

## Essrig wins Gladstone Award

Early this month, Hillsborough Circuit Judge Katherine Essrig received the statewide Gladstone Award for outstanding service to children and families in dependency court. Below is the letter nominating her for this prestigious honor.

We nominate the Hon. Katherine G. Essrig for the 2012 William E. Gladstone Award. Judge Essrig is the embodiment of judicial leadership in the area of dependency and child welfare. She has demonstrated her commitment not only to the children of Hillsborough County, but to children throughout Florida by her tireless devotion to improvement of the Court system that serves our young.

Judge Essrig has served as a trial judge for over 20 years in both County and Circuit Courts. Her assignment to the Dependency Division began in 2000. She has served as its administrative judge since July 2001. During her tenure she has been instrumental in developing specialty divisions to address particular parents' and families' needs in the system – such as Dependency Drug Court and a specialized adoptions division. In addition to coordinating with the judges and court staff to assure that the 13<sup>th</sup> Circuit is serving the families that come to our courts, Judge Essrig also has an active case load. She presides over several dependency specialty dockets, including an Adoption Project docket with more than 150 children.

Judge Essrig is also involved in child welfare organizations throughout the county and state. She has served on the Hillsborough County Children's Board since 2001 and is currently vice chair. This Board is responsible for the expenditure of tax dollars in the community on behalf of children and families. She is on the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court and is chair of the statewide Dependency Court Improvement Panel. And she served on the State-wide committee to devise the new Case Plan. She is also involved with judicial education, have served as the Department Head for the Families in Court – Juvenile courses at the 2012 Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies.

Judge Essrig approaches her work with determination and with perfect demeanor. She is completely dedicated to the welfare of the children that appear in her Court. Judge Essrig focuses on those in a personal and individual way. She makes every attempt to ensure they receive the benefits that a loving parent can provide, even when they do not have that loving parent. Judge Essrig looks after their clothing and educational needs, making sure they have particular clothing such as prom dresses, and are able to attend summer enrichment classes – all things that will make a positive difference in a child's life. She is connected to our community and uses all of her resources to find people and programs that are *just right* for the children in her court. Recently, when a child wanted to finish a senior year at the same school, Judge Essrig reached out to local education contacts to ensure that happened and that transportation could be provided; when a child needed both hearing aids and eye glasses she persisted so that the doctors made appropriate recommendations; when siblings needed time together, she found theme park passes for these siblings to spend important quality time together. Judge Essrig

makes sure birthdays are celebrated in her courtroom when a child wants to be or happens to be in Court on their birthday - complete with cake and singing. She reviews the report cards and evaluations for all of the children on her caseload. They are indeed fortunate to have her genuine parental concern for their individual welfare, which extends beyond her judicial requirements.

Judge Essrig never takes the easy way out. She completely and thoroughly reviews all available information about children and parents. She never stops working, thinking, networking and calling on community resources until problems are solved. She never stops recognizing areas of need – infant mental health, pregnant teens, and trafficked children – and devising approaches to assure these children’s rights and needs are protected. Judge Essrig is never too busy to schedule a hearing or to accommodate scheduling issues; she creates an environment that is positive for problem solving by her courteous nature and genuine interest and regard for all persons in her courtroom. Her willingness and commitment to seeing the best in everyone results in the best path to permanency for youth and children. She has done this for families in Tampa and throughout Florida.

We are fortunate to have someone of her outstanding intellect, disposition and determination leading our circuit and providing an example to other Judges in our state of judicial leadership and the positive results it can garner. She has been tirelessly devoted to Florida’s dependency system for over 20 years, and is an inspiration to all who work in this system.

#### References:

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