight after just six months on the bench, Judge Charles Burton, became known as the Judge who held up ballots to the light to examine chads. He was appointed to the canvassing board by then Chief Judge Walter Colbath. Judge Burton had no idea what to expect as a member of the board. He was told that at most he would be up late because it was a presidential election. Thirty-seven days later, he was able to begin to reclaim his life. He got to witness first hand the politics of it all. When asked what he was experiencing during those thirty-seven days, Judge Burton simply replies that he was just trying to do the right thing. The most fascinating thing about the whole experience was getting to hear the oral arguments before the United States Supreme Court. All and all, he was uncomfortable with the attention he received. He still has a collection of hundreds of letters he received from people all over the country. Judge Burton has appeared on Nightline, The Today Show, and the Larry King Show, to name a few. The only thing regrets about the whole experience was that his father was not alive to experience it with him. He believes his father would have gotten a kick out of seeing him on the news. In his office hangs a copy of the Palm Beach Post poster showing the front pages headlines from the thirty-seven days

The notoriety has not changed him. Born and raised outside of Boston, Massachusetts,

Judge Burton is the youngest of three sons. He obtained his college degree from Suffolk University in Boston where he met his future bride, Laurie. He is very proud to be the father of two beautiful daughters, Dana, a senior in high school and Staci, a sophomore.

Wanting a change in scenery and having relatives in the South Florida area, he applied and was accepted to the mid-year class of Nova University's School of Law. While in law school, Judge Burton participated in the criminal law clinical internship. He was encouraged by his professor to intern at the State Attorney's office in West Palm Beach where he would have the opportunity to actually handle and try cases. He found that he enjoyed the action of the courtroom. While an intern he had the opportunity to do jury trials and was bitten by the bug.

From 1984 until 1990, he worked as an Assistant State Attorney under the leadership of David Blutworth. He left the public sector for a period of five years when he joined his brother, Alan, in private practice in Fort Lauderdale. Practicing bankruptcy, family law and occasionally criminal defense, Judge Burton found private practice to be frustrating at times. In 1995, after Barry Krischer was elected State Attorney, he encouraged Judge Burton to return to the State Attorney's office as an experienced litigator. He continued his service with that office until becoming a judge in May, 2000.

It was Judges such as Judge Marvin Mounts and Judge Hubert Lindsey who inspired Judge Burton to seek appointment to the bench. He marveled at their ability to be fair, open minded jurist. He also was impressed with the fact that they always treated the people before them with respect no matter who they were or what they were accused of doing. He knew that if he ever got the opportunity to become a judge they would be his role models.

Receiving the call from the governor was one of the happiest days of his life. He was eager to start his new job, however, his mentor Judge Maass, required that he observe for at least

a week before taking the bench. He was initially assigned to the county criminal bench. It is clear to all that enter his courtroom that Judge Burton is totally at ease on the bench. He has recently been transferred to South County where he is handling county civil cases. He equates it to APeoples Court.@ He feels it is his responsibility to make the people who appear before him feel at ease. He is enjoying the entire experience. Judge Burton=s motto is AThere is nothing wrong with smiling, saying hello and treating people with respect. It doesn=t have to be a miserable experience for the lawyers and the litigants.@