

Judge Patricia H. Muise
The Environmental Judge of Recorder's Court
By: Margaret Gettle Washburn, ed.

In keeping with our new format of the environmentally friendly electronic newsletter, our focus on maintaining safety in our community, keeping recycle bins at our curbs and rainwater barrels during the drought, Judge Patricia Muise is in the spotlight this month. Judge Muise graduated Brown University, Providence, RI, and then attended the Georgia State University School of Law. She graduated in 1992. One of her more notable classmates is State Court Judge Randy Rich.

Patti has been married to Steven A. Muise for 26 years. Steven is with AT&T in internet yellow pages. Patti has two children, as does Steven, and between them, they share 6 grandchildren. Their grown children now reside in Pa., RI, Tampa and Chamblee.

Judge Muise has lived in Gwinnett County since 1987 and one of the reasons that she moved here was to enjoy the excellent school system and the beautiful landscapes of Gwinnett. However, she began to notice that the development in her area was progressing rapidly and getting out of hand. She decided to run for and was elected to the Gwinnett County Commission in 1995. She believed that District 2, then consisting of Norcross, part of Duluth and Berkeley Lake, as well as the Jimmy Carter corridor needed representation and she stepped up to the plate. Her goal was solutions to the problems and to make some sense out of the development trends that were taking place in her district. She served as a Commissioner for 7 years.

Judge Muise worked with her fellow commissioners to pass the Property Maintenance Ordinance. This was to set standards for landscaping, cleanliness, appearance and to protect property values. The Broken Windows Project originated from this ordinance.

It was a logical progression for Judge Muise to continue her work in the environmental effort for Gwinnett by applying the Gwinnett Recorder's Court. She was appointed in 2001 and took the bench as Judge in January, 2002. Patti presides over the environmental issues cases, local ordinances and barking dog cases. Judge Muise has the goal of solutions to environmental cases, as opposed to punishment in violation of ordinance cases. She prefers to be part of the solution and not a continuance of the problem. She is working on achieving flexibility in creating solutions for compliance. To that end, she is working on the establishment of an ongoing relationship with the County Commission to create better solutions to violations. The Board writes the ordinances and the Court imposes the penalties for violation of the ordinances, however, the Judge's goal is to work out better enforcements for the citizens in Gwinnett. Her other goal is to hear the cases before her in a prompt and fair fashion. She maintains a calmness in her courtroom, even when there are many neighbors present, disputing a land use or a barking dog.

Prosecutors, including Allison Cauthen, note that Judge Muise presides over very tough cases, because that division deals with "real life problems with

real life neighbors.” Some of the neighbors show up with “barking dog logs.” And, some photos of, well, you can guess the content of the photos.

Being acutely aware that she is sending these neighbors home to the same yards and neighborhoods, Judge Muise has made use of the Gwinnett County Magistrate Court, with the help of Judge Hutchinson. There are mediators on duty, usually on Thursday evenings, and Judge Muise sends the neighbors to mediation, particularly on the barking dog cases. She says this has a great success rate and that the Magistrate Court has been a successful resource.

Patti enjoys gardening, which keeps her outside in the environment she works to protect, and sewing. Her “bucket list” includes visiting Italy because it is a beautiful place and Ireland to visit the land of her ancestors. You may contact Judge Muise: patricia.muise@gwinnettcounty.com. She is also very proud of her staff: Judicial Executive Assistant Kim Everett: kim.everett@gwinnettcounty.com, (770)619-6166 and Calendar Coordinator Jennifer Brewer: jennifer.brewer@gwinnettcounty.com; (770)619-6167. Her staff, by the way, is just as proud of her as she is of them. As Kim put it: “she is always a fair and honest boss. Proud would be an understatement on my part.”