

A Fond Farewell As We Honor Judge Shames and Judge Schaefer

By Nicole Janine Poot



This February 28, 2018 the Sixth Judicial Circuit shall wave a fond farewell to two of its esteemed members of the judiciary as Judge Mark I. Shames and Judge John A. Schaefer are retiring. As a young lawyer it isn't very often that I've had the opportunity to sit down with a judge and hear about his or her experiences both on and off the bench. However, on November 8, 2017, I had the privilege of speaking to both Judge Shames and Judge Schaefer about their time on the bench and their future goals as they enter retirement.

Judge Schaefer began his legal career as a Judge Advocate for the Judge Advocate General Corps (JAG) after attending West Point and serving in the Field Artillery Branch of the United States Army. After serving as a JAG, Judge Schaefer entered private practice, primarily practicing as a commercial litigator before being appointed to the Sixth Judicial Circuit by Jeb Bush in 2000.

Judge Shames attended Stetson University College of Law before

starting his 20 year legal career, primarily practicing as a probate attorney. Dedicated to the community, Judge Shames served as president of the St. Petersburg Bar, president of the Pinellas County Trial Lawyers Association, as a member of the St. Petersburg Planning Commission, and numerous other public organizations prior to being elected to the Sixth Judicial Circuit in 1996.

During their time on the bench, both Judge Shames and Judge Schaefer shared a common interest in judicial education, and both expressed great pride in being granted the opportunity to educate new judges. Judge Shames spent approximately 16 years on the faculty of the Florida Judicial College and was also Associate Dean and Dean for the college during this time. By the same token, Judge Schaefer spent many years educating judges going onto the civil bench and gave them the civil basics for being a civil circuit judge. Both judges consider their involvement in judicial education to be

one of their greatest accomplishments during their tenure as judges. As an additional accomplishment, Judge Schaefer expressed how honored he was to receive the John U. Bird Judicial Excellence Award from the Clearwater Bar Association in 2016, given to a judge each year to recognize and honor, high ideal, personal character, judicial competence, and service. In 2011, Judge Shames was awarded the Judicial Appreciation Award by the St. Petersburg Bar Association.

Retirement is a new stage of life both judges look forward to enjoying. Both judges elected to retire, and both feel confident and enthusiastic about their decision to step off the bench. As one door closes another one opens – as Judge Schaefer said “[he’s] ready to play.” After spending much of their lives dedicated to the practice of law, retirement creates an opportunity for both judges to pursue other areas of interest. Judge Shames is looking forward to having time to spend with his children and grandchildren. He also

has a desire to improve his Italian and learn to speak Spanish and is hopeful to have an opportunity to utilize his learnings traveling abroad with his wife. Similarly, Judge Schaefer is looking forward to spending time with his family and intends to travel the Western United States and Canada. He is also excited to have more time to dedicate to his church. This past October, he was ordained as a deacon within the Catholic Church at a ceremony and Mass at the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle in St. Petersburg. As a deacon, Judge Schaefer may preach the Gospel and administer sacraments such as baptism, funerals, and weddings. Both judges are also avid fishermen and both hope their retirement will include lots of time on the water.

When asked what message they would like to leave the legal community with, especially young lawyers, Judge Shames said it was simple – never lose sight of professionalism and



civility. Judge Schaefer iterated similar sentiments regarding professionalism and also expressed the importance for young lawyers and young judges to find and utilize mentors and get involved in the legal community.

When asked about the benefits of practicing in the Sixth Judicial Circuit – Judge Shames and Judge Schaefer concur that it is a joy coming to work every day with attorneys who are prepared (for the most part) and represent their clients in a professional way, wonderful support staff, and brilliant colleagues. Judge Shames said that he felt the Sixth Judicial Circuit is the best place to be a judge and a lawyer because of the quality of the legal community and the people who work in it. He said that he's had the opportunity to see how things are done elsewhere and he

believes the Sixth Judicial Circuit gets a lot of things right and does them well in terms of the court system and this is largely a function of the people working within the system.

Both Judge Shames and Judge Schaefer expressed that they will truly miss their time on the bench, but are excited for what the future holds. Both judges also stated how grateful they are for the opportunity and privilege to serve the community as judges these many years. On behalf of the St. Petersburg Bar Association, I wish both Judge Shames and Judge Schaefer a very happy retirement and all the best in their future endeavors.

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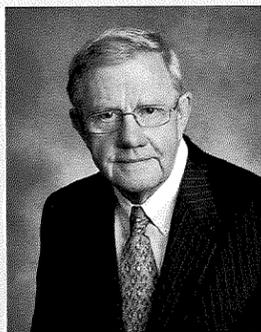


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