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Supreme Court Justice Peggy Quince to Join Local Judges in Forum with At-Risk Youths

CLEARWATER – Florida Supreme Court Justice Peggy A. Quince will join three local judges for this year's Judicial Forum, a program designed to inspire and motivate at-risk young men and women. The sponsoring Youth Development Initiative (YDI) has scheduled the 2013 Forum to begin at 10 a.m. Saturday, at Dunedin Highland Middle School, 70 Patricia Ave., Dunedin.



Justice Quince

Justice Quince and the other judges won't be in robes. They want the at-risk young persons to see them as someone they can identify with and discuss the problems they face. When appropriate, the judges relate their own experiences, hoping to inspire the attending young men and women to overcome prejudices and to make good decisions when faced with difficult life choices.

Justice Quince said she is looking "forward to having a dialogue with some of our youth to explore with them both challenges and opportunities they will face as they become productive members of our communities."

Three Sixth Judicial Circuit Judges –Michael Andrews, Myra McNary and James Pierce – will join Justice Quince for this year's forum.

The Judicial Forum originated in the 1990s under the guidance of Dr. Joseph Smiley, dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences at St. Petersburg College, and Randolph Lightfoot, former curriculum specialist for African American Education in Pinellas County Schools. They invited the Honorable Elijah Smiley of the 14th Judicial Circuit in North Florida to be the first African American Judge to participate in the Judicial Forum.

About 10 years ago, Sixth Judicial Circuit Judge Andrews took on leadership of the Forum and began recruiting fellow African American judges to help him:

- Address issues facing today's youths, particularly young black males.
- Present the justice system in a positive manner.
- Introduce himself and other African American judges as role models that young people may choose to emulate.

For several years, Pinellas County Judge James Pierce and the Alpha Institute – a mentoring program that focuses on at-risk African American males in middle and high school – has helped organize and manage the Forum. The Institute's primary mission is to provide a sound structural program to mentor male adolescents, enhancing self-esteem, education, leadership skills, and cultural awareness. Precious Pearls – a similar program for females – also participates.

Although the Alpha Institute's focus is on African American males, the Judicial Forum is a public program that is open to the entire community. The program is a collaboration of YDI, Alpha Institute, Inc., Dr. Martin L. King Jr. Neighborhood Family Center, Pinellas County Juvenile Welfare Board, Dunedin Highland Middle School, Omicron Beta Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and Nu Beta Omega Chapter of Kappa Alpha Sorority.

Judge Pierce refers to the Judicial Forum as "an excellent opportunity for young people to interact with judges outside the courtroom and benefit from their professional and life experiences."

To become the first African American female on the Florida Supreme Court, Justice Quince was appointed in unusual collaboration in 1998 between outgoing Gov. Lawton Chiles and Gov.-elect Jeb Bush. It also was Chiles who made her the first African American female appointed to the Second District Court of Appeal.

Justice Quince is a Virginia native who moved to Florida in 1978 and opened a Bradenton law office, where she practiced general civil law. In 1980, Justice Quince joined the office of the U.S. Attorney General's Office, Criminal Division. Her 13½-year tenure at that office included five years as the Tampa Bureau Chief. Additionally, three years were spent handling death penalty cases exclusively, on direct appeal and in post-conviction proceedings. She is a graduate of Howard University and earned her juris doctorate at Catholic University of America.

Additional information is available by contacting Dr. Joseph Smiley at 727.712.5851; Randolph Lightfoot at 727.871.9165; or Karalia Baldwin at 727.560.1103.