

# Judge Gerard Joseph (“Joe”) Curley

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By Meredith I. Biggs

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Putting others first is a character trait Judge Joe Curley learned from an early age. Judge Curley was raised in St. Petersburg, Florida by two loving parents. His father, Gerard (“Jerry”) Curley, was Judge Curley’s role model. Jerry Curley, a real estate developer, and entrepreneur, had a passion for serving the poor through his lifelong work at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. This passion left an imprint on Judge Curley, as did his father’s legacy of faith, devotion to family, and intense work ethic.

Judge Curley’s faith is at the center of his life and he is a family man to the core. Judge Curley often talks about his family and always with a smile. He and his wife have four kids, one grandchild, and two dogs. Judge Curley has always made time for his family even when the time was scarce, often seen working on the sidelines of baseball games or taking phone calls while riding in the car to the zoo. When he’s not with his family (or working), Judge Curley is an avid – and competitive – golfer. Judge Curley first learned golf as a sophomore in high school and joined the school’s golf team. After graduating high school in 1978, Judge Curley went to Stetson University for a year until he received a golf scholarship to the University of Notre Dame, to his father’s great delight. Jerry Curley had an unfulfilled life dream of going to Notre Dame and, when his son was accepted to the school, was beside himself. When Judge Curley obligingly accepted the school’s invitation, he did not anticipate how his experience at Notre Dame would quickly become part of his own life dream as well. Fighting Irish paraphernalia seems to magically appear wherever Judge Curley goes.

After graduating from Notre Dame, Judge Curley bravely adventured to Oklahoma to work on an oil rig and then at a grain elevator to take, according to him, “some time off” before beginning his professional career. In Oklahoma, Judge Curley learned the joys of farm living, bartering free accommodations at a farm in exchange for farm labor on the weekends after working long hours on the job. Almost a year later, Judge Curley decided he was ready to take the next step. After much prayer (and one-too-many episodes of Perry Mason), Judge Curley decided law school was that next step.

Judge Curley attended Stetson Law School in his hometown of St. Petersburg. Guided by a deep-rooted passion for justice and a hunger for trial work, Judge Curley was set on becoming a prosecutor with the Pinellas County State Attorney’s Office. But, his friend and fellow Stetson student, who also happened to be the son of the State Attorney, persuaded Judge Curley to at least interview with the law firm of Gunster, Yoakley, Criser & Stewart (its

former name). This friend told Judge Curley that he would like it because there were “real trial lawyers there who were a lot like him.” Without much initial interest in working there, Judge Curley agreed to the interview. After all, he and his wife were living at the time in what Judge Curley affectionately refers to as the “Roach Motel.” Judge Curley was out-maneuvered when the firm side-stepped him and went straight to his wife to make him a job offer. More than thirty years later, he still may not have forgiven her for gladly accepting on his behalf.

Judge Curley quickly found his place as a trial attorney and ultimately a shareholder with Gunster, Yoakley & Stewart and worked there for thirty two years. Judge Curley began as a general litigator and in 1992 formed the firm’s employment practice group. He led the employment practice group at Gunster along with Joseph Santoro until Judge Curley departed the firm to take the bench. From 1999-2003, Judge Curley served on Gunster’s governing committee and became board certified in business litigation in 1998. Judge Curley has fond memories of all the trial experience he received at Gunster over the years, even having two federal trials in the last four months with the firm. Perhaps Judge Curley’s largest point of pride at the firm is the number of young attorneys he mentored during his time, which he deems a vital part of his role as a leader in the firm and in the community. One would be hard pressed to meet a Gunster attorney who has not worked with and been impacted by the knowledge and care shown them during Judge Curley’s time.

Judge Curley considered becoming a judge for quite some time before he applied. Judge Curley gained interest in the work, not for the position itself, but as an opportunity to give back, do good, and serve his community. When several vacancies were announced in late 2017, Judge Curley knew that – God-willing – the time for him to take the step had come. Judge Curley feels honored and delighted to have the privilege of serving as a judge. Judge Curley looks forward to using his judicial role to advance justice and continue his father’s legacy of serving others.

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