



Judge John D Wessel
By: Thomas Hoadley
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John Wessel's father was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was a supervisor for a Chicago construction company, building churches, convents, and monasteries. While on a job in Dubuque, Iowa, he met John's mother, fell in love and they were married. In 1924, the Construction Company ran out of work, and the young family moved to Miami. Starting his own company, he built small hotels and houses in Miami Beach.

John's mother worked as a bookkeeper for Julia Tuttle (who had given Flagler half of her extensive Dade County holdings to extend his railroad to Miami in 1896). This job lasted only one year because their first child was born. Nine more children were born to the Wessel family over a period of 14 years (1925 to 1939). John and his twin sister were in the middle of this group of children. John was educated at a Catholic grade and high school in Miami.

Being one of ten children, he paid his own way through the University of Florida (1954 to 1958) by working in the College Cafeteria, as a delivery person, and a waiter at the Phi Mu Sorority and Primose Café. He graduated with a degree in accounting on a Friday. He was drafted into the Army on Monday. John was sent to an Army base near Frankfurt, Germany. With an accounting background, he was put on the military payroll section.

John was discharged in 1960, and he followed a brother to New Orleans to work for a small aircraft company as comptroller and office manager. He worked with this company until 1965, when it was sold. His brother had started law school at Tulane. John followed suit at Loyola law school. He was a member of the Loyola Law Review. In John's second year, he met Linda, also a college student, from Panama City. His brother was dating Linda's roommate, introduced them, they dated for two years, and were married in 1966.

Graduating in 1967 as one of the top students, he was offered the position of Law Clerk to James A. Comiskey, a Federal Judge in Louisiana. He worked with Judge Comiskey for a year and a half. Being a Florida native, he had wanted to return to his home state to live and practice law. He took the Florida bar, passed and was sworn in December 1968. He placed an employment ad in The Florida Bar Journal. Chief Judge Walden of the Fourth District Court of Appeal (then in Vero) called him and told him to come work right away as his Research Aide. It was 1969. He worked out an agreement with Judge Walden to work for nine months, and John and Linda moved to Vero, he decided to practice law in Boca Raton, thinking the city was about to expand. There were 29 lawyers in Boca (there now may be about 1,500). John worked for the Boca firm of Leo Fox and P.J. Brannen from 1962 to 1972. These lawyers were in general practice. John handled the firm's litigation cases (35% Broward County, and 65% Palm Beach County). Later, he practiced law by himself in Boca Raton from 1972 to 1979, handling most every type of case, including probate, personal injury, and commercial litigation; a general office practice.

In the process of working for Judge Comiskey in New Orleans, and Judge Walden in vero, over the years he has decided that he wanted to become a Judge. In 1976, he ran for a vacancy against one of the most popular office holders in Palm Beach County, Tom Johnson, former State Senator and State Attorney. It was a tough race, but go 47% of the vote. John kept trying, and his name was placed in nomination three times as a candidate for Circuit Judge. The first time, Judge Hurley got the appointment. The second time Carl Harper. The next time there were two vacancies. Governor Bob Graham appointed Rosemary Barkett, and John as Circuit Judges in September 1979. John has served in all divisions of the Court. He is very proud of being one of the four Judges that established (and for a time was the Administrative Judge) of our Family Division. He came to the Delray Courthouse in September 1993, and id currently sitting as the Probate/Guardianship/Mental Health Judge.

Judge Wessel states that one of the highlights of his career has been his work with our local bar Association. He started out as a Director of the South County Bar Association. He again worked his way up the chairs, and was to be President in 1980. In the meantime, he was appointed circuit Judge, and could not serve.

When asked what he does when he is not working, he states "I play a lot of tennis." He became very close to the Judges at the Fourth District while working in Vero. His usual tennis partners, two or three times a week, are usually those Judges.

In the meantime, Linda, after receiving her college degree at Tulane, has worked in various positions with the City of Boca Raton, and as John's legal assistant. After working at the Boca Raton Hospital, and for a pathologist, Linda decided on a medical career. She went back to FAU, and after three years, she became a RN.

Judge Wessel has a career to be proud of. He has served as Municipal Court Judge for Boynton Beach, Highland Beach, and Manalapan. Adjunct Professor of Insurance and Business Law at FAU, on the Boca Raton Beach Tax District, Boynton Beach City Prosecutor, Florida Bar Civil Rules and Judicial Administration Committee's, Chairman of the Palm Beach Marine Institute, (a day program where Judge-referred juveniles having problems with the law learn to dive, swim, and sail), Section leader Conference of Circuit Judges, Secretary/Treasurer Crime Prevention Task Force, Workshop Leader National College of Advocacy, Drug Abuse Prevention Committee, Executive Board Mental Health Association, and on an on.

John and Linda spend their 3-week vacation each year in a Maine cottage on the ocean. Rocking chairs on the front porch, mussel, clams, lobsters, and the roar of the ocean. According to Judges who know him well, there is no harder working Judge, or as sensitive a person, as Judge Wessel. Maybe he doesn't express it as easily as others, but it is there. Judge Wessel has paid his dues, and paid them well. To his family, church, country, profession, community, and Bar, he is as fine a Judge as there ever was.