

Name: Rey Flores

Court Justice of the Peace, Precinct 3, Place 2

1. What current or past judge do you most want to inspire your approach to judicial excellence and why?

Answer: Very early in my criminal justice career I had the opportunity to work along side a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel that served as my immediate supervisor. He was a no nonsense “what is right is right” sort of man. He was a man of strong conviction and placed great emphasis on respect for individuals and the judicial system. He, I and four others worked as the court probation team for the 203rd Judicial District Court in Dallas Texas, Judge Thomas B. Thorpe, presiding. Judge Thorpe, (now retired) was my mentor and the mentor to many new judges coming to the bench during his tenure. His draw for all of us was his great knowledge of the law, an even temperament, fairness, a checked ego and an earnest interest in passing on his knowledge and skill to those around him. As judge, I would emulate much of what I’ve learned from both of these men. and leaders. Proudly, I claim them to have had the greatest influence in my professional life.

2. What has been the greatest accomplishment in your legal career? In your personal life?

Answer: Professionally I would say there are a number of accomplishments for which I take great pride, but if pressed to name one, it would be my contribution to helping move the Texas criminal justice system to becoming a more effective system. What I mean by this is that I was one of the original taskforce members charged with creating the first drug court (Dallas’ Divert Ct.) in Texas. Not only was I involved with its creation, I also took part in its programming and monitoring. I taught staff in other Texas jurisdictions about programming and served as a facilitator with the National Drug Court Institute teaching about drug courts all over the country. Now there are drug and specialty courts in many Texas jurisdictions. Their existence is making for a much better and effective criminal justice system in Texas. I want to be in a position to contribute with my knowledge and experience in Collin County as well.

As for my greatest personal accomplishment, without a doubt it is my education. My father was a Mexican illiterate immigrant. My mother was a poor illiterate American widow with 5 children. I am a product of their marriage and their humble support. Through their toil and encouragement and my perseverance, I graduated magna cum laude from Texas A&I Univ. (now Texas A&M, Kingsville). I am the first in my family to attend and graduate from College. Since then, I have also graduated from Texas Woman’s Univ. with a Master’s degree in Education from the school of Family Sciences with emphasis in Counseling and Human Development. I am proud to say I now have nieces with college degrees.

3. What, if anything, would you change to improve the procedures and efficiency of the court you are seeking?

Answer: It is difficult to provide an adequate answer to the question without having complete knowledge of procedures now in place. What I do know is that it is very difficult to objectively assess procedures and processes that one has created and adhered to over a long period of time. That is the value of having different eyes do the assessing than those that do the creating. Should I prevail and become justice of the peace for precinct 3, place 2, I will be that person with different eyes doing the assessment. I will review, without prejudice, the procedures and processes, keep what is effective, modify what is needed and eliminate what does not work well. I will also work to incorporate college graduate level management and psychology students to do their master's level work doing scientific and objective procedure and process analysis of the court.

4. Do you feel that all citizens have equal and adequate access to justice in our county? How would you improve the access?

Answer: Access to justice to a very large extent is a function of communication. Ideally, it would be grand if all citizens spoke the common language, English. However, the reality is a growing number of citizens do not, but still have involvement that requires accessing the courts. Having court personnel with multiple language skills would go a long way toward providing access to many in our community. I am bilingual and bring a particular heritage and cultural understanding to the court. Should I prevail, at least in one court, there would be improvement of access for a significant population in the county.

5. Collin County tracks indigent defense dollars ordered by each judge. What effect would that reporting have on your decisions to order that the county pay for a defendant's defense?

Answer: None as my understanding is that the matter is not relevant at the justice of the peace level of justice. Nonetheless, such reporting provides transparency for the public and the judges. With that information, judges can compare and self evaluate so as to keep within the norm for their jurisdictional needs.

6. What do you perceive as the greatest obstacles to justice in Collin County?

Answer: Population in Collin County continues to grow and with that growth one can expect more people to come through the courts. A down economy only adds to the problem. The more people, the larger the dockets get for all courts. The larger the dockets, the greater pressure to dispose of cases. As the pressure builds, all involved in the judicial process tend to speed up to keep up. People become cases and justice suffers as it competes with the haste to dispose of cases. Collin County must prepare to have the resources commensurate with its growing population. Any thing short of that will negatively affect justice.

7. Incarceration is the most expensive criminal sanction available. How would that fact affect your sentencing decisions?

Answer: Fines and alternative sanctions other than incarceration are the primary tools of consequence for the justice of the peace courts. Nonetheless, to respond to the question, currently without proper assessment tools, too many people are incarcerated that could have had more effective and less expensive sanctions applied. My experience has shown that the normal fear and loathing common everyday law-abiding folks have to incarceration is not necessarily shared by everyone. Some will choose incarceration to paying a fine, attending treatment or being placed under supervision. Good assessment can lead to better, more effective and often less expensive sanctions.

8. Without commenting on a specific case or type of cases, should Collin County explore more or different types of alternative sentencing? What do you think works? What would you like to try?

Answer: Definitely, Collin County should pursue more alternative sentencing. There is an abundance of evidence to support that certain individuals will respond positively to specific strategies involved in alternative sentencing. It is not a matter of what I think works. I know what works, in many cases, better than traditional sentencing approaches. Research and personal experience has made me a true believer and strong advocate for alternative sentencing. True collaboration of judicial, enforcement, corrections and treatment entities committed to a tried and tested process can yield considerably better outcomes than traditional sentencing. As a member of the local judiciary, I would like to share my knowledge and experience with other judges in an attempt to bring more alternatives to the different courts in the county.

9. Recently, a Dallas judge made the news when he replaced a white juror with a minority one in a capital trial where the jury was all white and the defendant was not. Do you believe it is important for a minority defendant to have a jury that contains minority members?

Answer: It is important that a defendant have a jury consisting of jurors that can assess all the evidence without prejudice, bias, or preconceived notions of the defendant because the defendant is a minority. The judicial system has a process (voir dire) to account for that possibility. It is as presumptuous to believe that all whites are bias against minorities as it is to believe that all minorities are bias for minorities.

10 When a judge's sense of justice appears to be in variance to the strict application of the law, what approach should an ethical judge take to resolve the conflict?

Answer: Laws are the creation of men and women in the legislature and it is impossible for them to create laws that are always all encompassing and to which we all agree. Nonetheless, we are a nation of laws and the application of existing law is what a judge commits to when he/she becomes a judge. A personal sense of justice

must take a back seat to applicable law. The conflict occurs more often than most would expect. Every time a defense lawyer fails to adequately defend a client's rights or a prosecutor fails to prove up their case, judges can experience conflict knowing what could have been had alternative approaches been implemented? Yet, the judge must rule in accordance with the evidence presented, not what was left out. The personal conflict remains unresolved, but a judge can take some solaces in knowing he/she acted in accordance with his commitment to the law.

11. Do you believe that our system of partisan elections of trial judges should be continued? How can it be improved?

Answer: There is no easy way to select trial judges without politics playing a role. Yet once in office, we expect them to be non-partisan and fair. It has been my personal experience in working with judges, both republican and democrat, that party affiliation has no bearing on the quality of the judge. In fact, I have worked with judges that started out in one party and switched to the other with no perceivable difference in their demeanor or rulings. My opinion is that in most cases, switches occur for strategic re-election reasons rather than for philosophical ones. The system might be improved by establishing a bi-partisan vetting commission that takes into account the constitutional requirements and then adds qualifications they consider relevant factors to being a good trial judge. Once the applicants meets those requirements, they would become candidates for judge in a non-partisan election.

12 Tell the voters one thing about yourself that isn't on any website nor discussed in any forum.

Answer: Many years ago, I learned that General Colin Powell had developed a personal mission statement and had it posted on the door to his office so that anyone coming to see him would become aware of what his personal value are. It also served as a daily reminder for him of what is important in his life. Taking my cue from him in 1995, I took some time and developed my own personal mission statement and hung it on the door to my office as well. After I retired, I hung it on a wall of my home office I see it everyday and it serves as a constant reminder of my values and what is important to me. I've tried to live by that mission statement ever since.