

The Vassar B. Carlton American Inn of Court and the Legal Legend Justice Carlton

By Kelly J. McKibben

Vassar B. Carlton made Brevard County proud. As a practicing attorney and member of the judiciary in Brevard County, his legal career was full of great accomplishments. Many of you have already learned that Justice Carlton died on August 31, 2005 at the age of 92, with funeral services held on September 6, 2005 in Rockledge, Florida. But what many don't know is the journey that he took during his successful legal career and the fact that our local Inn of Court was named in his honor. Many of the Brevard County attorneys are familiar with the Inn of Court due to their membership over the years. However, there are many members of the bar that have not been affiliated with or introduced to the Inn.

Justice Carlton was a most distinguished jurist, with service on the Brevard County Court, Brevard County Circuit Court and the Florida Supreme Court where he would ultimately serve as Chief Justice. He grew up in Alachua County where his parents were in the farming business. The family eventually moved to Brevard County and got involved in the citrus industry. He attended Cocoa High School and then the University of Florida on a football scholarship. From there he attended Stetson Law School and after graduation in 1937 moved back to Brevard County.

At the time he became a county court judge in 1941 he was the youngest judge in Florida (27 years old). After his service on the judiciary in both county and circuit court in Brevard County he actually ran for the Florida Supreme Court, as the positions were not by appointment. He became a member of the Florida Supreme Court in 1969 and he was eventually appointed as Chief Justice in 1973, as elected by his brethren. He finally retired from the Florida Supreme Court in 1974.

Founded in 1992 by Judge Clarence T. Johnson, Jr., the Vassar B. Carlton American Inn of Court acts as a tribute to Justice Carlton's service to our legal community on a county and statewide basis. The Inn of Court is designed to promote legal excellence, civility, professionalism and ethics in the legal arena. Our Inn of Court is comprised of approximately 80 members including judges, experienced lawyers and less experienced lawyers divided into Masters, Barristers and Pupils depending upon years of legal experience. Based on the English legal system, the Inn offers an opportunity for members to improve the legal profession, engage in collegiality, learn from and with distinguished colleagues, help less experienced lawyers and enhance legal skills.

The Inn members meet on a monthly basis and participate in various programs that focus on the practical and ethical aspects of practicing law. Discussions both during the dinner and program that follows help to establish camaraderie and networking. Each program is designed to help share insights into the legal and judicial process and all include an element of ethics and professionalism.