



Judicial Vignettes: San Bernardino County's Newest Superior Court Judges

by Ed Butler

When new judges are appointed, our field reporter, Ed Butler, Esq. interviews them and submits for your information, a "Judicial Vignette." These vignettes are added to our online collection of Benchmarks, a monthly feature in the Bar Bulletin.

Judge Cara D. Hutson

Despite initial nervousness, Judge Cara D. Hutson says judging feels like her true calling.

A local prosecutor for 13 years, she was sworn into judicial office July 6 and has assumed a criminal assignment at San Bernardino District of the local Superior Court.

She says a number of her colleagues had encouraged her to consider judging, praising her temperament and fairness. After garnering broad experience as a prosecutor, she didn't want to supervise prosecution but "I did want some kind of change or promotion."

Now that she has donned the judicial robe and presided over her own courtroom, "I really feel that this was what I was supposed to do," Judge Hutson says.

The busy single brings a varied background of music, regular involvement in high school mock trial, and service as a literacy tutor.

Born in Georgia, she has lived in California since age four. She grew up the rest of the way in the Los Angeles area, mostly in Rancho Palos Verdes. Her mother is a retired middle school principal and her father a retired accountant.

The judge says music has been a lifelong interest of hers, including playing flute in several orchestras and bands. She continues to play, formerly in "The Courthouse Jam" jazz band that included a court reporter, criminal defense attorney and fellow deputy DA. The Jam practiced on the lunch hour and provided valuable life balance, Judge Hutson says.

She says she worked in various odd jobs as an undergraduate at UC Santa Barbara, where she was a law and society major. After graduating there, she took a year off to test the legal waters, assisting at the downtown Los Angeles law office of Argue, Pearson, Harbison and Myers. The Myers in this case was the grandson of Louis Myers, partner of O'Melveny and Myers.

Deciding that the law was for her, Judge Hutson went on to earn her jurisdoctorate degree at the University of San Diego School of Law.

Joining the San Bernardino County district attorney's office in 1994, she began with misdemeanor cases including DUI's, drugs and batteries. Later came prosecution of felonies including Three Strikes cases, homicide, robberies and arson. She mainly was based at the Victorville DA's office, except for a couple of years at Barstow, and left as lead attorney at Victorville.

As a prosecutor she was a mock trial coach for Apple Valley High School and one year coordinated the competition at the Victorville courthouse.

She says she'd like to continue work as a literacy

tutor at the Rancho Cucamonga library, but the heavy reading demands of judging make after hours volunteering at that impossible on weekdays.

Judge Hutson began her first trial as judge on her second day on the job. She'll be attending New Judges Orientation in October.

Judge Robert J. Lemkau

Judge Robert J. Lemkau brings the experience of more than 34 years as a local prosecutor to his new role as Superior Court judge of San Bernardino County.

Starting Aug. 20, he was to bring that experience to bear on a collaborative court, a fulltime mental health court at San Bernardino District. Before that he was filling miscellaneous assignments since he was sworn into office July 12. The mental health court would play host to sexually violent predators as well as mentally disordered defendants in general.

Judge Lemkau spent the bulk of his advocacy career at the San Bernardino County district attorney's office. He prosecuted a wide variety of crimes and spent 13 years focused on crimes against children. As prosecutor he was based mostly in the county's west end area, including Rancho Cucamonga, Chino and Fontana.

He says it was a long term goal of his to become a judge, motivated by "the opportunity to make a positive impact on people that would appear before me."

Judge Lemkau hales from the Bay Area, having been born in Oakland and growing up largely there and in San Leandro. His father worked as a machinist for Caterpillar Tractor and his mother was a nurse for Alameda County, at Highland Hospital.

Reading was a favorite pastime of the judge growing up, and he still embraces it for recreation. He says historical biographies and nonfiction in general are favorite areas of focus.

He says his interest in law came early, and he earned his bachelor's degree at UC Berkeley in the pre-law program, with a political science major. He earned his jurisdoctorate at the University of Texas School of Law.

His work as a student included delivering newspapers for the Hayward Daily Review and clerking at Christmas for Macy's. At Berkeley he enrolled in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). In the U.S. Army Reserve, he was commissioned as an officer in the quartermaster (supply) branch and retired as major.

As a student he worked at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles as a participant in Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). After passing the bar exam he worked as a staff attorney of the foundation before joining the San Bernardino County district attorney's office in November of 1972.

Among his community activities, Judge Lemkau served for five years on the Chino planning commission.

Judge Lemkau admits that "it's a transition" to shift from the mindset of an advocate to that of judge. "I'm adjusting," he says.

His family consists of a wife and daughter.

Judge Steven A. Mapes

After 12 years as a criminal defense litigator, Judge Steven A. Mapes relishes the change in role to that of Superior Court judge of San Bernardino County.

He says a knack for seeing both sides of a controversy encouraged him to apply for a judgeship. While he was "extremely nervous" at first as a bench officer, the change feels very natural to him.

He was appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger June 22 to succeed the retiring Judge Raymond

Youngquist. He was sworn into office July 2.

Judge Mapes' first judicial assignment is a criminal one at Barstow District.

Judge Mapes began his criminal defense work as a protégé of Bob Amador in his San Bernardino private law office in 1995. Enamored of trial work, he joined the local public defender's office in 1998, and credits the late Joe Canty as a valuable mentor in the death penalty unit there. He advocated for the defense in a wide variety of crimes.

Judge Mapes' exposure to the crime subject area began with his parents. He grew up in the San Fernando Valley, the son of a now-retired Los Angeles police department officer and the stepson of another. His mother formerly worked as an LAPD dispatcher, later as an air traffic controller, and currently in nutrient sales. (His stepdad later joined the Army and his biological father later became a nurse.)

Growing up, Judge Mapes says he loved baseball, such as Little League, and attending Dodger games. He also enjoyed bike riding and gold mining by dredging with his dad in the Sierra Nevada mountain range. He worked his way up to Eagle Scout, was involved in Order of the Arrow, and at age 19 undertook a church mission to Ecuador.

Judge Mapes earned his bachelor's degree at Brigham Young University with a major in Spanish and minor in communications. Envisioning a career in advertising, he spent a year working for a Spanish language biweekly newspaper in the Tri-Cities of Washington State.

Then came enrollment in Valparaiso University School of Law in Indiana, where he earned his juris doctor degree.

As a new California bar admittee he was recruited over the telephone by a "personal injury mill" office in San Bernardino. That work was not his cup of tea, and a family referral led him to Amador, who introduced him to criminal defense. He ended up devoting 90 percent of his practice to the conflict panel, representing indigent criminal defendants in cases in which the public defender's office has a conflict of interest. He also did some family and civil work as an associate of Amador.

Among his professional activities as attorney, Judge Mapes volunteered for the Inland Empire Latino Lawyers Association and for two years served on the board of the San Bernardino County Public Attorneys Association.

As for his interest in judging, "I feel like I'm a fair person," Judge Mapes says, who could aid in arrival at compromise. He cites his experience as the son of a Democrat mom and Republican dad. An independent voter registrant himself, "I've always been able to see all sides" in a controversy, he says.

He looks back on advocacy now as "a different lifetime," having found the black robe "an easy wardrobe to change" into.

Judge Mapes became a widower soon after the birth of the family's young triplets, two boys and a girl. Their mother was a court reporter as is their stepmother.

In addition to raising the young children, Judge Mapes is active in scouting and church and likes to "hack at the guitar . . . just picking at it," as well as embracing physical fitness activities.

Judge Elia V. Pirozzi

Judge Elia V. Pirozzi brings a varied real estate, business law and estate planning practice background to his new role as Superior Court judge of San Bernardino County.

Having maintained law offices in Ontario and Redlands, his advocacy included real estate broker disputes, land use, environmental law, business and corporate law, estate planning, real estate transactions and litigation.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed him in May to fill the office vacated by the retirement of Judge Thomas Glasser of Barstow. Judge Pirozzi was sworn into office July 3 and his first judicial assignment is a combination criminal/civil one at Chino District.

A former candidate for legislative office, Judge Pirozzi was a career changer who previously worked in project management and marketing for a San Bernardino real estate developer before becoming an attorney 18 years ago.

Judge Pirozzi says he spent his first 12 years of life in New Jersey, the son of a homemaker mom and dad who worked as a mechanic and truck driver and later real estate agent. He grew up the rest of the way in Southern California, mostly in the Simi Valley. He moved to the Inland Empire in 1984.

He says his hobby interests growing up were music, body building and miscellaneous sports. He majored in music to earn his bachelor of arts degree at California State University, Northridge. He worked as a professional symphonic trumpet player and drew upon that skill in performance and instruction to help pay his way through Southwestern University School of Law, where he obtained his juris doctorate. He later earned a master of law degree at the University of San Diego School of Law, cum laude, concentrating on environmental and comparative law and writing legal articles which were eventually published in various university law reviews.

Soon after becoming licensed to practice in 1989, he became an associate of the Law Offices of Robert E. Weiss, a real estate practitioner. He opened his own office the following year.

Formerly a pro tem judge for approximately a year, Judge Pirozzi says judging attracted him as an avenue of public service and a natural progression after his long advocacy career. He says he has much respect and admiration for the local judiciary and "I just wanted to be part of the process."

As for adapting to the new role, he describes it as "a life change." He says as a new judge and no longer an advocate he must resist the temptation to comment on legal strategies and potential courses of action for litigants -- particularly concerning civil matters.

Among his many community activities, Judge Pirozzi is a former candidate for Congress and State Assembly and former chairman of the San Bernardino County Republican Party. He founded the Community Action Legal Institute and has served on boards of trustees of the California Building Industry Association, National Association of Home Builders, and Camp Fire Boys and Girls. He has also served on the advisory board of KVCR-TV Channel 24.

Judge Pirozzi resides in Rancho Cucamonga with wife Diane, president of Coldwell Banker Western Properties.

He says his pastimes still include sports and body building, along with reading and writing about legal issues.

Judge Michael A. Sachs

Judge Michael A. Sachs says becoming a judge helps fulfill his desire to engage in public service in the legal field.

Formerly principle assistant county counsel in charge of litigation for San Bernardino County, he was appointed this summer to one of several newly funded judgeships of San Bernardino County Superior Court. His initial assignment at Victorville is a civil one, including trials, harassment injunctions, law and motion and small claims.

Judge Sachs says becoming a deputy county counsel 13 ½ years ago was motivated by a public service urge, and so was his application for judgeship. He also views service as judge as a way

to assist people on a more personal level to "help them resolve their issues."

He says the existing judges at Victorville have been gracious and supportive about welcoming him into the fold.

Then-County Counsel Allen Marks recruited him into his office to establish a litigation unit, partly to bring more litigation in-house. The unit grew from two to 10 attorneys during Judge Sachs' tenure. Among his assignments there, he was lead attorney in the county corruption case from 1998 to 2002, devoted to it fulltime.

He was born in New York, the son of a salesman dad and homemaker mom. The family first came to California in 1971 when he was 11, but moved back and forth as his father was promoted. Judge Sachs graduated from El Toro High School in Orange County, having embraced sports as a youth including cross country and track in high school.

Majoring in political science, he earned his bachelor's degree at UC Irvine, where he was involved in student government. He went on to earn his jurisdoctor degree at Western State University College of Law in Fullerton.

He says while a student at both schools he sold shoes for Robinson's Department Store, and left it as a manager when he passed the bar exam. At one point he wasn't sure whether he should remain in the fashion industry, he says.

Contemplating where to locate, he says he and his wife focused on the Inland Empire, as she came from Rialto and they appreciated the greater affordability of housing in the area. He spent his first six years as attorney at Roberts and Morgan in Riverside, where he engaged in both insurance defense and public entity work. He was litigating a case involving a library bookmobile when attorney adversary Sandy Baxter introduced him to her employer, the San Bernardino County counsel's office. He went to work there in February 1994, litigating a wide variety of cases including law enforcement civil rights controversies, auto accidents, personnel matters and dangerous conditions on public property.

Among his professional activities, as attorney, Judge Sachs was one of the first members of the local chapter of the Federal Bar Association. He was involved in the American Inns of Court and just before his judicial appointment by the governor June 22, had been elected a director of the San Bernardino County Bar Association.

Adjusting to the role of judge, "it sure is different" than being a litigator, Judge Sachs says. As judge, "You're trying to do the right thing for the right reason, you're trying to apply the law for the purpose it was intended," he says. He adds that being called "your honor" requires some adaptation.

The new judge says he and his wife, Michele, an X-ray technician, and their two teenaged daughters enjoy travel. The older daughter is active in club volleyball and the younger in dance, and "between the two they keep us very busy."

Judge Wilfred J. Schneider, Jr.

Judge Wilfred J. Schneider, Jr. is a bar leader who litigated civilly for 28 years before his appointment June 22 as Superior Court judge of San Bernardino County.

Leadership is a regular part of his lifestyle, as he served several consecutive terms as president of The Hon. Joseph B. Campbell American Inn of Court. That was before serving a term as president of the San Bernardino County Bar Association, and after having been student body president at his urban community college. He has also served on several local and state bar committees.

Motivated by the service opportunity afforded by judgeship, Judge Schneider now presides as family

court judge at San Bernardino District. The total immersion experience of changing roles includes learning a whole new area of law, after having devoted 25 years to insurance defense and three to construction defect plaintiff work.

Judge Schneider says his plan to become an attorney took root way back in his youth, growing up in Whittier, the community of his birth. His father worked as an insurance salesman and his mother was a homemaker. One of his two older brothers has retired as a police officer and the other continues in school teaching in Whittier.

Judge Schneider says his youthful interests included karate, which he studied for 4 ½ years to reach brown belt level. A major job of his was that of stable boy in Pico Rivera. Miscellaneous other jobs included moving furniture for a furniture store.

He earned his bachelor's degree in political science at UCLA. He transferred there as a junior, having previously attended Rio Hondo Community College in Whittier. His attendance there had extended into a third year to fulfill student body president duties in 1971-72.

He earned his juris doctor degree at Southwestern University School of Law in Los Angeles. While a student there he clerked at the law office of Perry Polamero in Pomona and also that of Arthur Jaffee in Pomona. By that time he had moved to the Inland Empire, feeling there were fewer attorneys per capita in the region.

His first job as a licensee lasted 15 years as an associate in the San Bernardino office of Chase, Rotchford, Drukker, & Bogust. His emphasis there in civil litigation was insurance defense. Then came three years in complex construction defect litigation, representing developers and subcontractors, at the then-law office of Mary Jo Carlos in Riverside.

Then came construction defect plaintiff work at Anderson & Kriger in Riverside, and then Fiore, Racobs & Powers in Irvine.

The past seven years, he performed both construction defect and bodily injury defense work at Ponsor & Associates in Redlands, acting as staff counsel-trial attorney for Travelers Indemnity Company.

A resident of the Inland Empire since 1974, Judge Schneider says the service opportunity attracted him to judging. "It's all about service to the community and giving back, and that's something I'm really dedicated to," he says. "It seemed like one more logical step in terms of service and outreach."

He was sworn into office July 9 and for the first week observed family court judges do their work. Taking the bench July 16, he finds there is much to learn and the workload is intense. "I'm learning every day and the learning curve is still very steep," he says. "I felt like my head was going to explode the first week." Having to make dozens of rulings daily, "It really brings you along in learning how to judge," he says. He likes the fact that in family court "you get to help people on a daily basis."

He brings his own family experience to his role as family judge. He and wife Sue, a homemaker who manages the family investments, have two daughters, Kristin, 20, a college student, and Rachel, 13, a middle school student.

Having achieved an "AV" rating from his peers from Martindale-Hubbell, Judge Schneider as an attorney served on an Inland Empire panel of judicial arbitrators and as pro tem judge at Rancho Cucamonga. He served on State Bar committees on administration of justice and court rules and procedures, and in the bench-bar coalition of the state Administrative Office of the Courts.

He says his favorite pastimes these days include working in the yard and enjoying a good cigar, sometimes at the same time.