

Judge Bill Bollinger

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by Thomas Hoadley

The earliest Bollinger relative was a Scotch-Irish Shipwright from Savannah. That family migrated west to a small town in Georgia. Judge Bollinger's father and mother were born raised, and married in Georgia. His father, John, attended Cumberland law School, graduating in 1935. They moved to West Palm Beach, where John became a popular downtown West Palm Beach lawyer. John Bollinger served in the Legislature from 1938 to 1952, at a time when there were only two Representatives in Palm Beach County. One from the Glades, and the other from the Coast. Bill was born in 1941. He grew up in a house on 35th Street, and went to Northboro Junior High. At Palm Beach High, he was President of the Key Club, and played center on the football team. Like most roaming youngsters, he spent hours on the sea wall between 34th and 59th Streets. His target was Snook (which he could eat) and Jack Cravelle (which he couldn't). Bill had two sisters and two brothers. After high school, Bill joined the Army, and was sent to a language school in Monterey, California, to learn to speak Russian. The last two years of his Army tour was on the East German border. he was in a small compound in the forest facing barbed wire barriers, and gun emplacements. His job was to help those fleeing East Germany. When his four year tour of duty completed, he returned to the United States. After his discharge, he went to Florida Atlantic University, majoring in English literature. Bill has always loved to read, particularly crime novels. In 1969, he enrolled in Law School in Gainesville, and graduated in December, 1971.

Coming back to his hometown, West Palm Beach, he immediately started to work for Marvin Mounts as an Assistant County Solicitor. He was to remain in that position, and as Assistant State Attorney, for the next 16 years (until 1987 when he became a County Judge). Bill opened the first full time State Attorney's Office in Belle Glade. This fulfilled a campaign promise of David Bludworth. Belle Glade was a very busy office. He commuted daily on Old Killer 80 to Belle Glade on three different tours of duty, starting in 1972. He states that he loved his work in Belle Glade. There were violent crimes, ("He backed into my knife," and, "The gun fired accidentally twice"). But he said Belle Glade had a small town atmosphere, and there is a real community spirit. His friends say he is just that kind of guy.

He spent years in "Intake", talking to law enforcement officers, and arriving at a decision whether or not to prosecute. Intake is a position that Barry Krischer once held, and Brian Brennan does so well now.

Bill wanted to be a County Judge, and put his name up several times, starting in 1982. In 1987, he was selected by the Governor, and took the Bench in July. The first year and a half was as a Trial Judge in County Court trying misdemeanor cases. It was "Fast Eddy" Garrison's idea, and he deserves much of the credit. Why move the mountain to Mohammed? Why not do first appearances at the County jail? In 1989 Bill, a few County Commissioners, and other interested people, went to California to study their progressive federal and state prisons. Blueprints were drawn, construction was started to build a Courtroom and expand the jail on Gun Club Road for its 600 bed capacity. Once constructed, Bill became our first County Judge at the jail. Was he busy?

he says one Monday afternoon he did 161 Courtroom first appearances. Also, during construction, our County had a tidal wave of crime. Crack cocaine was overwhelming southeast Florida. Sellers on Manning Avenue, and a thousand other places, and their purchasers ended up in jail.

It was impossible to double bunk the jail cells. The cells were too small for this, and didn't meet State requirements. Back to the drawing board. Financing completed, Bill was one of several who turned the ground with a shovel in 1990. Completed in 1994, there are two Courtrooms in the new jail, now presided over by Judges Jeff Colbath and Nancy Perez.

Bill presently sits as the County Judge at the North County Courthouse, and guess what? The County offices are running out of space. Construction will start on a new building in the parking lot just south of the existing Courthouse. The present structures will house only the Court and the Clerk's office.

Bill has one son, John, a graduate of the University of Florida. He married Chris Unrath last February. Chris does the space layouts for the new Home Depot stores. They bought a home off of PGA Boulevard. His backyard fronts on a large canal, where he can cast for bass. Home for Bill is "a good place to be." The story of Bill Bollinger is about a local boy, who grew up, and (with a great positive attitude) unselfishly tried to help his hometown solve its crime problem.

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