

Beyond the Bio: Judge Devon Anderson, Justice Forward President and CEO

Judge Devon Anderson's path to becoming a lawyer started when she saw the cover of a magazine. She didn't know much about law school or being a lawyer, but as a senior in college at the University of Texas at Austin, she read the cover story of a Parade Magazine issue about the top female prosecutors in the county.

"I read about the women, and I realized, oh, this is this could be really amazing. I mean, it sounds really interesting," Anderson said. "So, I went to law school wanting to be a prosecutor."

Growing up in Waco, Judge Anderson wanted to be an actress. Her mother, a history professor at Baylor University, thought law would be a good path for Anderson. She eventually used that knack for performing in her work as a prosecutor, defense attorney, and judge.

After graduating from the University of Texas at Austin School of Law, Anderson took a job at the Harris County District Attorney's office. She was a prosecutor for more than 12 years and tried over 100 jury trials, including capital murder cases. It's also where she met her husband, Michael Anderson.

"I got roped into a high-profile trial. I was way out of my depth and was at a bar night with a bunch of prosecutors and [Michael was] like, I'll try it with you," Anderson said. "So we tried this case, and did not do very well, which is ironic. But then we started dating and got married."

Anderson then went on to serve as a judge on the 177th District Court. During her tenure, Harris County started its fourth drug court and Anderson was asked to preside over it.

"I did, not knowing much about it, and just loved it," Anderson said. "Just to see the change that people could make if they really wanted to and really worked at it was remarkable."

At the time, drug courts were relatively new and had some resistance. But after getting the elected District Attorney's approval, Anderson's office engaged partners and started taking part in a lot of training and education. Anderson says the court changed her whole view on drugs and the criminal justice system.



Judge Anderson with her kids, Brynn and Sam

"I just saw people that I would see under the bridges or panhandling on the corners...and then I would see them come into these programs and literally come back to life," Anderson said. "I mean, just once you got the drug fog gone and they're 90 days sober, you see their personalities, their intelligence, their sense of humor come back and then just to see the reuniting with their families, getting jobs and feeling like they have self-worth again – I've just never seen anything like it."

Anderson opened a defense practice after losing re-election. She then stayed home with her two kids when her husband, Michael, was elected as the Harris County District Attorney. But eight months into his term, Michael was diagnosed with and passed away from cancer. Anderson



Judge Anderson speaking at a HOPE Drug Court graduation in Galveston

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needed to decide what to do for work after losing her husband and was soon appointed by Governor Rick Perry to succeed Michael.

As District Attorney, Anderson got to do a lot of policy work, which she enjoyed. But she also said it was a very stressful job, with crises popping up every day. After losing reelection, Anderson moved into the nonprofit space; she currently serves as the President and CEO of Justice Forward.

Justice Forward is an organization that assists all Specialty Court clients in becoming healthy and productive members of their communities. The nonprofit raises money from private foundations and individuals to provide transitional housing, grief and trauma counseling, transportation, college tuition, vocational training, and expunges criminal histories. Justice Forward serves all 18 Harris County Specialty Courts, two in Galveston County, and three in Fort Bend County.

“It's just been the most rewarding work. I've been just really happy where I am now,” Anderson said. “You look back at all the terrible things that have happened, but things do ultimately work out, maybe not the way you wanted them to or how you thought they should. But they do ultimately, I think.”



Judge Anderson in Acadia National Park where she did a solo iron rung hike

Justice Forward is the only organization in the state that helps all specialty courts in its jurisdiction, including mental health courts. Supreme Court Justice Jane Bland, one of the co-chairs of the JCMH, asked Judge Anderson to be on the Collaborative Council because of this work. Anderson says being on the Collaborative Council has helped her understand mental health challenges that are jurisdictions are facing.



Judge Anderson and her partner, Chris Flood, in Florence, Italy

“I am proud to be involved with the council and think they're doing great work and I hope I can be of service,” Anderson said.

Outside of work, Judge Anderson is a proud mom to Sam, who is in law school at South Texas College of Law Houston and is taking after his parents in his pursuit of becoming a prosecutor, and Brynn, who played volleyball at Sewanee: The University of The South and is studying abroad in Milan this semester. Her partner, Chris Flood, is a defense attorney.

She also has two dogs, Ellie and Murphy. She enjoys hiking, snorkeling, Pilates & yoga, movies and reading.

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