



Judge Richard Oftedal
By: Joseph Ianno, Jr
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Although certainly not by choice, Judge Oftedal began his duties as Circuit Court Judge in a tumultuous way. Within one month of being appointed to the bench, he was faced with campaigning in the primary elections to retain his position. Judge Oftedal officially took the bench on August 2, 1988 after receiving a telephone call in July informing him of his appointment as Palm Beach County's newest Circuit Court Judge. Because the division into which he was appointed was due for submittal to a general election, Judge Oftedal immediately faced primary elections which were to be held in September, 1988. During the month of August, he had to organize and develop a campaign for the September primaries as well as the general elections, which were to be held two months later in November. When asked whether he regretted having gone through the campaign and elections, Judge Oftedal responded, "I'm a better person for having done it."

Judge Oftedal graduated from the University of Virginia with a Bachelor of Science degree in nuclear engineering in 1973. After graduation, he began working for the Duke Power Company in Charlotte, North Carolina as an engineer. Judge Oftedal then moved to Florida to study law. He graduated from the University of Florida College of Law in 1976. After graduation from the University of Florida, the judge took residence in Palm Beach County and commenced private practice with the law firm of Jackson and Jackson in Palm Beach. Later he practiced with the firm of Haines and Rossow in North Palm Beach until 1980, when he joined the Palm Beach County School Board as a personnel attorney. In 1983, he became First General Counsel for the School Board and remained in that position until being appointed to the Circuit bench in August of 1988.

Judge Oftedal is married and has three children, which according to the judge, keeps him occupied. He has been very active in both The Florida Bar and the Palm Beach County Bar Association, having served as a member of the Grievance Committee, the Executive Counsel, Local Government Section, and the Labor and Employment Section of The Florida Bar. Judge Oftedal's other activities in the Palm Beach County Bar include the Judicial Relations Committee from 1984 to 1988; the Youth Education Committee from 1987 to 1988; Special Needs of Children Committee from 1986 to 1987; the Judicial Evaluation Committee from 1983 to 1984; the School and Youth Education Committee from 1980 to 1982; and the Fee Disputes Committee serving as chairperson from 1982 to 1983.

When asked why he decided to become a Circuit Court Judge, Judge Oftedal responded that it was both the challenge to be a non-advocate and the variety associated with the position. Judge Oftedal stated that every case, every hearing and every day is different, bringing with it a variety of legal issues; that makes it enjoyable to go to work every day. As the judge said, he allows his enthusiasm to show in the courtroom. He particularly enjoys presiding over jury trials.

Interestingly, he stated that issues and arguments that seemed so clear to him as an advocate do not as readily seem clear to him as a judge.

Presently, at the age of 37, Judge Oftedal is one of the youngest Circuit Court Judges in Palm Beach County. One of his aspirations is to become the oldest judge in the County.

Admirably, Judge Oftedal said that he considers it “humbling to have great lawyers that are well respected argue cases to him.” And he hopes he can live up to the trust that the other judges, lawyers and the electorate have placed in him. If the past is any indication of the future, Judge Oftedal will have no problem living up to that trust.