

Beyond the Bio: Judge Brent Carr, Tarrant County

Generations of the Carr family have answered the call to public service. Judge Brent Carr's father worked with migrant workers, and his mother was an elementary school teacher. After graduating from the University of Tampa, Judge Carr continued his family's mission of serving the public by joining the Marine Corps.

His time in the service took him to Washington D.C., Oklahoma, Korea, and Japan. Judge Carr's next step brought him to Houston, at the South Texas College of Law.

"After rolling around in the snow and in the mud for four years, reading a book sounded like something that was very easy," Judge Carr said. "So, I was very happy to read books."

Upon graduating, Judge Carr interviewed for a job in Fort Worth. He had never been to Fort Worth, but the city made an impact on him, and he never left.



Judge Carr on a deployment to Korea, 1978.

In May 1983, he began working for the district attorney's office in Tarrant County. Judge Carr served in many capacities in the office, before a man named Larry Brown called him and asked if he wanted to run for a judicial position. Three positions were being added to Tarrant County at the time. Judge Carr ran uncontested and earned the title he holds today, Judge of the County Criminal Court No. 9.

Judge Carr has also created a lasting impression on the county as the presiding judge over three specialty courts: a mental health court, a veterans treatment court, and a court for women involved in sex trafficking.



Judge Carr on the bench.

His involvement in specialty courts in Tarrant County began in the early 2000s. The local mental health association was having a free lunch at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, something Judge Carr said he would never miss. The association brought a mental health court team from Indianapolis to Texas to speak about how they put the court together. The concept captured Judge Carr's attention.

"It just seemed like it was too good a thing to not follow up on. We had a couple of discussions and I was very interested in it," Judge Carr said. "I offered to be the judge who would take over this project."

The Tarrant County Mental Health Court began in 2003. At the time, there wasn't a formal study and evaluation of specialty courts.

"It was a little bit of a wild west out there, and so we made some blunders," Judge Carr said. "We also, from the beginning, had some great successes. But one of the things we learned is that you have to carefully pick the group that you're going to cater to."

The team found diversion is not the right model for everyone, and they learned a lot along the way. There is now more research on specialty courts and best practices. The Tarrant County Mental Health Court has an 89% successful completion rate, and the rearrest rate is lower than the national average: 14% after two years, compared to the approximately 20% national rearrest rate for those who have

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completed a mental health court program, and approximately 60% national rearrest rate for any persons who have ever been arrested.

The numbers tell part of the story; it's the people Judge Carr has met along the way who tell the other. He recalls one young woman who came into his court whom he thought was on drugs. She was actually being heavily overmedicated with psychotropic medications.

"We sent her to our program physician who assessed her medications, changed [them], and by the time she left here you would have thought she was anyone's college aged daughter that had promise and had hope now and had a career before them," Judge Carr said.

His work with the Mental Health Court made Judge Carr a perfect candidate to be a JCMH Commissioner. He has served on the Commission since its inception in 2018.

Judge Carr worked as a college professor for 21 years, but on the Commission, he describes being a student again.

"I knew that if I had the opportunity to be on this Commission that I would have the opportunity to interact with people who were the supreme experts in the state of Texas in their field," Judge Carr said. "I try to approach everything with a servant's attitude because if you go in there understanding that you don't know everything, and there's a lot of information out there that you can benefit from...I just think you come out of it a much more knowledgeable and better person."



Judge Carr received the Silver Gavel Award in 2014 for exemplifying ability, integrity, and courage.



Judge Carr playing in concert with Charlie Daniels, 2005.

Outside of his judicial work, Judge Carr is a member of a band. He's been playing the trumpet since he was in the fourth grade and plays every string instrument except the fiddle. He's played with some noteworthy acts, including Charlie Daniels and Marshall Tucker.

Judge Carr and his wife live on a lake in Fort Worth. They have three grown children who have also been drawn to public service. Their daughter is currently an assistant U.S. attorney in Dallas, and both of their sons are Majors in the U.S. Army.

"I'm a Marine Corps veteran, so I jokingly say that after they both went in the Army I had to go through weeks of counseling," Judge Carr said. "But I've dealt with it and I'm very proud of both of them."