



BenchMarks: Douglas N. Gericke

Superior Court Judge,
County of San Bernardino

by Ed Butler

Judge Douglas N. Gericke sees breakup of the family unit as a key factor in the incidence of juvenile crime.

Having served eight years on the San Bernardino Juvenile Delinquency Court bench, he derives great satisfaction nonetheless from supporting reform of juvenile delinquents.

Having also presided over adult criminal, family, traffic, and civil matters in his 16-year career as judge, he especially likes presiding over juvenile delinquency matters.

The former parole agent and probation officer says his current assignment is "a natural continuation of what I started my working life doing.

"I enjoy working with kids. They're young enough to change. We see them change. We do what we can to help that along."

Judge Gericke grew up in San Bernardino as the son of Dr. Otto Gericke, the medical director of Patton State Hospital. The judge was born in Ukiah but his family moved to San Bernardino in time for him to attend and graduate from St. Anne's Grammar School. Experiencing the legendary Fifties firsthand as a teenager, he attended the first half of high school at St. Bernardine and the second half at Pacific High School, where he graduated in 1956.

He recalls that as a teenager he loved cars and owned several old Fords. "My friends and I used to like to work on them and fix them up." In keeping with that era, the boys would then show off their buggies cruising among several drive-ins including those on E Street.

Looking back to those times, the judge notes there has been a huge population increase and the rural atmosphere of the surrounding area is "fast disappearing." While "it was a pretty good place to grow up," as he remembers San Bernardino, "we seem to have a much more 'big city' feel now."

Judge Gericke ventured away to the Bay Area for his undergraduate study, majoring in psychology and graduating from St. Mary's College in Moraga. While he considered psychology as a career focus, an adviser suggested probation work, so he enrolled in graduate studies in criminology and sociology at San Diego State College. After about a year of that he returned to the Bay Area to take up employment as deputy probation officer of Alameda County. After four years in that role he joined the California Youth Authority and served it as field parole agent in the East Bay and Sacramento areas. At Sacramento he was assistant supervisor of the interstate unit, which tracks down escapees and out-of-custody wards.

In 1973 he transferred to Los Angeles to serve the CYA as community services consultant. This department dealt with related

agencies such as police departments and county probation departments in monitoring youth delinquency programs, supporting innovative approaches and auditing funded programs.

Judge Gericke says this earlier form of administration of justice was a good career choice for him. "I think there's nothing more interesting than human beings. I've always enjoyed working with people."

He was still a parole agent in Northern California when friends in probation and parole, who had entered the study of law, made it look attractive to him. "I thought it would be very interesting, and it turned out that was true," he says.

He first attended Lincoln University Law School in San Jose, before transferring in the CYA to Los Angeles and resuming residence in San Bernardino County. He resumed his law education at night at Citrus Belt Law School, now California Southern Law School, in Riverside.

He received his jurisdoctor degree in 1976, was sworn into bar membership that December, and the following summer began employment as a deputy district attorney of San Bernardino County. He spent his entire law practice career in the office, prosecuting misdemeanors and felonies for five years before supervising the welfare fraud unit for five years.

The judge says he experienced no career detriment in having attended Citrus Belt, which did not have accreditation. Once hired by the DA's office, "your educational background becomes far less important than your work performance," he says. "I was very happy to have (Citrus Belt) available."

While at the DA's office he served on the CYA regional citizens advisory committee and on the state Juvenile Justice Crime and Delinquency Prevention Commission.

After more than 10 years as a prosecutor, Judge Gericke was partly influenced by professional associates to look at bench office for further career progress. He says the work of a judge "looked very interesting. I thought it would be a natural progression." He liked the idea of continuing professional association with other prosecutors who moved on to the bench.

He spent about half of 1988 working as a commissioner at West Valley, with a variety of assignments including traffic, small claims, and civil, before Gov. Deukmejian appointed him to a Municipal Court judgeship created by the elevation of Judge Craig Kamansky to Superior Court.

As a municipal judge at Central Judge Gericke presided over criminal, traffic, jury trials and preliminary hearings. After San Bernardino County unified its courts he received a criminal assignment and did fast track for about 3 1/2 years before re-assignment to family and then juvenile delinquency eight years ago.

Judge Gericke expresses an attitude of genuineness and caring about the errant youth brought before him.

"It's tough to be a kid these days, to be a teenager...We have a lot more negative influences on kids, proliferation of drugs, the gang problem which is pretty widespread," he

says.

"And we're still feeling the effects of some of the radical social changes that took place in the Fifties and Sixties, families being less cohesive. That is probably I think on the whole not very good for kids."

Among juvenile crime trends, he sees a rise in incidence of violence, "gang type things," and a particularly distressing increase in group violence by females. Also, he observes the use of marijuana to be very widespread and "I think that's pretty tough on the kids," negatively influencing school performance and social development.

While crime is highly varied and "each kid that comes in has a different problem," Judge Gericke observes that "it's easier for kids that come from intact families to stay out of trouble. It's tough for a single parent to raise kids these days, especially if they have to work outside the home. It opens the door to a lot of temptations."

His general advice to parents would be to "be involved with their kids . . . as many ways as possible. Sports are a good thing. Knowing what the kids are doing."

As for the court process, Judge Gericke feels "we're doing pretty well" bearing the juvenile delinquency caseload, with the help of opening court branches during his tenure at Rancho Cucamonga and Victorville. "I think that's very positive. It brings services to areas where they are needed."

The San Bernardino branch still bears the heaviest caseload, and despite the recent help of refurbishment of the court facility the physical space is "barely big enough for the job."

His division of the county courts has benefitted from the paperwork efficiencies of computerization and a corresponding improvement in efficiency at the probation department, the judge says. While some workload was deflected by the district attorney's ability to file more serious cases directly in adult criminal court, that has not taken pressure off of demand for lockup facilities. That end has been improved in recent years with the opening of new juvenile halls at Rancho Cucamonga and Victorville and remodeling at San Bernardino.

Asked for general advice to attorneys appearing in his courtroom, Judge Gericke likes them to "be prepared and be courteous."

As for those who might like to serve as judge, he says "a good temperament" is needed. "Good common sense and broad life experience (are) very helpful. And I think having some solid experience in trial practice as a lawyer is very helpful as well."

"Most of all you need a good work ethic because there's an awful lot of work on the bench these days."

Judge Gericke's favorite pursuits away from work include travel, reading, sports and family activities, including those with children of his four children. His favorite travel destinations include Canada, Europe and the western United States.

Among his community activities, he served as a trustee of Aquinas High School, including board president, while working as an attorney.

While Judge Gericke doubts at age 66 that he will run again for re-election, "I probably won't totally retire if my health holds out. I enjoy working and keeping busy."

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