

Certification Matters



Q&A with Ann McClure

Chief Justice, Texas Eighth Court of Appeals in El Paso

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1. Why did you decide to pursue becoming a chief justice?

This court has had a terrific reputation since its inception in 1911, and I never thought about running against an incumbent justice. In 1984, however, two of the four justices announced they were retiring, and I was granted this 'now or never' opportunity. I enjoyed practicing Family Law and Civil Appellate Law and I felt I had a chance to make a positive difference in those areas as a justice. So I ran for one of the seats, and joined the court on January 1, 1995. By the time my predecessor chief justice retired in 2011, he had prepared me for the administrative end of the job. In addition to authoring my equal share of opinions, I am also responsible for shepherding our budget through each legislative session.



2. What's the highlight of your private and public career?



The Texas Academy of Family Law Specialists created the Judge Sam Emison Award in 1984 to honor each year one exceptionally distinguished family law practitioner or judge who has made significant contributions to Family Law. I received this award in 2002. This is the highlight of my career as it carries with it the recognition and respect of my peers. My husband, David McClure, won the award in 2012, which made us the only husband-wife duo to accomplish this.



As for my public career, I would consider the highlight to be the Judge Samuel Pressara Outstanding Jurist Award, which was presented to me by the Texas Bar Foundation in 2005.

3. Who's been your mentor that's helped you throughout your career?

Hugh Hackney, who currently serves as the chair of the International Dispute Resolution and Arbitration Practice Group, was my primary inspiration for entering law school. He is Board Certified in Labor and Employment and Family Law, and we worked together in both areas. I would also consider former Supreme Court Justice Eugene Cook and the late Chief Justice Max Osborn of this court to have been highly instrumental in helping me find direction in my legal journey. And of course, my Rock of Gibraltar has always been my husband.

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4. How has Board Certification impacted your career?

First of all, Family Law plays a very important role in the legal system — almost 50 percent of cases filed across the state are related to Family Law in some way. Secondly, Board Certification is beneficial to marketing an attorney's skill set. My network grew enormously after receiving my Board Certification, as did my reputation and credibility. Successful marketing brought even more state-wide opportunities.

Lastly, there are greater chances for legal malpractice now due to frequent legislative changes, appellate decisions, and rule amendments. If one does not stay current with continuing legal education, it's easy to fall into a number of traps. In fact, that is the acronym of the Texas Rules of Appellate Procedure — TRAP. The requirements of maintaining my dual Board Certifications ensure that I stand ready and able to handle the complex appeals this court receives.

5. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Hopefully, I will be playing with my yet-to-be-born grandchildren and my puppies, and enjoying life with my husband after retirement.

6. What would you recommend to an attorney aspiring to become a Chief Justice one day?

First, have a passion for reading and writing. I read and write every hour of every work day, and lots of weekends, too. I read briefs, prepare for and participate in oral arguments, confer with the other justices, and write opinions. There is satisfaction in bringing an appeal to its correct resolution and every one of them teaches me something new.

Second, enjoy the action. Litigators and trial court judges view the action in the courtroom every day. Appellate judges achieve the same thrill, only we do it vicariously. We enjoy reading the trial court proceedings to determine whether any error was committed. Then we become storytellers, explaining to the lawyers, the litigants, and future generations of lawyers what was done correctly and what mistakes were made.

Third, accumulate experience in trying lawsuits. Substantive law is learned by reading. Procedural proficiency requires full engagement in the entire spectrum of the legal process.



Fourth, become Board Certified in a selected area. Certification provides the opportunity to demonstrate you have mastered the knowledge, skills, and abilities to operate at a high level of expertise in the legal field.

And lastly, remain active and dedicated. Dedication will point to the right direction of your career path, just as my dedication led me to become the first female chief justice of the El Paso Court of Appeals.