

business news

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Ex-prosecutor opens defense practice

BY ROBERT SILK
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PLANTATION KEY — For most of the past six years Donald Barrett has made his living prosecuting the accused for the Monroe County State Attorney's Office.

But after resigning as chief of the state attorney's Upper Keys division in late May, he has begun putting his experience to work on the other side of the criminal justice divide.

Barrett, 36, opened his own Plantation Key-based criminal defense practice last month, a move he hopes will provide him more opportunities, economically and otherwise.

"I want to be in control of my own destiny," he said one afternoon last week, sitting behind an impeccably neat desk in his office. "I want to be awarded for my hard work."

Barrett will take all kinds of defense cases, from drunk driving to murder. Fees, he said, are worked out in advance and vary greatly from case to case.

The 1996 graduate of Stetson University School of Law in St. Petersburg is also accepting juvenile cases and civil cases on a select basis.

But it is criminal work that he plans to make his bread and butter, and it is in that arena that Barrett said he can most put his local prosecution experience to work.

"Not only do I know who to get in touch with and how to get in touch with them," he said of the attorneys he will be dealing with in the State Attorney's Office, "but I know these people and I know what



ROBERT SILK/Free Press

Attorney Donald Barrett, 36, has opened his own criminal defense practice on Plantation Key.

makes one person tick and what makes another person tick."

Barrett also said that clients will find that he excels at customer service.

"One of the biggest complaints I hear from people is lack of communication from their lawyer," he said. "I really strive to remain accessible to people whenever they need me, which is basically 24/7."

He has been happy with the results of his first month in practice.

"It has been busier than I ever imagined

it would be, and I am pleased to say that because I was very nervous about leaving my paying job," he said.

Barrett, an Atlanta native, lives in Islamorada with his wife, Rosario, whom he said can assist with clients that would prefer to communicate in Spanish.

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