



VIEWPOINT ~~ Public Defender vows leadership

By Matt Shirk/Public Defender

After serving the Fourth Judicial Circuit, including Clay, Duval and Nassau counties, as Public Defender for one full year, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you many of the accomplishments we achieved in 2009. It is my philosophy that the mission of the Public Defender is to provide superior public service. This is done by maintaining an efficient administration to protect taxpayers, delivering effective representation to protect clients and engaging in the community to protect and improve our quality of life.

We have built an efficient administration, keeping taxpayers in mind; we launched a Strategic Planning and Continuous Improvement (SPACI) program to promote growth within the organization, assigned a permanent J1 attorney for screening assistant public defender appointments and application fees, developed the Resource Recovery Program and initialized a partnership with other stakeholders, streamlined deposition notification and cancellation procedures to conserve costs, started a program of electronic subpoena notification to JSO to reduce burdens associated with private service, formed a new partnership with private industry for video conferencing system to reduce interoffice travel and attorney down time, began the shift to a paperless office through implementation of modernized wireless Internet apparatus and enhanced scanning systems, developed a public information office to ensure transparency in this governmental agency and launched an independent website for the office featuring a first of its kind case tracking system to reduce the burden on intake.

Also, we continue to improve and deliver effective representation for our clients as required by the Constitution. Notable steps we took in 2009: reorganized attorney divisions to better fit client representation in the courtroom and maximize staffing resources, tried a substantially larger number of cases than previous year, installed electronic legal library system to conserve costs associated with keeping law books updated, created an electronic record repository for capital legal cases, appointed a mitigation specialist to consult on homicide cases and provide mitigation training to necessary staff, expanded attorney/client video conferencing system through partnership with the city of Jacksonville and Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, enhanced Investigations Unit through use of additional technology and streamlined techniques which increased case analysis and availability to attorneys, elevated background experience base for investigative personnel and implemented a mentoring program for at-risk youth.

Education about the Public Defender's role in the criminal justice system and outreach to people who we can help indicates my commitment to prioritize this office's engagement in the community, which protects and improves our quality of life. In 2009 we were very active in this regard; we executed a successful drive for donations of school supplies for local homeless children, completed the Florida State Employees Charitable Campaign; raised \$3,500 for charities, incorporated Project SEARCH to offer employment opportunities for developmentally disabled clients of Hope Haven, provided quarterly meals to homeless, began aggressive outreach to local schools/ neighborhood associations for public education, initiated advocacy effort to Legislature to realign general revenue funding, enhanced pro bono program to include monthly legal service night at Sulzbacher Center and established a volunteer program for students with career aspirations in criminal justice.

I consider it a distinct privilege to represent Florida's Fourth Circuit as Public Defender. The success we have had over the course of my first year in office is notable and I do credit those committed public servants on my staff for their dedication and hard work. It is my goal to continue providing this brand of leadership; efficient administration, effective representation and engagement in our fine community

Matt Shirk was elected Public Defender

of the Fourth Judicial Circuit in November

2008 and took office in January 2009. Visit www.MattShirkPublicDefender.com for more information.