

Perry Nichols Award

Thomas S. Edwards Jr.



The Perry Nichols Award was established in 1977 as a permanent tribute to Perry Nichols, a founder and first president of the Florida Justice Association. This award is the highest honor that the FJA bestows and is given only in recognition of those who have fought valiantly for justice throughout their lives.

This year, we proudly recognize Thomas S. Edwards Jr., a man who has established a legacy in his lifetime commitment to justice.

Senior partner of Edwards & Ragatz, P.A., Tom has been practicing personal injury law since 1984. A Florida Bar board-certified civil trial lawyer since 1991, he holds a Tier 1 Best Law Firms rating in both medical malpractice and personal injury and is rated AV Preeminent by Martindale-Hubbell. He has received the Spartans at Thermopylae Award for extraordinary work in protecting the court system, has been included in *Florida Trend Magazine's* Legal Elite, has been recognized by Florida's Super Lawyers, and is a past recipient of the FJA's Al J. Cone Lifetime Achievement Award (2020).

Tom is a 1981 graduate of the University of the South: Seawee, and he received his Juris Doctorate in 1983 from Stetson University College of Law — the oldest law school in the state of Florida. His activism on behalf of justice traces back through his family history, including his grandmother's work during the women's suffrage movement. She led the women of Randolph-Macon in a march on Washington, D.C., in support of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Tom has been recognized for his hard work and achievements by many exclusive legal organizations, such as the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, the International Society of Barristers, and the American Board of Trial Advocates. Over the course of his career, Tom has served in every chair position within the FJA leadership, in addition to serving as FJA president from 2008 to 2009.

"My personal and professional history with Tom goes back decades and is nothing short of exceptional. I was fortunate to have been led by his example as we worked our way up the FJA ranks together, and I remain grateful for his leadership," says friend and colleague Past President Michael Haggard. "When considering the qualifications necessary to receive the Perry

Nichols Award, it is evident that Tom epitomizes these attributes, making him a deserving recipient of such an accolade."

The Florida Supreme Court has also recognized his leadership with numerous appointments over the last two decades, including the Florida Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice, the Florida Supreme Court Judicial Management Council, the Standard Jury Instruction Committee, and the Supreme Court Committee of Standards of Conduct for Judges, to name a few.

As the senior partner of Edwards & Ragatz, Tom and his team are committed to the aggressive and compassionate representation of clients and their families. Their goal is to achieve justice for each client. Edwards & Ragatz has repeatedly achieved extraordinary results, including landmark verdicts against multi-billion-dollar corporations and insurance companies.

"Tom has been one of the most energetic and hard workers in areas behind the scenes that don't pay anything. He has helped keep a fair justice system intact for the wrongfully injured victims of Florida as much as anybody I know in The Florida Bar," says friend and colleague Chris Searcy.

Tom has made a big impression on others when it comes to his legal acumen. When he took on a case called *Chandler v. Memorial Hospital*, he achieved a verdict of \$178 million after initially being offered \$100,000 on behalf of his brain-injured client.

"A substantial portion of that \$178 million verdict was for elder abuse under Chapter 415," Chris notes. "I had never thought of using the elder abuse statute for the extra damages you get on that in a medical negligence case [but] after I saw Tom do it, I quickly started doing that in my medical malpractice cases."

Chris recalls how Tom graciously shared his briefs and all his memorandums after that, which truly left an impression. "He works as hard as any lawyer I have ever seen, away from the spotlight for no compensation and for the good of all the wrongfully injured victims in Florida," he says.

"Tom is a complete lawyer. And what that means is he can literally take a case from the time the client calls into his office for the first time through a jury verdict and an appeal, if necessary," says friend and colleague Neal Roth. "Not everybody has that talent. There are few that do everything as well as Tom does it."

Tom has been a leader not only in the Bar but also in the Jacksonville community for many years and is involved with numerous organizations including the Rotary Club of

Jacksonville, Downtown Ecumenical Services Council, the United Way, Hubbard House, American Cancer Society, Dreams Come True, and Big Brothers Big Sisters, among others.

Tom is married, raised three children in Jacksonville, and works every day to help clients through difficult times, improve the legal system, and make a difference in the lives of others. His dedication to both his profession and community is unwavering, and his contributions are vast and impactful.

In recognition of his outstanding career, leadership, and unwavering commitment to justice, Tom is a truly deserving recipient of the Perry Nichols Award. His life and career exemplify the highest standards of the legal profession, making him an inspiration to all.

“Tom has clearly provided extended and distinguished service to the cause of justice. Having fought many battles together during his presidency and mine, I can say without hesitation that there is no better person I would want by my side,” says Past President Michael Haggard. “The

sacrifices made while leading the Florida Justice Association are immense, yet Tom never hesitated to do what he felt was right to defend the citizens of Florida, as well as those beyond our state lines. He continues that same path today.”

“No matter what the odds, no matter what the issue, whether it’s for an individual client or a piece of legislation [Tom] just perseveres until he can do the best that he’s done to make whatever it is better,” says Neal Roth. ■



SARA PRATT

currently serves as Florida Justice Association’s Marketing Director and is dedicated to supporting FJA’s mission to strengthen and uphold Florida’s civil justice system and protect the rights of citizens and consumers. Pratt received her master’s in public administration from Florida State University and is a storyteller with experience in developing and managing public relations and marketing campaigns for both the public and private sectors. Prior to FJA, Sara spent time in the public sector leading a public information team during disasters including Hurricane Michael and the COVID-19 pandemic.

