



PAUL C. PERKINS

BAR ASSOCIATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 8, 2021

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PAUL C. PERKINS BAR ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES INAUGURAL HALL OF FAME AND SCHOLARSHIP GALA

ORLANDO, FL – The Paul C. Perkins Bar Association (PCPBA) is pleased to announce its Inaugural Hall of Fame and Scholarship Gala. The event, hosted in celebration of the organization’s 40th anniversary, will be held on Saturday, November 13, 2021, at the Rosen Shingle Creek Hotel. A cocktail reception will begin at 6:00 PM, and the dinner program will follow at 7:00 PM. The evening will end with live entertainment and dancing. Registration for the event is available at pcpbagala2021.rsvpify.com.

During the Gala, PCPBA will honor the legacies of Orlando's first African American lawyers, Paul C. Perkins, Sr. and James C. Collier, along with 12 other legal professionals who paved the way towards diversity in the Central Florida legal community. Each of the inaugural Hall of Fame inductees began their legal careers more than 40 years ago. Additionally, scholarships will be awarded to deserving students attending Florida A&M University College of Law and Barry University Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law. Attorney, author, and past president of PCPBA Gregorio A. Francis, Esq. (Osborne & Francis, PLLC) will serve as the event’s keynote speaker.

The theme of the Gala is “Honoring the Past, Celebrating the Present, Embracing the Future.” President Benjamin Garcia said, “It is an honor to serve as president of this prestigious organization as it celebrates 40 years of service to the Central Florida community. The Board of Directors, Gala Committee, and I are honored to recognize the contributions of our Hall of Fame inductees and to reward the academic achievements of our future social engineers.”

For more information on the Hall of Fame & Scholarship Gala or sponsorship opportunities, please contact Benjamin C. Garcia, Esq. at paulcperkinsbar@gmail.com.

Inaugural Paul C. Perkins Bar Association Hall of Fame Inductees

Ralph Armstead is a founding member and past president of the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association. He is a native of Orlando, FL, and received his law degree from Florida State University College of Law in 1972. He has served the Central Florida legal community for nearly 50 years and is one of the area’s longest practicing African American lawyers.



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Jeanelle G. Bronson is a native of Winter Park, FL. She graduated with high honors from the University of Florida College of Law in 1978. Following a clerkship with U.S. District Court Judge John A. Reed, she secured a position with the law firm Swann & Haddock P.A. At that firm, she became the first African American woman in Orange County to become a partner in a majority firm. She later became a named partner at the law firm Grower, Ketcham, Rutherford, Bronson, Eide & Telan, P.A.

Theotis Bronson is a native of Orlando, FL. He graduated from the University of Florida College of Law in 1978. Governor Bob Graham appointed him to the Orange County Court bench in 1986. He was subsequently appointed to the Circuit Court by Governor Lawton Chiles in 1993. He retired from active service in 2013.

James C. Collier (1920-2005) graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1949. Following admission to The Florida Bar later that year, he became the first African American to practice law in Central Florida. He served the community for nearly five decades as an advocate for civil rights and equality.

Clarence W. Counts, Jr. served two terms (2008-2010) as president of the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association. He graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1976. He served in the Judge Advocate General's Corps United States Navy, from 1976 to 1983, and he continued to serve in the United States Naval Reserve until his retirement in 2000 with the rank of Captain. Additionally, he served as an Assistant Federal Public Defender for the Middle District of Florida, from 1990 until his retirement in 2010.

Evelyn D. Golden is a past president of the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association. She received her law degree from University of Florida College of Law in 1976. In 1990, she was elected to the Orange County Court, becoming the first African American woman to serve as a judge in the Ninth Judicial Circuit. Following her tenure on the bench, she served as an Attorney Advisor and Senior Trial Attorney with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Jerrie G. Magruder is a past president of the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association. She graduated from the University of Mississippi School of Law at the age of 20, becoming the youngest documented graduate of the law school. Her more than 40-year legal career has been dedicated to public service, including positions with the Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association and Greater Orlando Area Legal Services. She presently serves as Director of the Mississippi Field Office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Joseph Morrell, Sr. (1951-2020) was a founding member and one of the first presidents of the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association. He was a native of Winter Park, FL, and received his law degree from University of Florida in 1977. He was a distinguished member of the Central Florida legal community. He practiced in the areas of Municipal Law, Criminal Law, Family Law,



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Probate, and Appellate Law. Additionally, he served as General Counsel for the Town of Eatonville, FL, for nearly 40 years.

Paul C. Perkins, Sr. (1918-1985) served the community of Central Florida as an advocate for civil rights and justice. He graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1949 and was admitted to The Florida Bar in 1950. When he moved to Orlando in 1951, he became the second African American attorney to serve the area. Early in his career, he served as co-counsel with Thurgood Marshall and Jack Greenberg of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in their defense of the “Groveland Four.” In 1965, he was appointed to serve as the first African American City Prosecutor by Orlando Mayor Robert S. Carr.

Belvin Perry, Jr. is a native of Orlando, FL. He graduated from Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law in 1977. In December of that year, State Attorney Robert Eagan offered him a position at the Ninth Judicial Circuit State Attorney’s Office. He was later elevated to the positions of Felony Division Chief, Chief of Criminal Intake, and Chief Assistant State Attorney. In 1989, he was elected to the Ninth Circuit Court bench, becoming the first African American to serve without first being appointed. Prior to his retirement in 2014, he served as Chief Judge of the Ninth Circuit for nine terms (1995-1999, 2001-2014).

James E.C. Perry received his law degree from Columbia Law School in 1972. During his years in private practice, his firm served as general counsel for the Florida Chapter Branches of the NAACP. In March 2000, Governor Jeb Bush appointed him to the Circuit Court bench of the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit. He became the first African American to serve in that capacity and was later elected to serve as chief judge. In March 2009, Governor Charlie Crist appointed him to the Florida Supreme Court, where he served until his retirement in 2016.

James M. Sowell, Jr. (1946-2020) was a native of Jasper, FL. He received his law degree from the University of Florida in 1974 and was among the first 20 African American graduates of the law school. He began his legal career at the Ninth Circuit Public Defender’s Office, where he was the first African American to serve as an assistant public defender in the office.

Emerson R. Thompson, Jr. graduated from Florida State University College of Law in 1973. He was hired as an assistant state attorney with the Ninth Judicial Circuit, becoming the first African American to serve in that position. In 1976, he was appointed by Governor Reubin Askew to the Orange County Court bench, becoming the first African American to serve as a judge in the Ninth Circuit. He was subsequently appointed to the Circuit Court by Governor Bob Graham in 1980 and later served as the first African American Chief Judge of the Ninth Circuit. In 1993, he was appointed by Governor Lawton Chiles to serve as the first African American jurist on the Fifth District Court of Appeals.



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Norris D. Woolfork, III (1934-2005) received his law degree from Howard University School of Law. In 1961, he became legal counsel for the Orange County Chapter of the NAACP and successfully led the effort to desegregate Orange County public schools. He also successfully sued Orange Memorial Hospital for equal medical treatment and services for African American patients.

About the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association

The Paul C. Perkins Bar Association was founded in 1981. It is a professional organization devoted to actively promoting the advancement of African Americans in the legal profession and diversity within leadership roles in the Central Florida community. PCPBA also strives to educate the Central Florida African American community about the legal system and promote reform and improvements in the law to aid in the administration of justice.