

Judge Steve Franzén, Retiring from the Juvenile Court of Gwinnett County But, On the Road Again!

By [Margaret Gettle Washburn](#), Senior Contributing Editor

Judge Stephen Franzén, Gwinnett County Juvenile Court, is a graduate of Duke University, B.A. and received his J.D. at the University of Georgia in 1979. After two years in private practice, he joined the Office of the District Attorney in Gwinnett and served as Chief Assistant Attorney from



1985-1991. Judge Franzén was appointed as Judge of the Juvenile Court of Gwinnett County in 1991 and continues to serve. He served as President of the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges; and served on the Georgia Supreme Court Child Placement Project Advisory /Implementation Committee, the Georgia Commission on Child Support. He was named a Senior Fellow with the Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic at Emory University in 2008; and served as the CJCJ representative on the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council since 2009.

Judge Franzén was the first lawyer or judge from the Gwinnett Judicial Circuit to be named as a member of the Charles Longstreet Weltner Family Inn of Court, American Inns of Court, in 2003. The mission of the American Inns of Court Foundation is to lead the movement to elevate the American practice of law by promoting the ideals of excellence and professionalism. This particular Inn of Court is dedicated to the improvement of family law practice, share ideas and build camaraderie among the lawyers and Judges. Steve is a respected Judge of this Inn of Court and served as program chair and committee chair, until his retirement in May from the Inn. President Gwenn Dorb Holland recognized Steve for his achievements with a crystal trophy.



Now, many of you know that Judge Steve Franzén is an Actor, a musician and vocal artist as are his fellow Juvenile Court Judges, Rob Rodatus and Rob Waller. In fact, Judge Franzén first got Rob Waller involved with a theatrical group at his church, the Christ Church Episcopal in Norcross, in 2012. In the 2012 performance, Rob Waller, State Court Judge Pam South and Judge Clarence Seeliger, Sup. Ct. Judge, DeKalb County, played the part of a 3 judge panel. Steve played a lawyer arguing a case concerning a ban on "big gulp" fountain drinks. Steve actually wrote the play, and, according to Rob Waller, it was "quite clever and well received". They have gone on to star in plays together, and getting Judge South to join in. Last summer, Steve played the part of the cowboy philosopher and humorist Will Rogers, one of the most beloved entertainers of the early 20th century in the play "**Summertime**," at the Christ Church. Rob Waller played the part of "Bugsy," the bartender, who ran a Speakeasy. They are at it again in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial By Jury* at 7:00 PM on September 9 and 10, 2016 at Christ Church Episcopal. This is a comic opera, tells the story of a very unusual jury trial and features Judge Franzén and Judge Waller in very unusual roles.

Terry Franzén is also retiring on September 30, and she will continue doing pro bono work and other volunteer activities. She said that Steve has been very dedicated and would never take time off. It's now time to travel and see the world. They have 3 great children: Sarah, a graduate student at Harvard, and recently married to Andrew Stevens, a graduate student at Alabama; Chip, a graduate student at the University of New Haven at the San Francisco campus, and Scott, an account executive at SAP, living in Brookhaven. They plan to continue their travels to and work in Haiti with the school they support through church and with medical, dental, and eye clinics with the non-profit organization that Terry established (with others) last year. www.haiticompanions.org.



Judge Franzén, as Senior Judge, will work throughout the state as he is asked, as well as improve his golf game and cycling, but does not plan to join the PGA or train for the Tour de France. They plan to travel to Maine, Kiawah, the Rose Parade and Rose Bowl, Israel and Jordan, Kenya and Tanzania – and that's only through August 2017! They are moving to Bent Tree, Jasper, GA, where they will commune with nature. But look for them to be in Atlanta frequently for theater, and other fun events.

This was a fun article to put together. I have truly enjoyed my friendship with Steve Franzén. I have tried many cases in his courtroom and I am always impressed not only with his professionalism but with his heart, and his desire to make a difference in the life of a child or a family. We have endured many an autobahn ride on I-285 when traveling to the Inn of Court meetings and presentations over the past years. Sharing a ride for an hour each way gave us a chance to catch up on the local gossip, recent case law, and keep up to date on each other's families and health. He was our leader at the Charles Weltner Inn of Court, and I will miss his company this year.

Please read and enjoy the tributes from his friends and colleagues:

“I once reflected that my 35-year friendship with Steve was like Ringo Starr's with the other Beatles. He said wistfully, “They were the brothers I never had”. Steve replied that I was like the one he did. Seriously, I'm going to be lost without the next door neighbor, compatriot and sounding board I've had in Juvenile Court for 25 years.” Robert V. Rodatus, Presiding Judge, Gwinnett Circuit Juvenile Court.

“Steve is a true friend and a wonderful colleague. I will miss having him down the hall. Cindy and I wish him and Terry all the best! I will see him on the boards!” Robert Waller, Judge, Gwinnett Circuit Juvenile Court.

“Steve is a true and amazing world citizen. His entire family regularly spends time helping others areas of need across the globe. I doubt that his retirement future will be confined to one continent. Safe travels, my friend.” Superior Court Judge Warren Davis

“The Gwinnett County Bar Association is grateful to Judge Franzén for his many years of honorable service to the people of Gwinnett County and the children whose cases were decided in his courtroom. We wish Judge Franzén the very best in his retirement.” Chuck Efstoration, President, GCBA, Attorney at Law.

“Judge Franzén tried cases in my court as an A.D.A. He was an excellent prosecutor. I was involved in his selection as Juvenile Judge in 1991 at same time as Judge Rodatus. Judge Franzén is a very conscientious judge who has withstood the test of time! He always had the confidence of all the Superior Court Judges while he was working in juvenile court.” Sr. Superior Court Judge Dawson Jackson

“I researched the name Franzén. It is a Scandinavian surname that means one with a natural interest in the welfare of his fellow man, and a desire to help and serve others in a humanitarian way. And that truly describes our beloved Judge Steve Franzén. I also researched the name Steve. It is derived from a Greek name that means one who likes everyone to stand up when he comes into a room and to be hailed by cries of Your Honor. And that too truly describes Judge Franzén. Well, Steve, when you come into a room now, it will be with quite a bit less pomp and circumstance. However, I am sure you will find a way to continue to help and serve others. You have lived your life with honor, except that time Judge Huff made you come back in the crowded court room and apologize for slamming the door and the time you got ejected from our basketball game for calling the referee a ---, well this is a G rated newsletter. All the old guys from the DA alumni club wish you the very best.” TERRY L. LLOYD, P. C., ATTORNEY AT LAW

“I have known Steve for 30 years, not only as a prosecutor and Judge, but as a friend and colleague. As a prosecutor he was fair, but concerned and focused on the victim. As a Judge he was dedicated on the wellbeing of the children that were before him, never afraid to make an unpopular decision if he felt it was the right thing to do. While on the bench he demonstrated a true judicial temperament, knowledge and concern, that was occasionally dispersed with a touch of his dry wit. Out of the courtroom he was Steve – the easy going, fun loving amateur actor and hack golfer. He always enjoyed talking about his family and was happy and, rightfully, proud of their accomplishments. Hopefully, he will now have more time to enjoy them, travel, attend to his acting and practice his golf. Regardless of who is appointed (and has to put up with the Rob twins) I will miss him, both in, and out, of the courtroom.” Lee Washburn, III, Attorney at Law

“I have been practicing before Judge Franzén for 18 years. I recognized early on the intellect, passion and heart he brought to his job. I greatly respected him then as I do now. I will miss his wry humor and the clever witticisms peppered with his perpetual looks of disgust, amazement and my personal favorite, the incredulous "you gotta be kidding me" face. He did not suffer fools (gladly or otherwise) and you could always tell when time was running out on his patience. Pity the fool who missed the stop-whatever-the-h---you're-saying-or-doing-NOW warning. He would lean back, look up at the ceiling and pinch the top of his nose between his eyes. That was the signal that we were approaching DEFCON 1 and you had better wrap it up *instantly*.

Ignore it at your peril as you would be in for one of his memorable and loquacious but oh so eloquent and exasperated rants, many of which I regret we did not write down and which will live on only in our memories and in the annals of Juvenile Court transcripts. At the root of it all was his call to arms - his desire to inspire, commend, exhort, and, sometimes, admonish people, including counsel, to do the right thing and seek the high road. He touched the lives of thousands, including mine. It has been my joy and privilege to appear in his court. I wish him happiness, peace and more books than he can possibly read.” Debra Hale, Attorney at Law, Guardian ad Litem.

“Sometime in 1988 or ‘89, it was, to my knowledge, the first time Steve made an appearance in Juvenile Court. The court did not have a prosecutor and at arraignment I would read the complaint into the record and the Judge would ask the necessary questions and the cases moved on through the court process. We rarely had a Defense Attorney show up for an arraignment. One morning we did and I called up to the District Attorney’s Office to try and get a prosecutor for that case. I talked Steve, Chief ADA at the time, into coming to Juvenile Court to present the case. So, I’m waiting outside the courtroom and he arrived. We went into a conference room and I handed him the file. He opens it up, reads a little, and then gives me this look (1.) Those that know Steve well know this look (2.) I think my wife learned this look from Steve. What I handed him was a Bestiality case. He moved around in his seat a little bit, this move is now known as the Franzén Shuffle, and in a very colorful way asked “Are you kidding me?!” Now, I smile every time I think back on this. He went on to professionally handle the case through closure as I knew he would. I’ve, on occasion, reminded him of his first case in Juvenile Court and I’d like to think that this was when Judge Franzén first realized that the youth of Gwinnett were in need of his guidance and counseling. It has been a joy to know and work with Judge Stephen E. Franzén for the past 30 or so years, and I wish him and his family the best.” Jesse Lawler, Clerk, Juvenile Court of Gwinnett County.

“I have enjoyed working for Judge. He is the kindest, most generous and tenderhearted person and has a very good sense of humor- a quick wit. The one thing I will not miss is trying to read his handwriting!! Thank goodness for typewriters and computers over the years. He has a photographic memory with issues of the law and history, but letting me know about appointments or meetings to remind him of – that’s a different story. Oh yes, not telling me after a day of hearings are set – that he is going to be out of office on this date – “I didn’t tell you?” Kathy Wilkinson – Superior Court, then Juvenile Court in 1991; Calendar Coordinator, Judicial Asst. 1994 to the present. Joined in her comments by Cathy Buchheit-Court Reporter, 1991-present.

“My journey with Judge Franzén began 9 years ago. The years have flown by and they were full of laughter, tears and sober conversations “just between us girls”! I have the utmost respect and admiration for Judge Franzén. In all honesty, he is the best boss I have ever worked for, including my own Father! I have read what my office mates (actually my partners in crime!) wrote and all I can say is “DITTO”! I will miss him very much. I wish Terry and Judge a long and happy retirement filled with many adventures!” Kim Patton, Calendar Coordinator, Gwinnett County Juvenile Court.

Other important people in the Judge’s career: Lynn Pass – Secretary for Judge Handsel Morgan, January 1986-July 1, 1991; Secretary to Judge Franzén, July 1991-1994. Calendar Coordinators: Deedra Nelson 1993-1995; Tina Mulkey 1995-1997; Carol Dossman 1997-2010.