



Experiencing a Day of Justice

Teachers & Judges in the Courtroom

The happy anticipation of the 5th graders from Julington Creek Elementary changed to solemn watchfulness as they passed through the intense security on the first floor of the Duval County Courthouse. For many of the 145 students, this was the first time they had ever seen a person in chains and prison attire. For all of them, this was their first-hand introduction to the Judicial System.

"It changed my life", student Ryan Bridgam shared in a letter of thanks to Judge Davis. "I mean, I like you (Judge Davis) and all, but I don't ever want to be in front of you in this courtroom."

Classroom teacher, Nancy Vara, was surprised to find herself in front of the Judge's bench. Judge Davis welcomed the Julington Creek students to his courtroom and then requested their teacher come to the front of the court for introduction.

"It's sobering to be in front of the judge and quite an honor that he would interrupt his court schedule to focus on our students and respond to their questions," noted Ms. Vara.

Judge Davis asked students to approach the bench with any questions they may have. Ten brave souls ventured forward with questions that represented the thoughts of other 5th graders. Judge Lance Day also answered numerous intelligent questions posed by the 5th graders, and both Judge Davis and Judge Day answered questions in a respectfully equally reflective manner.

One of the questions asked of Judge Davis by the children was, "Do you feel bad about sentencing people to jail?"

Judge Davis replied, "Sometimes I do, and sometimes I do not.

Generally, people are sent to prison for a long time because they have committed very bad crimes. I do not enjoy sending people to prison, but a judge must send people to prison when they commit certain crimes."



Classroom teachers participating were (l-r) Karen Itner, Jan Croysdale, Nancy Vara, Troy Keefe, and Connie Serra.

One student noted and asked Judge Day why different prisoners wear different colored uniforms and Judge Day also explained the color coding of the uniforms and what they meant. "For example: The color green means an adult male. Orange - This is a person with discipline problems and he/she may have mental status issues. Dark grey is worn by females. Light grey a trustee. Blue is for an unsanctioned juvenile (1st offenders), brown - a sanctioned juvenile (2nd offense or a juvenile that has been sentenced). Red is for an inmate going to the hospital or who is suicidal, also a yellow top means that they have health issues."

One of the questions posed to Judge Day by the children were, "Do you like being a judge?"

Judge Day responded, "Yes. I have wanted to be a lawyer since I was a small child. Once I became a lawyer, I realized it was possible to become a judge. I became a judge in 1992. Since that time, I

have enjoyed serving in a position that allows me to participate in our government.

After watching the sentencing of several assault, theft and drug use cases, the students participated in a mock trial led by Prosecutor John Guy. "Every morning I wake up able to do the right thing at my job," Prosecutor Guy told his avid listeners, "I love what I do." The students learned the mechanics of the legal system by participation in the mock trial in which a fellow student was arrested for video theft. He was defended by his lawyer, (another student), and following testimony of a witness, sentenced by a jury of his peers.

"Our hats go off to these Judges who after listening to several cases had security remove the prisoners from the courtroom. Both judges then called for a recess taking the time out of their busy calendar to talk personally to the students and addressed any and all of their questions. What a wonderful

can make such a lasting impression on these children's lives and we were so grateful to these judges for this opportunity. They went above and beyond for us and we are truly appreciative."

Later the students shared with their teachers that they found the courtroom "kind of a scary place" and



Judge Lance Day takes time from his busy schedule to answer questions from JCE students.

some students said, "It was kind of like church, you know you better behave." The secret word is citizenship.

Thanks to the combined efforts of the teachers of Julington Creek, Judge Davis, Judge Day and Prosecutor John Guy, the students of Julington Creek Elementary, participated in a life-changing experience. All of the teachers were both pleased and proud the Judges took time out of their busy court schedules to explain to the children how the system works and to answer all questions they asked. These young 5th graders were so anxious to learn and they asked very intelligent questions of both Judges. The students walked into the Duval County Courthouse not knowing what to expect and they departed more informed on making wise choices and actually seeing firsthand the consequences of making bad ones.



(l-r) Christina Omran, Kristin Bookstaver, Mazie Keener, Bethany Robinson, Ryan Wahl, Kevin Itner, Shea Green, Kasey Dutcher, Breanne Valis, and Jaclyn Cariveau participated in the question & answer session.

personal learning experience it was for both the children and us," praised one teacher. "This only goes to show how the educational system and the judicial system working hand in hand

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