



Judicial Profile

by Peggy Hunt

Hon. William T. Thurman Chief Judge, U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Utah

Many bankruptcy practitioners in the Tenth Circuit know by now that William (“Bill”) T. Thurman, chief judge of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Utah, is taking senior, or “recall,” status starting Sept. 4, 2015. As steps are taken to choose his successor, there is a lot of discussion by those of us in the local bar about traits that are important for a bankruptcy judge. In all of these discussions, judicial temperament is at the top of the list—and everyone agrees that Chief Judge Thurman epitomizes this trait. He treats everyone appearing before him, and everyone who works for him, with the utmost respect. In remarks made to honor Chief Judge Thurman as a 2012 recipient of the FBA Utah Chapter’s Distinguished Service Award, it was said that he is a judge “known for listening, being compassionate, and having respect for the judicial process and all those who are before him. Everyone gets an extra benefit of the doubt from Chief Judge Thurman.”¹

Chief Judge Thurman clearly enjoys his role as a public servant and, although kind, he is also firm, managing his courtroom well. He sees himself as an educator and feels a keen commitment to the betterment of the judicial system.

He was appointed as a bankruptcy judge in September 2001, named chief judge in 2009, and often serves as a visiting judge in districts outside of Utah. Chief Judge Thurman also frequently makes the five-hour trip to St. George, Utah, and holds hearings at the federal courthouse there. In 2003, Chief Judge Thurman was appointed as a member of the U.S. Bankruptcy Appellate Panel (BAP) for the Tenth Circuit, and he currently serves as its chief judge as well.



Many well-respected attorneys got their start as law clerks to Chief Judge Thurman. He enjoys mentoring members of the bar and frequently takes on new judicial clerks, interns, and externs. Chief Judge Thurman is a frequent speaker at CLE events presented by the FBA’s Utah Chapter. He also educates professionals at statewide programs of the Utah State Bar and the Utah Bankruptcy Bench and Bar, and serves on the faculty of the Norton Bankruptcy Institute. He is an emeritus member of the American Inns of Court. Not only does the chief judge instruct lawyers and other professionals appearing before him, but he participates in a number of programs edu-

Peggy Hunt is a fellow in the American College of Bankruptcy and a partner at Dorsey & Whitney LLP in Salt Lake City.



cating Boy Scouts, high-school students, and college and graduate students of the University of Utah.

Chief Judge Thurman is strongly committed to bettering the administration of justice. He is a former member of the U.S. Judicial Conference's Committee on Financial Disclosure. He also served on the board of the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges (NCBJ), an association of bankruptcy judges whose mission is education, public outreach, and support of and for the bankruptcy system. The chief judge served on several NCBJ committees and is currently co-chair of NCBJ's legislative committee. When I met up with him last to interview him for this profile, the chief judge was preparing for a trip to Washington, D.C., to further his work on this committee. He anticipated informing congressional members of the needs of the bankruptcy courts—specifically the “ongoing challenges” of ensuring that the courts are adequately funded and that bankruptcy judgeships are created and filled in districts experienc-

ing high bankruptcy filings.

Before being appointed to the bench, Chief Judge Thurman practiced law in Salt Lake City for 27 years with the law firm of McKay, Burton & Thurman. His practice focused on bankruptcy law, and he served on the panel of Chapter 7 Trustee for the District of Utah. He was well-served in private practice by his assistant, Thora Searle, who went with him to the bankruptcy court and who has served for 14 years as his judicial assistant. She will retire when the chief judge takes recall status.

Chief Judge Thurman received his B.A. and J.D. degrees from the University of Utah, and he is a devoted alumnus. He and his wife, Sue, have two children and (currently) six grandchildren in Salt Lake City and Phoenix. ☺

Endnotes

¹Remarks of Steven T. Waterman, reprinted in the UTAH CHAPTER NEWSLETTER (Winter 2013).