

WOMEN LAWYERS HONOR JUDGE COLLEEN TOY WHITE AND RENNEE DEHESA

by *Kymerley Peck*



At its 11th Annual Scholarship Dinner at the Museum of Ventura County on Sept. 14, Women Lawyers of Ventura County (WLVC) will proudly honor **Judge Colleen Toy White** with the Legacy Award, and **Rennée Dehesa**, partner with Schuck, Becker & Dehesa, LLP, with the Holly Spevak Award.

JUDGE WHITE

Given her more than 22 years of service on the Ventura County Superior Court, it surely comes as no surprise to many that the complete list of Judge White's accomplishments is too long for this article; perhaps this publication. During her time on the VCSC bench, she has acted as Presiding Judge and Assistant Presiding Judge. While serving as the former Supervising Judge for the Family Law Division, Judge White initiated the Pro Per Clinic, an early edition of what is now the Family Law Self-Help Center. While serving as the Dependency Court Judge, she established the Dependency Drug Court. Today, Judge White serves in the Criminal Trial Division where she presides over Veterans Court, Domestic Violence Court, Elder Abuse Court, Mental Health Court and Community Intervention Court, hearing some of the community's most emotionally-charged disputes. Judge White has been instrumental in shaping these courts and in advancing community access to justice.

Judge White's commitment to justice developed well before she joined the bench. As a child, she would often ride with her



police officer father while he was on patrol in their small town of Wetumpka, Oklahoma. She witnessed firsthand how her father dealt with the people he encountered, an early influence for how she might do so in the future. She then married at age sixteen and was prohibited from finishing school at her high school. Overcoming challenges early in life, she not only finished high school, but went on to obtain her undergraduate and law degrees while working during the day and studying at night.

Former District Attorney **Michael Bradbury** recalls that Judge White originally planned to be a defense attorney. But after clerking in the D.A.'s office as a law student, Judge White was hired as a deputy D.A. while awaiting Bar results. Bradbury reminisces that there was a brief moment when they thought Judge White had not passed the Bar. The results came in, but there was no Colleen White on the pass list. "That's because her name was listed as White Colleen," chuckles Bradbury. When someone thought to check back with the Bar office they determined that, in fact, Judge White had passed. This was the start of two decades that Judge White would serve in the D.A.'s office, where she was ultimately promoted to Chief Assistant. Bradbury notes that Judge White served with "great distinction." Bradbury reveals there was a point when President Ronald Reagan asked Judge White to join his administration's White House Counsel or the Attorney General's Office. Judge White declined both, but she accepted the President's offer to chair the Presidential

Advisory Council on the Peace Corps. She is an "absolutely extraordinary woman," says Bradbury.

Judge White has been an inarguably extraordinary force on the bench, too. Fellow Ventura County Superior Court Judge **Glen M. Reiser** remarks of Judge White, "She thinks, she listens ... she is iconic in her ability to be compassionate." These traits have not only made Judge White so successful on the bench, but have also served the litigants who enter her courtroom. "She has no pretension. Every person in the judicial system gets a new start with Judge White," states longtime friend **John C. Orr**. This sentiment echoes from all who speak or write of Judge White. Her colleagues on the bench believe the diversity, knowledge and life experience she brings make her "such a fantastic judge," as Judge Reiser puts it.

"[Judge White] is an incredible role model for women of all ages," says Bradbury. We agree.

RENNEE DEHESA

Dehesa's receives the Holly Spevak award to commemorate her outstanding public service in our community. An active member of the Ventura County Bar Association, Dehesa has devoted innumerable hours to advocating for immigrants' rights in 2017's ever-changing political landscape. Dehesa is a board member of the VCBA's Barristers and Chair of the Barristers Mentorship Program, where she takes an active role in connecting new attorneys with experienced mentors. She also regularly volunteers through WLVC's program with Girls, Inc., which seeks to foster self-esteem in incarcerated youth through workshops at the Oxnard Juvenile Justice Center. Dehesa's passion, empathy and strong sense of civic responsibility have engendered vital changes to this community's treatment of immigrant families. (See Dehesa's article in this issue of Citations.) Ventura County is made better by the gracious contributions of Rennée Dehesa.

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