Administrative Office of the Courts

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The Honorable Karen L. Townsend to retire

AZTEC – Judge Karen L. Townsend, the longest-serving district judge in San Juan County, is retiring at the end of March after serving more than 17 years on the bench in the Eleventh Judicial District.

Judge Townsend became the second female judge in the district when she was appointed by Governor Bill Richardson in 2006. Judge Townsend was elected the same year.

In 2008, Judge Townsend started a Treatment Court program for the district with the help of Court Executive Officer Weldon Neff. "The most rewarding part of my job is when I get stopped in a grocery store or on the street by someone and have them say, 'Hey you saved my life when you sent me to treatment.'"

Although judges in the district usually share case types, Judge Townsend primarily presided over felony criminal cases. Between 2015 and 2021, Judge Townsend was administratively responsible for all magistrate and district courts in Farmington, Aztec and Gallup as the Chief District Judge.

"Judge Karen Townsend's experience will be missed," said Chief District Judge Curtis R. Gurley. "Judge Townsend has served our community and the state well for nearly two decades."

Judge Townsend graduated from Aztec High School in 1982, Ft. Lewis College in 1985, and worked at the Public Service Company of New Mexico at its San Juan Generating Station before going to Syracuse University College of Law and receiving her Juris Doctorate in 1990. Judge Townsend moved back to Farmington and was an associate with Tansey, Rosebrough, Gerding and Strother for seven years, helping to start the San Juan County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program with former judge Benjamin Eastburn before opening her office in Aztec. CASA volunteers advocate for foster children as they move through the child welfare system.

After an extended European vacation with her family, Judge Townsend said she hopes to remain active in the legal profession in some way in retirement. “Mediations and legal training are on the table,” she said.

“Being a judge is the best job I could have ever imagined,” said Judge Townsend. “I am happy to see the support the judiciary received this year from the Legislature for better compensation. I'm sure it played a part in getting a very qualified slate of applicants for my position.”

Judge Townsend and her departing Trial Court Administrative Assistant Katrina Barber will be celebrated at a gathering in Aztec on April 2, 2024.

The Eleventh Judicial District serves people in San Juan and McKinley counties.

Eleventh Judicial District Judge Karen L. Townsend

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