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## **Chief Judge Thomas McGrady Named Florida Jurist of the Year**

CLEARWATER – Circuit Judge J. Thomas McGrady, chief judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit, has been named by the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) as its Florida Jurist of the Year. Judge McGrady will be honored on July 23<sup>rd</sup> during the banquet that concludes FLABOTA’s annual conference at the Hammock Beach Resort in Flagler County.

ABOTA, a national organization of trial lawyers who handle complex litigation, is dedicated to more effective representation for court litigants and a more efficient administration of justice. Membership is by invitation only and is made up of an equal number of attorneys who represent plaintiffs and defendants.



*Judge McGrady*

The Tampa Bay ABOTA Chapter nominated McGrady as “an excellent, fair, and well-prepared judge,” who is “a splendid example of what a judge should be. Rather incredibly, Chief Judge McGrady maintains his patience with litigants and lawyers while effectively steering a busy and expansive circuit featuring an increasing caseload, 69 judges, nine locations and an administrative staff.”

The 69 judges preside in the nine courthouses of the Sixth Circuit, comprised of Pasco and Pinellas counties. Last year, more than 328,500 new cases (criminal, civil and traffic) were filed in the circuit.

But more importantly, McGrady has been an unvarying voice for the courts, constantly reminding citizens of the why an independent judiciary is necessary to protect the principles on which the nation was founded. And he responded when uninformed members of the media referred to a legislature-initiated program as “rocket dockets” and “robo judges.” In an article carried in several metropolitan dailies, McGrady wrote, “At worse, some coverage – particularly in the national media – perpetuates misunderstanding, misinterprets the process and shows a lack of respect for judges, staffs of the courts, and legislators, all of whom are working to solve a tremendous problem (foreclosures).”

The local Chapter’s letter nominating McGrady for the state award recognized his work on behalf of all courts by stating, “Though reserved by nature, Chief Judge McGrady is a powerful, if somewhat unheralded advocate for the independence of the judiciary in the face of recent attempts to politicize the judiciary. Those in the know are aware of Judge McGrady’s tireless and effective behind-the-scenes efforts to maintain a judicial system that is open to all and free from the influence of financial and political power.”

For the past two years, McGrady has managed the circuit – one of Florida’s largest – through diminishing budgets, staff cuts and a mortgage foreclosure backlog that threatened to bring civil court proceedings to a virtual halt throughout the state. Under McGrady’s guidance, the Sixth Circuit was among the first in the

state to implement a Supreme Court-mandated mediation program. Pending mortgage foreclosure cases have been reduced in the circuit by approximately 14% over the past year.

McGrady just began his second term as Chief Judge, having been re-elected in a meeting of the circuit's 68 other judges. In 2009, he was elected to succeed Circuit Judge Robert J. Morris Jr., appointed to fill a vacancy on the Second District Court of Appeal.

The Chief Judge is constitutionally responsible for the administrative supervision of the courts and court staff within the Sixth Circuit, which serves almost 1.5 million residents in the two counties.

Judge McGrady has been on the bench in the Sixth Circuit since August 1999, when then-Gov. Jeb Bush appointed him to fill a vacancy as a County Judge in Pinellas. He was elected for a full term without opposition in September 2000, and in December 2001, Bush again chose McGrady, this time for a vacant Circuit Judgeship. In 2004 and 2010, he was elected without opposition for full six-year terms. During his judicial service, he has been assigned to the Family Law Division, where he was administrative judge, the Civil Division, and both misdemeanor and felony Criminal Divisions.

Recently, the Barney Masterson Inn of Court presented McGrady with its William J. Castagna Award for Judicial Excellence, which recognizes a "sitting Pinellas County or Circuit Court judge who displays the highest standards of judicial excellence in knowledge of the law, ethics, civility, professionalism, demeanor, and commitment to the community." In May 2009, the St. Petersburg Bar Association presented its Judicial Appreciation Award to McGrady.

In the community, Judge McGrady has served St. Jude Catholic Church and School as a school board chairman, fall festival treasurer, president of the Moms and Dads Club and member of the parish council. He has served as chairman of the Indian Shores Code Enforcement Board, is a Legion of Honor member of Kiwanis International and has twice served as president of Midtown Kiwanis.

He earned his Juris Doctorate Degree in 1974 from the University of Florida, where he had completed undergraduate work in 1971 with a Bachelor of Arts in education. A native of Indiana, he moved with his parents, sisters and brother to St. Petersburg in 1956, attended local schools and graduated from Bishop Barry High School. In 1970, he married his high school sweetheart, Mary Choquette, now a retired teacher. They have two grown children and four grandchildren.