

She wasn't law trained, but. . .

Judge makes her case

By **CAROLYN PLOTTS**

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Thirteen years experience working with Social Services and three years with Juvenile Services for the State of Kansas, was good preparation for Deb Anderson to sit on the bench as Norton County Magistrate Judge.

Mrs. Anderson finished out the term of Judge June Brown who retired in 2002, with one year left on her term. A close friend prompted her to submit her name for consideration. An interview committee selected Mrs. Anderson and one other candidate to interview with then Governor Bill Graves. He appointed Mrs. Anderson to fill out Judge Brown's term.

Judge Anderson took the oath of office on April 15, 2002. At the end of that term, she campaigned for re-election and ran unopposed for the judgeship. She is an odd-year candidate and will not have to campaign again until 2010.

Judge Anderson said provisions are made for judges who do not have law degrees. "I was worried because I wasn't law trained," she said. But Judge Brown encouraged her and supported her decision, she said.

She said during their first year on the bench non-law trained judges receive intensive training and must pass a competency test. She received a certificate proclaiming she has the ability to perform the duties of her office. In addition, Judge Anderson completed a two-week course

at National Judicial College in Reno, Nev. She said judges receive on-going training.

At the end of her first year on the bench, Norton experienced its first murder since 1933. Judge Anderson heard the evidence against Jimmy Williams in the alleged beating death of his stepfather and ordered him bound over for trial. "District Judge William Elliott really mentored me. It was an eye-opening experience for me," she said.

Most of the cases she hears are not so sensational. She makes determinations in child in need of care cases, juvenile offender cases, misdemeanor criminal and traffic cases, probate of wills, limited action cases, small claims cases, adoptions, care and treatment (mental health, drug and alcohol) cases and temporary custody hearings.

Maintaining a professional distance is the hardest part for Judge Anderson. "I know a lot of the people who come before me," she said. "But I cannot have any pre-conceived opinion. I always assume the accused is innocent. The burden of proof is on the prosecution." It has happened that Judge Anderson had to remove herself from a case because she was personally involved. Another judge had to hear the proceedings.

Judge Anderson grew up in the Norton/Long Island area and is a graduate of Northern Valley High School. She completed three years at Kansas State University. Her hobbies include



Norton County Magistrate Judge Deb Anderson has been on the bench for six years. Judge Anderson has taken extensive training and has met all the requirements to hear cases.

— Telegram photo by Carolyn Plotts

following her children's activities and gardening, which she said is relaxing to her.

She is a member of the Norton United Methodist Church and a sponsor of United Methodist Youth Fellowship, president of the board of directors for Norton County Big Brothers Big

Sisters, president of Northwest Kansas Magistrate Judges Association and on the Post Prom Committee.

She and her husband, Ron Anderson, live in Norton and have four children: Ryan, 24, Kyle 21, and twins, Megan and Logan 18.

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