

Medical Lake judge recognized for outstanding contributions to judicial education



Judge Richard Kayne (above) has been the presiding judge for Medical Lake municipal court since 1995.

By CARA LORELLO
Staff Reporter

When faced with the choice of going to college or accepting a Decca record deal some three decades back, Richard Kayne, presiding judge for the city of Medical Lake's municipal court, chose the former.

To this day, he says he has no regrets. Perhaps the fact that Kayne's 30-some odd years in the legal profession were recently recognized by the American Judges Association for significant contributions to judicial education at their September annual conference in Vancouver, B.C., had something to do with it.

Or, perhaps, it was advice from his father, a New York band manager at the time, who discouraged choosing the latter.

"My dad, being a musician, was convinced there are very few who end up making it big in the industry," Kayne said of his choosing college over the life of a working artist.

He didn't take the record deal, and Kayne Sr. ended up leaving the music profession for a successful banking career, and later entered politics.

Whatever the motivation was for this first-generation American, who grew up in New York's Borscht Belt—an informal term for the summer resorts of the Catskill Mountains in New York's Sullivan and Ulster Counties—hardly seems significant now that Kayne, a current dean emeritus of the Washington State Judicial College, has a long-established reputation in the field on both the regional and national level.

Kayne made the trip from New York to Eastern Washington in the mid 1970s to attend law school at Gonzaga University.

Spokane became home shortly after he met and got engaged to his wife, a Spokane paralegal and Colfax native, in 1975.

It was a change from New York, where Kayne said he and his father lived like "a couple of bachelors," housed next door to working musicians and comedians, including Lenny Bruce and Buddy Hackett.

"It wasn't with the intent to move to Spokane," Kayne said of attending GU, where he got the opportunity to serve as a court bailiff under former Spokane judge, Willard J. Roe, before graduating in 1977.

In 1978, Kayne entered trial litigation in Spokane through private practice.

Since 1985, Kayne has served as sitting pro-tem commissioner for Spokane Superior Court, plus held judicial positions in district and municipal courts for Lincoln County, Airway Heights, Cheney, and, since 1995, Medical

Lake, where as presiding judge he's been approved four times by three different administrations.

When the job opened in 1995, Medical Lake's acting judge was retiring, and Sheri Stearns was mayor.

"It was a one-year process. There were about 40 applicants up for the position, and it was mine she [Stearns] chose," Kayne said. He's currently serving his fourth consecutive four-year term with the city, which runs through 2009.

There's really not much distinction to the types of cases handled between a rural court such as Medical Lake compared to a district court in Spokane, where the usual offenses include driving under the influence, suspended licenses, or domestic disputes.

From a judicial standpoint, Kayne said he enjoys the advantages of working in the rural court system to that of the superior court, where the legal resources tend to be more limited.

"It's a great job in that you actually get to do more than superior court judges. Not to over generalize the district court from the municipal court, but we've got more resources when it comes to working with people," Kayne said.

As a longtime faculty member of the National Judicial College, one of the first things Kayne teaches to incoming law students is that their education won't fully train them to do their job.

"Law school teaches you about different areas of law, and relationships between those areas and how it relates to solving a case—it doesn't teach you a thing about doing the job," Kayne said. That's outside the fact that the law is constantly changing, he added.

When asked what the motivation behind his long career was, Kayne's response was simple: keeping faith in the competence and effectiveness of government. He referred to a statement from Indiana superior Court Judge Michael J. Kramer:

"Confidence...that each individual and each case will be heard by a knowledgeable, skilled and well-trained judge is fundamental to every person so that can go about their lives each day without fear of being taken advantage of..."

"All we really have is the public's confidence that we'll be fair in doing our job," Kayne added.

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