



Judge Stephen A. Rapp

By: Jack Aiello

May 1998

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to the Palm Beach Country Bar, as one its newest Circuit court judges, my friend and former colleague, Judge Stephen A. Rapp. Judge Rapp, a former member of Guster, Yoakley, Criser & Stewart, P.A., has presided over Circuit Court Division "G" since January 11, 1988.

Before spending the greatest part of his life in South Florida, Judge Rapp was born in Detroit, Michigan, just before the Cleveland Indians last won the World Series. When he was 10 years old, he moved to Ft. Lauderdale with his family, where he lived until he went away to college. Attracted by the Mardi Gras and an otherwise provocative social atmosphere, Judge Rapp pursued his undergraduate studies in the business and economics school at Loyola University in New Orleans. It was there that he met the woman who would make possible almost simultaneous matriculation and matrimony in mid 1969. When they met, Steve's wife, Diane, was a cheerleader for the fighting Wolfpack of Loyola. A couple of months after the wedding, he enrolled in the University of Florida College of Law.

Before law school, Judge Rapp performed construction work, assisting his father, an electrical sub-contractor, on certain of his projects. The judge was, for a time, a member of the carpenters' union in New Orleans.

After law school, Judge Rapp worked for a year in the capacity of Assistant County Solicitor and Assistant State Attorney (after the adoption of Article V of the Constitution). In conjunction with approximately thirteen other solicitors, five of whom are also currently Palm Beach County judges, Judge Rapp had a hand in the prosecution of cases involving robbery, burglary, aggravated assault, and second-degree murder. In February 1973, he left the state's employ and joined Gunster, Yoakley, Criser & Stewart, P.A.

The judge and his wife have three children, all of whom presently attend Catholic schools. The oldest of the three, Christopher, is 14, Jonathan is 12 and their daughter, Stephanie is 9. Diane has lectured at various grade schools about the evils of drug abuse and, for seven years headed the Engaged Encounter Program in the Catholic Church; a program devoted to assisting in the preparation of congregation members for marriage. Presently, Diane is studying for her Master's Degree in counseling at Florida Atlantic University.

Judge Rapp's expressed motivation for seeking the judicial nomination was to become more directly involved in the aspects of the practice of law, which he found the most satisfying. Among the aspects, which he mentioned, was having the opportunity to enjoy a diverse spectrum of civil matters such as one could rarely, if ever, expect to see in any single position as a lawyer. Suggesting a link to age or the accumulation of experience in the "litigation trenches," Judge Rapp believes that for many there comes a time when it is much more satisfying to resolve disputes than to argue them.

Asked whether in his thus far limited experience on the bench he has found it more challenging than adversarial trial practice was, Judge Rapp noted that his vocation is, at the same time, more intellectually challenging, and, because it is more interesting, more enjoyable. The judge observed that, with respect to the novel issues he has faced each day, being a judge is “like going back to law school but not having much time to study.” Finally, he was pleased to allow as how he had been impressed thus far by the high quality of the lawyers’ performances in his division, not only in terms of their intelligence and preparedness, but also in relation to the fairness and courtesy which they have displayed toward each other.

Having personally had the opportunity to benefit from Steve’s legal and personal experience throughout my entire practice and having witnessed the high level of esteem in which he has always held at the firm, I am certain that my colleagues share with me the hope and the expectation that the enhanced satisfaction which the judge seeks in his service to the Bar shall be a mutual one.