



## BenchMarks: Raymond Van Stockum

Superior Court Judge,  
County of San Bernardino

by Ed Butler

Judge Raymond P. Van Stockum is a family-minded juvenile court judge who urges parents to be more involved with their children, as a deterrent to crime.

A member of the San Bernardino County bench for 16 years, Judge Van Stockum rates his three-year juvenile delinquency assignment at Rancho Cucamonga as his favorite among a wide variety of calendars handled.

In juvenile court, "you catch people at the time when you can do something with them," bringing out their good qualities, the judge explains.

He is passionate about the importance of parents maintaining involvement with their children. "Parent involvement will change the whole thing, bring us back," he says.

Judge Van Stockum was a civil practice attorney, largely in real estate, for 10 ½ years before Gov. Deukmejian appointed him to the municipal bench in May of 1990. He presided over both civil and criminal matters in that jurisdiction before taking a 4 ½-year assignment in family court during San Bernardino's pre-consolidation period. Since formal consolidation in 1998 he presided over criminal trials and preliminary hearings before his current juvenile assignment.

Born and raised in Chicago, the son of a long-term city police officer, the judge dreamt of following his older brother into the Air Force. The judge succeeded in winning a U.S. Air Force Academy appointment from U.S. Sen. Everett Dirksen, but a vision limitation prevented his enrollment. That didn't stop him from serving eight years in the Air Force, anyway, after high school.

While he was a latchkey child whose mother also worked, as a diamond setter for industrial diamonds and tools, Judge Van Stockum recalls a "very nice childhood" in Chicago. Neighborhood fun growing up included riding bikes, playing cowboys and Indians and baseball. In high school he played saxophone in the band. It was there that he met Elaine, his wife of 42 years, an oboe player with whom he has two adult daughters.

In high school he worked in grocery delivery and also at a gas station.

The judge's eight years in the Air Force took the young family far and wide. Switching back and forth between camera

repair and missile launch crew assignments, the judge's duty stations included Germany and Turkey, as well as Washington State, Colorado and Massachusetts. After boot training he had orders to report to Vietnam but was diverted to Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane. He recalls staying in a Kurd area of Turkey that was very tribal and where people had to be wary of causing cultural offense. He was part of a group robbed by bandits in their military mail bus, and was relieved of his class ring by that incident. In Germany he was stationed at a town flattened by Gen. Patton, and recalls the people being friendly and the region prosperous. The family enjoyed exploring Europe during that time.

The judge became fatigued of being moved by the military every 18 months and mustered out just before a new assignment in the White House defense communications agency.

Having gained the skill of camera repair in the Air Force, Judge Van Stockum opened a Gordon Ayers camera repair store in Ontario and managed it for several years in the 1970s, until its sale to Ritz Camera. (His family settled in Southern California after his parents retired there.) It was during that business period that he enrolled in Chaffey College to advance his education, visualizing a business degree. A business law class turned him on to the law, however, and led to his fulltime enrollment in the night program at the Western State University College of Law in Fullerton. His busy schedule included remaining at the camera store until he took up clerking at the Upland law office of Sid Jones, with whom he became a partner after the judge's admission to the State Bar in late 1979.

Judge Van Stockum mainly practiced real estate law, his favorite advocacy area, representing several builders as the West End area boomed with growth. He also did some bankruptcy and probate and along the way became a licensed real estate broker.

Judge Van Stockum was a sole practitioner for several months just before his appointment to the bench. The judge says he felt it was "just a natural progression" to seek judicial office. "I thought it would be an interesting thing to do."

Confidently and disarmingly congenial with a large woolly beard, Judge Van Stockum clearly is not overly impressed with his status as judge. He recalls with levity that his wife reminded him, early on, "that judges take out the garbage" just like everyone else.

He says the role of judge is gratifying in that "I really can make a difference... knowing you can do something, make a contribution in some way."

Among his leadership roles on the bench, he served as municipal court presiding judge

from 1995 to 1997 and served on the county law library board from 1993 to 2004.

During his three years presiding in juvenile court, Judge Van Stockum says he has observed an increase in the number of girls accused of crimes and of more serious crimes. Trends include identity theft "starting to creep into the kids," and commission of more sophisticated crimes at younger ages, such as a 12-year-old selling drugs.

In his view the attraction of gangs is providing youth "with a family that they don't have otherwise." He comments that "the breakdown of the family has caused all of this, in my view," resulting in gangs providing a substitute and identity otherwise lacking.

Judge Van Stockum would strongly urge parents to not "just turn (children) over to schools to raise them," but be involved with them daily, aware of who their friends are.

The judge gave good marks to a new pilot program, Court for Individual Treatment of Adolescents, which screens youth for mental health needs that might be helped with treatment. He says new leadership of the county behavioral health department has been supportive of the new program, which aims to use counseling to prevent worsening of criminal behavior. "I think it's working very well," the judge says.

Judge Van Stockum also gives high marks to the local attorneys practicing in juvenile court. He says juvenile delinquency is a unique area for which attorneys need specialized training to be prepared. With 99 percent of the juveniles represented by the public defender or alternate appointees, "the mindset is what's best for the kid." To achieve this end, he indicates both sides need to work cooperatively, as beating the rap might not be the most productive result, nor exacting the greatest possible punishment.

Judge Van Stockum has a reputation as a leader in adopting automation at the courthouse. He says computers have been a great aid, helping access case histories much faster and allowing research online. "We're not anywhere near a paperless society yet but a lot has converted," he reports.

He reports a major gain in automation in the establishment of two major parallel computer storage systems at Rancho Cucamonga and Victorville, allowing full backup after several years of development.

San Bernardino County Superior Court relies heavily on automation, with its understaffed judiciary bearing a greater caseload per bench officer than any other county in the state. Under constant volume pressure "we learn to work smarter," Judge Van Stockum says, adding, "We have a great bunch of judges that pull together and share the load, making it happen." He appreciates the fact that juvenile court allows more time per individual, compared to other

jurisdictions.

With funding of additional judgeships anticipated, the judge was asked to state ideal traits for a prospective judge. In his opinion, even temperament is the most important thing, not allowing one's buttons to be pushed. He adds that a judge needs to know how to respect people, have common sense, and have good knowledge of the law.

Off work, the judge and wife Elaine are focused to a large extent on their three grandchildren. Under the special circumstance of their son-in-law having been disabled as a Desert Storm combatant, Elaine resides with their two daughters in Texas where Elaine tends to the grandchildren while their mother and aunt work at a hospital. The judge visits the family in Texas once or twice a month and plans to retire there eventually.

This two-region lifestyle has limited his ability to participate in an old pastime, trap and skeet shooting, as well as community leadership activities. He no longer flies an airplane privately as he once did but still finds relaxation in woodworking. He says he also enjoys fishing with the grandchildren.

When he was an attorney, Judge Van Stockum's heavy involvement in Ontario Parkway Kiwanis included service as president. He also served as chapter chairman of the American Red Cross, San Bernardino Chapter.

Ed Butler is Rancho Cucamonga branch manager of the Law Library for San Bernardino County.

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