



Judicial Spotlight: Gwinnett County Juvenile Court Judge Stephen Franzen

By: The Honorable Pamela South, Gwinnett County State Court

Judge Stephen ("Steve") Franzen moved to Avondale Estates in Dekalb County when he was 15 and graduated from Avondale High School. After high school, he attended Duke University and received a Bachelor's degree in history. He went on to attend the University of Georgia School of Law, graduated with a J.D. and began practicing law in 1979.

Judge Franzen spent two years in private practice, starting his legal career by working for Gerald Kunes in Tifton, Georgia, and then practicing with Earl Van Gerpen in Atlanta.

In 1981, then District Attorney Bryant Huff hired Judge Franzen as a prosecutor. (At that time, the District Attorney's Office had a total of 4 attorneys and there were 3 Superior Court judges!) Judge Franzen continued to serve as a prosecutor after Tom Lawler was elected to the position in 1984 and was promoted by Lawler to Chief Assistant District Attorney. Franzen acted as an administrator and trial attorney during his tenure there. During Lawler's service term, the District Attorney's Office moved into GJAC located at 75 Langley Drive, Lawrenceville. When asked about a memorable case, Franzen recalled *State v. Moon*, a case in which a defendant was accused of threatening two Gwinnett County judges. (Moon was

convicted after a jury trial although the conviction was later overturned.)

In July, 1991, Judge Franzen was appointed to the bench in Gwinnett County Juvenile Court, where he hears delinquency, deprivation, and custody cases. Judge Franzen states that he loves serving as a juvenile court judge and being of service to the community. He notes, however, that resources continue to dwindle for children in the juvenile justice system. Over the last twenty years, Judge Franzen has observed a change in the diversity in the community and its concomitant cultural challenges.

Judge Franzen has observed that many families who have moved in to Gwinnett are not rooted in the community here and face a lack of resources, making the children of those families more at risk.

Judge Franzen has been married for almost 28 years to Terry Franzen, a lawyer and founding partner at the firm of Franzen and Salzano, a Norcross law firm that specializes in representing lending institutions.

The Franzens live in Duluth and have three children: Sarah, who is now a program director with Teach for America in the Mississippi Delta; Chip, a graduate of Duke University who is now working for a nonprofit; and Scott, who is a sophomore at the University of Georgia.



Judge Franzen is active in the community. He is a member of the Duluth Rotary Club. He has volunteered for the Gwinnett public schools by assisting with remedial reading programs in the Duluth cluster.

He is also active in his church, Christ Church Episcopal in Norcross, where he has served on the vestry and as a youth leader. Judge Franzen and his wife Terry have been active in the church's mission programs over the last few years and have helped to build homes for families in Juarez, Mexico. Recently, both have been working with an Episcopal church in Haiti, St. Joseph of Arimethea located in Jasmin, Haiti, where they traveled last year to assist with a medical mission. Jasmin, located near the epicenter of the recent earthquake, has suffered tremendous damage. (See photo of Judge Franzen's last trip to Haiti in 2009.) Franzen recalls staying at the Hotel Montana in the fall of 2009 during his first trip to Haiti and is shocked to know now that the hotel was flattened in the earthquake.

When asked about his bucket list, Judge Franzen says that he would love to raft the Colorado River with his two sons one day!

