

Celebrating 25 Years of Service to the Bar, the Courts, and Florida's Education Community

After 25 years of classroom visits, curriculum development, teacher training, mock trials, moot court competitions, evaluating public policy and the myriad of tasks required to run the most respected law and civic education program in the country, FLREA founding director Annette Boyd Pitts says it has been worth every minute. "To know that your life's work has been dedicated to improving our justice system and preparing our next generation for self-government, I cannot imagine a higher calling or more important work for the future of our country and our legal system."

Annette Boyd Pitts, Founding Executive Director
The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc.

The past twenty five years have brought many successes and challenges to Florida's nationally recognized law related and civic education program. Annette Boyd Pitts, founding Executive Director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. credits partnerships with Florida's legal and judicial communities as the backbone of these successes.



Justice Barbara Pariente and Charlene Ochogo from Lincoln High School in Tallahassee during Florida High School Moot Court Finals in 2009.

Florida students have won multiple national championships in constitutional studies. Tens of thousands of students have interacted with government officials using effective lessons and activities developed by the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. Mock trial and moot court competitions

for high school students have encouraged critical thinking and legal reasoning skills as a diverse array of students experience the administration of justice in positive, interactive simulations. Middle school students have passed important legislation and contributed to changes in their local communities through civic and political participation projects. Law and democracy camps have encouraged students from the United States as well as new and emerging democracies to



Students from Our Lady of Lourdes Academy accepting their first place trophy at the We The People: The Citizen and the Constitution State Finals Competition.

experience self government and the rule of law through an innovative youth leadership experience. Model professional development institutes for teachers have been successfully

implemented on the courts and the Constitution utilizing Florida's Supreme Court justices as faculty and creating a newfound trust and confidence in the courts. Free resources on the Constitution, public policy and the rule of law have supplemented thousands of classrooms state-wide. Scholarships and leadership opportunities for students have helped recruit our next generation of public servants. Graduates of FLREA programs have become



Students from Ruediger Elementary in Tallahassee participate with Rep. Alan Williams in constitutional hearing sponsored by FLREA.

lawyers, legislators, and involved, responsible citizens.

From lessons on judicial review and evaluating the constitutionality of proposed legislation to helping elementary students understand why we need rules and laws, you will generally find an enthusiastic representative of the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. working in classrooms or preparing teachers throughout the state to improve understanding of the rule of law, the US Constitution, and the American legal system at all grade levels. A small staffed non profit with funding from the Florida Bar Foundation, the Center for Civic Education, the Hearst Foundation, and a

host of private foundations and government entities, the Association is dedicated to providing quality law related and civic education experiences and programs. The primary mission of the organization has always been to advance law related and civic education opportunities for Florida students and to prepare them for their roles in self-government. In 1983, The Florida Bar hired Annette Boyd Pitts to work with a committee of attorneys, judges, teachers and law enforcement officers to create a consortium to advance law related education. Within one year Pitts had acquired funding from the US Department of Education and Florida was on its way to developing one of the most well respected and recognized law related education programs in the country. "It was almost too fast," says founding Executive Director Annette Boyd Pitts. "It still seems like yesterday when we started this organization."

Twenty five years later, Pitts has seen highs and lows, successes and challenges. On a very high note, in 2006, FLREA worked with the League of Women Voters, The Florida Bar and other entities to acquire a legislative mandate for teaching civics in middle school. Only six per cent of Florida school districts required civics in middle school prior to this legislation. The new requirement provides for public schools to teach at least one semester of civic education and the study of state and federal government. "Alan Bookman, then President of The Florida Bar, was instrumental in bringing attention to the status of civic education in our system of public education", Pitts stated. The media provided a voice to the effort to strengthen the status of civic education in our public schools. Ultimately sixteen

simple words added to a bill more than 100 pages in length have strengthened opportunities for Florida students to learn about and experience our system of government and the role of the citizen within that system.

FLREA worked with the Florida Department of Education to develop new state standards for civics and government recently as well. These new standards will require attention to this subject area in every grade level with special attention given to create a yearlong course in civics in seventh grade in addition to the high school semester government course. The standards provide emphasis on the rule of law, the American legal system, and the US Constitution; the structure and function of government and its corresponding institutions; the foundations of government, law and the American political system; civic and political participation; and world affairs.

Florida offers more law related courses in its high schools than any other state. FLREA has developed many of these courses for the Department of Education. Courses in law studies, legal systems and concepts, court procedures, international law, constitutional law and many, many others are offered as electives throughout Florida. Florida also has a wide array of law magnets, criminal justice academies, and other model schools with a specific curriculum focus in the law. Many of these schools have courtrooms and forensic labs on campus.

Pitts continues to work closely with the Supreme Court of Florida to host an annual teacher institute at the Court. All justices participate in the program each

year as teachers follow a case through the Florida courts to learn about how to teach effectively about the courts and the Constitution. This model program has contributed significantly to improving trust and confidence in the courts as well as knowledge of the appellate process. Last year, one teacher remarked, “When I received the case materials, I had my mind made up about the defendant. I did not care about his rights or the process he should go through in the courts. Then I came to the training and my mind opened and I realized the importance of the rights we have for the accused under our Constitution. I realized that the



*Florida Supreme Court Teachers' Institute
teachers with Justice R. Fred Lewis.*

courts are the guardians of our rights. They may not be the most popular branch because of the types of decisions they must make but to me, they are the most important.” Another institute participant wrote, “My trust and confidence in the courts has improved dramatically after participating in the institute. It brings forth a human side to justice and shows how decision-making is based on the law.” The Court hosts the annual teacher institute taught by the justices. FLREA works to implement the institute and provide the educational components including lessons, active learning methodology and classroom resource materials. Additionally, the Court works with FLREA to host a unique brief writing and oral argument

competition bringing students face to face with justices in a moot court experience. "The Court's commitment to civic and law related education is unprecedented," remarked Annette Boyd



FLREA Executive Director, Annette Boyd Pitts, working with Chief Justice Peggy Quince at the Florida Supreme Court Teachers' Institute.

Pitts, Executive Director. "These and other experiences will impact student knowledge of and access to our justice system and improve public trust and confidence in our institutions of democracy," Pitts concluded.

Pitts has remained a strong advocate and has stayed close to the classroom throughout the years. "Somewhere along the way, this became much more than a job. It is my life's work, my passion", Pitts continued. Pitts recalls after having her first child, things never slowed down. "My daughter had traveled on every available mode of transportation by the time she was five. I have photos of Chief Justice Warren Burger of the US Supreme Court holding my baby on his shoulder at a reception following the bicentennial of the Constitution." Pitts added. Along the way there have been many friends and many colleagues who have helped smooth the paths to success. From Florida Bar presidents to Chief Justices of the Supreme Court to legislators and members of Congress, so many people have contributed to helping

educate Florida's youth in this vital area of instruction.

This past year, FLREA hosted US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (retired) in Tallahassee. She visited schools, addressed the Florida legislature, and spoke at a law school function. "The Florida Bar should stand tall and proud of its work in the area of civics and law related education," announced Justice Sandra Day O'Connor during her recent visit to Tallahassee. "This is just an outstanding program that is having a tremendous impact on our young people and our courts." The retired associate justice of the United States Supreme Court attended a reception hosted by The Florida Bar following a whirlwind trip through Tallahassee. Holding the hand of Annette Boyd Pitts, Executive Director of the Florida Law Related



Retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor holding hands with FLREA Executive Director, Annette Boyd Pitts.

Education Association, Inc., Justice O'Connor applauded the efforts of The Florida Bar, the Florida Bar Foundation, and the Supreme Court of Florida for its outstanding support of the model efforts of FLREA.

Running a nonprofit is a constant challenge to identify funding and other human resources to implement the multitude of programs needed for the state. Without the support of the Florida

Bar Foundation and The Florida Bar as well as attorneys and judges throughout the state, Pitts knows the organization would never have survived. Trying to run programs, train teachers, write grants, visit classrooms, develop materials, run academic competitions, and the myriad of tasks this nonprofit faced daily, made it difficult to keep things juggled. Attorney Wayne Hogan of Jacksonville provided critical support one year to help FLREA with travel and related costs for training thousands of attorney volunteers. "This support came at a critical time," Pitts remarked. "He was our guardian angel."

Twenty five years later, Pitts recognizes "it's been worth it all". Running a nonprofit has its ups and downs. The ups are always the work and the good you do for the children. The downs are trying to find funds from year to year to do all the work that needs to be done. "We have grown in so many ways", states Pitts. "This becomes such an important part of your life. You can't stop trying to make things better. It gives life more purpose and meaning to know you have a part in securing the future of this democracy and our institutions of democracy," Pitts added.



Student excited to learn about the Constitution during Constitution Day at the Florida Supreme Court.

Along the way, the programs have grown larger than the staff at times.

Students who once participated in FLREA programs have grown into adults who now work for the organization, serve as volunteers, or participate in other ways. "When I present at Bar conferences, now there are attorneys who stand up and tell me how they became lawyers because they participated in one or more of our programs". Other times we have met legislators who tell us of similar experiences." Rep. Anitere Flores



Representative Anitere Flores with students.

participated in the We the People...the Citizen and the Constitution program administered by FLREA when she was a senior in high school. Her class won the state championship and went on to win the national finals in Washington, DC. Flores says the program had a profound impact on her life and her decision to enter state politics. Flores serves in the Florida House of Representatives.

Ben Kanoski, a high school mock trial student spent all four years of his high school life on the Pinellas Park Criminal Justice Academy Mock Trial Team. FLREA sponsors the high school program with funding from the Florida Bar Foundation. When Kanoski graduated from high school, he moved to Tallahassee to attend FSU. He stopped by the offices of FLREA where he spent the next four years as a part time work study student. After graduating from FSU, Mr. Kanoski entered law school.

Today he has returned to where it all began and is back at his high school this time coaching their high school mock trial team.

FLREA has been recognized throughout the world for its respected programs and initiatives. Pitts has received the National Improvements in Justice Award, the American Bar Association Isidore Starr Award, the Florida Bar President's Award, the Florida Council for the Social Studies Outstanding Citizen Award and a host of others. Pitts has served as guest editor of the Florida Bar Journal to address special issues relating to law and civic education. She has presented in over thirty countries to share Florida's law related and civic education models. With funding from the Education for Democracy Act, FLREA is partnered with countries in Eastern and Central Europe as well as Latin America to provide reciprocal learning experiences in law related and civic education.

FLREA has a strong and positive relationship with the courts. Based on numerous studies documenting that as public knowledge of the courts increases, so too does public support for this democratic institution, FLREA has worked tirelessly to educate students about the courts and the Constitution. Pitts visits classrooms regularly with Florida's Supreme Court justices and government officials to teach interactive law related lessons. All seven of Florida's Supreme Court justices also participate in the annual Supreme Court Teachers' Institute, a professional development workshop for teachers held annually at the Court. Teachers are given a real case and prepare to walk in the

shoes of the justices in deciding the case. They receive a balance of clinical and academic instruction. Ultimately they observe the actual case being argued in the Florida Supreme Court.

The Court hosts thousands of student visitors annually to learn more about the appellate process. In past years, FLREA has assisted in designing mock oral arguments and training the volunteers who interact with the visiting students. Additionally Florida's Supreme Court justices hear oral arguments annually from high school students that enter the appellate brief writing and moot court program.

Pitts also assisted Justice R. Fred Lewis in designing the initial activities for his Justice Teaching program. Pitts and Justice Lewis trained over 3500 volunteer lawyers and judges who participate in this partnership program. Research supports the use of lawyers and judges in the classroom as a means of changing attitudes about the justice system. However it is important to use effective methods and materials. Just going in and telling war stories can do more harm than good.

Dana Bivins Brown, chair of The Florida Bar's Law Related Education Committee, supports the efforts of FLREA. "It is our mission this year to create greater support and visibility of the incredible work of this one of a kind organization," Brown announced. The committee of lawyers assists the Association in implementing its various annual objectives, including formulating the cases for mock trial and moot court competitions. Hundreds of volunteers are needed annually to support these programs.



Tallahassee attorney Jim Floyd at Ruediger Elementary School in Tallahassee as part of Justice Fred Lewis' Justice Teaching Program.

A brand new initiative this year is putting FLREA at the top of the charts for technology-based law related and civic education programs. An article highlighting the new learning management platform, www.thepeopleunite.com, developed by FLREA will be published in the April issue of Social Education. The site provides an online learning platform to explore law, civics, and government through a variety of sources. Additionally the new platform allows for classroom to classroom partnerships throughout Florida, the United States and the world. Government officials will be involved in the culminating activity which involves a virtual showcase. "That is one of the most exciting things about this organization," Pitts stated. "There are so many opportunities to explore new ideas and programs that will benefit our students and make learning more interesting."

FLREA is also working with government officials and legislative staff to support its Project Citizen initiative to engage students directly in the legislative process. Staff of the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate have signed up to work

with classes of students participating in this program. Board members play a critical role in the implementation and evaluation of programs as well as policymaking for the organizations. "Attorneys need to value and promote this organization," said Noel Lawrence of Jacksonville. "This is a product of the Bar and a valuable asset to this state."

Many attorneys have even entered the education profession full-time serving as faculty and coordinators for Florida's vast array of high school law programs. Doug Oswald of Ocala and Cindy Schmidt of Orlando are but two of Florida's respected attorneys who have decided to enter the teaching profession", stated Annette Boyd Pitts. "Their love of the law is transferred to their students on a daily basis."

When asked why she has stayed committed so long to this initiative, Pitts replied "I guess it's in my blood". Her mother's maiden name was Justice.

For additional information on law related and civic education efforts and how to become involved, contact Annette Boyd Pitts, Executive Director at ABPflreaED@aol.com or visit the FLREA website at www.flrea.org to learn more about their various initiatives.

