

Judicial Profile

Judge Karen Miller

By Alicia Trinley

Born in Rochester, New York, but raised in South Florida, Judge Karen Miller was elected as a Palm Beach County Circuit Court Judge in November 2002 to take a position on the bench in January of 2003. January 2004 will mark her first anniversary as a judge. During my interview with her, she reflected on the past year and told me that she believed the law was a “noble profession” and that she considered it a special privilege and honor to be elected to the bench and serve Palm Beach County.

Actually, she has been “serving” Palm Beach County for quite some time prior to her elevation to the bench. In the beginning, right out of law school, she worked as an Assistant State Attorney for Palm Beach County. Immediately prior to the election, she was legal counsel for the Clerk of Court, Dorothy Wilken. Prior to that, she was employed as Chief Legal Counsel for A.G. Holley Hospital in Lantana, Florida – the only tuberculosis hospital in the United States. She was also employed for many years (1989 through 1997) by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). During those years, she started off as a Health Attorney for the Department of Health, which included HRS. A few years later, in 1990, she became the Acting District Legal Counsel for what was then known as “HRS” (now known as DCF). In 1991, she was officially named District Legal Counsel, which meant she oversaw the entire legal department of DCF.

Judge Miller acknowledged that her employment history was different than that of many other judges on the bench. However, it was evident that her employment experience helped prepare her for her judicial role. The time she spent at A.G. Holley Hospital as Chief Legal Counsel, and also a licensed risk manager, gave her needed insight for the medical malpractice cases she now presides over in the civil division. Although it appears that she will remain in the civil division for now, she has an extensive background in the areas of aging and adult services, juvenile and family matters, and criminal law as they all were issues she dealt with during the years she worked for DCF. These past experiences will undoubtedly continue to assist her when she is presiding over other cases in different divisions of the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit (i.e. probate, family, criminal, etc.).

Judge Miller’s employment history was not limited to only the prestigious titles mentioned above. When asked, she divulged that she “paid her dues” and held various jobs during the early years before law school as a bank teller, probation officer, and even a house painter! Thus, I learned from my conversation with her that she has a very easy-going outlook on life and is not afraid to roll with the punches.

She probably acquired this great outlook on life during her college years at Bard (a liberal arts college in New York). It was there that she was able to express herself and tap into the desire she had to travel and learn more about the world around her. Judge Miller always had a love of traveling. Her father, John R. Miller, was a pilot and she was lucky enough to make traveling a part of her lifestyle. During college, with a major in European History, she spent her junior year abroad studying German politics and the social system of Eastern Europe as well as Austrian music and art. Later, during law school at Nova, she spent a



Judge Karen Miller, with her husband, Stephen, and her son, John Ryan Alexander.

semester abroad at Oxford. Once out of school, she took trips across the globe to wonderful destinations like China, Canada, Mexico, and South America. She is looking forward to visiting these destinations again now that her son is old enough to travel with her.

Judge Miller met her husband, Stephen Alexander, when she was working as an Assistant State Attorney in Palm Beach County. He was a psychologist hired to examine a juvenile defendant on one of her cases. They were married in 1989. They have one son, John Ryan Alexander, who is twelve years old and just started school at Jefferson Davis. She is very proud of her son and told me that one of her favorite past-times (besides traveling) is to watch him play football and baseball.

Judge Miller spoke fondly of both her immediate and extended family. She told me that she was the third oldest of four children. Although her father passed away after she graduated from college, her mother is still alive and has an active life in Lake Worth. In fact, her mother, Marjorie Miller, is a fellow classmate of hers from Nova. Yes, you read correctly . . . Judge Miller attended law school with her mom. (Actually, her mom was in the class ahead of her, but they did have one class together – condo law – before graduation!) Unfortunately, Judge Miller refused to tell me who got the higher grade in the class.

When she is not working, enjoying one of her son’s athletic events, or traveling, she volunteers her time. Judge Miller has been a member of FAWL (Florida Association of Women Lawyers) since 1997. She is also active with the Inns of Court, Professionalism Committee, and a program called “Take Stock in Children.” Judge Miller has been serving as a mentor for the past three years for a child through that program. She encourages her son to follow in her footsteps. Through the Boy Scouts, the Alexander/Miller family participates in annual Food for Families Canned Food Drives, Toys for Tots Collections, and the Ocean Conservation Clean Ups.

The path Judge Miller took to the bench started where they all do – with sound academic education. Her path, unlike the paths of other judges, took some unique twists and turns into the administrative arena. In the end, her path led to the same place as those of her colleagues - the bench. Now serving on the bench, there is no doubt her past experiences have left her well equipped for her new role. On behalf of the Palm Beach County Bar Association, we wish her well and look forward to trying cases before her.