

Palm Beach County Bar Association
Judicial Relations Committee - Judicial Profiles Subcommittee
By Alison K Brown, Esq.¹

Judge Laura Burkhart was appointed to Florida's Fifteenth Judicial Circuit on August 4, 2020 by Governor Ron DeSantis, but she chose August 31, 2020 as her commission date because it was her late father's birthday. She wanted to honor his memory because he was a driving force behind her becoming a life-long public servant and a lawyer.

Judge Burkhart was born in Bellville, Texas, but primarily raised in Arcadia, Florida – due east of Bradenton – to Charles (Buck) and Carole Burkhart. Judge Burkhart was shaped by her parents' upbringing to become who she is today - down to earth, polite, a straight shooter, and someone who is most satisfied when she is helping people.

Buck was a former Marine Corps Major and ran the family accordingly. From Southern Arkansas, Buck's dad died when he was 15. He took over the family's shoe shop while going to school. Eventually, he obtained a college football scholarship and earned an engineering degree. Shortly after, he went into the Marine Corp. For Buck, education was key and he passed that down to Judge Burkhart, her brother Stephen, and sister Dr. Tiffany Boyd. He wanted his children to dream big. And Judge Burkhart did just that by graduating in 2003 from Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) with a bachelor's degree in business management and from Nova Southeastern University's Shepard Broad College of Law in 2007. While at Nova she was president of the local chapter of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America and upon graduation, was inducted into the Order of Barristers for her demonstrated exceptional skills in trial advocacy. She was one of only eight members of her graduating class, and the only female, to be bestowed this honor.

Her mom Carole is easy going with a flair for art – if you want to know if a throw pillow will work, she's your gal. Carole is a strong-willed woman who has preserved through life's challenges always living life to the fullest. She is the reason that Judge Burkhart is the nurturing mother she is.

Judge Burkhart loves her family deeply and lives for time with her kids. She has two school-aged children who she raises with the same traditions and values she was raised with – tough with a lot of love.

While Judge Burkhart grew up without a lot of money, she learned a very strong sense of purpose, grit, and can-do attitude. Her parents designed, and the family together largely built, what would become the family home. At age seven she began working in the family's newly planted 80 acre orange grove. She tracked her hours, and from her wages was tasked with purchasing items like her school clothes. She learned responsibility and the value of a dollar at an early age. But for her, life is really about who she can help, not about possessions.

For Judge Burkhart, public service is benefiting the collective, not just one side or the other. Her entire career has been in public service, starting when she took an internship with the Palm Beach County State Attorney's Office in law school. While it was not the job she had planned, being a prosecutor became her passion. She was hired out of law school and she stayed for thirteen years. First prosecuting misdemeanors, up through felony including a specialty in domestic violence felonies, and ending in Traffic Homicide. She was ultimately promoted to the Chief of Traffic Homicide and the Felony Trial

Units. She appreciates that this type of public service comes with a lot of power, and as a result a lot of responsibility. She understood that responsibility by always trying to find a resolution that was appropriate for the crime, but not losing sight of the people involved and the surrounding circumstances.

While she might not have nine-lives, she certainly has more than one. She's had a number of life-threatening injuries and survived them all. She's also been in tough spots herself so she understands that life can be difficult and thrives when she is helping people find solutions and helping to guide them onto a better path.

Fun facts: Judge Burkhart is a former Miss DeSoto County. If it's her choice, she will always choose to be outside, especially at the beach. It's a safe-haven and a place to relax. She considers herself a country-girl at heart and drives a truck but has a love of high heels. She loves to run even if it means squeezing it in during lunch. And, she is a lifelong lover of dance with a background in tap, jazz, ballet, and pointe. She was even a founding member of the FGCU cheerleading and dance squads.

Being a judge combines her love of the law and her love of public service. During her time on the bench, she has been assigned to the South County Courthouse as a family court Judge. It's an area where she can make a difference helping people through one of the most difficult times in their life. She is grateful to have the opportunity to help.

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