

Name: Sharon Ramage
Court: Collin County Court at Law #2

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

There are many current and past judges that I admire and I believe I have learned from all of them and will take those combined experiences to the Bench. I have the utmost admiration and respect for retiring Judge Henderson for his servant approach to our profession and the Bench, his intellect, hard work, availability and consistency in the manner in which he applies the law. I also respect retired Judge Betty Caton for the no-nonsense manner in which she handled cases before her. I also had the privilege of working with a judge in Tarrant County as a misdemeanor prosecutor who used a common sense approach in the Courtroom that was very effective.

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

Legal career: While in the Tarrant County District Attorney's Office, I was able to successfully prosecute someone for the murder of his 18 month old child, who died of blunt force trauma to the head. Seven years elapsed between the child's death and the defendant's prosecution, so this was a difficult case. This successful prosecution brought peace and closure to the victim's grandparents and the sibling who witnessed her sister's death. The sibling is now grown and has become an advocate for others. I feel fortunate that through the hard work of many people there was justice for the victim and her family, and that I was able to be a positive influence for the surviving sibling and able to witness her resilience in overcoming adversity.

Personal life – Parenting my incredible twin 8 year-old daughters. My husband and I are very involved with our children's activities and education. I am so thankful that my participation in this election has provided teachable moments for our children and I believe they will grow to be better citizens for it.

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

I would like to be available earlier in the morning (8:00 a.m.) for an announcement or plea docket so lawyers and parties can appear early and move onto other courts and their clients can return to work, and then maximize the court's time to preside over trials and hearings. I would like to work diligently to move cases more quickly to prevent the court's backlog from becoming greater than it is. This would require a more active role in managing the court's docket and setting the expectation for all parties that cases will be disposed of expeditiously, whether by trial, plea or dismissal.

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

I believe all citizens have equal access to justice. There is a process in place to determine indigence and to insure that indigent defendants have access to adequate legal representation. Judges should be diligent in insuring that correct determinations are made regarding indigence. I believe the judges do a good job of screening and approving attorneys who handle court appointments but improvements can always be made. As for adequate access to justice, unreasonable delays in resolving cases has an negative impact on all persons affected by the judicial system, from the defendant who needs a prompt resolution of his or her legal matter, the witness who is called to testify, to any victim who also needs a prompt resolution of the case. I believe more attention needs to be given to the prompt and efficient management of the court's docket.

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?

Although all public officials have a responsibility to be good stewards of tax dollars, the Defendant's right to counsel is paramount and indigent defendants will not be denied appointed counsel because indigent defense dollars are reported by court.

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

Overcrowded dockets and delays in resolving pending legal matters. A delay in resolution, with repeated court appearances, not only creates an unmanageable docket, but creates uncertainty for the accused (or civil litigant), often requires many days of missed work to appear in court, and lack of closure for victims or others affected by the case.

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

Incarceration for any length of time is not a penalty that should be taken lightly, not just because of the expense to the taxpayer, but because of the impact on the offender, victim, and society. However, criminal sanctions should be individualized and based only on the evidence. They should be appropriate to the crime as well as the offender, taking into consideration the offender's criminal history, efforts and willingness to rehabilitate, need for deterrence, and the facts of the particular case.

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?

Absolutely. I am very encouraged to hear that each of the candidates for District Attorney supports diversion programs. Many cases in the county courts at law involve youthful or first time offenders. By offering a diversion program, the offender who has a willingness to change his or her behavior can keep his or her record clean. Diversion programs, however, are within the discretion of the District Attorney.

However, other alternative sentencing programs may be implemented while an offender is on probation, such as in the DWI/Drug Court program already being implemented. I would support expansion of that program. I would also support the development of a similar program for non-violent mentally ill offenders who do not meet the criteria for hospitalization but nonetheless have a diagnosed mental illness that is directly related to the charged offense.

- 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?

I believe it is important for any criminal defendant to have access to a jury selection process that provides a fair cross-section of people from the community from all walks of life or races. The Law does not allow for the striking of potential jurors for racially motivated reasons. Neither does the law authorize the judge to be an activist judge by removing and replacing jurors with the sole objective being to gain a minority juror. The judge's role is to make sure the jury selection process is fair, rule on disqualifications, and rule on challenges to jurors as they are made.

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

An ethical judge must constantly evaluate her own motives when asked to make any type of ruling. If strict appliance of the law is inconsistent with a judge' personal bias, the judge must put that bias aside and strictly apply the law.

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

Yes, the partisan election of trial judges should be continued. I believe the number of judicial candidates in the current primary is healthy for the county and creates an atmosphere of accountability for elected officials. I believe the process can be improved by better efforts to inform the public at all times about the work performance of elected officials and candidates (not just during the primary season).

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

I love to browse for antiques and frequent bed and breakfasts in small towns, and absolutely live for annual summer trips to pick blueberries with my children every June. My husband and I have long had the dream of opening our own bed and breakfast when we retire and I would love to have a berry patch!