

# Judge Howard K. Coates, Jr.

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By Liz Herman, On Behalf of the Judicial Relations Committee

My fellow Wellington residents may have known the recently appointed Judge Howard K. Coates, Jr. as Councilman Coates, described by a local paper as an “independent voice and skilled consensus builder.” Originally appointed to fill a vacancy on the Wellington Village Council, Judge Coates subsequently ran unopposed and won a contested election to stay on the Council, which presides over numerous complex issues affecting our community. Having now resigned from the Council, Judge Coates is currently assigned to Family Division FJ and Probate Division IJ at the North County Courthouse.

Judge Coates grew up here and has been actively involved in Palm Beach County for the past forty years. Don't try to take advantage of his friendly and easy going demeanor, however, Judge Coates is a former Marine and had even considered accepting the prestigious appointment to the United States Naval Academy. He spent six years in the Marine Corps, four of which were on active duty, had earned the rank of Sergeant in two years, and received numerous awards for outstanding service. Although he contemplated pursuing a career in the military, Judge Coates ultimately chose to attend the University of Florida (an obviously smart move!), graduating *phi beta kappa* with a B.A. in Political Science ('82) and the distinction of being the only student that year to attend Yale Law School. At Yale, Judge Coates served as Associate Member of the *Yale Law Journal*, a Senior Editor of the *Yale Law and Policy Review*, and a Director of the Urban Legal Workshop and the Yale Law and Technology Association. He was also a Director for the school's State's Attorney's Program, where he tried misdemeanor cases for the County of New Haven.

Coming from humble roots, Judge Coates worked his way to the Ivy Leagues and to where he is now. Growing up, he helped out in his father's upholstery business and then worked as a Publix bagboy. At Twin Lakes high school, Judge Coates explored his diverse interests, playing football and wrestling, while participating in the school's speech and debate team.

At UF, he held two jobs to help pay for college, working at night as a cashier in a local convenience store. While at Yale, Judge Coates continued to work his way through law school, including detailing cars at a local car wash.

Following graduation, Judge Coates returned to Palm Beach County, where he has practiced law for almost thirty years. Before his most recent position as a Partner in the Litigation Department at McDonald Hopkins LLC, Judge Coates had also worked at Squire Sanders & Dempsey, Edwards & Angell, and Proskauer Rose. He even had his own law firm in Wellington from 2004 to 2009. And in 2001, Judge Coates went back to school to earn a Masters in Business Administration from FAU.

A former Board member and President of the South Palm Beach County Bar Association,

Judge Coates is a strong proponent of lawyers getting involved with the Bar Association, as well as with other civic organizations. Judge Coates dedicates his time and resources to numerous causes and groups, including serving, prior to his appointment to the Bench, as a long-standing member of the Board of Directors for the Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, as an active member of the Central Palm Beach County Chamber of Commerce, and the Wellington Rotary Club, and as a former member of the Board of Directors for the Wellington Boys and Girls Club. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Richardson Scholarship Foundation, which assists young people in pursuing careers in medicine, and the J. Eric Jordan Charitable Foundation, which provides scholarships and grants to students interested in music, with jazz, in particular.

The Boy Scouts are also dear to Judge Coates' heart. He was one of the founding members of Boy Scout Troop 190 at Melaleuca Elementary, where he was the Senior Patrol Leader of the troop, and ultimately attained Scouting's highest rank of Eagle Scout. Continuing his support of Scouting while at UF, Judge Coates served as an Assistant Scoutmaster in Gainesville. And after starting a family, Judge Coates served as the Cubmaster for Pack 208 at Wellington's Panther Run Elementary for two years.

Judge Coates met his wife Cheri, while on the UF Speech and Debate Team. They have been married for over thirty years and have four children, Colby (29), Kelsey (26), Colton (21), and Cameron (16). While raising four children, Judge Coates has also been an active participant in youth sports. He has coached baseball for the past 20 years and had previously served on the Board of Directors and as President for the Okeehheelee Youth Baseball. The Coates family also includes three dogs, Blue, Midnight and Izzie and two cats, Sylvester and Smokey, all of whom were adopted from the Animal Rescue League and the Luv-A-Pet Foundation.

We warmly welcome Judge Coates to the 15th Judicial Circuit and look forward to his tenure on the bench!

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