

Judicial Profile – Ronald V. Alvarez

By: Lawrence P. Rochefort, Esquire

April 2012

“I never give up on my kids.” This is how Judge Ronald

V. Alvarez responded to a question about his experience in the juvenile division of the Circuit Court in Palm Beach County, Florida. Joining the Bench in 1993, Judge Alvarez has served continuously for nineteen (19) years on the Circuit Court, thirteen (13) of which have been in the juvenile division. Despite opportunities to transfer to other divisions, Judge Alvarez chose to remain in the juvenile division.

Judge Alvarez’s impact and success as a lawyer and juvenile judge is evidenced by his numerous awards and recognitions. For example, in 1986, Judge Alvarez received the Florida Bar’s President’s Pro Bono Service Award for the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit. In 2000, the Palm Beach Post recognized Judge Alvarez and his wife, Elaine Webb Alvarez, as two of the “100 People Who Made a Difference for Palm Beach County”. In the words of the Palm Beach Post:

“In this special publication, meet the 100 people who dreamed, who dared, who did...in Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast in the last 100 years ...Written by Palm Beach Post reporters and editors, Our Century features the defining moments and people of the past century who made a difference in our area.”

In 2001, Judge Alvarez was selected to participate in the United States Surgeon General’s Report on Youth Violence. He was the sole jurist to be asked to be involved in this study.

In 2005, Judge Alvarez was recognized by the American Board of Trial Advocates, Palm Beach County chapter as Jurist of the Year. The following year, 2006, Judge Alvarez was chosen as by the Florida American Board of Trial Advocates Florida

as Jurist of the Year. In 2010, he was given the Alternative to Suspension Award from Inlet Grove Community High School. Most recently in 2011, Judge Alvarez was awarded the prestigious William E. Gladstone Award for Judicial Leadership and Service to Children for the State of Florida.

Judge Alvarez also is often asked to speak about his efforts with kids. In September 2009, Judge Alvarez was the keynote speaker at the New Beginnings Development Center, Teen Summit. In October 2009, Judge Alvarez was a guest lecturer at Florida Atlantic University, Criminal Justice Master’s Program on “The Role of the Judge in Juvenile Court”. In 2010, Judge Alvarez was a panelist on a Dependency Summit in Orlando, Florida and in 2011, he was a speaker at a Juvenile Justice Workshop.

Judge Alvarez also serves on a number of boards that illustrate his commitment to children and the community. From 1996 until 2000 and then again from 2002 through the present, Judge Alvarez has served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Children Services Council in Palm Beach County. Additionally, he serves on the Board of Directors of the Palm Beach and Martin County Community Foundation and the Advisory Committee to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fund of the Community Foundation. In an effort to provide the most effective and efficient services for the troubled

youth of this county, Judge Alvarez has served as the chair of the Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission, Criminal Justice, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Committee on Juvenile Population from 2010 to the present.

Despite all these accolades, Judge Alvarez remembers most caringly about those kids who appear before him and whom he is able to help. He speaks fondly of a girl named Veronica who had various juvenile delinquency issues. One sanction that he imposed on Veronica was that she was to write him weekly letters on her progress. After receiving each letter, Judge Alvarez would respond to Veronica in writing. As explained to him years later, Veronica found inspiration and caring in Judge Alvarez' letters, when she most desperately needed both. Though Veronica had setbacks along the way, Veronica ultimately attended junior college, then Florida Atlantic University and, in December of this year, graduated from law school. Veronica sat for the Florida Bar exam in February, 2012.

A similar success story concerned a boy, who, at the age of fourteen, moved to Palm Beach County with his mother and father. One day, the boy went to school and returned to an empty home. He was abandoned by his parents and entered the Department of Children and Family's dependency system. At age sixteen, the boy was a "B" and "C" student, working two part time jobs. In an effort to improve his future, the boy wanted to enroll in independent living classes, which classes teach young people in the dependency system life skills, such as how to write a resume or how to turn on the utilities for a newly rented apartment. The Department denied his request finding that he was not eligible. The boy's attorney filed a motion before Judge Alvarez. The motion was granted, the Department appealed and Judge Alvarez' decision was affirmed.

Three years later, the morning session of Judge Alvarez' delinquency docket was coming to a close. Judge Alvarez happened to look toward the doors of his courtroom, which were just opening. There stood a young man in a full dress United States Marine uniform. As the young man approached the bench, Judge Alvarez recognized him from three years earlier. After some conversation, Judge Alvarez asked the young man why he had returned to West Palm. The young man said "I just came back to thank you."

Judge Alvarez is a shining example of how a member of the judiciary can make a difference in our community. He gives of his free time to assist as many children in our community as possible, from coaching youth sports to presiding over Saturday drug court in Riviera Beach. When asked what he would like most to be remembered for, Judge Alvarez said "I help people so that they will help others."

It is his "one child, one family, one life at a time" attitude that has guided Judge Alvarez over the course of his remarkable career. In his last term as a sitting judge, if we are fortunate enough to have him re-elected, Judge Alvarez will surely continue his mission of helping those least able to help themselves, such as starting the county's first delinquency drug court or implementing a therapy dog program to decrease the stress experienced by dependent children when they visit the courthouse.

The next time you see Judge Alvarez in the courthouse, thank him and then tell him to thank his wife, Elaine Webb-Alvarez, of 42 years, and their two adult sons, Mark and Chad, for the time that her husband and their dad has dedicated to the Palm Beach County. And if you are really lucky, perhaps Judge Alvarez will share one of his incredible recipes for Spanish cuisine. I hear Judge Alvarez makes an incredible dish of arroz con pollo y chorizo!