

# Goodell appointed Mason County Superior Court judge

BY ARLA SHEPHARD  
MASON COUNTY LIFE

Every 10 years, Dan Goodell seems to reach another career milestone.

In 1984, Goodell graduated from law school from what was then the University of Puget Sound School of Law, in 1994, he decided to start practicing law in Belfair, and in 2004, he built the building where Goodell Law has existed for the past 10 years.

Now, with the 2014 state legislature creating a new judicial position in Mason County Superior Court, Goodell has had perhaps the biggest career milestone of his life.

The former lawyer joins Judges Amber Finlay and Toni Sheldon as a Mason County Superior Court judge starting Jan. 1, 2015.

"It feels like the right time," Goodell said prior to taking the judgeship. "I've been an attorney for 30 years, and this is a significant career change. I'm looking forward to that change."

The career change also means big changes for Goodell Law, Inc, which Goodell's clients already know has now been sold to Port Orchard lawyer David Gates.

Gates will retain the Belfair office with all of its staff, but is closing the Shelton office. He plans to meet with Shelton clients in the shared office space of another law firm.

"I selected David simply because I thought his personality and the way he practices law was more in keeping with how I practiced law," Goodell said. "I spent



PHOTO BY ARLA SHEPHARD  
Port Orchard lawyer David Gates has taken over the practice of Goodell Law. Dan Goodell assumed his position as Mason County Superior Court Judge on Jan. 1.

20 years developing this practice, and it's the only one in the north end. I want it to be successful."

Gates graduated from Seattle University School of Law in 1998, after a career in the military and an undergraduate career at Syracuse University in New York, where he studied political science.

Law had always appealed to Gates as the best career option after he decided to go back to school upon leaving the military in 1983.

"I didn't want to be 70 years old and kicking myself for not taking the opportunity to go to

school," he said. "Law has always been something in the back of my mind."

Gates, like Goodell, practices law with an emphasis on problem-solving rather than litigation in court.

"Clients come to me because they have a problem, and I'm here to help solve the problem," Gates said. "That doesn't mean running a big, huge bill and getting rich off them. I don't have a problem going to trial, but I'm an effective, not an aggressive lawyer. If people want an aggressive lawyer, I send them down the road."

The governor's appointment of Goodell, who applied for the position after the Legislature created it, means Goodell will have to run for election and re-election in 2015 and 2016.

After that, he will be up for re-election every four years.

"Typically judge elections are unopposed, but I work at the choice of the people," Goodell said.

In the late 1990s, Goodell served as a judge pro tem in Shelton Municipal Court and Mason County District Court, filling in as needed part-time, all while managing his law firm in Belfair.

In 2008, when Mason County Superior Court Judge James Sawyer retired, Goodell ran in the election for the open seat, which Amber Finlay won.

Goodell assumed that would be his last opportunity to ever serve on Superior Court.

"Once a judge gets on a bench,

most attorneys support that judge as I supported Amber," he said. "It's important to have consistency on the bench."

Last year, Goodell testified before the Legislature on the need for a third Superior Court judge in Mason County, due to the county's enormous backlog of civil cases awaiting litigation.

Criminal cases are prioritized over civil cases because of state-mandated time limits on how much time can pass before criminal cases go to trial.

Goodell saw firsthand from his own clients the burden prolonged trial dates for civil cases.

"When a matter takes a long time to get resolved, it takes two serious tolls on a client," he said. "The first is financial because each time you get a new trial date you have to prepare all over again. All that effort had to be put on a shelf."

The second toll is emotional, he continued.

"I don't care if it's a boundary line dispute or a child custody matter, it's one of the most significant things going on in that person's life," Goodell said. "It's the first thing they think of when they wake up and the last thing they think of before bed. It's a heavy burden to carry for a long time."

The three Superior Court judges have decided to split cases into three categories (criminal, civil and juvenile cases) and rotate who will hear which cases.

Goodell believes he will start by hearing juvenile cases.

"By doing this, it takes a bur-

den off the other two judges and we can start working on these backlogs and end up in a situation where matters are resolved," he said.

Under judicial canon, Goodell will have to step back from the active role he's played in the North Mason nonprofit community — while he can attend fundraisers, he can no longer speak at or emcee an event, so that people don't assume they'll get favors by attending an event.

However, another judicial canon encourages judges to be active in charitable and educational work, so Goodell expects to continue to support the functions he does now, albeit in a less high-profile manner.

He wants the community to know that the practice is in good hands and that Gates is committed to becoming as much as part of Belfair as Goodell was.

"It's important for me to get out there that I am comfortable with David taking over this practice," Goodell said. "He has a long track record of success."

Gates is active in his church, Our Lady Star of the Sea in Bremerton, and volunteers in the church's efforts to feed the homeless and mentor boys in middle school and high school.

He plans to practice family law, estate planning, criminal law, civil litigation, dependency and traffic cases at this time.

For more information, email [dave@dbgateslaw.com](mailto:dave@dbgateslaw.com) or visit the practice at 10 NE Creelman Lane in Belfair. ■

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