



Judge Steven Howell Class of 2014

Steven Howell was born in Greenville, South Carolina and graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1970. While at OHS he earned Top Ten honors as a junior, was life member of the California Scholastic Federation (CSF) and the National Honor Society (NHS). He was also a National Merit Scholar as a senior, only the second OHS student to earn this distinguished honor. By those who knew him, he was called “scary smart.”

Steve played baseball for 3 years and was a Block O member all 4 years. He was active in the United Nations Club for 3 years and twice elected president of the club. He was a class officer during his sophomore and junior years at OHS as well as a member of the Key Club that performed community services.

In 1974, Steve earned his BA degree in philosophy from the University of California, Davis (UCD) and his JD degree from Santa Clara University Law School, graduating magna cum laude in 1977.

Upon being admitted to the California State Bar, Steve opened his private law practice in Oroville and maintained it for the next 9 years. In 1987, he was appointed to the Municipal Court, South Butte County Judicial District. In 1996, he was elevated to the Superior Court of Butte County. He was elected in 1998 and stood for election 5 times without challenge. He is believed to be the second longest serving judge in Butte County history.

Judge Howell initially conducted court in what was known statewide as “the worst courtroom in the State of California,” a double-wide construction trailer located in a parking lot of the Oroville Justice Court. He led the effort that expanded the Superior Court in Oroville. Two additional court rooms were added to the Superior Court building in 2005, largely due to the efforts of Judge Howell. As presiding judge, he also oversaw the complete unification of the Municipal and Superior Courts of Butte County, the first in the state to do so. Very soon, the court system will dedicate a new North County facility in Chico that should meet the county needs for decades to come.

From 1993-96, Judge Howell served on the State Judicial Council, the policy-making body for the state judiciary, and was then named to the Council’s Executive Committee among other statewide educational and administrative committees to which he was appointed. He was elected by his peers to lead the Rural Municipal and Justice Court Judges Association and also served as president of the Butte County Law Library Board of Trustees. After a distinguished career that spanned more than three and a half decades at the local, county, and state levels, Judge Howell retired from the bench on February 29, 2012.

While in private practice and while sitting on the bench, Judge Howell found time to lecture in the Continuing Judicial Studies Program and serve as a panelist at the Administrative Office of the Courts Management and Presiding Judges Conference. He also was a participant in the State Bar Colloquium on Access and Affordability.

Community service in Oroville was also a part of Judge Howell’s life as he was a 30 year member of the Butte County Historical Society. Before being appointed as judge, he was a member of the Rotary Club and the Fellows Club of Oroville, but due to his judicial time demands and his concern about being placed in positions which might raise ethical concerns, he resigned his membership in those two organizations.

Steve was a driving force in creating the Butte County Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program that trained persons to advocate for dependent children who were in foster care.

Current OUHSD Hall of Fame member and Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey writes, "Over his long and illustrious career, Judge Howell has been all things a judge should be: wise, compassionate, insightful, patient, and with more than a bit of wit. This could be seen even in his days at OHS in the June 5, 1970 edition of the ***Tiger Tales***. There was a section entitled, "Senior Plans" where eager young graduates contemplated their bright futures with such excitement as 'going to college...getting married...joining the navy...traveling the world...etc.'" but young merit scholar Steve Howell boiled his grand plans down to one word: "Existing"; "How existential!"

Steve and his wife of 42 years, M. Melanie Howell raised two sons and now reside primarily in Washington State.