



United States Bankruptcy Court
Middle District Of Florida
Sam M. Gibbons United States Courthouse
801 North Florida Avenue
Tampa, Florida 33602

Memorandum

Contact: Catherine Peek McEwen
United States Bankruptcy Judge
Phone: (813) 301-5082

September 11, 2009

The purpose of this memo is to provide bankruptcy judges information on the Middle District of Florida Bankruptcy Court's Bench-Bench outreach program for state court judges. From time to time -- annually or biennially -- our Tampa Division judges gather with state court colleagues to provide them updates on bankruptcy law developments that impact their court.

Our state courts are organized by circuit, and generally a circuit comprises one or two counties. We limit our program to one circuit at a time. So far, we have provided programs for the two largest circuits within our federal judicial district division. We generally see about 20 to 30 state court judges at a program.

The content of our program is set out on the agenda that is a part of the materials accompanying this memo. Each of our participating bankruptcy judges is responsible for a brief presentation as noted on the agenda.

Our handouts also accompany this memo. One of our handouts is a 67-page publication of the National Association of Women Judges titled *The Bankruptcy Card and How to Play It* by Bankruptcy Judge Sarah Sharer Curley (D. Az.). We have her permission to copy and distribute it. In addition, we profile two American Bankruptcy Institute publications for state court judges: *Bankruptcy Issues for State Trial Court Judges* (Third Edition) and *When Worlds Collide: Bankruptcy and It's Impact on Domestic Relations and Family Law* (Third Edition). We provide information on how to order these two publications from the ABI. All of this information can be copied to a CD ROM, which can then be handed over to a state court representative to distribute the materials electronically to the state court judges (both those who attended and those who could not).

During the program, we circulate a sign-up sheet so that we know who was there and can capture their contact information (email address, primarily). Name tags are very helpful, too (a template in Word is provided in the materials accompanying this memo).

The logistics of the program are quite simple. We select a restaurant centrally located in the state court's geographical jurisdiction. We target a restaurant with a separate dining room or seating area and a free parking lot. (Free and easily accessible parking facilitates attendance.) The program starts around 3:30 PM, and we conclude by 4:45 PM. We then have a social hour with hors d'oeuvres and cocktails (cash bar). Typically, the two courts split the tab for the hors d'oeuvres. An alternative to the social hour is a dinner (Dutch treat).

We coordinate the date with the chief judge of the state court. Sometimes the chief judge appoints another judge to be our liaison. The chief judge or his or her designate is responsible to circulate the invitation, report RSVPs, and solicit questions for us from his or her colleagues, a couple weeks in advance of the program. That way we know to address issues the state court judges want to hear about.

We find that the little bit of time it takes to prepare and put on the program is well worth the investment. Of course, our main goal is to assist our state court colleagues to better handle bankruptcy issues when they come up in their court. But perhaps an even better consequence of the program is the

relationship building it brings. After attending one of our programs, state court judges feel comfortable in calling us to help them navigate a bankruptcy issue.

If you are reading this memo and have reached this point, you probably have an interest in devising a bench-bench program of your own. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions about our program.