

Innovator loves position as neutral

Former Judge Connor 'invariably polite' but knows when 'to push'

By **Matt Hamilton**
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — After 25 years on the bench, Jacqueline A. Connor is relishing the opportunity to do what she never could: talk to the involved parties.

As a neutral for ADR Services Inc. with two years under her belt, Connor listens to the narratives, probing all sides' motives and objectives. Unlike in a courtroom, where law, precedent and argument play a part in the decision-making, Connor takes stock of emotions.

"Now I can ask. They can talk to me," Connor said, referring to parties in a dispute. "This takes everything I've ever learned of my 62 years living, from reading people, to understanding people, to thinking outside the box.

"I now have access to all those other dimensions that are not available in the courtroom," Connor said.

Since joining ADR Services, Connor has handled medical and legal malpractice claims, employment and construction defect cases. Her matters have involved a 12-year-old boy who was bullied at school; a woman who slipped and lost her eye in Beverly Hills; a breach of contract involving script writer s' revenues, and an assault by a landlord's handyman.

The diversity of cases matches her broad experience, first as a deputy district attorney for Los Angeles County, heading the sex crimes unit starting in the 1970s.

Longing to return to the courtroom and leave administration behind, Connor pursued a judicial appointment.

Gov. George Duekmejian appointed Connor to the Municipal Court in 1986, and in 1988, she was appointed to the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

For 15 years, her courtroom on the 9th floor of the downtown Criminal Justice Center saw several high profile cases, including the trial of three Los Angeles Police Department officers

Jacqueline A. Connor

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Areas of specialty: business, employment, medical malpractice, personal and premises liability, probate, real estate

from the Rampart division accused of framing gang members.

Connor overturned the three convictions, much to the chagrin of then-District Attorney Steve Cooley. But Connor stood her ground, ruling that jurors improperly focused on issues that weren't raised at trial.

From 2002 to 2012, Connor heard civil matters at the Santa Monica courthouse before retiring. Attorneys who have worked with Connor say she's made a seamless transition from judge to neutral.

Richard Glucksman, a partner at Chapman Glucksman Dean Roeb & Barger, said he relied on Connor's decisive and energetic approach to settle a problematic construction claim related to a downtown Los Angeles high-rise.

"The other side was very unclear where they were coming from, and had been somewhat difficult," Glucksman. "Whatever she did in her private talks with them led to a satisfactory resolution."

Now a grandmother to a 4-year-old boy, Connor said she's not retired — just reinvented.

To start every mediation, Connor invokes Mark Twain: "I've only been wronged but twice in my life: once when I lost a lawsuit, and once when I won."

She tells parties her bias is to keep them out of court, where they'll cede confidentiality to a public record and all power to a judge and 12 strangers.

"I have high respect for the fact that this is a place where parties have control," Connor said. "They say 'yes' or 'no.'"

Sometimes, attorneys ask her to explain to a client why securing a trial date or setting a time for a demurrer is so difficult — an outcome of eviscerated court budgets across the state.

In lieu of justice and fairness — pos-



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sibilities, but not guarantees — Connor said she above all seeks a solution, ranging from an apology to an annuity. "We're looking for compromise, we're looking for the best result that protects their true interests, and avoids the risks of losing," Connor said.

David B. Madariaga of The Fowler Law Group said Connor's deep courtroom experience and time management skills give her the credibility to analyze a case's merits and pinpoint an agreeable settlement.

That same credibility strikes a chord with parties, Madariaga said.

"She has an ability to empathize with the litigants, which can obviously be very helpful in negotiating the settlements," Madariaga said.

Occasionally that means she can speak their native tongue. Connor was born in Detroit but because her father worked in military intelligence during the post-World War II occupation of Japan, she was raised there and is fluent in Japanese.

The third of seven children, she graduated from USC after studying economics and international relations, and attended USC's Gould School of Law, graduating in 1976.

As a judge, Connor was known as an innovator on the role of juries, allowing jurors to ask questions. She'd ask attorneys to give jury instruction as early as possible in the trial, which she explained by recalling what it's like to watch curling on the Olympics. The sport mystified her, but getting an explanation after the

fact isn't much help.

"I want to know the rules while I'm watching, so I know what to look for," Connor said.

And Connor is keenly aware of the fickle, even arbitrary nature of juries. She recalled a jury that witnessed the plaintiff drop his gum wrapper on the floor outside the courtroom and formed its opinion of him based on the revealing detail.

"I think jurors tend to look for who the bad guy is, and who the good guy is, whether its criminal or civil," Connor said.

That emotional intelligence now guides Connor's work as a neutral, and the modified schedule still allows her to pursue her hobbies: reading, working out and traveling. She recently visited France and the U.K. on an American Board of Trial Advocates' trip, and up next: Hawaii.

Here are some attorneys who have used Connor's services:

Gary Dordick, The Law Offices of Gary A. Dordick, Beverly Hills; Jim Zurawski, Kirk & Zurawski, Los Angeles; David Olan, Olan Law, Los Angeles; Ken Ruttenberg, Tesser, Ruttenberg & Grossman, Los Angeles; Richard Glucksman, Chapman Glucksman Dean Roeb & Barger, Los Angeles; Matthew Liedle, Liedle, Lounsbery, Larson & Lidl, LLP, San Diego; Kevin Engelen, Collins Collins Muir & Stewart LLP, Pasadena; Armen Kiramijyan, Kaass Law, Glendale; David Madariaga, The Fowler Law Group, Los Angeles.