

Dr. Mediation

Retired Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Patricia Collins compares her efforts to keep clients out of the courtroom to orthoscopic surgery.



Patricia Collins
Age: 57

Affiliation: ADR Services
Location: Southern California
Areas of Specialty: Business, personal injury, entertainment, insurance, real estate, employment, professional negligence
Rate: \$425 per hour

By Catherine Ho

Daily Journal Staff Writer

If mediation is an orthoscopic procedure and trial is major surgery, Patricia Collins is a legal surgeon who's operated in both settings.

"I compare settlement to orthoscopic surgery," said Collins, a retired Los Angeles County Superior Court judge and mediator and arbitrator at ADR Services. "It's painful but compared to trial, you recover sooner, and recovery is more certain and less painful. It's nowhere near as invasive as trial."

Others say she's more magician than surgeon.

Steven Glickman, an attorney at Glickman & Glickman in Beverly Hills, turned to Collins to settle wrongful death and legal malpractice cases.

"The sign of a good mediator is when you have a case you think is impossible to resolve and the mediator works their magic and gets it resolved," he said. "She is exceptionally good at reading what each side is really interested in besides the monetary aspects of the case. She knows how to work on that angle and get everyone's interests aligned the right way and close the deal."

For Collins, a judge for 20 years before joining ADR Services in 2008, the best part of mediating is rolling up her sleeves and solving problems from the inside out.

"My role is more active as a mediator," she said. "A lot of being a judge is trying to be on the sidelines. In mediation, the whole point is to be involved and work with the parties to find a solution."

As a professional problem solver, Collins makes it a point to prepare before each

mediation session, taking detailed notes on briefs, highlighting issues and questions as well as gleaning a sense of the personal relationships that come with each case.

"I'm always thinking in advance about bargaining chips we might put on the table," she said.

Collins' game plan changes depending on the nature of the dispute and the players, she said, citing a recent sexual assault case.

"I knew there was going to be emotional issues to get past so I spent a lot of time with the plaintiff to allow her to relax, vent and trust me," she said. "I let her talk as much as possible because a lot of what they need is to be heard. If they're settling, they're not getting their day in court and it helps if they can tell their story."

Adapting to clients' needs is one of Collins' strengths, said Christopher Caldwell, a partner at Caldwell Leslie & Proctor in Los Angeles, who has brought legal malpractice and lender liability lawsuits to Collins.

"She was thoughtful, creative and very good at understanding the interpersonal dynamics of the players involved," he said.

Collins was thoroughly prepared and clearly had a grasp on the legal issues, having done her own independent research in addition to reviewing information provided by the lawyers, Caldwell said. She also has a way of establishing trust with both clients and attorneys, he added.

"She has a very easy manner with people," he said. "Even when she's delivering news you don't want to hear, you trust it and know that because she's taken the time to really learn the case, her recommendations are based on careful analysis of the facts and law of the case as opposed to banging heads to try and get to some number."

Collins, a native of Buffalo, New York, attributes her move to California to annual trips she and her family made to Disneyland - a luxury afforded by free airline tickets her dad, a longtime American Airlines employee, got from work.

After graduating from law school at Georgetown in 1979, Collins packed her bags and moved west, starting a job at Adams Duque & Hazeltine in Los Angeles.

After three years of focusing on business litigation and insurance, Collins left for the U.S. attorney's office in the Central District of California, which she describes as "the world's best job." From 1982 to 1988, she specialized in financial and real estate fraud and violent crimes, and served one year as chief of the major crimes unit, supervising prosecution of violent federal offenses including murder, rape and arson.

She still remembers her first federal criminal trial, where a defendant had ingested a cocaine balloon and tried to skirt punishment by claiming he didn't know what he was swallowing. The jury was out just 17 minutes before returning a guilty verdict, she said.

Collins met her husband Gordon Greenberg, a partner at McDermott Will & Emery in Los Angeles, while they were both federal prosecutors. They have two daughters, Haley, 20, and Danielle, 16.

In 1988, Collins was appointed to the municipal court by Gov. George Deukmejian and elevated to Superior Court four years later, most recently presiding over civil cases in Santa Monica before her retirement in 2008.

At ADR Services, she handles mostly mediations.

"I like to solve," she said. "I like to get everyone involved in solving problems."

Here are some attorneys who have used Collins in mediation or arbitration:

Steven Glickman, Glickman & Glickman, Beverly Hills; Daniel Sheldon, Scolinos Sheldon & Nevell, Pasadena; Judith Meadow, Russ August & Kabat, Los Angeles; Christopher Caldwell, Caldwell Leslie & Proctor, Los Angeles; Linda Burrow, Caldwell Leslie & Proctor, Los Angeles; Paul Malingagio, Sheppard Mullin, Los Angeles; William Delgado, Willenken Wilson Loh & Lieb, Los Angeles; Alan Wilken, Loeb & Loeb, Los Angeles; Gregg Martin, Hamburg Karic Edwards & Martin, Los Angeles; Jeffrey Huron, Huron Law Group, Los Angeles; Charles Coate, Costa Abrams & Coate, Santa Monica; Alan Abrams, Costa Abrams & Coate, Santa Monica; Shirley Hayton, Gartenberg Gelfand Wasson & Selden, Los Angeles; Robert McKenna, Carroll, Kelly, Trotter, Franzen & McKenna, Long Beach; Esther Holm, Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith, Costa Mesa; Geoffrey Wells, Greene Broillet & Wheeler, Santa Monica; Lance Gams, Santa Monica City Attorney's Office, Santa Monica.

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