



Supreme Court of Florida

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Contact: Craig Waters, Public Information Office

Florida Supreme Court

(850) 414-7641

New Supreme Court Justice saw life through the eyes of a Honduran child

TALLAHASSEE – Alan Lawson and his wife Julie both grew up in families that believed in service to others, and so it was only natural for them to volunteer when they learned of a group doing health-related work in Central America called SMART – Surgical & Medical Assistance Relief Teams.

That was how they came to the slums of Honduras in 1999 and met a beautiful 12-year-old child named Denia Osorto Corrales. She had an endless smile, full dark eyes, long black hair – and a damaged heart that soon could put her in the grave.

“We just couldn’t walk away from her without at least trying to help,” said Lawson, 55, who will be sworn as Florida’s 86th Supreme Court Justice Wednesday in Tallahassee. “We knew that God put her in our path for a reason.”

Lawson, 55, said he and his wife began their work with Denia on the spot, by securing her medical records. Immediately upon returning to Orlando they arranged to bring her to their home for open-heart surgery at the Arnold Palmer Children’s Hospital. And when complications arose, they arranged for her return for a second surgery and follow-up care. She lived with the Lawson family for almost a year.

When they returned Denia to Honduras, they travelled with a team of family members, church members and other friends who worked together to move the family – seven siblings, parents and grandparents – from a two-room structure in a remote area with no electricity or running water into a home purchased with help from Make-a-Wish Foundation, and others. The team, which included Lawson’s parents, in-laws and children, personally rehabilitated the home on that trip.

The Lawsons have continued to travel annually to Honduras to volunteer there and visit with “the family.” Friends who were on the second trip in 2000 have sponsored Denia’s older brother through medical school at the National University of Honduras. The Lawsons are sponsoring another brother who

is studying civil engineering at Honduras' Catholic University. The goal is to increase the entire family's self-sufficiency.

"Julie and I found that our lives were so greatly enriched by the presence of the Corrales family," said Lawson. "Seeing life through their eyes, and seeing their family tragedy turn into a story of hope and promise was the most joyful experience I can recall, other than the birth of our children. We have come to love their family as much as we love our own."

Lawson will take the oath of office at the Florida Supreme Court Building on Wednesday, April 5 at 3:00 p.m. At the ceremony, Gov. Rick Scott will present Lawson's written credentials to Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, signifying the point in time when Lawson formally moves into the judicial branch as the state's newest Justice.

More than 70 judges from around the state have committed to attend the event and take part in a Judicial Processional – formally entering the courtroom in Tallahassee wearing their black robes after a public introduction by the Supreme Court marshal.

Wednesday's ceremony is open to the public, although overflow crowds already are expected. The event will be streamed live by the Florida Channel and from the Court's own Gavel to Gavel video portal located at: <http://wfsu.org/gavel2gavel/>

Lawson is a native of Lakeland and grew up in Tallahassee. He and his wife later moved to the Orlando area, where Lawson served as a trial judge. More recently he was chief judge of the Fifth District Court of Appeal in Daytona Beach.

Lawson is the 86th Justice named to the Supreme Court since Florida achieved statehood in 1845.

Photo of Denia Corrales: <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/images/lawson/denia-corrales.jpg>

Photo of the Corrales family: <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/images/lawson/corrales-family.jpg>

Photo of Justice Alan Lawson: <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/justices/lawson2017-large.jpg>

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