

BenchMarks:



Larry W. Allen
Superior Court Judge,
County of San
Bernardino

by Ed Butler

Judge Larry W. Allen traveled widely as one of three "military brat" sons of a Marine careerist. He also traveled heavily as a Municipal Court assigned judge officially designated as the Justice Court judge of Trona, San Bernardino County.

His geographic life is more stable now, however, as he presides at and supervises the Victorville District of San Bernardino County Superior Court.

A contented resident of the Victor Valley for more than 20 years, he looks forward now to becoming assistant presiding judge of the county in January 2004.

Judge Allen was born at the Naval Hospital in Corona when his father was on Marine duty in Korea. Being uprooted was a way of life in his childhood, having to move every couple of years for his father's duty assignments on both the country's oceanic coasts.

A tennis competitor in high school, Judge Allen was back in California when it was time for college, and he earned a degree in philosophy at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa.

On the way to becoming a California lawyer at age 23, he held various jobs including that of May Company stock boy, janitor, security guard and carpet cleaner.

He was a member of the first fulltime class of Western State University School of Law, Fullerton, and graduated and became licensed to practice in 1976.

For a few years in Orange County he practiced mostly family law as the associate of two firms. In 1980 he moved to Victorville and became associated with the Arthwell Hayton firm. Judge Allen and wife Lois had just had their first of two sons and sought a more rural area to raise a family. He indicates they haven't been a bit disappointed with relocating to the High Desert.

Associated with Hayton, he practiced in the family and criminal areas. In 1983 he opened his own law office and practiced in the family, criminal and probate areas.

Judge Allen says he enjoyed probate practice the most, as he "found it interesting." Along the way he was under contract to the county a couple of years to serve as probate research attorney for the local court.

In mid-1991 he was appointed by county supervisors to the Trona Justice Court, succeeding the late Robert K. Devin. In this capacity, Judge Allen had the authority of a municipal court judge and sat at the Trona bench two or three days a month. The rest of the time he had a widely varied caseload at municipal benches throughout the county and in other counties of California. He enjoyed this variety, as "everybody does things differently" and he "liked seeing other ways of doing things" found at different courthouses. "You just go where they send you and do what they tell you to do."

As an early phase of court consolidation, justice courts statewide including Trona's were closed in 1995

to merge them with municipal courts. (The thing that had set them apart at that time was only their serving fewer than 30,000 residents in their district.) While the Trona caseload went to Barstow, Judge Allen received a regular municipal assignment at Victorville. He has mostly been on the Victorville bench since then, except for stints at San Bernardino and Barstow.

His past assignments at Victorville have included family, civil and criminal trials, and he presently presides over pre-preliminary hearings.

He is another judge who enjoys presiding over civil litigation the most. That's "because it can be very complex. So much of it, you see it for the first time. You have to learn it, it's new."

Judge Allen feels the 1998 unification of Municipal and Superior courts was a logical move. It overcame duplication of effort including parallel administrative systems in the same courthouse.

"The taxpayers deserved to have their justice system as efficient as it can be and of course perform its function," he comments.

As Victorville District supervisor, Judge Allen speaks highly of co-workers making supervision easy. "We have great judges here in Victorville . . . we have great administrative staff here, too," he says.

Recently completed facilities improvements have helped the Victorville courthouse meet its workload from a steadily growing community. Two new courtrooms were dedicated earlier this year and a couple hundred parking spaces were just recently added. Also with remodeling a net increase of three courtrooms was achieved, one presided over by the traffic commissioner and two by retired judges on assignment, Judge Phillip Morris and Judge

Robert Law.

The courthouse property was originally designed for four courtrooms, now has 13 and "the architects tell us we have pretty well built out this site," Judge Allen says.

Victorville is participating in the movement to increase in-house alternative dispute resolution to resolve cases in a timely manner. Something new that's afoot is settlement conference contractors assisting with family cases.

Asked for any general advice to attorneys, Judge Allen says:

"The practice of law is a profession. Attorneys should make every effort to make a professional appearance and presentation that benefits them, their clients and the general public that comes in to watch what they do."

Judge Allen says the camaraderie with fellow judges of the county – "a great group of people" – and the county's fine attorneys do much to make his job satisfying. "We do the public's business and there's a great deal of satisfaction to be derived from that," he says.

As a member of the High Desert community, his leadership roles have included that of president of the High Desert Bar Association and also the Victorville Kiwanis Club. For the latter, he formerly directed its soap box derby competition.

His favorite pastimes these days include genealogy.

He and wife Lois, a radiological technician, have one son employed at the local Cemex plant and another who's a Marine corporal stationed on Okinawa.

Ed Butler is Manager of the Rancho Cucamonga Branch of the San Bernardino County Law Library.

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