

JUDGES OF BENTON & FRANKLIN COUNTIES



William H. Upton was born June 19, 1854, son of William W. Upton, Chief Justice of Oregon Supreme Court and Comptroller of the Treasury of the United States. He spent his boyhood in Sacramento, and the family moved in 1865 to Portland, Oregon. After college, he worked three years for Richard W. Thompson, Secretary of the Navy in Washington, D. C.

During that time, Judge Upton studied the law, and received his Bachelors of Law degree from Columbian University (now George Washington University) in 1879. The following year he earned a Masters of Law degree. In the summer of 1880, he moved to Walla Walla and began a practice with his older brother, Charles B. Upton. He served in the Territorial Legislature.

He became a judge of Walla Walla and Franklin Counties Superior Court on November 18, 1889, having won the election a month earlier. He served until January 1897, having refused re-nomination in the 1896 election due to financial difficulties. Thomas H. Brents succeeded Judge Upton, eventually becoming the first judge in judicial district that included only Walla Walla County.

After leaving the bench Judge Upton practiced law in Seattle but returned to Walla Walla in 1898 where he again prospered. He served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Washington, F & AM in 1898 in a most heroic manner. As Grand Master, Judge Upton caused Washington to be the first Grand Lodge in the United States to recognize a "Negro Masonry". The recognition of Prince Hall Masonry was vehemently opposed,

particularly in the east. Recognition of Prince Hall Lodge was soon withdrawn. Judge Upton gave instructions that a masonic symbol should not be placed on his headstone until the Prince Hall Masons were again recognized.

Judge Upton died in Walla Walla on November 3, 1906, at age 52. On June 8, 1991, almost one hundred years later, the masonic symbol was placed on his grave marker by a joint assembly of the recognized Prince Hall Masons and the Grand Lodge of Washington.



John B. Davidson was born near Rochester, Indiana, March 14, 1860, a son of Stephen and Catharine B. (Brown) Davidson. The Davidson family is of Scotch ancestry. The father was a son of Andrew Davidson, whose father came to America from Scotland prior to the Revolutionary war, crossing the Atlantic about 1760, when sixteen years of age. Later representatives of the name became pioneer settlers of Ohio.

Judge Davidson completed a public-school course and later entered university in the state of Michigan. He was also for a time a student in the Valparaiso University at Valparaiso, Indiana. He began reading law in Rochester, Indiana, with M. L. Essick, a leading member of the bar. Subsequently, he became a law student in Indianapolis, Indiana, and in 1883 graduated from the Albany Law School of New York.

In the same year Judge Davidson moved to the northwest, making his way to Yakima County. He was admitted to the bar the same year and then located in Ellensburg, Washington. At different times he has been called upon for public service. He filled the position of city treasurer, was also city attorney and in 1889 was elected mayor of Ellensburg.

In 1896 Judge Davidson was elected judge of the Superior Court of Yakima, Kittitas and Franklin Counties. He took office on January 11, 1897, while Washington was still a territory. He served on the bench for four years and then retired to private practice of law. But, in 1916 was recalled

to the Yakima County Superior Court where he served until his death.

Judge Davidson died on September 26, 1928, after suffering two strokes. He, his son and grandson were on a 25-mile trip on horseback to mining property near Lake Chelan when he suffered the strokes. He declined to cut the trip short after the first stroke and then suffered the second stroke a day or two later. It took two days to transport him home. He died soon thereafter. Had he lived, he would have been re-elected to a fifth term as judge, as he was running unopposed.

Judge Davidson was second exalted ruler of the Ellensburg Lodge No. 1102 of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. He was also a member of Kiwanis and the Knights of Pythias. He was active in the Chamber of Commerce and other community organizations.



Frank H. Rudkin was born in Vernon, Ohio on April 23, 1864. He was educated in Ohio and in Canada. He attended Washington and Lee University, in Lexington, Virginia, where he took up the study of law. After completing his studies, he was in private practice in Ellensburg, Washington from 1887 to 1890, and in North Yakima, Washington from 1890 to 1901.

Judge Rudkin won election as Yakima, Kittitas and Franklin Counties Superior Court judge in 1901. In 1905, he was elected to the Washington Supreme Court, and he became chief justice in 1909. In 1911, Judge Rudkin accepted President William Howard Taft's appointment to become U.S. District Court judge for the Eastern District of Washington. Twelve years later, President Harding nominated Judge Rudkin to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. He served there until his death on May 3, 1931.

No greater description of a jurist could be earned than that found in the History of the City of Spokane and Spokane County, Vol. II, Nelson Wayne Durham, S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912: "Devotedly attached to his

profession, systematic and methodical in habit, sober and discreet in judgment, calm in temper, diligent in research, conscientious in the discharge of every duty, courteous and kind in demeanor and inflexibly just on all occasions, these qualities enabled Judge Rudkin to take first rank among those who have held the highest judicial office in the state and have made him the conservator of that justice wherein is the safeguard of individual liberty and happiness and the defense of our national institutions. His reported opinions are monuments to his profound legal learning and superior ability, more lasting than brass or marble and more honorable than battles fought and won. They show a thorough mastery of the questions involved, a rare simplicity of style, and an admirable terseness in the statement of the principles upon which the opinions rest."



Harry B. Rigg was born in Waco, Texas on September 1, 1868. He graduated from Vanderbilt University with BA and LLB degrees in 1890. Judge Rigg was admitted to the bar in Tennessee in 1890 and practiced in Chattanooga until he moved to Washington. He relocated to Yakima in 1895 at the age of 27.

After practicing in a partnership with Raymond Venables in Yakima, he was elected judge of Yakima, Kittitas, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court in 1905. On March 6, 1907, the judicial district was split, and as a result, Judge Rigg became a judge of Yakima County Superior Court. Judge Rigg resigned that position on October 1, 1907, to return to private practice. He died on November 18, 1932, in Yakima. At the time of his death, he was with the firm of Rigg, Brown & Halvorson in Yakima.



Walter Watson Zent was born June 22, 1876, in a covered wagon at Salt Lake City while his parents were traveling overland from the east. After living on a farm near Pendleton, they moved to Dayton, where his father became the city marshal. He studied law while working in the cattle business. He was admitted to the bar in 1897 while living in Ritzville.

Judge Zent was elected prosecuting attorney of Adams County in 1898. He became the first judge of the newly created Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties judicial district when he was appointed to the position in the spring of 1907. He served until 1909. He re-entered private practice in Ritzville but then moved his practice to Spokane in 1910. He was chairman of the Spokane County central committee from 1912 to 1914 and served in the 1925 session of the Washington Legislature. Later, he unsuccessfully ran for the office of Attorney General. He died at age 54 on August 30, 1931, at his home in Odessa, Washington.



Oscar Raymond Holcomb was born in Gibson County, Indiana on December 31, 1867. His father fought and was wounded in the Civil War. His father was an attorney, practicing in Indiana until his death in 1906. Judge Holcomb graduated from Chicago College of Law in 1892. He practiced in Evansville until he moved west in 1894. He opened his practice in Ritzville and quickly became known as an attorney of unusual skill. He was elected Adams County Prosecutor in 1895. He resigned that office in 1898 to become the Commissioner Arid Lands for the State of Washington. He served in that capacity until 1899, when he returned to private practice. He was the mayor of Ritzville from 1905 to 1908.

In November 1909 he was appointed judge for Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court. He was recognized as a particularly insightful and knowledgeable judge. He served in the Superior Court until his election to the Washington State Supreme Court on January 15, 1915. He was defeated in the 1926 election and left the Supreme Court bench on January 27, 1927. He returned

to the bench on April 22, 1927, when he was appointed by Governor Roland Hartley to fill the vacancy left by the death of J. B. Bridges. He served until his retirement in January 1939.

Justice Holcomb died at the age of 80 years on September 13, 1948. As a point of interest, it is noted that Judge Holcomb's son, S. R. Holcomb served for 30 years as the chief clerk of the Washington State House of Representatives.



Bert Linn was born October 3, 1875, in Missouri. Nothing is known of his early years. He graduated from the University of Colorado School of Law in 1898. He married Jo Tourtellot in Denver Colorado on August 10, 1899. Her father was Jonathan A. Tourtellot, a prosperous businessman in Boulder, Colorado. Judge Linn practiced law in Colorado Springs in 1900, and moved to Ritzville in 1902, and practiced with Walter W. Zent. He moved to Prosser several years later.

Judge Linn was appointed to the Adams, Benton and Franklin Superior Court bench on January 4, 1915, by Governor Lister to complete the term of Judge Holcomb, who had been elected to the Supreme Court. Judge Linn did not run for re-election in 1916. He served until Judge Truax replaced him on January 18, 1917.

Before his appointment to the bench, Judge Linn practiced law in Prosser with his partner, Lon Boyle. He was the Prosser City Attorney from 1908 to 1910. He was a deputy Prosecuting Attorney in Benton County from 1910 to 1912. He was also the president of the Benton County Bar Association three times between 1910 and 1916. Judge Linn served on the Code Commission Standing Committee of the Washington State Bar Association from 1918 to 1919 and chaired the Benton County Council of Defense from 1917 to 1919. He also served as the Worshipful Master of the Mason's Euclid Lodge #125, in Prosser from 1909 to 1910.

Judge Linn's life after he left the bench is not well understood. He continued to practice law. He registered for the draft in September 1918, at the age of 42. It is doubtful that he served. In what was described as "probably the most mystifying episode in the history of Prosser," Judge Linn disappeared on March 19, 1919. He cleaned up his office, locked the door and left. Initial reports were that he was last seen on a railroad bridge spanning the Columbia River, coatless and about to jump. He had been recently sued over a legal matter that went awry. Considerable effort was expended by family, friends and business associates to locate him.

The jumping-from-the-bridge theory was quickly put to rest when it was reported that Judge Linn was seen alighting from the No. 4 train in Pasco. He was seen posting a letter, which was later received by his wife. While Judge Linn did not jump from the bridge, the letter ominously suggested that his life would soon end. Believing he had died, the grieving Jo Linn sold their house in Prosser and moved to Seattle.

Four months later, on the Fourth of July, Judge Linn was spotted by two Prosser residents in Pendleton, Oregon. He was described as fit and suntanned. In a conversation with one resident, Judge Linn reported that he had been working outdoors, and that he had plans to buy a wheat ranch in the Pendleton area. Judge Linn was reluctant to discuss his personal affairs but made inquiries of the state of certain matters in Prosser, and also asked about some of his friends.

Then Judge Linn disappeared again. According to an article in the Tacoma Daily Ledger dated November 21, 1921, Judge Linn surfaced two years after the Pendleton encounter, first in Portland, Oregon and then in San Francisco, California. It was reported that he worked as a farm hand and had plans to work at some fruit orchard in southern California. After the San Francisco sighting, he disappeared again. According to his wife's obituary published in 1974, Judge Linn died in 1919. The obituary did not describe how or where he died. No date of death was given. His obituary has not been found. Judge Linn was well respected in Prosser.



John Truax was born February 12, 1877, in Calhoun County, Michigan. He graduated from University of Michigan Law School in 1901. Shortly after graduation, he moved to Adams County, Washington. He was immediately recognized as an outstanding attorney. He was soon appointed as court commissioner for Adams County. It was then part of the judicial district of Lincoln and Adams Counties. He served in that position until 1909, when he was elected as the Adams County Prosecuting Attorney. He served two terms in that position and was then elected representative to the Washington Legislature in 1913.

Judge Truax was first elected as judge of the Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court in 1916. For fourteen years he held that office and earned a reputation as one of the best loved jurists in the state. He was president of the state association of superior court judges. He was also regarded as a potential candidate for the Washington State Supreme Court.

Judge Truax died tragically on May 14, 1930, when his car plunged off the Richland-Pasco ferry and into the Columbia River. He was returning to Ritzville from a short court session in Prosser. He was 53 when he died, leaving a wife and adopted son. He was a Mason and received his 32nd degree the week before he died.



Matt L. Driscoll was born in Antigo, Wisconsin, and moved to Pasco in about 1922. He was a member of the law firm of Driscoll & Horrigan until his appointment as judge of the Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court in 1930. He was appointed upon the death of Judge John Truax. Judge Driscoll was re-elected without opposition for four additional terms. He was last re-elected in 1944.

He died suddenly from a heart attack on October 4, 1945, in Seattle. Judge Driscoll had been in poor health for several years, but his death was unexpected. He and Mrs. Driscoll had gone to Seattle a week before and he had entered Providence Hospital for treatment. Besides his widow, he was survived by one son, Matt, Jr.

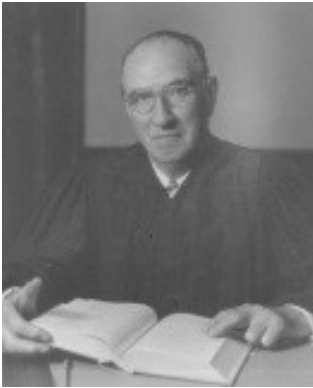


Ivan Merrick was born October 25, 1890, at Mt. Erie, Illinois. After graduating from the University of Montana Law School, he was admitted to the Montana bar in 1913. He practiced law in Montana from 1913 to 1921, during which time he served as prosecuting attorney in Mineral County, Montana. He then moved to Seattle and was admitted to the Washington State Bar on September 1, 1938. He formed a law firm with Lewis B. Schellenbach, former senator and Secretary of Labor, and Robert McFarland, future president of the Northern Pacific Railway. After practicing 20 years in Seattle, Judge Merrick moved to the Tri-Cities in 1943 as a federal attorney to acquire land for the Hanford Project. He formed a partnership with B. B. Horrigan in 1944.

Judge Merrick was appointed by Governor Mon Wallgren to fill a newly created position for the Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court in 1956. Later that year, he married Florence Mayne. She was one of the first women licensed to practice law in the State of Washington and was beloved for her civil rights work.

Judge Merrick left the bench after 18 months. He continued in private practice until his retirement. He was honored for 50 years of service as an attorney on January 4, 1964. He passed away on October 19, 1972, in Pasco at age 81. He was survived by his wife, Florence and

daughters Rebecca Heidlebaugh and Patricia Nightingale. He was a member of the First United Methodist Church and Pasco Masonic Lodge.



Bartholomew B. Horrigan was born on August 28, 1880. He arrived in Pasco in 1904 just after passing the bar examination. His law practice included irrigation district cases. He helped to reorganize the many well-engineered, but financially unsuccessful irrigation districts that existed at the time. He was also an influential booster of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project.

In 1945 Governor Mons C. Wallgren appointed him as judge for the Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court to fill the unexpired term of deceased Judge Driscoll. He served in that capacity until the judicial district was split in 1951. He continued to serve as judge in the Benton Franklin Superior Court. Judge Horrigan served twelve years on the superior court bench.

Judge Horrigan served in the Legislature from 1911 to 1913. He was hailed as a community leader and public benefactor. He was a member of the Pasco School Board. His influence was important in the development of the "Three Flags Highway", which extends from the Mexican border to the Canadian border. It is now known as Highway 395. He was one of the organizers of the funding drive for Lady of Lourdes Hospital and served many years on the Blue Mountain Council of the Boy Scouts. Many honors came his way, including the DeSmet Medal, Gonzaga's highest award, which is given annually to an individual who has "displayed real Christian community service to the Pacific Northwest." A plaque hangs outside Franklin County Courtroom 2, recognizing it as the "B. B. Horrigan Courtroom".

Judge Horrigan passed away in Pasco on August 5, 1970, just a few weeks before his 90th birthday.

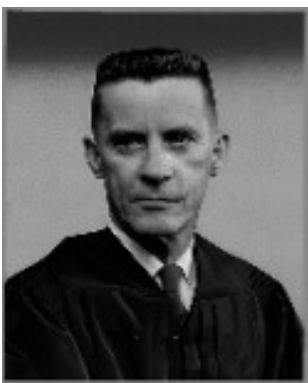


George O. Beardsley was a native of Aberdeen, Washington, but received his early education in Yakima. He was a veteran of World War I and moved to Prosser in 1917 as a young attorney. He had earned his law degree from the University of Washington. He was for many years a prosecuting attorney in Benton County and the Prosser City Attorney.

Judge Beardsley was elected to the Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court in November 1946, and was sworn in on December 23, 1946. He was the first to be elected to the newly-created second position. (Judge Merrick was the first to be appointed to that position). He was reelected unopposed in 1948 for a second four-year term.

Judge Beardsley was quite active in community affairs. He served as president of the Washington State Good Roads Association. He was instrumental in promoting the Prosser hospital district, and active in the National Guard in Prosser. He also represented the Army Corps of Engineers when it acquired land for the Hanford project.

Judge Beardsley was described by his colleague, Judge B. B. Horrigan, as a man of unquestioned integrity and that he was "regarded as one of the most capable attorneys in the state." Judge Beardsley died on November 7, 1948, at his home in Prosser just days after his reelection. He was 52 years old.



Orris L. Hamilton enjoyed a long and distinguished judicial career, having served 13 years as a superior court judge, and then 17 years on the Washington State Supreme Court. He was born on November 10, 1914, in Prosser, Washington. Judge Hamilton was an infantry captain in the 44th Division of the US Army during World War II. He earned the Bronze Star. He graduated from American University's Washington College of Law in 1940. He was an assistant Attorney General in 1940 and 1941.

Judge Hamilton was the Benton County Prosecuting Attorney for two years, from 1946 to 1948. He was

appointed to the Adams, Benton and Franklin Counties Superior Court in 1948 by Governor Wallgren. He served as a superior court judge for 13 years, most of which were in the Benton Franklin Counties judicial district. Judge Hamilton became a member of the Washington State Supreme Court on January 22, 1961, having been appointed by Governor Rosellini. He served until 1979. He was the Chief Justice in 1971.

Judge Hamilton was active in the legal profession, being a member of the American Judicature Society, Institute of Judicial Administration, and National Institute of Crime and Delinquency, and vice president of the Washington State Superior Court Judges Association. He was also a member of the Elks, the Shriners and Free Masons. He died on March 20, 1994.



James J. Lawless was born on a farm in Beresford, South Dakota on January 22, 1924. He attended the South Dakota School of Mines, left school and attempted to enlist during World War II. Rejected due to a heart murmur, he left for the San Francisco shipyards and worked there until the end of the war. He decided he wanted to study law and knew he would have to work his way through school. There were only two law schools in the country that had night classes, one in New York, the other in Spokane, Washington. He enrolled at Gonzaga having never been in Washington State before he set foot on campus. Working during the day, taking classes at night, he graduated from Gonzaga University and practiced law with the firm of Sensney and Davis in Richland Washington. It was there he met Herb Davis' cute secretary, Beth Gage, and the two were soon married. Theirs was a very happy marriage and the two had five children together.

In 1956 he was elected to the Benton Franklin Superior Court, as the youngest Judge ever to be elected to the superior court bench in the State of Washington. Judge Lawless was respected for his judicial abilities, as well as his pleasant demeanor and wicked sense of humor. For six months he served as an interim Justice on the

Washington State Supreme Court, authoring several opinions. He declined appointment to the Washington State Court of Appeals in 1969, preferring to live in Richland, a city he loved. Judge Lawless was assassinated in his judicial chambers at the Franklin County Courthouse in Pasco on June 3, 1974. He was survived by his wife, Beth, and his five children.

A plaque hangs outside Franklin County Courtroom 3, recognizing it as the "James J. Lawless Courtroom". (This biography was submitted by Judge Lawless' son, Greg Lawless



John Thomas Day was born on October 30, 1922, in Twin Falls, Idaho. He was admitted to the bar on February 26, 1951. After completing public and parochial education in Twin Falls, he enrolled in Boise Junior College. But his post-secondary education was interrupted by World War II. Judge Day enlisted in the Air Force, and qualified as a pilot. His B-17 was shot down on March 8, 1944, during a daylight raid of Berlin, Germany.

Judge Day spent next 15 months in a German POW camp, Stalag Luft One. His "job" was making machinery for tunnel digging primarily collapsible blowers for tunnel ventilation. He also took up art, making his own brushes and watercolors. Judge Day and the other captives took over their prison camp just before the war ended. Local citizens had provided them with weapons and ammunition so that they could escape the advancing Russians.

Judge Day completed his college education at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service in 1947. He then went to Gonzaga School of Law where, in 1951, he earned his LLB and juris doctor degrees. He was in private practice in Spokane before moving to Richland in 1952. There, he initially worked for the Henry J. Kaiser Co. as house counsel, primarily working in the areas of labor negotiations and nuclear construction contracts and claims. He returned to private practice in 1955.

Judge Day was appointed to the bench of the Benton Franklin Superior Court on March 1, 1962. He served until he was defeated in the 1972 election by Judge Yencopal. Judge Day was very active in politics for the Democratic Party. He served in the State House of Representatives from 1959 to 1961. He was elected to the Skamania County District Court bench in 1983 and served for two years.

After leaving the superior court bench Judge Day moved to Stevenson, Washington, where he continued in private practice.

There are newspaper reports of his representation of clients in high-profile criminal cases. Judge Day also put his artistic talents to good use, making furniture, carving gun stocks, and designing and drawing his own Christmas cards. He died at home in Ft. Rains, Washington on November 12, 1990.



Richard Patrick was born in 1924 in Sandpoint, Idaho. He entered the US Navy in 1943. He met future Judge Taber during boot camp at Farragut, Idaho. Upon completion of his service with the US Navy, he graduated from University of Idaho and then went on to law school at the University of Michigan. He was surprised to see Judge Taber during the bar examination, as the two had not seen each other since boot camp.

Judge Patrick and his wife then moved to Pasco, where they raised three children, while he practiced law for 17 years. He was appointed to the Benton Franklin Superior Court by Governor Dan Evans to a newly created position on August 2, 1969. He served for 17 more years, retiring on February 28, 1986. Judge Patrick was respected for his gentle demeanor and keen legal mind.

Judge Patrick was active in his community and church. He served as president of the Benton Franklin Bar Association and the Washington State Superior Court Judges Association. He was a lay reader at the Episcopal Church of our Savior and a member of Rotary and Elks. After retirement, Judge Patrick worked part time as an arbitrator,

mediator and judge pro tem. In 2010 Judge Patrick and his wife, Erma moved to Redmond Washington, and later to Mercer Island to be closer to his children. He died on June 18, 2014, at home.

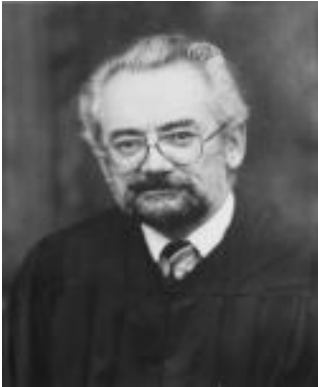


Albert J. Yencopal was born on April 19, 1928, the son of Czechoslovakian immigrants in the mining town of Ronald, Washington. He knew from his freshman year in high school that he wanted to be a attorney. World War II delayed his legal career, however. Judge Yencopal joined the Army after high school and managed a post exchange in Tokyo.

Judge Yencopal earned his undergraduate degree from Gonzaga University, and his law degree from Gonzaga School of Law, the latter coming in 1954. He was in private practice for two years before accepting employment with the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency. While there, he assisted with the transfer of government-owned homes to private parties. When that task was completed in 1960, Judge Yencopal returned to private practice.

Judge Yencopal was appointed as part-time Richland Municipal Court Judge in 1965. The position became full-time in 1967. He served capably until his election to the Benton Franklin Superior Court in 1972. He defeated incumbent Judge John Thomas Day. Judge Yencopal was known for his imaginative sentences of criminal offenders. A youngster caught deflating the tires of police cars was sentenced to washing them for a period of time. Another youngster spent the summer watering the fire house lawn with buckets because the irrigation system was inoperative.

Judge Yencopal was very active in the community. He served on the boards of YMCA, Richland Chamber of Commerce, and the Boy Scouts of America. He received the Medal of Honor from the Daughters of the American Revolution. He taught citizenship and coached athletics at Christ the King School for over 20 years. Judge Yencopal died on July 18, 1993, while still in office.

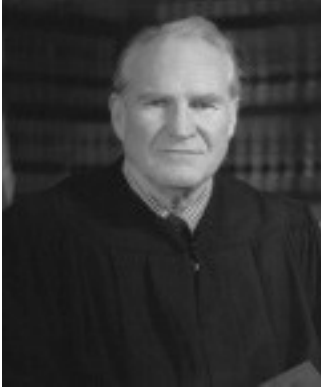


Fred R. Staples was born October 14, 1933, in Post Falls, ID, to Russell and Doris Bentley Staples. His family lived a nomadic lifestyle until moving to the Yakima valley in the late 1940s or early 50s. The family owned and operated several orchards up and down the valley until the 1980's.

After graduating from Sunnyside High School in 1951, Judge Staples attended school at the University of Washington for a short time. He then enlisted in the Army reservist program in 1951 and entered the military full time in October of 1953 at the age of 20. He was discharged on July 16, 1955. Judge Staple finished his college education at Gonzaga University in Spokane in 1960 and opened a law practice in Pasco shortly thereafter.

From 1962 to 1974, Judge Staples was a District Court Judge in Franklin County and Pasco Police Court Judge. After the death of sitting judge James Lawless in 1974, Judge Staples was appointed to the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court. He was later elected to the position and served until retiring in 1994. Judge Staples was admired for his work ethic, knowledge of the law and sound judgment.

He died at his home on September 19, 2011. He left behind his wife Kay Bacca Staples, who served as the Benton County Clerk for many years.



Robert S. Day was born on April 16, 1923, in Ezel, Kentucky, but raised in Okanogan County. He went to Whitman College on a track scholarship, having set the state high school record in the 880-yard dash. He won the state championship in 1942. He served as a U S Marine in World War II as an aircraft armorer in the south Pacific. He received his law degree in 1953 from Gonzaga School of Law, graduating at the top of his class.

After admission to the bar, he went directly to work for Superior Court Judge Swellingback as his law clerk. He moved to Pasco, Washington in 1954, and was appointed Kennewick Police Judge and Justice of the Peace. Judge Day practiced law in Pasco, Washington for many years, first in a firm with John Westland. Later he practiced in the firm of Peterson, Taylor, Day and Shea. He served as the president of the Washington State Bar Association in 1975.

He was appointed on November 1, 1977, to a newly created position in the Benton Franklin Superior Court by Governor Dixie Lee Ray. Judge Day was reelected three times and retired from the bench in January 1989. He is remembered as a no-nonsense judge who demanded professionalism and respect for the law.

He was described as a “renaissance man”, skilled in the arts. He taught himself to be a silver smith late in life after a heart attack slowed him down. He assembled ships in bottles. He even rebuilt his Chriscraft from the keel up.

He passed away on July 4, 2009, in Pasco. He was 86.



Duane Taber was born on March 26, 1925, in Pasco, Washington. After graduating from Pasco High, he entered the Navy. He met his future bench mate, Judge Richard Patrick, in boot camp at Farragut, Idaho. (They next saw each other at the bar examination). He served aboard the USS Tillman, in the Atlantic and Pacific theatres. Upon his discharge in 1945, he entered the Washington State College in an engineering program. He transferred to the University of Washington and switched to law, graduating in 1952.

Judge Taber worked briefly for the Atomic Energy Commission assisting with land acquisitions at Hanford Atomic Works. He then became a solo practitioner for several years before forming a partnership with Jim Leavy. He was a trial attorney until appointed to the bench. He estimates that he tried over 200 cases. In one memorable trial in Judge Orris Hamilton's court, he stabbed an ice pick into a witness's knee to prove the point that amputees could function at a high level. Of course, only Judge Taber and the witness knew that the man had a wooden leg.

Judge Tabor was appointed to the Benton Franklin Superior Court by Governor Spellman on July 27, 1981. He was re-elected several times and retired in 1997. He was active in the community, having served on the park board and several school district committees. He was also the president of the Benton Franklin Bar Association. His beloved wife, "Carey" died in 2013 after 65 years of marriage. Judge Tabor passed away at home on February 17, 2018. He was 92.



Dennis D. Yule was born April 11, 1943, in Shelton, Washington. He received a B.A. degree from Seattle Pacific University in 1964 and, in 1967, earned a J.D. degree from the Duke University School of Law and was admitted to the Washington state bar. He began his legal career as a law clerk to Washington Supreme Court Justice Matthew W. Hill. His clerkship was cut short when he was drafted in 1968 and served for two years in the U.S. Army, including one year in Vietnam.

Upon his return to civilian life in 1970, Judge Yule was employed by the Seattle law firm, Helsell, Paul, Fetterman, Todd and Hokanson. In 1975 he and his family moved to Prosser, Washington, where he became a Benton County Deputy Prosecutor. In 1986 he was appointed to the Benton-Franklin Superior Court by Governor Booth Gardner, succeeding Judge Richard Patrick upon his retirement, and served on the bench until his retirement in 2009. During his 23-year tenure Judge Yule served as the supervising judge of the juvenile division of the court. He was a founder of the court's drug court programs and established and served, until his retirement, as the first judge of the adult drug court. He also participated in the creation of the court's volunteer guardian ad litem program and began its annual Adoption Day celebration and its annual memorial session to remember and honor deceased members of the local bar. In 2002, Judge Yule organized the first annual Tri-Cities Youth and Justice Forum which each year brings together middle and high school students from throughout southeast Washington and justice system professionals from throughout the Tri-Cities for a day of interaction and learning about the justice system.

During his service on the bench, Judge Yule was an active member of the Superior Court Judges Association, serving as chair of its Institutions Committee and member of its Equality and Justice Committee, served on the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission, the Washington State Interpreters Commission, the Washington Children's Justice Task Force, the Washington State Center for Court Research Advisory Board, the Task Force on Unified Family Courts, the Washington team of the national Juvenile Indigent Defense Action Network, the Board of Directors of the Benton-Franklin Substance Abuse Coalition, and was a member of the Washington Models for

Change Judicial Advisory Council and a leader in the Benton-Franklin and Washington state juvenile justice reform projects developed under the MacArthur Foundation's nationwide Models for Change initiative.

Since his retirement, Judge Yule and his wife, Lynda, have traveled extensively around the world, and he has continued to participate in state and national organizations and activities involving minorities and justice and juvenile justice. He continues to participate in the planning and presentation of the Tri-Cities Youth and Justice Forum and continues as a member of the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission, the Judicial Advisory Council of the Center for Children and Youth Justice, the King County Sexual Assault Response Center Social Justice Council, and the Washington Judges Foundation Board of Directors.



Carolyn A. Brown was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1939. After marriage to Larry Brown in 1966, she lived in Oak Ridge, Tennessee where she volunteered in many areas in the community. She graduated from University of Tennessee at Knoxville with a degree in business administration in 1974. Judge Brown then moved to Chicago with her husband and attended law school at John Marshall. She graduated in 1978.

Her next move was to Richland, Washington, where she worked as a deputy prosecutor until 1982. Then it was back to the Chicago area where she opened her own law office. In 1984, she moved to San Diego and studied for the California bar. The return to Richland occurred in 1985. She rejoined to the Benton County Prosecutor's office.

When Judge Robert Day retired in 1988, Judge Brown ran successfully for that position, becoming the first woman elected to the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court. Judge Brown retired in 2004.



Craig J. Matheson was born in Pasco, Washington in 1951 and grew up in Kennewick. After graduating from Kennewick High School, he went on to Northwestern University and in 1973, earned a B.A. in Economics. He received his Juris Doctor degree from Gonzaga University School of Law in 1976 and was admitted to the Washington bar in the same year.

He began his legal career with the Benton County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. After two years, he was in private practice with his brother, John Matheson. He left to become a staff attorney with the Washington Public Power System. Judge Matheson worked there for three years, until he was appointed in 1987 to take the place of deceased Judge Brice Horton as judge of the Benton County District Court. He served in that capacity until he was elected to the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court in 1993. He was reelected to five additional terms.

Judge Matheson was very active in efforts to improve the courts. He was appointed by the Supreme Court to the Gender and Justice Commission in 1994. During his five-year tenure he chaired the planning committee for the first Washington State Domestic Violence Summit. He also served on the domestic violence homicide review committee of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic violence. He also served on the Courthouse Security Task Force, a committee tasked with developing statewide guidelines for courthouse security.

Judge Matheson was also active in developing and operating educational programs. He was elected to the Board of Court Education of the Washington Superior Court Judges Association. He taught for four years at the Washington Judicial College. He was the dean of the judicial college in 2008 and 2009. One of his favorite activities was the YMCA High School Mock Trial Competition. He served for 20 years on the Board of Directors of the YMCA Youth and Government Program, and in that capacity chaired the Mock Trial program committee in the Tri-Cities.

Judge Matheson was also active in the Washington Superior Court Judges Association. He served as a member of the Association Board. He was elected

President of the Washington Superior Court Judges Association from 2012 to 2013. He also assumed a leadership role in developing caseflow management programs for civil, domestic and criminal cases in the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court.

In 1996, the Supreme Court recognized Judge Matheson as one of twenty judges in the state who went beyond the bench to improve the judicial system. He was also named as the Judge of the Year by the Washington State Trial Lawyers Association in 2002. The YMCA awarded him its Outstanding Leadership Award in 2013. Judge Matheson retired from the bench in May 2013. He has been a licensed pilot since 2001 and enjoys flying his airplane.



Philip M. Raekes was born November 11, 1931, in Montague, Michigan. His family moved to Richland so that his stepfather could work at the Hanford Atomic Works. Judge Raekes graduated from Columbia High School in Richland, Washington, and then enrolled at Gonzaga University, after one year of prelaw, he joined the U.S. Navy and served in the Korean War, serving from 1950 to 1954. He then completed his prelaw and enrolled in Gonzaga School of Law. He received his LLB and JD degrees in 1959, and in his senior year, won the best orator award in the annual Legal Argument. 1959 was a banner year, as he married his wife, Mary, and they have five children.

After graduating from law school, he worked as an assistant attorney general in Olympia and Yakima. He joined the firm of Loney, Westland, Koontz and Raekes in 1961. In March of 1977 he and his partners started the prestigious firm of Raekes, Rettig and Osborne. He practiced in various specialties until elected to the bench.

Judge Raekes was elected to the Benton Franklin Superior Court to complete the term of retired Judge Staples in 1994. He was re-elected in 1996 and served until his retirement in January 2001.

Judge Raekes served on the Gonzaga Law School Council for a number of years. He was later appointed to the Gonzaga University Board of Regents, where he served 25 years. He received the Distinguished Alumni Merit Award from Gonzaga University in 1999. He and his wife established the Philip M. Raekes and Mary M. Raekes Law School Scholarship to assist needy and deserving law students.

Judge Raekes passed away on January 27, 2024, leaving 5 children and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was 92



Vic L. VanderSchoor was born in Pasco, Washington in 1952. He graduated from Eastern Washington University in 1974, with a B.A. in Economics/Accounting/Finance. He earned his Juris Doctor from the University of Washington in 1979 and was admitted to the Washington bar the same year.

Judge VanderSchoor was in private practice for 18 years, first with Olson, Olson, Hevel & VanderSchoor, and then McKinley, Hultgrenn and VanderSchoor. He was elected as judge of the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court in 1996. He was re-elected five more times and served on the bench until his retirement on September 5, 2017.

Judge VanderSchoor has been active in the community, having served on many boards, including, Benton/Franklin Legal Aid Society, Consumer Credit Counseling Service, Carondelet Psychiatric Care Center, Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center and the Pasco Chamber of Commerce. He is a charter member of the Tri-Cities Exchange Club, and, in 1995, was a member of the first class of Leadership Tri-Cities.

Judge VanderSchoor passed away on February 17, 2026.



Robert G. Swisher was born in 1946 in Lewiston, Idaho. Shortly after he started grade school, his family moved from St. Maries, Idaho to Connell, Washington where he grew up. He graduated from Connell High School in 1964. While growing up in Connell, he was active in the Boy Scouts which gave him his first exposure to government and the court system. After completing high school, he earned a degree in accounting from the University of Idaho. He then served in the U.S. Navy for 3 ½ years where the majority of the time, he was Operations Officer on the U.S.S. Detector. Upon release from active duty in the Navy and after working briefly at Hanford, he entered law school at the University of Idaho and graduated in 1975.

Judge Swisher was admitted to the Washington Bar in 1975. He practiced law in the Tri-Cities for 25 years with an office in Richland. At the time of his election as a Superior Court judge, he was a partner with Wayne Gladstone. His law practice was general in nature. However, he did represent several small municipalities including the City of West Richland for 25 years and the City of Connell for 15 years. He and his partner were also legal counsel for GESA and HAPO credit unions.

Judge Swisher and his wife, Nilea, raised their two children in the Tri Cities where they continue to reside today. While in private practice, he was active in the community serving on the Benton-Franklin Counties Community Action Committee Board of Directors and as president of his Rotary Club. He also served the Girl Scouts as their pro bono legal advisor.

Judge Swisher was elected as a Judge of the Benton-Franklin Superior Court in 2000 and served until his retirement in January 2017.



Carrie Runge was born in 1959 in Tacoma, Washington, grew up there and graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School. She earned a B.A. in psychology, with a secondary education teaching certificate from the University of Washington. She received her Juris Doctor in 1986 from University of Puget Sound Law School (now Seattle University).

Judge Runge worked as a Deputy Prosecutor in Benton County from 1986 until she was appointed to the bench by Governor Locke. She was appointed to fill the newly-created sixth position in the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court and took office in 2004.

Judge Runge served faithfully for 17 years until her retirement in July 2021.

Judge Runge is a fitness enthusiast and dog lover.



Cameron Mitchell was born and raised in Richland, Washington. After graduating from Richland High School, he went on to Washington State University. He played varsity football for the Cougars and was on the team that played in the 1981 Holiday Bowl. He graduated in 1982 with a B.A. in History.

Judge Mitchell graduated from Willamette Law School in 1986 and was admitted to the Washington bar the following year. He was employed as an Assistant Attorney General until appointed as a Hearings Examiner with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. He served in that capacity until his appointment to the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court in 2004. He has served on the bench since that time. In 2012 Judge Mitchell received the prestigious Martin Luther King, Jr. Spirit Award by Columbia Basin College.

Judge Mitchell retired in March 2022, after a distinguished 18-year career.



Bruce A. Spanner was born in Denver, Colorado in 1955. He was raised in Richland, Washington, and attended public schools there. He earned a B.S. degree in chemical engineering from WSU in 1977. After working four years in the pulp and paper industry in Longview, Washington, he enrolled in Gonzaga University School of Law. After graduating in 1984, he entered private practice and developed a diverse civil practice.

Judge Spanner was elected to the Benton Franklin Superior Court bench in 2008 and was re-elected in 2012 and 2016. He has served as chair of the Technology Committee of the Washington State Superior Court Judges Association and was the association's representative on a project to replace the statewide case management software until the project was completed in 2018. Judge Spanner received the Washington State Bar Association's 2018 APEX Outstanding Judge Award.

Judge Spanner has been active in the community, having served in Kiwanis, March of Dimes, Salvation Army, Water Follies, Richland and Tri-Cities Regional Chambers of Commerce and Bethel Church. He is also active on the Law Day and National Adoption Day Committees.

After serving 12 years, Judge Spanner retired on January 8, 2021, looking forward to spending quality time with his wife, Mary.



Salvador Mendoza, Jr. was born in 1971 in Pacoima, California, but grew up in Prosser, Washington. He earned a B.A. Degree in philosophy from the University of Washington, and his juris doctor degree from the UCLA School of Law.

Judge Mendoza was an Assistant Attorney General from 1997 to 1998, and Franklin County Deputy Prosecutor from 1998 to 1999. Until he joined the bench in 2013, he was in private practice handling civil and criminal cases in state and federal courts.

Judge Mendoza was appointed judge of the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court by Governor Inslee in

2013. After serving 14 months, he was nominated by President Barrack Obama to the United States District Court, Eastern District of Washington in 2014. He was confirmed by the Senate later that year. On September 16, 2022, Judge Mendoza was appointed by President Biden to the position of Circuit Judge of the United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit.

Judge Mendoza is active in the community and particularly enjoys organizing and presenting at the annual Tri-Cities Youth & Justice Forum.



Alexander Ekstrom was born in 1969 in Seattle, Washington. His family moved to Kennewick in 1974 and lived in the Tri-Cities until 1983, when his father took a job in a small marine technology firm located in the San Juan Islands. He attended the University of Washington for both his undergraduate degree and for law school. During both high school and college, he worked as a crewmember on a fishing boat during the summer. He was admitted to the Washington bar in 1997. He and his wife Aimee returned to the Tri-Cities after he graduated. They have three children.

Early in his career he interned in the areas of municipal law and criminal defense. Judge Ekstrom was employed in private practice, and then with the Franklin County Prosecuting Attorney. In 2004, he joined the Office of the Benton County Prosecuting Attorney, where he served as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney and a Special Assistant United States Attorney. He joined the United States Attorney's Office in 2008. Before becoming an Assistant United States Attorney, Judge Ekstrom was an adjunct professor at WSU Tri-Cities. He was appointed as Judge of the Benton Franklin Counties Superior Court in 2014. He was elected in 2015 and re-elected in 2016. Judge Ekstrom served on the Superior Court bench until June 2022, when he was appointed to the position of Magistrate Judge of the United States District Court Eastern District of Washington. He continues to serve in this position and now resides in Yakima, WA where he sits in the William O. Douglas Courthouse.



Jacqueline J. Shea-Brown was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1964 and moved to Pasco, Washington in 1971. She received a B.A. degree from the University of Washington in 1987 in Business Administration and, in 1992, earned a J.D. degree from Georgetown University Law Center in Washington D.C.

While in private practice, she handled a variety of cases including cases involving family law, juvenile law, criminal law, employment law and civil law.

Judge Shea-Brown has participated in the Tri-Cities Youth and Justice Forum which annually brings together middle and high school students from throughout southeast Washington and justice system professionals for a day of interaction and information about careers in the justice system.

She is a member of the following organizations: the Superior Court Judges' Association, the Benton-Franklin Counties Bar Association, the Washington State Bar Association, the Pasco Kiwanis – Satellite Club.

She was appointed to the Benton-Franklin County Superior Court by Governor Inslee and was sworn in on October 16, 2015, and stood for and won election in 2016.



Joseph M. Burrowes was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1962. He was raised in a military family traveling around the United States before making Tri-Cities his home in 1979. He earned his B.A. degree from Washington State University Tri-Cities and AA degree from Columbia Basin College while attending night school. After working 15 years for the Department of Energy and Hanford Patrol, he enrolled in Gonzaga University School of Law. Upon graduation, he practiced as a prosecutor, civil attorney, family law facilitator and public defender.

Judge Burrowes was first appointed to Benton County District Court in 2007 as a Court Commissioner. He was

later appointed as a Benton County District Court Judge in 2009 by the County Commissioners. He was retained in the 2010 election and re-elected in 2014. In 2016, Judge Burrowes was elected to the Benton Franklin County Superior Court.

Judge Burrowes has been very active in Washington State judiciary leadership, having served as Vice President, Treasurer and Board Member of the Washington State District and Municipal Court Judges Association, the Dean of Judicial College, the past Chair of the DMCJA Education Committee. He has also been a member of the Washington State Bar Association Local Rules Committee, a member of the Washington State Judicial Needs Committee and a faculty member of the Judicial College.

In 2013, Judge Burrowes was honored by WSU Tri-Cities with the Distinguished Alumnus Award for his support of higher education, community involvement and distinguished service on the bench.

Judge Burrowes devotes countless volunteer hours to civic organizations such as the YMCA Mock Trial Competition, various high school programs, police citizen's academies, and domestic violence advocate training programs. He has received many service commendations from the Washington State Bar Association for his legal work and various community activities.



Samuel Perry Swanberg was born in Los Angeles, California in 1966. Judge Swanberg grew up in Edmonds, Washington. After receiving undergraduate and law degrees from Brigham Young University, he began his legal career at an admiralty firm in downtown Seattle.

After realizing he was meant to be a trial attorney, Judge Swanberg accepted a position with the Franklin County Prosecutor in 1993 and prosecuted felony cases. In 1996, he became a partner at a private law firm where he received exposure to various areas of civil law. His passion for the next 21 years, however, was serving as a public defender in the Superior Courts of Benton and Franklin Counties, as well as a Criminal Justice Act

Attorney for the United States District Court for Eastern District of Washington. During this time, he handled many high-profile cases. He has six children.

Governor Jay Inslee appointed Judge Swanberg to the Superior Court Bench for Benton and Franklin Counties on August 10, 2017, and he was sworn-in on October 2. Judge Swanberg resigned on May 17, 2024.



David L. Petersen was born in 1969 and raised in Kennewick, Washington. After graduating from Kamiakin High School, he served in the U.S. Army for two years, stationed in South Korea. Judge Petersen continued his service in the Army National Guard for six more years while attending college and law school. Judge Petersen attended Columbia Basin College and graduated with a B.A. degree in Business Administration from the University of Washington. He completed law school at Thurgood Marshall School of Law in Houston, Texas.

Upon passing the Washington State Bar exam in 1997, he returned to the Tri-Cities to serve as a deputy prosecutor for Franklin County. After leaving the prosecutor's office, Judge Petersen was a partner in two local law firms, as well as the owner of his own law firm. He served as judge for Pasco Municipal Court from 2011 to 2017. Judge Petersen was elected to the Benton Franklin County Superior Court in 2020 and was sworn-in on January 11, 2021.

Judge Petersen has been actively involved in his community since returning to the area in 1997. Most meaningful for him has been his service on the Benton Franklin Legal Aid Board of Directors, coaching the Mock Trial team at Tri-Cities Prep High School, and actively participating in his church.

Judge Petersen and his wife, Dena, have enjoyed living in and raising their three kids in the Tri-Cities area. They have been very active in youth sports over the years and enjoy spending time outdoors, waterskiing, hiking, camping, fishing and shooting.



Jacqueline Stam. Judge Stam was in private practice for 18 years, focusing on family law guardianships, probate and estate planning. She also served as a guardian ad litem and as a mediator. She was appointed to the position of Benton Franklin Superior Court Commissioner in 2011 where she presided over domestic and juvenile matters. Court Commissioner Stam became Judge Stam on August 2, 2021. She was appointed by Governor Jay Inslee to replace retired Judge Runge.



Norma Rodriguez was appointed by Governor Jay Inslee to the position of Benton Franklin Superior Court Judge on April 1, 2022. She replaced retired Judge Mitchell.

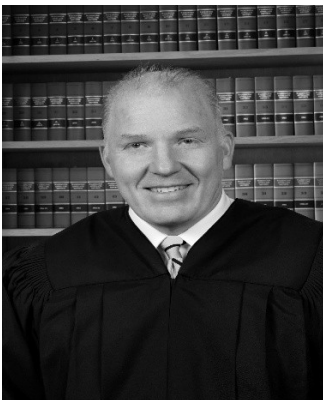


Diana N. Ruff was born in Richland, Washington seven minutes after her fraternal twin sister Katherine, to Lyman and Esther Powell. She attended Gonzaga University in Spokane, where she graduated magna cum laude with a double major in Political Science and Journalism. After college, she attended Marquette University School of Law in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for one year, but then transferred to and, in 2009, graduated from Gonzaga University School of Law.

After law school, Judge Ruff joined Allen Brecke Law Offices as an associate attorney handling litigation and

negotiation of personal injury cases. She then joined the Benton County Prosecuting Attorney's Office in 2013 as a deputy prosecutor, where she focused on domestic violence, sexual assault, and internet crimes against children's cases. After leaving the Benton County Prosecutor's Office in 2018, she worked as a judge pro tem in Franklin County District Court and Pasco Municipal Court. In September 2020 she became an Administrative Law Judge for the Washington State Office of Administrative Hearings. She was appointed as a Superior Court Commissioner for Benton and Franklin Counties in August 2021. She became Judge Ruff in June 2022 when she was then appointed to the position by Governor Jay Inslee.

Judge Ruff has served on the City of Richland Parks and Recreation Commission (a commission that her mother was once Chairwoman of in the 1990s and which sparked her love of parks and recreation); City of Kennewick Parks and Recreation Commission; and Benton County Park Board. Judge Ruff also served on the Board of Directors for the CREHST (Columbia River Exhibition of History, Science and Technology) Museum for three years prior to the museum closing. Judge Ruff was active in the Benton Franklin Counties Bar Association, serving as Secretary/Treasurer, President of the Bar Association, and on the Board of Trustees. Judge Ruff resigned effective June 30, 2026.



Bronson J. Brown was born in Richland, Washington. A lifelong resident of the Tri-Cities area, he graduated from Kennewick High School in 1994, earned two Bachelor's degrees (Law and Justice and Spanish) from Central Washington University in 2000 where he also was a member of the Rugby team, and received his Juris Doctor from California Western School of Law in 2003.

Before his election to the bench, he served as a part-time Superior Court Commissioner in Benton County from January 2023-November 2024. His legal career also includes serving as General Counsel for school districts and public agencies, city attorney for cities and was a long

time law partner in a small firm local law firm. Judge Bronson Brown is a past president of Benton Franklin Legal Aid and is a long time board member.

Judge Bronson Brown was elected to the Benton Franklin Superior Court and sworn as a full-time judge in December, 2024. He and his wife, Wendy, have raised five children and remain active in the community.



Andrew M. Howell was first appointed as a Superior Court Commissioner for Benton and Franklin Counties on September 16, 2022. Court Commissioner Howell became Judge Howell on June 1, 2026. He was appointed by Governor Bob Ferguson to replace Judge Ruff.

Families are encouraged to provide additional biographical information and photographs. Submissions may be sent to tiffany.runge@co.benton.wa.us