



BenchMarks: Jules E. Fleuret

Superior Court Judge,
County of San Bernardino

by Ed Butler

A strong taste for variety in life has spurred a long legal career of achievement and professional and community involvement for Judge Jules E. Fleuret.

Now a Superior Court judge at Victorville District for 14 years, Judge Fleuret has always savored the opportunity to sample different professional activities. Having served as the Victorville supervising deputy district attorney for several years, he plunged into civil practice and found himself stimulated there by several practice areas. Having been appointed to the bench by Gov. Pete Wilson in 1992, he has enthusiastically embraced several kinds of court calendars successively. After all this variety he continues to exhibit satisfaction at trying new things.

His professional merit along the way has resulted in his past service as judicial supervisor of the Victorville District and receipt in 2002 of the Kaufman/Campbell Award bestowed by the San Bernardino County Bar Association. The honor singles out local judges on the basis of courtesy, integrity, wisdom and impartiality.

A lifelong resident of California, Judge Fleuret was born in San Diego and grew up in Imperial County near El Centro. His father worked as a paving contractor and his mother was a registered nurse.

The judge says his favorite pastimes growing up included camping, prospecting, "rock hounding," and reading. He remains an avid reader.

An involved student at Imperial High School in Imperial, he served as its student body president along with filling various other student body offices. Also as a student there he was involved in the tennis and chess clubs and California Scholarship Federation and managed the student store.

As a high school student and undergraduate at the University of San Diego, he busied himself in several part-time jobs including construction work in the summers. His jobs at university included that of recreation room monitor, library assistant, and food service worker.

As for career choice, "I decided in junior high school that I wanted to be a lawyer," Judge Fleuret says. "I thought I would like the drama and excitement and intellectual challenge of the law. I enjoyed reading and writing and I was a good public speaker."

Having majored in English at USD with philosophy and Spanish minors, he chose the same university for earning his jurisdoctorate, which he received in 1973. He continued busy with jobs during law school, at first employed by the sheriff's department as infirmary clerk,

information clerk and monitor of hospitalized prisoners. During his last 1 ½ years as a law student he worked fulltime as a law clerk for a San Diego firm that specialized in securities, antitrust and complex business litigation.

In 1973 he was admitted to the California Bar and also began a varied, 14-year career as deputy district attorney of San Bernardino County. In addition to prosecuting general felony trials, he accepted varied assignments including major frauds unit, pornography and red light abatement, consumer protection unit, and service as Grand Jury legal adviser. He served on the attorney general's obscenity and pornography commission and his consumer protection targets included false advertising, deceptive business practices, and short weights in products.

Asked to reflect on particularly memorable prosecutions of his, Judge Fleuret mentions "a gold mine investment fraud scheme involving 80 victims with a combined loss of \$1 million." Search warrants in the case were served in this county, San Diego County and Nevada. He also prosecuted "several rogue union members who vandalized a High Desert concrete firm's trucks and equipment during a labor dispute." The culprits poured grinding compound into the oil and gas filler tubes of the victim's trucks and equipment. "A sad case that I handled involved a 40-year-old man who kept giving drugs to his teenage niece," the judge relates. "She finally died of a drug overdose."

Around the time that he joined the DA's office, Judge Fleuret settled with his family in Highland. He relocated his home to the High Desert after becoming supervising deputy DA at Victorville in 1983.

He broke away from public employment in 1988 to take up civil practice at the Victorville firm of Caldwell and Kennedy. His practice emphases there included real estate, business, probate and civil litigation.

Looking back, Judge Fleuret says he would not rate criminal or civil practice as being preferable, one over the other, in terms of job satisfaction. "I had more opportunity for trial work as a prosecutor, which I found very satisfying," he says. "But I also enjoyed the creativity required in transactional work" in business practice. He also enjoyed probate and civil litigation.

Judge Fleuret had been an attorney more than 18 years when Gov. Wilson singled him out in 1992 to succeed the retiring Judge Kenneth G. Ziebarth, Jr. at Victorville.

Judge Fleuret says the role of judge attracted him for the sake of "giving up the adversarial role for that of the neutral arbiter of cases."

In his first four years as judge he worked under the old master calendar system presiding over a variety of civil and criminal matters. Then followed civil and criminal fast track, four years of probate calendar, and 3½ years of family court. For two years now he's been handling arraignments, pre-preliminary hearings and preliminary hearings.

The judge says he's enjoyed all these calendars but has been "ready to move on after several years on each calendar. I enjoy the variety of assignments that is available.

For me, changing assignments prevents burn out."

Judge Fleuret was asked to describe the detriment created by this county's widely reported shortage of judges, relative to workload.

"We have an exhausting volume of cases. Handling 100 cases a day is not unusual for the (criminal) calendar I now manage," he says. "Since October 2003 monthly filings for misdemeanors have increased 23 percent and felony filings have jumped 28 percent. There have been similar increases in other filings.

"Due to the volume of cases, particularly in civil and family law, we cannot spend the time we would like on each case. Staff and judges burn out more quickly. Civil, family law and probate litigants wait much longer for hearings and trials."

Meanwhile, the county court awaits adoption of expected legislation adding more judgeships.

Judge Fleuret says ideal traits for prospective judicial appointees are "intelligence, patience, a sense of organization, a sense of humor, a desire to serve others, as broad a legal background as possible, (and) a history of community service and activities."

He admits that Victorville District will need more courtrooms in order to accommodate more judges. Also, he says the courthouse there, lacking a cafeteria at present, needs more room for family court services and also more parking.

Among other issues, Judge Fleuret reports that "response to jury summons has increased significantly" since the court recently began an enforcement program.

He applauds the growth of the private judging movement and ADR in general, as "It is always preferable for parties to settle their disputes rather than go through the trouble and expense of litigation. Moreover, we simply do not have the judicial and support resources to provide swift justice for civil litigants."

As for making life easier for self representing litigants, Judge Fleuret feels "shorter lines and more self-help services" would be beneficial.

Judge Fleuret admits there are times when he misses the role of advocate.

Asked for pointers to attorneys on litigating effectively, he advises to "be on time. Keep in contact with the court if you are going to be late. Be prepared. Don't take yourself too seriously. Keep your perspective on the cases you are handling."

Having been deeply involved in community outreach as an attorney and judge, Judge Fleuret likes to see attorneys provide pro bono service. In his own experience as attorney, he served on the pro bono council of the Lucerne Valley Community Council, and directed the legal aid clinic of Christ the King Church.

"There are many people who simply cannot afford a lawyer. By helping them lawyers can improve the image of the legal profession while they are helping others," Judge Fleuret says.

He reports that his chief satisfactions in the role of judge include "the opportunity for creativity in managing calendars and settling

cases.” Also, “I enjoy the human interplay and drama involved in the courtroom and in the cases that come before the court. I like working with people, lawyers and litigants.”

He indicates that one of his favorite professional sidelight activities is presiding over mock trial. He finds that in court his experience with youth tends to involve those in trouble. Mock trial provides a contrast in bringing to court energetic, positive, successful students. He finds that mock trial is “a good general life experience” for students, providing an organizational discipline, while also giving participants a sampling of trial activity as a possible career interest.

Judge Fleuret has a long record of varied involvements both professionally and as a citizen of the community. As a judge, for example, he has served as a teacher of judges, as a member of the Superior Court executive committee and miscellaneous committees, and for nine years as a past trustee of the Law Library for San Bernardino County.

As an attorney, he served as an examiner for the State Bar Disciplinary Board. He was an active county bar association member, holding various offices including president-elect at the time he was appointed judge. He also served as chairman of its law day committee and speaker’s bureau and on its judicial selection and evaluation committee.

Also drawing upon his legal expertise, he served as a teacher for the county sheriff’s academy and in business law for Victor Valley Community College.

As a community resident, he has also served as commissioner of the Victor Valley Wastewater Reclamation Authority and president of the Spring Valley Lake Association board. He has been a board member of two local chambers of commerce and the Victor Valley Community Improvement Council, along with Project Focus, assisting at risk children and their families; Streams of the Desert Foundation, coordinating local charitable giving; and Youth in Charge, which provides educational and recreational activities for youth.

Judge Fleuret and Ann, his wife of 36 years, parents of two adult children, recently occupied a new High Desert home that was an involving two-year project in its development. Ann works as a language, speech and hearing specialist for the Hesperia Unified School District.

The judge says his favorite pursuits away from work include spending time with the couple’s three grandchildren, with a fourth to arrive soon. He says he spends up to 90 minutes daily power walking and working out at the gym, and also enjoys gardening and landscaping. Special focal points these days include studying Spanish and the Mexican legal system.

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

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