

A. Rex Victor Gets Kaufman-Campbell Nod

Veteran Jurist to be Honored June 8 for Service on Bench

By J' Amy Pacheco,
Editor, San Bernardino Bulletin

Veteran San Bernardino Judge A. Rex Victor will receive the San Bernardino County Bar Association's Kaufman-Campbell Award honoring judges of distinction on June 8.

The award is named for former state Supreme Court Justice Marcus Kaufman and former Fourth District Court of Appeal Justice Joseph B. Campbell. It 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.

Presiding Judge Larry Allen said Victor's colleagues are "very happy that Judge Victor is receiving this recognition."

"He's long been a mainstay of our court system," Allen said. "He has presided over civil calendars, criminal calendars, and he's done two tours as presiding judge of our juvenile court. He's always been a valued asset to us and we're very happy he has received this recognition. It's well deserved."

Victor, 70, said he was "surprised" to learn he would receive the six-year-old award, and joked that other judges were "more deserving."

"I'm pleased," he said. "Joe Campbell and I were friends for many years, and I have nothing but great admiration for Marcus Kaufman. I knew him for a long time also."

A native of Nebraska, Victor began working in a store before he was 12. He spent time working as a janitor, waiter and ditch digger before graduating from St. Louis University with a bachelor's degree in business and finance.

He moved to California and went to work for General Dynamics, handling contract proposals for the federal government. Encouraged by future Judge Kenneth Ziebarth, then an attorney with General Dynamics, Victor enrolled in law school and graduated from Loyola

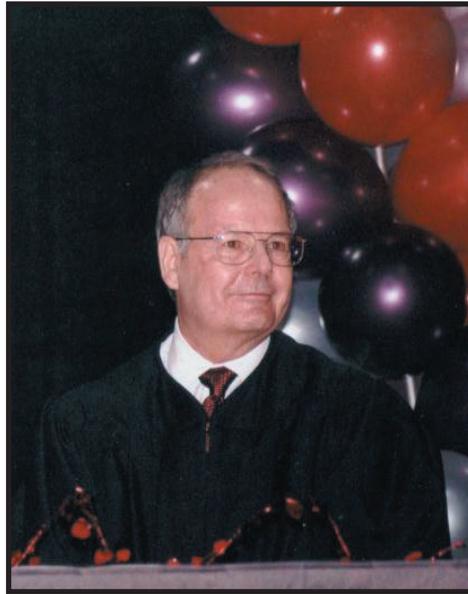
University of Los Angeles School of Law.

In 1968, he joined the San Bernardino District Attorney's Office. After four years, he left to become a partner in a private firm. In 1975, he returned to the District Attorney's Office as assistant district attorney.

He later returned to private practice, and was appointed to the bench in 1986. Victor currently handles a civil fast track assignment in San Bernardino.

Associate Justice Betty Richli from the Fourth District Court of Appeal, Div. Two, worked with Victor in the District Attorney's Office and later on the San Bernardino Bench.

"Rex Victor epitomizes the term, a 'judge's judge,'" she said, adding that he has "so many virtues" that a judge should possess.



"He is incredibly bright, and extraordinarily conscientious," she said. "Everybody knows he's a workaholic. He maintains a great demeanor. He really is what I think most people who come into a courtroom want to see on the bench."

Victor, she said, also possesses a "great sense of humor."

"It's rather wry," she observed. Richli said she has known Victor as a lawyer, an administrator, a judge and a colleague.

"I've had a lot of opportunity to be around him," she observed. "I think Rex wears very well over the years."

Judge John Martin, who also worked with Victor in the District Attorney's Office and later, in the Juvenile Court,

joked that Victor has "the worst sense of direction of any judge on the San Bernardino County bench." But he also recalled Victor having given him his first job in the area in 1978, when he was hired as a prosecutor.

"I have a great deal of respect and affection for him," Martin said. "I can think of no one who so richly deserves this award -- not only for his service on the bench, but for his service to the legal community since I've been here."

Roberta Shouse, director of the Legal Aid Society of San Bernardino, recalled Victor volunteering his time at the Legal Aid Clinic "many, many years ago."

"He was absolutely delightful," she said. "He was funny, and helpful." Victor, she said, even brought several of his five daughters to work in the clinic as well.

"I remember thinking what an excellent attorney he would be," Shouse reflected. "I would listen to him and think he would be an attorney that I'd want. He was an excellent attorney, and very pleasant to have around."

As a judge, Victor has been credited with reforming the county's Juvenile Courts. Cathy Cimbalo, director of the Department of Children's Services, described Victor as "Probably the most effective juvenile court judge we've ever had."

"He has an amazing capability to balance the law - which he has an incredible knowledge of - with the best interests of children and families," she said. "His decisions were fair and pragmatic - what was best for the kids."

Cimbalo said social workers often have difficulty understanding legal decisions, and don't always see them as fair.

"I know of no social worker who objected to having cases in Judge Victor's court," she said.

Victor was "very strict," and "demanded timeliness and quality in court reports," she said. But he treated everyone equally, whether it was an attorney, a social worker, or a fellow jurist.

"He expected everyone to do their jobs and do them well - and he did the same," she said.

Cimbalo said she found Victor to be "delightful, gracious" and "fun."

"We were sorry to see him leave," she said. "We hoped he would stay in Juvenile until he retired."

Judge Raymond "Chip" Haight echoed those sentiments. He served with Victor in Juvenile Court first as a pro tem judge, then as a referee and later a commissioner.

"He completely changed the culture from a 'go along, get along' system to a very effective and efficient system," Haight said. "One of my greatest breaks was working as a bench officer for him. He's a good person to work with."

Victor, he said, taught him how to be a judge and how to run a calendar.

"He has such good habits," Haight observed, explaining that Victor taught him to start promptly at 8:30 a.m. and to avoid continuances, which he described as "the enemy of good calendar management."

"I think he's the best calendar manager on the bench," Haight opined. Victor, he said, is a "really hard worker who comes to work by 7 a.m. each day."

"Working with him causes other people to work harder because of his example," he said.

Sandra Baxter, supervising deputy county counsel, also appeared before Victor in Juvenile Court. She described Victor as her "favorite judge."

"He is just the best," she said. "He is extremely bright. ...I used to fashion my closing arguments by thinking how he would fashion a closing argument."

Baxter said Victor is a "quick study" who is also "very fair, terrifically fair" and "even-handed with all parties." She described the jurist as "funny," and a "joy to work with."

But he was also "tough."

"You had to be on top of the game, and you wanted to," she said. "Because he was."

Victor, she said, "exemplifies everything I value in a judge." This was especially important in the Juvenile Court, where each side has a difficult job to do, she said.

"He never shrank from the job," she said. "He never ruled from sympathy. We could absolutely trust him. We knew he would hold us to a legal standard."

"He's a great judge," she added. "I'm very glad he's getting this honor. He exemplifies the best of the law."

Victor will receive the award June 8 at the Clarion Hotel in San Bernardino (formerly the Radisson).

Past recipients of the Kaufman-Campbell Award include Frederick Mandabach, Rufus Yent and John Ingro in 2000; Joseph Johnston, Betty Richli and LeRoy Simmons in 2001; Dennis Cole, Jules Fleuret and Michael Smith in 2002; Patrick Morris in 2003; Bob Krug in 2004 and Christopher Warner in 2005.

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