

## Annual Report of the Trial Lawyers Section of The Florida Bar

The Trial Lawyers Section (TLS) is pleased to report a busy and productive year. Last Spring/Summer, the Section published a new addition of the Discovery Handbook. The Handbook is published as a joint project of TLS and the Conferences of Circuit and County Court Judges. The Handbook is an invaluable tool for judges and practitioners. TLS furnishes a hard copy to every judge in Florida. The Handbook can be downloaded on the Section's website, [www.flatls.org](http://www.flatls.org).

The Third Annual Trial Lawyers Summit was held in January at the Tampa Waterside Marriott and featured both the Chester Bedell Mock Trial Competition and the Teachers Law School. The Mock Trial Competition paired two teams from 11 of Florida's 12 law schools against each other. Participants, based on a common fact pattern, presented a trial....everything from pretrial motions and openings to direct and cross examination and closing. Each round of the competition was presided over by a sitting judge and scored by five lawyer "jurors." For the second year in a row, the two teams from Stetson Law School faced off in the final round. Stetson won!

In its second year, the Teachers Law School provided two days of instruction to approximately 80 middle and high school civics teachers on the importance of the Judicial Branch of government. Speakers included the President of the Florida Bar, a United States District Judge, a Florida Supreme Court Justice, and many outstanding trial lawyers. The goal of the School was to impress upon the teachers that our free and democratic society would not be possible without the courts. In my 30 plus years of bar service, this is the single most significant program of which I have been a part. All 80 teachers rated the program as 5 star. Some were literally in tears, saying that not only did they learn from outstanding speakers, but they were treated like professionals. They all were energized and pledged to return to class with renewed enthusiasm in teaching civics, especially the importance of the judicial branch. The 80 participating teachers will impact the lives of thousands of students. If they can impress upon them the importance of the role of lawyers in our democratic society, our time is well spent.

As I write this report, the Florida Legislature is in session. TLS is active in this process and employs a lobbyist to advance our three main legislative objectives: Judicial Independence, Access to Courts and Adequate Judicial Funding. The Section's Executive Committee met with key legislators in February in Tallahassee as the session began to discuss these issues. The Section has to date submitted a White Paper on a proposed amendment to the Hearsay Rule which was well received. As a result of the paper, the bill was amended to narrow its application. TLS will address other Bills which affect Trial Lawyers as the need arises.

TLS continued this year its tradition of providing quality advanced educational opportunities for its members. In February, the Section held its annual Civil Trial Update and Review Course. In March, the Section presented an advanced Med Mal Seminar at the CAMLS center at the University of South Florida's downtown Tampa campus and an Advanced Evidence Seminar. All of these programs were well attended and received.

Of special note is the Section's Advanced Trial Advocacy Seminar. The program, held at the University of Florida's Levin Law Center, is packed with a week of hands-on experience in trial practice. Participants view, prepare and present every phase of a civil jury trial. They are critiqued by seasoned trial lawyers and judges from throughout Florida, and this year by barristers from both London and Barbados. We believe that this program is unparalleled in trial practice education and counts as a trial credit toward Board Certification in Civil Trial Law.

The Section again this year gifted funds to The Florida Bar Foundation in the amount of \$50,000, recognizing the shortfall occasioned by low interest rates on IOTA accounts. While not an annual gift, the Section recognizes the significant contributions of the Foundation in providing access to courts to low income residents. Hopefully, the TLS contribution will help bridge the gap while a more permanent funding solution is obtained. TLS also continued its support of the Bar's Leadership Academy with a contribution of \$10,000 for the Academy's second year.

TLS continues its joint sponsorship of the Trial Lawyers Section/Criminal Law Sections/Chester Bedell Foundation annual bar convention luncheon. This year's featured speaker is former Florida Supreme Court Justice and Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Joseph Hatchett.

As my year as chair draws to a close, I want to thank the TLS Executive's Council for its leadership and hard work. None of the Section's many, many and outstanding programs would be possible without the dedication of these members. I also want to recognize the Section's Program Administrator, Eugene Sherman, for his hard work in keeping us on track, always with a smile.

All the best,

Ted Eastmoore, Chair

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