

Face Time: Judge has relished chance to help change lives



District Court Judge Richard "Rick" White, in his office in May, will retire July 1.

For 36 years, Richard "Rick" White has reported to his job at the Spokane County Courthouse, mostly on foot.

White started in 1975 working as a juvenile probation officer, a first brush with the legal system that made him want to become a lawyer.

For the past two decades, he's enjoyed what he called a daily adrenaline rush every time he donned a black robe and presided over District Court.

"It has been one of the most humbling and rewarding experiences to have served my community over the last 20 (plus) years and I have thanked God every day for giving me this opportunity," he wrote Spokane County commissioners earlier this year in announcing his July 1 retirement.

White graduated from Gonzaga University School of Law in 1980 and turns 60 this month.

After growing up in Salt Lake City, White came to Spokane in 1969 to attend Gonzaga. He and his wife of 33 years, Frankie, raised three sons. Recently, he talked about his career.

Q. What did you enjoy most about your work?

A. Right after I got this job, I sold my car. I walked to work every day. It is absolutely true that every morning when I got up, I looked forward to coming to work. There is so much excitement and drama and opportunities to influence the lives of people every day. That's what makes the job so very exciting.

Q. What has been your most fulfilling moment on the bench?

A. The first DUI-supervision graduation. That was my most favorite day in 20 1/2 years. It was seconded only by the very first hearing of Drug Court, which was 14 years ago. In those programs, we are using the resources of the government to treat the disease, which is probably the single most contributing factor to their criminal behavior. We are showing them that they can recover from their disease and addiction.

Those programs have helped thousands of people. I see them on the street. They give profound gratitude to me and all the judges for helping them change their lives.

Q. What has been the source of your greatest frustration while sitting on the bench?

A. When the county government started experiencing significant financial problems, and they began making personnel cuts in the prosecutors' and public defenders' offices. Then we were rarely doing jury trials. We were doing more plea bargains because we don't have the resources to try cases. It felt like we weren't doing what served our community best, in terms of accountability.

Q. After a lengthy legal career, what's next?

A. I have for the last seven years been performing free mediation once a week, mostly for family-law cases. It's the subject that I teach at the (Gonzaga) law school and what I practiced as a lawyer. I have fallen in love with that role. So, I'm doing that ... in the next chapter of my career.