

Judge Burton Conner

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Since he was five or six years old, Judge Burton C. Conner knew he wanted to be a lawyer. He ultimately achieved that dream and more, as he is the newest judge of the Fourth District Court of Appeal.

Judge Conner was raised by a single mom in the Sarasota/Bradenton area, the fourth out of five kids. He attended Duke University where he received a BA in History and English. He then went on to the University of Florida College of Law, where he got his first taste of public service: serving as an intern in the Public Defender's office during his last year of law school.

Upon graduation, Judge Conner moved to Fort Pierce, where he started as an Assistant Public Defender for the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit. After a little over a year at the PD's office, in 1979 he joined Conely & Conely, P.A., in Okeechobee, where he practiced civil litigation.

In 1984, Judge Conner was appointed as a County Judge for Okeechobee County, where he served for approximately five years. It was these first few years presiding over Juvenile Court as an Acting Circuit Judge that made the most profound impact on Judge Conner. Indeed, he believes that working with children in the Juvenile Court is the most important duty a judge has because they are directly impacting (and hopefully helping) the lives of children, who can then pay it forward in raising their own kids.

In 1988, Judge Conner returned to private practice, forming his own firm that focused on all areas of civil litigation and transactional work. In April 1997, he was appointed to the Circuit bench for the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit. Judge Conner served for approximately fourteen years, presiding over various divisions in Indian River, St. Lucie, and Okeechobee Counties, including the juvenile, criminal, civil, probate, guardianship, and family divisions.

Judge Conner's other judicial passion – besides working with kids in Juvenile Court – is working with juries, as he believes that America's system of a trial by a jury of our peers is the ultimate implementation of "government of the people, by the people, for the people." He echoed these beliefs when giving his welcoming speeches to juries that he presided over. In these speeches, Judge Conner emphasized that the jury members were "fellow judges" when deciding the facts of the case and applying the law and that the importance of their work could not be overstated.

In 2001, the Florida Supreme Court appointed Judge Conner to its Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules and Policy. This Committee includes a cross-section of judges, mediators and ADR professors, who then make recommendations to the Supreme Court as

to mediation and arbitration rules, certifications, training, etc.

In 2009, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court appointed Judge Conner to the Mortgage Foreclosure Task Force, which lasted six months and included judges, lawyers, real estate professionals, and bankers. The Task Force was responsible for drafting Florida's mortgage mediation program.

It was his enjoyment of the collaborative decision-making process on the Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules and Policy and the Mortgage Foreclosure Task Force – along with sitting as an associate judge on the Fourth DCA in 2001 and 2008 – that led Judge Conner to apply for the vacancy on the Fourth DCA bench. In February 2011, Governor Scott appointed Judge Conner to the Fourth DCA, thereby becoming the second judge from the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit currently sitting on the Court (after a span of twenty-two years since the appointment of Judge Martha Warner). Although he misses being in the trial courtroom and working with juries, he loves collaborating and discussing the law with the other Fourth DCA judges in making a ruling.

Off the bench, Judge Conner has worked with several civic organizations geared toward children's issues. One such organization is the St. Lucie County Executive Roundtable, where he has served as a board member since 1998. The Executive Roundtable is comprised of local business and community leaders whose sole task is to implement plans and programs to improve children's lives in St. Lucie County. Judge Conner has also served on, among others, the St. Lucie County Children's Services Council and the Exchange Club Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse.

In his free time, Judge Conner enjoys physical exercise, yoga, and performing yard work. He has four children – daughters Seyward, Courtland, Doanyelle, and son Burton II– and three grandchildren.

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