

Clerk of Court celebrates Juror Appreciation Week

Jurors thanked for civic duty with coffee, doughnuts, and certificates

By **ANNE EASKER**
STAFF WRITER

Jurors summoned to the Charlotte County courthouse Wednesday didn't get called to the courtroom, but they did get coffee, doughnuts, and a certificate from the Clerk of Court to celebrate Juror Appreciation Week.

"The bad news is we dragged you in for nothing," Judge George Richards told the jurors, explaining the defendant had taken a plea agreement just before the case would have gone to trial. "The good news is you don't have to spend a few days with me."

As the 29 potential jurors checked in Wednesday morning, Clerk of Clerk Roger Eaton thanked them for performing for their civic duty and discussed the technology updates he's made since taking office, allowing jurors to check

in online, so when they arrive they only have to scan a code in one of the two juror kiosks.

"What used to take an hour to check everybody in only took a few minutes," he said. "Because again, we value your time."

Eaton said Charlotte County typically has a much higher jury turnout than other counties, typically around 50 to 60 percent.

Judge Richards mentioned to the jurors in another county he was aware of, they sent out 300 summonses and only eight people showed up.

"You can't pick a jury from eight people," he said. "Somebody asked me, why can't we have professional jurors? I'm going to ask you. The state of Florida is the people that bring the charges against you. The state of Florida is the entity that's seeking to convict you. And now the

state of Florida's paying those jurors? Who wants to be tried under those circumstances? Anybody? Because I don't. That's why we've got to have fair and impartial jurors that have no investment in the case. Without people like yourselves, the system would not work."

Richards stated while the jury system isn't perfect, it's as close as you can get to being perfect. In most other countries, people are presumed guilty until proven innocent.

"Nowhere else can you

get a fair trial," he said.

The jurors were excused shortly after 9 a.m., and seemed to agree it was an easy, painless process.

"I didn't quite know what to expect, but it went so quickly," said Susan Keefer. "It was worth it in the end."

Veteran Zannie Morrison was also pleased with the experience and said he'd been looking forward to serving as a juror, since he never has before.

"I feel like it's my duty, just like serving in the Navy," he said.

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Zannie Morrison and Susan Keefer received certificates for Juror Appreciation Week Wednesday. They were dismissed after the defendant took a plea deal instead of facing trial.

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