

Capitol gadfly stirs up change

By [Shannon Colavecchio-Van Sickler](#), Times Staff Writer

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TALLAHASSEE — He started every appearance before lawmakers the same way: "Brian Pitts, Justice 2 Jesus."

Not that he needed any introduction.

Pitts, 36, of St. Petersburg became this legislative session's best-known gadfly — attending just about every committee meeting and lecturing lawmakers on the flaws he saw in their proposals.

"Y'all *need* to find some additional trust funds for your court system to survive," Pitts told House representatives during a meeting this month.

He is back home now, having achieved his goal of "blowing the whistle on things that are fishy." But people are still talking about him around the Capitol.

Some legislators and lobbyists roll their eyes at Pitts. To them, he's just another annoying gadfly. But others developed begrudging respect for Pitts, who spent hours researching legislation and case law. More than once, a legislator conceded to Pitts, "Well, you have a point there."

Tampa Sen. Victor Crist even amended a juvenile justice bill (SB700) at Pitts' suggestion to require better coordination among various children's and law enforcement agencies.

Pitts is most passionate about Florida's courts, which he says are overloaded and underfunded.

A Philadelphia native who moved to St. Petersburg in 1999, he spent four months in 2003 in the Pinellas County jail for practicing law without a license.

A more recent arrest on another count of unlicensed practice of law is pending. "All of this set me up so I know what I'm talking about when I go to the Legislature."

Going all the time

Pitts is 5 feet 6, barely 110 pounds.

He spent hours at a time on the computers in the Capitol.

Inside his two-bedroom apartment within walking distance of the Capitol, he says he stayed up until 2 or 3 a.m. reading late-filed amendments to bills.

"You've got to watch these characters," Pitts says, his tone conspiratorial. "I'm here for what the people aren't seeing, and we're standing here for them."

Pitts' Justice-2-Jesus business cards have a picture of the scales of justice in one corner, the political action committee's motto in the other: *Holding government to accountability & duty.*

Justice-2-Jesus is registered as a PAC with the Pinellas County supervisor of elections.

Pitts is listed as chairman and treasurer. Calvester Benjamin-Anderson, the write-in candidate that Darryl Rouson recently beat for the District 55 House seat, is the PAC's registered agent.

Pitts says contributions to the PAC paid for his rent and his suits.

But according to the supervisor of elections, Justice-2-Jesus hasn't received any contributions since October 2007.

He is not registered as a lobbyist, which rules would require him to do if he's getting paid for his work.

But he spent more time at the podium speaking for or against bills than the lobbyists who get paid tens of thousands of dollars.

A successful stint

Pitts was born and raised in Philadelphia by his grandmother and his mother. He graduated from high school but not college.

Then he moved to St. Petersburg in 1999, hoping to cash in on the real estate boom.

But that didn't work out. He says he bought property from a "scandalous lender out of Coral Gables." Records show the bank foreclosed in 2000 on a property in St. Pete Beach that Pitts had bought.

By 2002, he met a woman named Jeanie Nardozi. The relationship would lead to his first arrest for illegally practicing law.

He said he represented her in a paternity and divorce case. Court records show he also represented her in 2003.

In 2006, he listed himself as the "attorney in fact" for Calvester Benjamin-Anderson in a discrimination case against the Manhattan Beauty School in St. Petersburg, court records show.

He was arrested in June 2007 by the Pinellas Sheriff's Office.

For now, he is celebrating what he considers to be a successful stint in Tallahassee.

"It's behind the scenes, with J2J ideas getting into legislation," he said, referring to Crist's juvenile justice bill.

"I've accomplished a lot by exposing them (lawmakers) to information in some of these meetings."

Times researcher John Martin contributed to this report. Shannon Colavecchio-Van Sickler can be reached at svansickler@sptimes.com or (850) 224-7263.

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