

## Judicial Profile

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JOHANNA VALENZUELA AND ANDREW DE HOLL

# Hon. G. Ross Anderson, Jr. Senior Judge, U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina

ON APRIL 5, 2002, THE federal courthouse in Anderson, S.C., was officially renamed and dedicated in honor of Judge G. Ross Anderson, Jr. A fixture in the Anderson community, the G. Ross Anderson, Jr. Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse started off in 1938 housing a post office, the local federal district court, and other agencies. Today, the courthouse's original courtroom features an array of cutting-edge electronics, allowing the courtroom to serve as a modern forum while maintaining its classic charm and style.

A combination of the modern and the traditional, Judge Anderson is a lot like the federal courthouse named after him. As a man who has served on Anderson University's board of regents for the past 25 years, aided the Anderson area's YMCA so much that he holds an honorary position on its board of directors, and served as Anderson's only federal judge for the past 31 years, Judge Anderson is also a fixture in the Anderson community. This is true not only because of the services he has provided to the city and the state during a legal career spanning six decades but also because Judge Anderson was born and reared in Anderson.

Born in 1929, Judge Anderson grew up in one of Anderson's many "mill villages"—that is, neighborhoods constructed, owned, and operated entirely by the local textile mills. His parents and grandparents worked at the Equinox Mill, and his family, along with the families of all the other mill workers, lived in the surrounding homes owned by the mill. Judge Anderson recalls those days fondly: "People had a certain sense of pride about the particular mill where they were raised. They kept up the houses even though they didn't own them. The mill was almost like an extended family where you played and grew up with other children in the mill village."

When Judge Anderson was a young boy, his father told him he could grow up to be anything he wanted—except a mill worker. So, at the age of 10,



Judge Anderson began delivering newspapers before he went to school. Waking up at 3:30 a.m. every day, he constantly challenged himself to improve his delivery time. He finished his route by 5:00 a.m., when the mill's whistle woke up the workers, and by dawn he was off to school. While attending grade school, Judge Anderson also worked as an usher at the State Theater and as a roofer's assistant.

He graduated from high school at the age of 16 and accepted a position in Washington, D.C., analyzing fingerprints for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. After working for the FBI for two years, Judge Anderson became an aide to U.S. Sen. Olin Johnston, a fellow Anderson County native and the former governor of South Carolina. Judge Anderson served as a Senate doorkeeper and was assigned to Vice President Alben Barkley's office. Never one to waste an available moment, Judge Anderson furthered his education while working at the Senate, often taking trolley rides directly from class to the Capitol. He first earned a commercial science degree from Southeastern University and then

attended George Washington University, from which he received a degree in political science.

His first degree prepared him well for service in the Air Force, which he began in 1951. Based in New Castle, Del., Judge Anderson worked as a finance instructor and as the wing historian. Reflective of his personality, Judge Anderson jokes that he is still waiting for the medal acknowledging his efforts in ensuring that not a single hostile North Korean crossed the Delaware River under his watch. However, he did manage to take enough time off from his vigil to marry his wife, Dorothy, in December 1951.

After obtaining his political science degree and completing his service in the Air Force, Judge Anderson enrolled in the University of South Carolina's School of Law in Columbia. Throughout law school, he continued to work for Sen. Johnston's local office in Columbia. Balancing family, school, and work, Judge Anderson became president of his class and served as assistant editor of the *South Carolina Law Quarterly*. Perhaps thinking that he did not have enough going on in his life, during his last year in law school, Judge Anderson ran for a seat in the South Carolina House of Representatives. Every afternoon after class, he would drive for two hours to get back to Anderson to campaign and return to Columbia late that night. True to form, both of Judge Anderson's endeavors proved successful: in 1954, he graduated second in his class from law school and was elected to the South Carolina legislature.

While serving in the legislature, Judge Anderson returned to Anderson to open his own practice. Over the next 26 years, his practice mainly consisted of criminal defense and personal injury cases, trying approximately 1,200 cases to verdict as lead counsel. He also served as the vice president and general counsel of Independent Publishing Company, which published the same newspaper he had delivered as a 10-year-old boy.

When District Judge Robert Martin assumed senior status in 1979, Judge Anderson's extensive trial experience and his reputation among his peers and in the community made him the obvious choice for the vacancy on the bench. Recommended by Sen. Fritz Hollings and nominated by President Jimmy Carter, Judge Anderson assumed his seat on the district court on May 23, 1980.

From the start, Judge Anderson applied his characteristic industry to his new duties on the bench. Presiding over all manner of cases, the judge often held court in different cities throughout the state. Some of his older law clerks recall that, on travel days, they were to meet the judge no later than 7:15 a.m.; otherwise, they would miss their ride. On dozens of occasions, Judge Anderson also sat by designation for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. He recalls fondly one oral argument

session in which he posed some pointed questions to John G. Roberts, now chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Judge Anderson took senior status in 2009 at the age of 80. Having been on the bench for 29 years, he finally felt ready to "slow down," which, for Judge Anderson, means that he continues to swim at the YMCA pool daily, just as he has for the past 40 years; he comes in to work every day, presiding over trials, motions, pleas, and sentencings; he continues to serve the community through his efforts with Anderson University and the YMCA; and he continues to be devoted to his family. Any conversation with Judge Anderson will almost certainly include a discussion about how proud he is of his grandson, who started college in August of this year. The conversation will not be complete without the judge asking about your own family.

Judge Anderson engenders loyalty in any person who works with him and for him, and he is generous and loyal in return. Last year, his staff and his previous clerks came together to celebrate his 30th year on the bench. In his 31 years as a judge, more than 50 new lawyers have worked for Judge Anderson as law clerks. Although his clerks change from year to year, the rest of the judge's staff has been with him since his days in private practice.

Judge Anderson's generosity and loyalty have been rewarded in more ways than through the loyalty of his staff. In 2002, South Carolina Gov. Jim Hodges awarded Judge Anderson the Order of the Palmetto, the state's highest civilian honor, for a lifetime of achievements and contributions to the state. Judge Anderson has also been awarded the Outstanding Trial Judge of the Year Award from the South Carolina Trial Lawyers Association, the War Horse Award from the Southern Trial Lawyers Association, and the Distinguished Judicial Service Award from the Civil Justice Foundation, as well as honorary degrees from the University of South Carolina, Anderson University, and the Charleston School of Law. In the words of one of his fellow district judges, Judge Anderson "has demonstrated a level of integrity that makes him a jewel in the sacred treasures of our national reputation. His keen sense of justice, unblemished character and sound legal views clearly reflect that he has justly earned the honor that Congress has bestowed on him" by dedicating the Anderson federal courthouse to him.

Throughout his career, Judge Anderson has always been committed to improving the legal profession. In addition to being one of 12 original founders of the South Carolina Trial Lawyers Association (now called the South Carolina Association for Justice) and serving as that organization's vice president and then president, Judge Anderson has been a circuit vice president of the South Carolina Bar Association and a member of the Board of Governors for the South Carolina Bar. He is also a Fellow of the International

Society of Barristers and the International Academy of Trial Lawyers.

At the dedication of the G. Ross Anderson, Jr. Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in 2002, William W. Wilkins, former chief judge of the Fourth Circuit, remarked that Judge Anderson “cares about lawyers and the difficult job they have. He cares about the plight of jurors and witnesses and litigants, and he cares about our system of justice and respect that it must earn from the citizens it serves in order to be effective.” Nearly 10 years later and after almost 60 years in the legal profession, all who watch Judge Anderson at work in his courtroom can see that Judge Wilkins’ statement continues to be true. **TFL**

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*Johanna Valenzuela and Andrew de Holl are Judge Anderson’s current law clerks. Portions of this profile are derived from the comments made by Judges William Wilkins and Joseph Anderson during the presentation of Judge Anderson’s portrait and the dedication of the G. Ross Anderson, Jr. Federal Building and United States Courthouse on April 5, 2002. The entire transcript of the proceedings is published at 232 F. Supp. 2d (2002). The authors would also like to thank the judge’s secretary, Darlene Hopper, for all the help she provided in researching this article; as usual, we could not have done it without her.*