

December 2003

JUDGE DIANA LEWIS
by V. Lynn Whitfield

Being a judge was a life long dream of hers and she was not willing to watch it pass her by. After four unsuccessful interviews with the Judicial Nominating Committee, Diana Lewis decided to throw her hat into the political arena. A native of West Palm Beach, Judge Lewis received her Bachelor degree from the University of Notre Dame. She returned to South Florida and received a Masters in Guidance and Counseling. After receiving her masters, she was off again to the University of Notre Dame. This time instead of being a student there, she was assisting others with the admission to the University as an Admissions Counselor in undergraduate admissions. But it wasn't long before she was enrolled again at the University's law school pursuing her dream.

Since graduating from law school, Judge Lewis has worked at many prestigious law firms in the Palm Beach area. She mastered her trial skills at law firms such as Walton Lantaff, Schroeder & Carson; Metzger & Sonneborn; Jones & Foster; Gay, Ramsey & Lewis; and finally Carlton Fields. Judge Lewis was known as a tenacious litigator, defending medical malpractice and product liability lawsuits.

Once she made a decision to seek election to the bench, Judge Lewis was faced with many challenges. During the campaign, not only did she find herself in a fourteen week medical malpractice trial, she also found herself grieving the loss of her brother. This was a very difficult time for her. She credits her family and friends for helping her get through it all. Her family is very close and her brother was a big supporter. She tells a story about how some campaign stickers had been printed that could only be worn on

clothing Her brother liked the stickers so much, he wanted to place the stickers all over town. She had to explain to him this could not be done.

On election night, Judge Lewis stayed up to 3 a.m. watching the results come in, but she knew that the next day she was due back in court to fight for her client. When asked how being in trial affected her ability to campaign, Judge Lewis empathized with sitting Judges who have to be in court all day and then find time to go out and campaign in the evenings. “Often the events that you need to attend are during the daytime,” she said. “Thank God, my family was able to go in my stead.”

Judge Lewis loves her new job. She has been on the bench just less than one year. She does not miss the stress that is associated with private practice. She says that the stress she now feels is nil compared to what she experienced when practicing law. Once she assumed her duties as a judge, she was amazed at just how many cases do not go to trial. She is proud to say that she is current on all her dockets, with the exception of non-jury trials.

Naturally it took her time to adjust from being a lawyer to being the judge in a case. At first, she found herself wanting to make suggestions on the handling of cases. She knows that she must maintain her neutrality when presiding, even when hearing medical malpractice cases. The one problem that she has noticed with the system is lawyers not talking to each other before hearings. She wishes that more lawyers would read the Professional Rules of Conduct and adhere to them. She believes that this would reduce the court dockets and allow for more time to try cases or hear extensive motions. Her one complaint is that she spends a lot of time reading all documents submitted prior to the hearings and often the lawyers get to the

courthouse and then agree on the order or finally read the motion the day before and agree to the issues addressed in the motion.

If you look around Judge Lewis' office it is easy to see that she is a woman prepared to work. Her desk has all the necessary tools readily available for her use. You will see the post-it for marking portions of depositions and/or transcripts. Have no fear, if you submitted it to her, she read it, she marked it and she is ready when she takes the bench. One thing everyone can agree on about Judge Lewis, she works just as hard as a judge as she did litigating cases.