



Judicial Vignettes: San Bernardino County's Newest Superior Court Judge

by Ed Butler

When new judges are appointed, our field reporter, Ed Butler, Esq. interviews them and submits for your information, a "Judicial Vignette." These vignettes are added to our online collection of Benchmarks, a feature in the Bar Bulletin.

The story of Judge Miriam Ivy Morton is one of a local girl who makes good and serves her community.

It's also one of a woman who earned it the old hard way, paying her way through college waiting on tables and cleaning university lab equipment.

Judge Morton brings widely varied practice and prior bench experience to her new role as Superior Court judge of San Bernardino County. Gov. Schwarzenegger appointed her on Friday, Jan. 25, she was sworn into office the following Sunday, and she was on the bench the day after that. She fills the judicial office vacated by the retirement of

Judge Paul M. Bryant.

Judge Morton had already warmed to the judicial role for more than a year as juvenile hearing officer of the local Superior Court. In that capacity she heard lesser juvenile crimes as assigned and also substituted as needed for judges on both dependency and more formal delinquency matters.

Her first assignment as Superior Court judge is criminal trials at Barstow.

Judge Morton is virtually a lifelong product of the High Desert, having grown up in Apple Valley from the first grade. Her father was an Air Force careerist stationed at George Air Force Base and retired there. Her mother taught math in the Victor School District, mostly at the junior high level and at Silverado High School upon its opening.

Judge Morton says her favorite extra curricular activities growing up included reading, hiking, swimming and travel.

She ventured away to UC Santa Barbara to earn a bachelor's degree in sociology. She helped pay her way working as a waitress during the summer and, during school, cleaning test tubes, beakers, and base baths in the UCSB physics department.

Graduating early at midyear, she worked as a substitute teacher in the High Desert, saving money toward enrollment the following fall at the Hastings College of the Law. When she graduated there in 1993, she received a public interest scholar distinction after working in eviction defense in the San Francisco Tenderloin district and general advocacy assistance.

Her varied career as advocate began

with five years associated with Robert J. O'Connor in the High Desert, first in family and criminal defense work and later bankruptcy. In 1998 she became a sole practitioner, contracting with Alvarenga & Drake in adult criminal defense, and also the firm of Friedman, Gardner & Gebbie in San Bernardino in juvenile indigent defense. She also worked on the criminal defense conflict panel under Robert Ponce. The next phase was work in Los Angeles as general counsel for Kurtzman Carson Consultants, a firm consulting chiefly on large scale corporate bankruptcies. Her hiring as juvenile court hearing officer followed that in 2006.

After a couple of months as judge, Judge Morton says she really enjoys it, and enjoys having her own courtroom and calendar in contrast with constant travel in the juvenile hearing officer role.

She says she had had the desire to become a judge for a number of years. "I feel that I have something to offer, that I can help resolve cases," move them along, she says. Her object is "basically (to) help the system work the way it's supposed to work."

Judge Morton was president of the High Desert Bar Association in 2005, serving as board member from 1998 until 2006.

She and husband Armand, a Hesperia school teacher, have two sons, seven and three. She says spending time with her family is a top priority off work, and she still enjoys travel.

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

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