

## Judicial Profile- Jeffrey Colbath

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When I first saw Wally Colbath, it was a warm Indian summer afternoon. He raced toward the goal line in a crimson jersey. The ball slowly wafted toward him and settled in his arms. The stands cheered. He dropped it, the stands groaned. Indiana was off to another losing season. Football prowess aside, there always has been something open, honest, and corn-fed about Hoosiers. It rubbed off on Wally, and maybe his son, Jeffrey, one of our newest County Court Judges. He was born in Fulda, Germany, in 1957. His father was in the Marine Corps and was in charge of persons who slipped across the East German border to count Russian tanks. Returning to civilian life, the family then moved to Cleveland, and then to Singer Island, where Jeff grew up. Red Johnson loved across the street. Jeff and the three Johnson sons were close friends. They hung out together, went water skiing, played volleyball, and chased girls. Jeff graduated from Gardens High School in 1975.

Jeff then graduated from the University of South Florida in Tampa in 1979. He states he had an "uneventful" college stay. As you are aware, USF is one of the largest schools in Florida, but only 2,000 students live on campus; it is a "commuter school." Jeff was a Resident Assistant and had free room and board. He next went to law school at Nova University. At Nova, he worked as the manger of the Nova Law School Book Store. He had opened it with a partner, and expanded it into a going business.

His last year in law school, he interned with David Bludworth for nine months, until June 1982. This was the month he graduated and became an Assistant State Attorney. He started in the North County Courthouse, and misdemeanor offenses North of 45<sup>th</sup> Street. He came back to the Courthouse, moved to the Felony Division, and tried cases under Judge Harper and Judge Mounts. He describes his two-year stint with the State Attorney's Office as very "rewarding" and a "fell-good" job in putting away the bad guys.

At the end of these two years, his father became a Circuit Court Judge and Jeff took over his father's law practice and moved the practice with him to Metzger, Sonneborn. After he was there about one year, Roy Watson sweet-talked him into Adams, Coogler. He started doing insurance defense work.

It was during this time that he met Mary Ann, one of five children from a Cleveland suburb. Mary Ann had been a Delta Airlines flight attendant for 13 years. She not only had brains and beauty, but could offer a prospective husband free, first-class air flights anywhere, anytime. Jeff and Mary Ann met at Billy Johnson's wedding. They were both in the bridal party, and they dated nine months. He proposed to her on the Northeast corner of Olive and Datura Streets. They cut across the intersection, and she accepted on the Northwest corner. Their decision to get married in the Catholic Church was a problem because they couldn't get a date for the wedding. They decided to have an initial marriage ahead of time. Not knowing where or when to get married, they made a wise decision. Since they had to dress formally for the Bar Installation Dinner on June

10, 1988, they thought it would be good to get married just before dinner. They would be all dressed up. Red Johnson performed the ceremony under the Kapok tree down by the water near Whitehall. That, of course, was before the church put a picket fence around the Kapok tree. As a result of their free-fly status, they think nothing of going to Paris, London, or Vienna for a few days. This has been hampered somewhat by the arrival of Kelly. Kelly is now in her “terrible two’s.” Her grandfather and Judy love to baby sit, when they are on trips. Jeff next became a partner in Davis, Carroll, Colbath and Isaacs, again doing defense work. You may remember that this was the firm John Hoy left after his epic struggle to become a Circuit Judge.

In 1992, Jeff kept thinking about becoming a judge. He had thought about this for many years prior to that, and he thought he had a “good shot” at being elected. Although there was originally only one County Court vacancy, he knew that I.C. Smith would soon turn 70. That is the age for an automatic retirement. When Judge Smith announced his retirement, Jeff switched races to run for his County Court seat. He thought he had clear sailing until, at the last minute, former County Commissioner, Ken Spillias entered the race. Ken Spillias had just come from a bruising and bloody primary battle with Eleanor Weinstock for the State Senate.

This County Judge race was different. Both Jeff and Ken conducted a very high-level campaign. I was curious as to how Jeff Colbath could win over Ken Spillias. Ken had County name recognition, and was a favorite among the Condo Commandos. But maybe it was Jeff who had name recognition. Did the voters think it was his well-known father who was running for Judge? After all, in the 60’s, a Kennedy had been elected Treasurer of Massachusetts, and he wasn’t even related to the “family.” I asked Jeff why he thought he won the race over Ken; and he, quite honestly, replied, “I don’t know why I won.” He did mention that he worked very hard and was all over the County shaking hands, making personal appearances, and doing TV. ads. He had some influential support in obtaining a great number of Bar members to publicly support him. Or, maybe John Hoy told him how to get elected.

After the election, Judge Smith retired and the Governor appointed Jeff as County Court Judge. He stated that on assuming this position, he was not surprised at much and had no expectations the job would be different that what he knew it was.

I asked him what his future plans were, and he said he first wanted to learn to be a good judge. He stated someday, he probably will get tired of County Court cases. Maybe he will make a move to Circuit Court; but that is far in the future and he is not even too sure about that. His next-door neighbor, John Phillips, has told him that being a County Court Judge. Jeffrey has a lot of friends and family who know he will do an outstanding job as one of our newest County Court Judges.