

Judicial Profile: The Honorable Scott Suskauer

by William B. Lewis

[Published January 2016]

You do not have to speak with newly appointed Circuit Court Judge Scott Suskauer for long in order to recognize that he is the type of judge that lawyers will want to practice before. In his more than twenty-five years spent in the courtroom, Judge Suskauer has tried over a hundred cases and litigated before a wide range of personalities. Building on that experience, he now seeks to run a courtroom imbued with professionalism, where all litigants and attorneys are treated fairly.

Growing up in Long Beach, New York, Judge Suskauer learned the importance of treating others with respect and the value of hard work from his father, John Suskauer, who sold wallets to support his wife and three children. After excelling academically at Woodmere Academy in Woodmere NY, Judge Suskauer enrolled at Northwestern University, where he studied political science and became a fervent fan of the Wildcats football team. In 1985, Judge Suskauer graduated from Northwestern and enrolled at the University of Miami School of Law to be closer to his parents – who had retired and moved to Florida.

After his first year of law school, still unsure of which area of law he wished to pursue, Judge Suskauer spent the summer clerking for a Circuit Court judge and working with a criminal defense lawyer in Miami. For the first time, he saw lawyers arguing in court and was immediately drawn to the excitement of trial practice. From that point forward, Judge Suskauer knew he would spend his career in the courtroom.

Upon graduating from law school in 1988, Judge Suskauer accepted a job as an attorney in the West Palm Beach Public Defender's Office. From day one at the Public Defender's office, Judge Suskauer was in court, meeting with clients (often at the jail), and handling jury trials. After only two years, he was promoted to chief of a felony division. Managing hundreds of files at one time, Judge Suskauer learned the importance of organization and time management to a successful law practice.

Practical experience was not the only valuable benefit Judge Suskauer received from his time at the Public Defender's Office; in 1991, he met another young Assistant Public Defender, Michelle Rosenkranz, who he soon began dating. In 1994, Judge Suskauer and Michelle were married and both left the Public Defender's Office. Judge Suskauer started his own criminal defense firm and Michelle joined him soon thereafter. For more than twenty years, until he accepted an appointment to the bench, Judge Suskauer teamed with his wife to run a highly-regarded criminal defense firm in West Palm Beach.

In addition to practicing law together, the Suskauers also found time to raise two wonderful daughters, Talia and Rebecca. Despite Judge Suskauer's early efforts to share his passion for sports with his children – he is a diehard Mets, Knicks, Jets, and Rangers fan – they were drawn, instead, to the performing arts. Judge Suskauer has dedicated himself to fostering his daughters' interests in the arts, spending many of his non-working hours driving them to voice and dance lessons and watching recitals. Thanks to his

children, Judge Suskauer even finds himself listening to the Broadway Channel on XM radio on his way to work.

Judge Suskauer tries to attend as many of his daughters' performances as his schedule will allow. In fact, he happened to be in New Hampshire this summer watching his eldest daughter in summer stock theatre when the Governor called to offer him an appointment to the bench. The call came somewhat as a surprise to Judge Suskauer – not only because the Governor does not usually call his cell phone – but also because it is rare for a criminal defense attorney to receive a judicial appointment. It had been twenty-five years since a criminal defense attorney had been appointed directly to the Circuit Court bench in Palm Beach County. This is a detail not lost on Judge Suskauer, who appreciates the opportunity he has been given and believes it is important to have a bench made up of attorneys with diverse career experiences.

When asked about the challenges of transitioning from a criminal defense attorney to the bench, Judge Suskauer says, matter-of-factly, that, “the most difficult part has been not being able to work with Michelle every day.” But if there was any question as to whether Michelle Suskauer – a former President of the Palm Beach County Bar and current member of the Florida Bar Board of Governors – supported her husband's career change, it was answered at the memorable Investiture she organized for him. The festive event included congratulatory video-cameos by sports figures from some of the Judge's favorite teams, including Northwestern University football coach Pat Fitzgerald, former New York Mets All-Star Daryl Strawberry, ESPN's Mike Greenberg, and others. Of particular significance to Judge Suskauer was a moving musical performance from his daughters and being able to share the recognition with his parents, who sacrificed so much so he could pursue his career.

After more than twenty-five years as a criminal practitioner, Judge Suskauer is enjoying the exposure to a different area of the law in Family Division “FC.” Ruling on child custody matters and other serious family disputes, however, have been some of the most challenging decisions of his career. Fortunately, the attorneys and citizens of Palm Beach County can rest assured that they have an experienced and thoughtful new judge assessing these significant matters.

We congratulate Judge Suskauer on his appointment and welcome him to the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit bench!

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