

HONORING JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE AND FAIRNESS

JUDGE KEITH D. DAVIS (JD 81)

When the Hon. Keith D. Davis (JD 81), Judge of the San Bernardino Superior Court, joined the bench more than thirteen years ago, one of his mentors gave him some career advice that stuck.

“He told me to change assignments every four years or so,” Judge Davis recalls. “He said that change keeps you from getting burned out. It also keeps you fresh, intellectually interested and engaged. It was some of the best advice I ever received.”

Judge Davis’ most recent career change puts him at the helm of the California Judges Association (CJA), an 81-year-old professional organization that represents the interests of the California judiciary and provides judges with training and educational programs to help them transition from one assignment to the next. As president of the 2,600-member group, Judge Davis plans to continue CJA’s legacy of promoting judicial excellence and fairness through advocacy work and programs that keep judges current and informed.

Associate Justice Eileen Moore, a fellow CJA executive board member, says Judge Davis has what it takes to effectively address the needs and concerns of California judges. “My impression is that he is a born leader,” Justice Moore says. “He’s a voice of sanity in this brave new world of shrinking budgets and increasing challenges to the independence of the judiciary.”

THE PATH TO LEADERSHIP

Looking back, Judge Davis has embraced new experiences for much of his life. A self-described military brat, he saw much of the United States and Europe as a youngster. By the ninth grade, he had attended eleven schools. While being uprooted had its downside, the experience of changing cities and traveling the world with his family helped prepare him for his work as a lawyer and judge. From a young age, he learned how to relate to people and how to quickly make new friends and find his way around.

Judge Davis sowed the seeds of his varied career at GGU, where he received guidance from Dean Judy McKelvey and instruction from Professors Bernard Segal, Michael DeVito, Roger Bernhardt and others. At GGU, he focused on real property and copyright. While in school, he never dreamed he would some day be a Superior Court judge, he says. Rather, he prepared himself for what he thought would be a career spent as a lawyer. Initially, he planned to work as a transactional lawyer in business and corporate environments, but after passing the bar exam and working for awhile in a small law firm, he realized he wanted something different. In 1985, he landed a job with the San Bernardino District Attorney’s office, a position that opened his eyes to new possibilities.

“I found that I absolutely loved trying cases while representing the people of California,” Judge Davis says. “I also enjoyed jury trial work a great deal – I found it fascinating to be put in a position where you had to persuade jurors and show them that your view was the one they should follow. I found this work very enjoyable. It was very stressful, too, but also incredibly rewarding.”

Judge Davis practiced law in the private sector for ten years after leaving the District Attorney’s office in 1987. He tried dozens of jury trials for public entities, law enforcement officers, private businesses, and individual clients. Although he primarily represented defendants in his trial practice, he also represented plaintiffs.



Judge Keith D. Davis and Dean Drucilla Stender Ramey at the California State Bar Annual Meeting, where Judge Davis was appointed President of the California Judges Association.

In 1996, a colleague encouraged him to apply for judicial appointment. While initially dismissing the idea, Davis realized that becoming a judge would give him an opportunity to give back to the community that had treated him so well. The following year, Judge Davis was appointed to the San Bernardino Superior Court. Since then, he has presided over San Bernardino County criminal, civil, juvenile dependency, juvenile delinquency, family law, and probate cases. He also served three terms as the Presiding Judge of the Appellate Division and participated in numerous court committees. Judge Davis served on the CJA’s Executive Board for three years before fellow members elected him president this past September.

MOVING FORWARD

Judge Davis’ leadership role with CJA adds a new dimension to a career that’s been anything but static. When asked if there are any changes he’d like to implement at CJA, Judge Davis paused before giving examples of the organization’s value to judges, and by extension, the community at large.

“The CJA has done a fine job of representing the interests of its members and promoting judicial excellence for the last 81 years,” Judge Davis says. “It was around for a long time before I came along, and it will be around for a long time after I’m gone. I simply want to continue its good work during my term.”

By Gina Gotsill