

After 30 years at the bench, Harvey County District Judge **Richard Walker** is stepping down, but he remains adamant about one thing. This is not retirement.

"I don't like the R word," Walker said.

After all, he will be working a new job. Walker will serve with the Kansas Court of Appeals, which only holds court five months out of the year, yet within that time, travels to many different cities in Kansas and hears thousands of cases.

"I'll have a lot of research writing to do," he said.

He believes passionately in the separation of the the three branches of government and an independent judiciary. Walker does not like politicians threatening to de-fund the judiciary and get rid of judges because they are unhappy with their legal rulings.

"Trying to politicize the judiciary is one of the great concerns of my life," he said. "They're trying to make it a step-child of the executive and legislative branches."

In addition to his work as an appellate judge, Walker will continue teaching political science at Bethel College where he has been an adjunct instructor for the past 15 years. He has recently been in talks with other area colleges about teaching additional classes.

A Newton native, Walker received his bachelor of arts degree in history from Bethel in 1970. Originally, he wanted to teach history at the college level, but he was advised there were not many jobs in that field. His father, a realtor, said he had always wanted to go to law school and suggested the career to his son.

Walker received his juris doctor degree from the University of Kansas Law School in 1973.

While still in law school, Walker defeated a 20-year incumbent, Ernie Unruh, in the Republican primary and was elected to a seat in the legislature where he served three terms. He does not think he could get elected today.

"I think my basic beliefs aren't compatible with the current Republican philosophy in Topeka," he said.

Walker was a partner in the law firm, Adrian and Walker, from 1973 to 1977. He then served as chief legislative assistant to the late U.S. Senator from Kansas, James Pearson. Walker later served as vice chairman on the Kansas Adult Authority (now the Kansas Parole Board) and was later a partner with the firm, Ice, Turner and Ice.

In December 1984, Walker was appointed as a judge for the Ninth Judicial District, covering Harvey and McPherson Counties. Voters have retained him in the position for the past 30 years and he leaves his role with the title of Chief Judge of the district.

Role as judge

Over the years, Walker has handed down some creative sentencing. When a woman was convicted of cruelty to animals for not properly caring for her horse, Walker ordered her take a class in horse care, to earn a certificate, read a book on the subject and consult with a veterinarian.

The woman was only going to be on probation for a year or two, then could buy another horse. There was a question of whether her mistreatment of the horse was neglect or ignorance. If she were charged again, "I wanted to make sure she would not have the excuse of ignorance," Walker said.

On another occasion, a group of people committed a vigilante act in retaliation for some perceived injustice. Part of the sentence Walker handed down was they were to read Walter Van Tilburg Clark's classic western novel, "The Ox-bow Incident," which depicts the tragic consequences of vigilantism.

"Civil society requires we not to take the law into our own hands," Walker said.

For non-violent offenders, Walker prefers alternatives, such as house arrests and supervision by Community Corrections to prison terms.

"I'm a strong believer in certain people being supervised in the community rather than being incarcerated," he said. "People don't get better in prison. There are lots of examples of people who were minor criminals becoming major criminals. It's a training school for criminals."

Probably the most heartbreaking case Walker ever presided over was the 2012 in which Chad Carr pleaded guilty to second degree murder and was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the death of toddler Vincent Hill.

"I will remember until I am no longer the autopsy photos from the case," Walker said. "I get nightmares from the case. I wish I'd never seen the photos."

During the past five years, Walker has grown weary of presiding over domestic cases.

"They're brutal and nasty and I'm tired of handling them."

Walker has been working with the KIPCOR (Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution) Conflict and Mediation Center, helping children whose parents are getting divorced.

"I want to make sure that works," Walker said. "I want to stay plugged in with that one. It hurts kids so much when parents are at war with each other. It's absolutely toxic to them."

Between his new job, teaching and community service, Walker plans to stay vital, visible and far from the R-word.

"I'm too much of a type A personality to sit around," he said. "I've got to be doing something."

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Jeff Guy; Newton Kansan @jguy_kansan, 'Feature Walker leaving district judge position Will work for Kansas Court of Appeals', *Newton Kansan, The* (online), 28 Jul 2015 1 <<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=NewsBank&docref=news/156E00D76BCDCE60>>

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