



FEDERAL BAR ASSOCIATION SOUTH FLORIDA CHAPTER

Interview with Cathy Wade Babyak, Executive Services Administrator for the Southern District of Florida – Interview by Michael Caruso

At every court investiture and ceremony, no matter the honoree or occasion, there is one common denominator: a big shout out to **Cathy Wade Babyak** for making the event a success. But, Cathy, the Court's Executive Services Administrator, does much more than plan courthouse functions – she is the person who is integral to the successful and smooth operation of one of the busiest federal judicial districts in the country.

An "Indispensible Part of our Court Family"

As **Chief Judge K. Michael Moore** says about Cathy: "Anyone who has attended any of our court's public ceremonies or private functions knows by now that Cathy is the one individual behind the scenes who arranges these events. Behind the scenes, Cathy works closely with the Court's Chief Judge in maintaining accurate Administrative Orders and records, as well as insuring timely compliance with statutory and administrative reporting requirements. Finally, anyone who has worked with Cathy knows she conducts herself professionally and cheerfully at all times."



Cathy's innate talents and work ethic defy description. She is not only a "jack of all trades" but a master of all of them. Cathy started as the secretary to the District Executive and then the Clerk of Court. But when the Assistant District Executive left over 20 years ago, she inherited his duties in addition to handling every administrative task that crossed the Clerk's desk. Most people struggle to excel at one job; she excelled at two jobs simultaneously.

Judge Darrin P. Gayles also has high praise for Cathy: "Cathy Wade is an indispensable part of our court family. At the moment a federal judge is appointed in our district, Cathy becomes the first person the judge relies on for information and logistics. She is also the unsung hero for every event we host in our district, from investitures to commemorations."

Currently, some of her duties include: drafting Court correspondence and administrative orders; coordinating the Court's events; reviewing the Court's continuity of operation and occupant emergency plans (no small task given our vulnerability for hurricanes and flooding); coordinating security and the issuance of access cards with the Marshals Service; assisting the Local Rules Committee and Ad Hoc Committee on Attorney Discipline; coordinating the scheduling of all Court Committee meetings with Judges and the Court Administrator; and assisting in preparation of all materials for Court Committee meetings and Judges' Meetings. In other words, a lot.

Strong South Florida Roots

On a personal basis, Cathy has deep and longstanding ties to the South Florida community. Along with her identical twin and younger sister, Cathy was raised by her father, who worked at FPL, and her mother, a homemaker, in North Miami. Cathy had an idyllic childhood, riding her bike and skateboard (no helmet of course), drinking water from the hose to cool off, and playing outside until the street lights came on or until she heard the holler to come home. She knew when she heard "wait until your

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father gets home," she was in trouble. If Cathy wasn't playing outside, she was reading a book. She also has fond memories of visiting the power plant with her father and blue-crabbing on the weekends. As Cathy got older, she developed a love for classic rock. Jethro Tull, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Beatles, Moody Blues were favorites that she would blast on the stereo. And, as many high schoolers did at the time, Cathy made regular trips to the Hollywood Sportatorium for concerts.

Cathy's childhood was not without struggle. She remembers her parents fought to make ends meet at times. She can remember standing in line at Publix with her mom and had to put food back on the shelf because there wasn't enough money. Cathy's parents made sure she had piano and choir lessons and she practiced an hour every day. Every Saturday, Cathy went to Coconut Grove to rehearse with the Miami Girls Choir. She wasn't allowed to go outside on Saturdays until her practices and chores were done.

At the time, she said, she resented her parents for the times she missed playing with her friends, but as she grew up, she realized the lessons her parents taught her would serve her well in life and in her career. Her parents taught her about responsibility and commitment. They also taught her to do her best with everything, and if she didn't, she had to go back and do it again the right way. They taught her how to be the caliber of person that others rely upon without hesitation.

Eastern Airlines and Beyond

In 1984, Cathy graduated, with honors, from North Miami Senior High and received two outstanding student awards. After high school, Cathy worked full-time at Eastern Airlines and attended Broward Community College part-time. Over the next seven years, Cathy worked her way up from a secretary to purchasing assistant and then purchasing agent. As an Eastern employee, she took great advantage and spent her free time "flying the friendly skies." After Eastern closed, Cathy went to work for Royal Caribbean, and gave birth to a son- Christopher. Cathy had another son, Cody, and a daughter, Caitlyn, after her remarriage. (Cathy warns that Caitlyn is about to start driving so keep your eyes open.)

Cathy identifies **Judge Kathleen M. Williams** and the Court's former Clerk, **Steve Larimore**, as the two strongest influences in her professional life. When Cathy started working at the Court in 1994, she heard Judge Williams – then the Federal Public Defender – speak to a group of high school students about the importance of the law. Judge Williams's words that day continue to inspire Cathy.

Cathy worked alongside Steve Larimore, the former Clerk of the Court, for many years and she counts him as "the best boss." When Cathy had personal difficulties, Steve always offered his support and guidance. Steve and Cathy had a similar work ethic – work hard and be professional. Having worked as a teenager at McDonald's cleaning bathrooms and taking out the trash, Cathy is not above doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

Cathy's husband of 15 years – Andrew– is her strongest personal influence. Andrew grew up on his own and at the age of 16 had to work to support himself and put himself through school. Through hard work and commitment to



quality, he started a successful business. He's also one of the most caring and giving people Cathy knows. When Cathy's father moved in with them because of health issues, he put his business on hold to

stay at home and take care of him. Having started with nothing, he appreciates all that he's earned and has taught Cathy to appreciate what is truly important in life – family.

In her spare time, Cathy and her husband listen to music, go to concerts (their daughter plays drums), swim in the pool and just enjoy each other's company. Her husband loves to cook, so Cathy spends a lot of time hanging out in the kitchen "taste testing."

Stories to Tell

As you may imagine, Cathy has some stories to tell about the courthouse. One night at 10 p.m., Cathy received a call from the Warden of the Federal Detention Center. The warden wanted to know why there were semi-trucks being parked around the courthouse. Apparently, a film crew had been given permission to film a movie in the ceremonial courtroom. Little did anyone know that the crew would take over the entire 2nd floor of the Courthouse as well as the surrounding streets. In her typical fashion, Cathy stepped in, coordinated with the movie crew, and actually directed the director to be quiet because they were disturbing court. The highlight for Cathy was meeting and spending time with Bill Murray.

Cathy has a few favorite court ceremonies. At one investiture, a judge had a large table set up and stacked high with boxes of Malomars. Another was when Christy's catered a reception in West Palm Beach and the grouper fingers set off the fire alarm. The food was so good, not a

single person evacuated even when the fire department arrived.

“The Heart and Soul of the Executive Office”

Steve Larimore sums up Cathy’s role in the courthouse –

both professionally and personally – perfectly: “For the past 25 years, and certainly during my tenure as Clerk, Cathy has been the heart and soul of the Executive Office. She is conscientious, hardworking, and professional. Cathy also has more institutional knowledge than anyone in the Clerk’s Office. Cathy has superb judgment knowing exactly

which issues to refer to others, which to handle herself and which to escalate. And finally, and most important to me,

she is simply a great person and hilarious. Every day I looked forward to working with her because I knew that she would not only do a tremendous job, but we also would have big fun while doing it! Cathy is one of a kind, and the Court has been incredibly lucky to have her all of these years!”

Everyone who has met and worked with Cathy could not agree more.

Upcoming Events

CANCELLED! FBA Hyatt Luncheon with Hon. Roy K. Altman

In light of the CDC interim guidance recommending that in-person events of 50 or more people be postponed for the next eight weeks, the Board of the South Florida Chapter of the FBA has made the necessary decision to cancel the upcoming March 25, 2020, Hyatt luncheon with the Honorable Roy K. Altman for the health and safety of our community. We will begin processing refunds for those who have already purchased tickets, and we are working with Judge Altman to re-schedule this program for a date in the fall. If you have any questions regarding your refund, please contact us at federalbar.southflorida@gmail.com. Thank you for your participation in the FBA and your support of our programs. We hope to see you soon.



South Florida to Host the 2021 Annual Meeting & Convention!

The South Florida Chapter will proudly be hosting the Federal Bar Association’s 2021 Annual Meeting and Convention. The Annual Meeting and Convention will take place from September 22-25, 2021, and will feature several programs and events of value to the federal bench and bar. In addition to a broad range of CLE programs presented by federal judges and practitioners, the convention will offer a number of networking opportunities for hundreds of attendees, and will culminate with the installation of the FBA’s national president on Saturday, September 25, 2021. There will be opportunities to meet attorneys and judges from around the country, participate in wellness events, and attend luncheons featuring notable speakers. The FBA’s national sections and committees will also meet during the convention. Sponsorship opportunities will be available, and inquiries regarding the event can be directed to Alaina Fotiu-Wojtowicz, the Chapter’s President, and to Oliver A. Ruiz, the Chair of the 2021 Annual Meeting and Convention Committee. – *Oliver Ruiz*, oruiz@malloylaw.com

Message from the FBA Diversity Committee

During Women’s History Month, the FBA Diversity Committee reflects on the many contributions of women to the federal judiciary, from legendary pioneers such as Constance Baker Motley to the many distinguished women who have served, and continue to serve, as judges of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida. Here in South Florida, we are very fortunate to have a judiciary that is nearly as diverse as, and reflective of, the community it serves. Diversity within the judiciary is not just an intrinsic good, but also plays an important role in fostering public confidence in the federal courts. When decisions are made by those who look like us, and who share a common background, it lends legitimacy to the decision-making process. We should never take this for granted, and to the women of the federal judiciary who contribute to its diversity, we thank you for your service and celebrate your work during Women's History Month, and beyond.

If you are not already a member, join the FBA’s South Florida Chapter today! Members have access to a wide array of events involving the judiciary, notable speakers, and lawyers in our community. Please visit our website for more information, <http://fba-sdfla.org/membership>.

Become a member today!