

# Judge Scott Kerner

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By: Laura J. Starr, Esq.

May 2019

A Native of Palm Beach County, Judge Scott Kerner was born at Good Samaritan Hospital as Hurricane "David" was skirting the Florida coast – and, in particular, Palm Beach County. His parents originally planned to name him "David," however, they decided against it due to the impending hurricane David which had just crushed the Dominican Republic as a category 5 hurricane. The Kerner family welcomed their second son a few years later and were then able to use the name, David. Judge Scott Kerner's brother is David Kerner, currently a Palm Beach County Commissioner who was previously a police officer and then a two-term member of the Florida House of Representatives. Judge Kerner's election to the Circuit Court Bench in November 2018 follows a long family tradition of community service.

Judge Kerner's father was a uniform police officer and eventually moved up the ranks until he was named as the Assistant Chief of Police for the City of Lake Worth. Judge Kerner's mother was an IRS Agent. At a young age, Judge Kerner was taught the Golden Rule of "do on to others as you would have others do on to you." To this day Judge Kerner adheres to his father's early teaching by treating others as he would like to be treated. When he was just eight years old, Judge Kerner remembers going to work with his father and seeing the inside of a jail cell at the Lake Worth holding facility. His father showed him at an early age that the inside of a jail cell is a place you never want to end up. Judge Kerner never forgot that day, nor the look of respect on the faces of his peers and teachers when his father brought him to and from school wearing his police uniform. Another early memory for Judge Kerner was a field trip his school took to the Palm Beach County Fair Grounds. He recalls his teacher pointing to the sky while the entire class watched the space shuttle Challenger taking off from Cape Canaveral. Shortly after launch, they watched as the takeoff turned into an explosion and huge flash in the bright blue sky above. While his teacher did not explain to the class what had occurred, Judge Kerner recalled the terrified look on his teacher's face. Judge Kerner learned from his parents later that day what had transpired and the ultimate sacrifice those astronaut heroes made to our country through their service. It is through his upbringing that Judge Kerner learned public service is an honorable and meaningful way to serve the community.

Judge Kerner attended public school in Palm Beach County and graduated from Santaluces Community High School in Lantana, which is rated as one of the most diverse schools in Florida. Before high school, Judge Kerner played intermural baseball and soccer. However, it was at Santaluces High that Judge Kerner joined the men's varsity tennis team where he

played in the number one position until graduation. Upon graduation from high school at age 17, Judge Kerner attended college in Binghamton, N.Y. where he earned both a Bachelors and Masters degree of Arts in English. Although tennis was not a big focus due to the bitter cold winters in upstate New York, Judge Kerner continued to play on the men's varsity tennis team during his first year at Binghamton until studies took priority. Immediately following college, Judge Kerner returned to Florida and enrolled at St. Thomas University School of Law where he earned his JD degree.

After graduating law school, Judge Kerner went to work at local Palm Beach County law firms focusing on a civil and personal injury trial practice until he decided to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a Circuit Court Judge. While some did not believe that he had enough experience and was too young, Judge Kerner disagreed due to his 10 years of trial experience and pushed forward to fulfill his dream of becoming a Circuit Court Judge. Running for election to the bench was a challenging but fulfilling process. Each time he puts on the black robe, Judge Kerner understands the importance, enormous responsibility and duty to be fair, unbiased and to treat all who come before him with dignity, respect and an open willingness to hear all sides of an argument. One of Judge Kerner's favorite parts of being a judge is presiding over jury trials. In particular, he likes the *voir dire* portion of the trial and the process of selecting a jury, as this is typically the only time he hears from the jury. Unfortunately, Judge Kerner has noticed that the jury pools are experiencing an increase in the number of people who do not comply with their jury summons and fail to appear. He is hopeful that this is an issue that can be worked on and improved. While Judge Kerner has found most lawyers who appear before him to be professional and well prepared, there are a few standouts. In particular, Judge Kerner views these attorneys as lawyers who do not comply with Local Rule 4, do not narrow issues or even attempt to do so, and misuse UMC by setting inappropriate matters. Judge Kerner is hopeful that his patient reminders to counsel on these topics will have a positive effect and assist lawyers in abiding by their professional responsibilities.

Judge Kerner is married to Vanessa and has a 4-year-old daughter Antonella who is proudly pictured with Judge Kerner at work. Antonella is bilingual and is able to practice both languages at home. When called to duty and child care permits, Vanessa is a substitute teacher in the Palm Beach County Public School system.

It was an enormous honor to Judge Kerner to have been sworn in to the bench by former Florida Supreme Court Justice Rosemary Barkett. On behalf of the Judicial Relations Committee and Palm Beach County Bar Association, we welcome Judge Kerner to the Bench and look forward to his dedicated service, commitment, and contribution to the local bar and community at large in the 15<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit.

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