



Judge Mary E. Lupo
By: Kevin Crowley
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Come away from an extended chat with Palm Beach County Judge Mary Lupo and you come away with mental snapshots in a series, each reflecting a different aspect of her personality. Bubbly enthusiasm for her work, serious concern for an inefficient court system, delight over champagne and oysters, compassion for have-nots, rapture over Puccini operas, satisfaction over a problem solved a warm glow for her husband and children.

Mary Lupo was born of Italian descended parents in Albany, New York, in 1947. Her father, a dentist, and her mother, a schoolteacher, encouraged independence and ambition. A full scholarship permitted Lupo to attend Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York, where she received an A.B. in Physics. In off-school hours she tutored underprivileged children in Harlem. Lupo "came into her own" soon after receiving her Masters in Teaching Math in 1969 from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Her teaching (and endurance) skills were tested on the proving grounds of an all-boys high school. Subsequently she taught high school equivalency for ex-convicts, drug abusers, prison guards and welfare mothers at Community College of Baltimore.

It was in Baltimore that Lupo met a "sharp-tongued" law student named Edward M. Ricci. In June 1971, they were married. The following year, Lupo enrolled in the Georgetown University Law Center. Both she and her husband sold real estate part-time to finance their educations and ate many meals consisting of 19 cents a pound chicken.

Upon graduation from law school, Lupo and husband, Ed moved to Palm Beach County. Ricci became associated with the law firm of Cone, Owen & Wagner now called Cone, Wagner, Nugent, Johnson, Hazouri & Roth, P.A., with which she has practiced since that time. Lupo joined the State Attorney's Office in the juvenile division where she specialized in delinquency and child abuse cases. In 1977 the position of Domestic Relations Commissioner was created in Palm Beach County to relieve the congestion of post-trial family matters in circuit court. Lupo applied and was appointed. For the next year she worked at the demanding job of resolving child support and visitation problems; in her words, "I was pretty tough."

In late 1977, a vacancy occurred on the county court bench due to the elevation of Judge Edward Rogers to the circuit court (Lupo and Rogers joke about the "minority spot"). Despite reservations because of her age, gender and a field of qualified applicants, Lupo sought the position and was appointed by Governor Askew. For the next four years Lupo presided over the gamut of county court cases, jury, non-jury, criminal, civil, juvenile and traffic. At present, she has a roving geographical assignment: Mondays at the Lake Worth Branch, Tuesday, Wednesdays and Fridays at the Northeast Annex in Palm Beach Gardens and Thursdays at the main courthouse.

In her off-work time, Lupo swims daily, listens to Puccini operas and Chuck Mangione, regularly goes to the movies, reads nonfiction, and spends as much time with her husband and their two children, Irene and Edward.

On her First Years As Judge: “I think in the first year or so on the bench I may have been perceived as being cold, too severe at times. However, being the first woman judge and relatively young, my goal was to run a courtroom that was orderly, formal and dignified. Now I am relaxed and comfortable with the job. I don’t have to be so serious to be taken seriously.”

Needed Improvement: “The local court system has got to move into the 1980’s. We’re still operating as if this was a one-horse town. There is no valid reason why the court system is not computerized right down to the time of day. Other than manually, there is no way to retrieve information like how many cases a judge has, how old the cases are, how many warrants are outstanding, etc. We are using a quill while everybody else is using a computer.”

Advice to Lawyers: “I’m impressed by lawyers who state their point, are prepared, and have case authority...and candor, I fall for the technique of ticking off you defendant’s worst points, followed by a plea for one more chance.

Judicial Philosophy: “Progressive... I think there is a tendency to continue along on past law... As my father used to say, “the pencil point is sharper than life.”

Judicial Salaries: “I am happy with my salary but I’m in a different position from most judges. Objectively speaking, if you want quality judges, then salaries out to be somewhat commensurate with the private sector.”

Future of Mary Lupo: “Right now the circuit court is not attractive to me. Neither is private practice. I like to work in the nitty-gritty, the everyday problems of people. The county court affords flexibility; I can work miracles. I have this social work aspect to me.”

The Perfect 3-Day Weekend: With Ed in Manhattan, subways, champagne, oysters, Broadway, dancing.