

The Judge Margaret A. Cooper Public Interest Law Fellowship

Margaret A. Cooper served as Judge of the 353rd District Court of Travis County for sixteen years from 1993 to 2008, when she retired from the district bench, serving thereafter as a senior judge for six years. She graduated from the University of Houston School of Law in 1977, and worked as a trial attorney for the firm of Tinsman and Houser in San Antonio, before returning to Austin to take a position as hearing officer for the Texas Education Agency. She later served as Director of Hearings and Appeals for the agency. During her tenure, she advised school districts and citizens in the area of education law generally, as well as on the implementation of the special education provisions of the landmark provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act relating to the education of handicapped children, who, prior to the passage of this statute, had often been turned away or denied adequate educational services by their local school districts.

Judge Cooper returned to private practice in 1983, incorporating her school law practice with a more general civil practice. She continued in the private practice of law until her election to the bench, becoming board-certified in the area of administrative law in 1990. In 1983, she also served as president of the recently formed Travis County Women Lawyers' Association, at a time when women were not always fully welcome in trial practice, a situation that has certainly changed over time.

Following her election to the bench, Judge Cooper presided over a wide variety of cases falling under the civil jurisdiction of the Travis County district courts, including family, juvenile, child protective service, commercial litigation, personal injury, administrative appeals from state agency decisions, encompassing areas of civil law touching virtually every aspect of our citizens' lives. Programs were developed to assist the *pro se* litigants who could not afford representation, but needed navigation through the legal process of the court system. At her retirement, she was serving as the civil presiding judge, assisting the local administrative judge on civil matters, the ongoing development of dockets to address the needs of the increasing population of the county, and the modernization of procedures and practices necessary to the function of the courts that would insure the consistent movement of dockets so that the legal needs of our county could be timely and efficiently met.

Following her retirement from the district bench, she was appointed by the Austin City Council in 2009 to serve as chair of the approximately thirty-three member Citizens Advisory Task Force, charged with developing a thirty-year comprehensive plan that would provide a framework for growth and management of the city of Austin into the future. This project, encompassing many volunteer hours dedicated to this effort by city staff, citizens and the task force, resulted in the adoption by the city council in 2012 of *Imagine Austin*, the comprehensive plan now being implemented, with ongoing citizen participation, to shape the city to the demands of the future, in an effort to insure that the city prepares for inevitable change, rather than simply reacting to it.

The Judge Margaret Cooper Public Interest Law Fellowship is awarded in hopes that the recipient will be inspired by what successful lawyers like Margaret Cooper do in the public interest as an essential part of their career, and will make the same commitment.

The Judge Suzanne Covington Public Interest Law Fellowship

Judge Covington received her BA with high honors from the University of Texas at Austin in 1972 and her J.D. with honors from the University of Texas School of Law in 1977. She began her legal career as a Legal Aid attorney, with DNA-People's Legal Services, in Arizona, later serving with Greater Boston Legal Services, Legal Aid Society of Central Texas, and as Director of the Children's Rights Clinic at The University of Texas School of Law. She began her judicial career as an Associate Judge in 1990, eventually becoming a Senior District Judge serving in the 201st District Court in Austin, Texas from 1995 through 2010.

Judge Covington is a life fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation and the Travis County Women Lawyers' Foundation. She is past president of Austin's Robert W. Calvert Chapter of the American Inns of Court. Recent recognitions include the naming of the Judge Suzanne Covington Pro Bono Service Award in her honor. She was recently recognized as a Pathfinder by the Travis County Women Lawyers Association. She serves on the governing board of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation.

In previous years, Judge Covington has served the legal profession on numerous boards and committees including the Texas Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Court-Annexed Mediation, Texas Supreme Court Historical Society, Texas Center for the Judiciary Long Range Planning Committee, Travis County Lawyer Referral Service and Volunteer Legal Services of Central Texas.

The Judge Suzanne Covington Public Interest Law Fellowship is awarded in hopes that the recipient will be inspired by what successful lawyers like Suzanne Covington do in the public interest as an essential part of their career, and will make the same commitment.

The Judge John Dietz Public Interest Law Fellowship

John K. Dietz received 3 degrees from The University of Texas, his Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Psychology, and in 1977 his JD from UT Law School. During his undergraduate years he was selected as Cactus Outstanding Student, Cactus Goodfellow, and a member of the Friar's Society. During his Law School years, he represented the Law School in the National Locke Purnell Mock Trial Competition.

Following graduation, he served as an Administrative Assistant to Attorney General John Hill, an Administrative Assistant to Senator Lloyd Doggett, a Prosecutor with the Special Crimes Division of the Travis County District Attorney, and private practitioner. John was elected to the 250th District Court Bench in the November 1990 election. During his time on the Bench, he was appointed by his colleagues to serve as the chair of the Juvenile Board and then the Local Administrative Judge, which he served for a record 10 years. Judge Dietz has been instrumental in promoting and implementing e-Filing systems in the State, in designing, planning, and implementing the electronic document management system for the Travis County Civil Courts, and electronic evidence presentation systems. He has been a leader and relentless advocate for the planning and building of a new greatly needed Travis County Civil and Family Courthouse. He also was a pioneer in developing a procedure that allowed his juries to ask questions during the trial. He served as the President for the Texas Association for District Judges for the 2008-2009 term.

Judge Dietz is dedicated to education for attorneys, law students and fellow judges and has been a speaker at well over 100 continuing legal education seminars, UT Law School classes, civic groups, and professional organizations on various topics including Discovery, Summary Judgment, Advocacy Before the Court, Voir Dire, Direct and Cross Examination, Expert Challenge Motions, and Electronic Presentation of Evidence. Attorneys from all over Texas request his papers on Discovery, Motions for Summary Judgment and Disqualification of Lawyers and Judges. Judge Dietz was also an Adjunct Professor at the UT Law School teaching the Advanced Civil Litigation course and has coached UT mock trial teams.

Judge Dietz has presided over numerous complex cases with statewide impact including those involving the deregulation of the electric utilities of Texas, Texas Freedom of Information Act, Texas Insurance Receivership cases, and Texas Election Laws. Among the many cases to gain notoriety was the \$32 million verdict awarded to a Texas couple against Farmers Insurance over the company's handling of a mold case, the case drew national attention and prompted some insurers to stop offering coverage. In the early 1990's, Judge Dietz held two Ku Klux Klan officials in contempt for their activity of intimidation to the Vidor Public Housing Project. However, Judge Dietz is best known for the two Texas School Finance Cases that he has presided over, the most recent was a 56 day trial with over 20,000 exhibits, and it was the largest of the school finance cases in Texas history. On December 31, 2015, Judge Dietz retired after 24 years on the bench. He is currently serving as a Senior Judge while enjoying retirement.

The Judge John Dietz Public Interest Law Fellowship is awarded in hopes that the recipient will be inspired by what successful lawyers like John Dietz do in the public interest as an essential part of their career, and will make the same commitment.

The Justice Diane Henson Public Interest Law Fellowship

Diane Henson obtained her J.D. with honors from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa in 1979. From 1979 to 1982 she entered Public Service/Public Interest Law as a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. as part of their Criminal Division Honors Program. Her rotating assignments included Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia and the District of Maryland, the Office of International Affairs and the Appellate Section.

Diane joined the law firm of Graves, Dougherty, Hearon & Moody in Austin, Texas in 1983 where she became a partner/shareholder and practiced until 1995. During this time she also served part time as an Adjunct Professor at St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio and the University of Texas at Austin. She left to form her own law firm in 1995, the Henson Law Firm, where she practiced until 2006.

Her rise to national prominence came as lead counsel in a class action filed against the University of Texas at Austin seeking injunctive relief to enforce Title IX in the Athletic Department. After one year of litigation, the case settled and the University doubled its women's athletic program and provided millions of dollars in additional scholarship aid to its women athletes. This case received national publicity and was featured on CBS's Eye on America and in the Washington Post as well as by other national press. Justice Henson went on to become a national leader in sports law disability discrimination, sex discrimination, ADA, due process, First Amendment and Title IX cases. This was supplemented with products liability class actions, medical malpractice, toxic tort, reverse discrimination, employment discrimination and other complex litigation.

She also served as a consultant to the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education where she assisted with revising the OCR's Title IX Investigations Manual. A highly sought speaker and author, her published articles and presentations are impressively extensive.

Re-entering Public Service/Public Interest Law, Diane was elected to a six year term (2007 to 2012) as Justice on the Third Court of Appeals, Austin, Texas, where she served on more than 2000 three-judge panels and personally authored more than 700 opinions. This court is an intermediate appellate court handling both civil and criminal appeals, as well as all governmental regulatory agency appeals (much like the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals in the federal system). In 2013, she once again entered private practice with the firm of Ikard Wynne in Austin. She is currently on a well deserved sabbatical riding her bicycle on a 2800 mile trip along the Atlantic coast from Key West, Florida to Canada.

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The Justice J. Woodfin (Woodie) Jones Public Interest Law Fellowship

A native of Austin, Woodie Jones graduated from Stephen F. Austin High School and the University of Texas at Austin. He received his B.A. in the Plan II Honors Program in 1972, where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He received his J.D. from the University of Texas Law School in 1975 and earned an LL.M. degree from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1995. He has been a member of the State Bar of Texas since 1975.

After law school, he accepted a judicial clerkship with the 14th Court of Appeals in Houston. He then practiced law with the firm of Bracewell & Patterson in Houston from 1976 to 1981. He returned to Austin in 1981, where he was a partner with the firm of Sneed, Vine, Wilkerson, Selman & Perry from 1981 to 1988.

Woodie Jones was elected as a Justice of the Third District Court of Appeals in 1988, where he served until the end of 2000. After leaving the Court, he practiced civil appellate law with the firm of Scott, Douglass & McConnico before helping found the appellate boutique firm of Alexander Dubose Jones & Townsend in 2003. He was elected Chief Justice of the Third Court in 2009 and served in that capacity until the end of 2014. On his retirement from the Court, he returned to his old firm, now known as Alexander Dubose Jefferson & Townsend LLP, where he currently serves in an “of counsel” capacity.

During his years in private practice, he was rated by Texas Lawyer Magazine as a “Super Lawyer” in the area of civil appellate law. He is currently board certified in civil appellate law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. He has been a frequent speaker and author for continuing legal education programs, most often in the areas of judicial decision-making and appellate advocacy.

Active in the Austin Bar Association throughout his career, he has served on the board of directors and held various offices, including president in 1987–88. In addition to serving on various Bar Association committees, he has been a trustee of the Austin Bar’s Justice Mack Kidd Fund since its establishment in 2005. He also served for six years as a member of the Texas Lawyers Assistance Program committee of the State Bar of Texas.

Two of the personal acknowledgements of which he is most proud are the 2009 Bettie Naylor Award, given by the Austin chapter of the Human Rights Campaign, and the 2015 Larry F. York Mentoring Award, given by the Austin Bar Association.

He is active in his church, where he has twice served as president of the board of directors. He has also served as president of the Phi Beta Kappa Alumni Association of Greater Austin and as a member of the host committee of Monday Connection, a group associated with the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest. He is a member of the Robert W. Calvert American Inn of Court.

The Justice J. Woodfin (Woodie) Jones Public Interest Law Fellowship is awarded in hopes that the recipient will be inspired by what successful lawyers like Woodie Jones do in the public interest as an essential part of their career, and will make the same commitment.

The Judge W. Jeanne Meurer Public Interest Law Fellowship

Jeanne Meurer received her J.D. in 1977 from the University of Texas and entered private practice in Austin. She embarked on her career in public service/public interest law in 1979 as a lawyer for the Travis County Domestic Relations Office. In 1984 she was appointed as Travis County District Court's first Associate Judge.

It was obvious to all who worked with or observed her that she had found her calling. This was confirmed by the Travis County voters when she was elected in 1989, and re-elected continually until she retired in 2008, as District Judge for the 98th District Court, a court of general jurisdiction. During her 18 years on the bench, Judge Meurer developed specialties in juvenile law, family law and child abuse.

As a Senior District Judge, she served as Court Legal Management Administration Director for the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department from 2009 to 2014. Her work in juvenile law drew wide recognition and acclaim, accumulating over twenty local, state and national awards, including the 2008 Barbara Jordan National Forum on Public Policy's Public Service Award, the Austin Police Department Victim Services Judge of the Year Award, the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault Justice Award, the Juvenile Justice Association of Texas Distinguished Service Award, the American Red Cross of Central Texas Lady Bird Humanitarian of the Year Award, the City of Austin Distinguished Service Award, the American Board of Trial Advocates, Central Texas, Judge of the Year Award, and the Children's Advocacy Outstanding Children of Champions Award. When the new Travis County Juvenile Court Facility was built, it was dedicated and named the W. Jeanne Meurer Intermediate Sanctions Center.

Today, Jeanne is retired from the bench specializing in juvenile law with expertise in local commitment program development, performance and effectiveness, in public policy development and implementation, and as a resource to local, state and legislative leaders and the community on commitment programs and juvenile policy initiatives. She currently serves as an individual consultant d.b.a. Juvenile Justice Solutions.

The Judge W. Jeanne Meurer Public Interest Law Fellowship is awarded in hopes that the recipient will be inspired by what successful lawyers like Jeanne Meurer do in the public interest as an essential part of their career, and will make the same commitment.