

JUDICIAL PROFILE

HONORABLE DEBORAH SCHUMACHER

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When she graduated from the University of Notre Dame Law School and began her career, Second Judicial District Family Court Judge Deborah Schumacher did not have her heart set on a career in family law; instead, she specialized in civil cases – the opposite side of the legal spectrum. But when Schumacher decided to adopt a child, her journey through the adoption process piqued her interest in family law.

The first time Schumacher requested a position as a hearing master, “it took a lot of verbal persuasion,” on her part. Thanks to her persistence she became a part-time hearing master in 1992. She held that position, as well as a full-time position with McDonald, Carano, Wilson, McCune, Frankovich & Hicks, until 1997, when she was elected to the family court bench.

Know your Rules

Attorneys entering Schumacher’s courtroom should be well-versed in the rules of evidence, and must know how to use those rules properly. One of Schumacher’s pet peeves: not filing discovery in a timely fashion. “[It’s to the attorney’s disadvantage] if I don’t have time to read everything,” Schumacher explains. She also suggests attorneys “be prepared. Be honest about facts and legal weaknesses.”

Memorable Cases

In her more than 10 years on the bench, Schumacher has seen a variety of cases, many of which have been

memorable, including a case involving a girl who lived under a bridge for six months before authorities in Reno found her and placed her in foster care. When the young lady appeared before Schumacher, she made an unforgettable request: she asked if the judge could send her to Bishop Manogue Catholic High School. She explained that her foster siblings attended Bishop Manogue but that her foster parents could not afford to send her too, and she wanted to know if the judge could help her.

Schumacher was impressed by the request and the young lady's resolve. "I see a lot of people who cannot resolve their problems," she said. She added that, too often, she sees those without strong determination turning to drugs and other addictions in an attempt to deal with their problems. Schumacher agreed to help and found a donor who paid the teen's tuition. The young lady went on to attend the University of Nevada, Reno and became a domestic violence counselor helping others in circumstances similar to her own. "[She was] so amazingly able to overcome her situation with grace and grit," Schumacher said.

Pro Se Litigants

One challenge Schumacher faces on a constant basis is that of dealing with litigants who want to represent themselves. As Schumacher explained, often pro se litigants are not the best advocates for themselves; they often do not fully understand the legal system. Adding to the difficulties is the fact that, in Schumacher's opinion, the system is inherently flawed. "The legal system was set up for real estate disputes," she explained. "I don't believe anyone would design this system for interpersonal problems."

Outside Interests

Away from the courtroom, Schumacher's primary interest is her 3-year-old granddaughter. She also enjoys quilting, hiking and the study of neuropsychology. ■