

Presiding Justice Ramirez Tapped for Kaufman-Campbell Award

By J'Amy Pacheco

Presiding Justice Manuel A. Ramirez said he was "stunned," "shocked" and temporarily speechless when he learned he would receive this year's Kaufman-Campbell Award from the San Bernardino County Bar Association.

"I didn't really know how to respond," he admitted. "This is a very special award, and not one that I thought I'd ever receive."

Named for former state Supreme Court Justice Marcus Kaufman and former Fourth District Court of Appeal Justice Joseph B. Campbell, both of whom served in San Bernardino, the periodic award honors jurists designated as having served on the bench with distinction and having made substantial contributions to the community as well as the practice of law.

Ramirez, who presides over the Fourth District Court of Appeal, Division Two in Riverside, will receive the award at a dinner ceremony scheduled for Thursday, June 9, 2011 at the San Bernardino Hilton.

Associate Justice Betty Richli, who has known Ramirez since the late 1980s, said he "has proved to be a wonderful administrator for the Court of Appeal."

"He is an excellent jurist," she observed. His legal and managerial abilities, as well as his sense of humor and humility make him "a wonderful asset to the Inland Empire legal culture," she opined.

"Obviously, I'm a fan," she added.

Associate Justice Thomas Hollenhorst said he was "very glad to hear that Manuel was selected as the recipient of this award."

"I knew both Joe Campbell and Marcus Kaufman and both would have been very proud that the award was being presented to our PJ," he wrote in an e-mailed statement. "Manuel has done an inspired job of keeping the court moving in a forward direction with huge increases in case load and the complexity of the cases we are currently getting. He has managed to get the most out of the staff and keep the judges productive with no new resources. We are very fortunate to have Manuel as our PJ."

Nancy Smoke, a research attorney who has worked with Ramirez for 20 years, described the jurist as "a wonderful man."

"I don't think anybody who knows him would tell you differently," she stated. "He has a huge heart. That's part of the reason this court has been able to maintain almost a family feeling, which other courts don't have. A lot of that is due to the way he steers our ship here."

Smoke credited Ramirez with making Division Two one of the most productive courts in the state through implementation of a mediation program that helped eliminate a significant backlog that existed when the jurist took the helm more than two decades ago. She also noted that Ramirez periodically takes oral argument on the road in an outreach program that allows high school students to observe the justices at work on actual cases.

He is, she said, an "outstanding contributor to the legal system."

"I knew Justices Kaufman and Campbell," the 30-year veteran of the court said. "They would be very, very pleased knowing he was getting this recognition."

San Bernardino Judge Cynthia Ludvigsen said Ramirez represents "the perfect choice for this award."

"He is an exemplary human being and judge; a wonderful ambassador for our profession," she said.

"You can see this in his outreach activities with high school and college students." She also lauded Ramirez for the settlement program.

"He has a reverence for the law, and is humble about his role in assuring the rule of law," she said, adding that the jurist is "keenly aware" of the impact that his conduct and decisions have on litigants in the courts.

"He very quietly and humbly serves in the community where he lives," she added. "The bar association has done itself proud in selecting him for the Kaufman-Campbell Award."

Judge John Pacheco observed that Ramirez "has devoted his entire career to improving our system of justice in the Inland Empire."

"There is not a single justice in this state that comes to mind, who has done more for a legal community in the past two decades than Justice Ramirez," he stated. "It is his relentless pursuit of perfection, in everything he does, that makes him stand out above everyone else. His unselfishness, wisdom, vision, humility and tireless efforts have made him a quiet leader at so many levels."

Pacheco recalled that Ramirez devoted "thousands of extra hours" to the planning, construction and decoration of the facility that was built to house the court - a building that Richli described as part of his legacy.

Judge Wilfred Schneider said he was "wonderfully thrilled" to learn that Ramirez would be honored.

"His ethics, civility, professionalism and legal excellence have drawn many to him as someone to emulate," he said. "He is a fair and intellectually honest jurist who is greatly respected and admired."

Schneider said Ramirez has been a "tireless supporter" of the SBCBA as well as the Joseph B. Campbell chapter of American Inns of Court, and said his community outreach "stands as a small example of what he does every day to promote the administration of justice and the rule of law away from the courthouse."

"He is so very deserving of the award and the recognition it brings," he said.

Attorney John Lowenthal said the description of what the award means to recognize represents "a perfect description of Justice Ramirez."

Lowenthal said he has had many opportunities to see Ramirez in action. At a time when the courts and legal system are coming under scrutiny and attack, Ramirez has done more to champion the cause and be an ambassador for the importance and value of the justice system than "anybody I can think of," he stated.

"Wherever he goes, whatever he does, he is gracious and charming," Lowenthal said. "...At a time when we need good examples, you couldn't ask for a better one than Justice Ramirez."

Attorney William Shapiro described Ramirez as "the quintessential jurist who has devoted a lifetime to the judicial system."

"His hard work and dedication on behalf of the Fourth District, Second Division has created a mold for one of the most efficient appellate courts in our state," he observed. "Through his efforts, we not only enjoy a state-of-the-art facility, we have novel settlement and educational programs not typical of appellate divisions. He was thinking outside the box before the phrase was coined."

Attorney Thomas Dominick said the selection of Ramirez was "really a 'no brainer.'"

"He is an outstanding jurist who truly exemplifies all of the qualities for which the award is bestowed," he said. "The 4th DCA Outreach Plus Program, which Justice Ramirez established in 2002, is just one of his many accomplishments in promoting the public good and maintaining the honor and dignity of the legal profession."

Attorney Michael Scaffiddi said the outreach program implemented by Ramirez is "one of the greatest things that's happened."

"High school students who have no idea what the appellate court is have now seen lawyers argue at the appellate level," he explained. "It introduces young people to a level of understanding of the

justice system that some lawyers don't get to see."

Scaffiddi said Ramirez "makes difficult decisions every day with civility, a passion for and love of the law, and by following the rule of law."

"He's a great guy - a very, very well-deserving person to get this," he said.

Attorney Jacqueline Carey-Wilson said she has known Ramirez for over 16 years.

"I have a great respect for his work in the Fourth District, Second Division, as well as his efforts to improve access to justice for the litigants," she said. "The Second Division is unique because it is the only appellate court in California to allow the litigants to have a copy of the tentative opinion before oral argument. This allows the litigants to prepare more precisely for oral argument or to waive oral argument if the law is clearly against their position."

Carey-Wilson said the jurist is also leading the way for the Second Division to become its own District by supporting SB 848, which would create a Seventh Appellate District in which appellate cases arising from San Bernardino, Riverside, and Inyo counties would be decided efficiently and expeditiously by the local appellate court.

"This will prevent cases from these counties to be transferred to the other Divisions of the District," she said. "In addition, Justice Ramirez has welcomed many visitors to the appellate court, including attorneys from China and women attorneys and judges from Afghanistan. Justice Ramirez will often speak on appellate issues to educate practitioners and he supports the local bar associations. I am grateful for Justice Ramirez's leadership in the Inland Empire legal community."

Past recipients of the Kaufman-Campbell Award include Judges James McGuire and J. Michael Welch in 2010; Margaret Powers in 2009; Michael Dest in 2008; Brian McCarville, 2007; A. Rex Victor, 2006; Christopher Warner, 2005; Bob Krug, 2004; Patrick Morris, 2003; Michael Smith, Jules Fleuret and Dennis Cole, 2002; LeRoy Simmons, Betty Richli and Joseph Johnston, 2001 and Rufus Yent, Frederick Mandabach and John Ingro in 2000.

Pacheco said: "We are so fortunate to have such a committed and devoted jurist who has done so much for our community and while the Kaufman-Campbell award has been given to many fine and qualified recipients, I feel there is no one who is more deserving than Justice Ramirez."

"I'm just a lucky son-of-a-gun to be here at the right place and right time," Ramirez said. "I'm very, very excited."

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