



SAO ALUMNI PROFILE - JUDGE (Ret.) JERALD BAGLEY

This month we highlight a distinguished former member of our SAO family who has faithfully served our community as a prosecutor and judge for over three decades. Our SAO Alumni Profile for April 2022 is Retired Judge Jerald Bagley.

There are some people who know from a very early age what they want to dedicate their lives to doing. There are others who come to that realization later in life. Judge Jerald Bagley is the latter.

“When I was a little boy, I wanted to be superman!”, he says jokingly. “I had no idea what I was going to be when I grew up. I didn’t formulate that until much later.”

Though he may not have become a superhero, he has created a reputation and legacy of defending victims, the community and upholding the law.

“Early on I thought I was going to join the military. My father was a Marine and my brother was in the Army. So that was the image that I had in my mind as to what I was going to do,” he explains.

Judge Bagley was born and raised in Orange, New Jersey. He later attended Bloomfield College, a local private college just a few miles up on the Garden State Parkway, where he earned a degree in Political Science.

After graduation from college, Judge Bagley worked for a few years in a re-entry program that finds jobs for first-time offenders once they are released. “It was the early 1970’s and given the volatile times, that is when my interest in the criminal justice system became more crystalized.”

“I applied to law school while also working at another program which had to do with social services and home development,” he states. Judge Bagley attended Rutgers Law School from which he earned his Juris Doctorate.

As a second-year law student, he took a course on the practicality of having and running your own private firm. “It was very interesting since originally, I was thinking of becoming a criminal defense lawyer.”

Then as fate would have it, a piece of paper on a bulletin board changed the course of his career forever. “One day in my last year of law school, I saw a flyer about the SAO recruiting for lawyers in Miami. The office interviewed all over the country. At the time, Miami was the murder capital of the U.S. and there were all the drug trafficking cases.” For Judge Bagley, it seemed like the perfect place to start his journey as a minister of justice.

Judge Bagley was able to get an interview and was hired by then State Attorney Janet Reno. He started in 1985 and worked his way up from County Court, through Juvenile and to the Felony units. “I went on to be the Division Chief for the Sexual Battery Unit, then to Major Crimes, before becoming Deputy Chief of

Administration. I then served for two years as Chief Assistant for Operations under State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle.”

“I always appreciated having Judge Jerald Bagley as my first Chief Assistant for Operations when I initially became State Attorney,” said State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle. “It goes without saying that Jerald was a superb trial lawyer who had a keen understanding of the daily needs of our lawyer staff. His calm temperament and insightful additions to each conversation helped make running, what amounts to one of America’s largest law firms, not only easier, but immensely enjoyable.”

Being a lawyer in service to the public is something that Judge Bagley recommends to anyone who loves the practice of law. “Public service law, like being a prosecutor at the SAO, is a venue for getting real trial experience. The trial work and litigation skills you will acquire is like no other.”

Though initially he was not interested in being prosecutor, Judge Bagley set out to be “the best trial attorney I could be and serve the victims and the State.”

“The important thing is to be reasonable, fair and not cut corners. Being prepared and putting your best effort forward is essential.”

“I was hungry to try cases,” Judge Bagley recalls. “In County Court, I was eager and would join others on their cases. I even asked more senior prosecutors if I could carry their box to court. Eventually I was able to do a little bit more on cases and even take on a witness or two.”

As a Division Chief trying homicide cases, Judge Bagley found it challenging yet took advantage of the opportunities to further develop and hone his skills. He tried approximately 85 cases with jury trials.

As a prosecutor, there are cases that you remember more vividly than others. For Judge Bagley, one such case was the case against Bobby Lee Robinson who was convicted of a contract killing during a drug deal involving two others. “I handled some horrific murder cases also.”

In the most difficult and shocking cases, a prosecutor learns to rise to the occasion and learns as they seek justice. “You have to focus on the commitment to the job and dedication to oath.”

When Judge Bagley looks back on his years at the SAO, he likens it to the memories one has from college. “At the SAO, we all shared wonderful times and are still connected.”

In 1995, there was an opening for a judge in the Circuit Court Division. Judge Bagley applied to the Judicial Nominating Committee and was appointed by then Governor Lawton Chiles.

“I was a judge for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida for 23 years and was honored to serve on the bench in all of the court’s divisions.”

For him, there was no difficulty in transitioning from being a prosecutor to being a judge. “When you put on a robe and are no longer a prosecutor, you are not on one side or the other.”

Besides his experience in handling a variety of cases, Judge Bagley also brought something very important to the bench. “As a prosecutor, I had an experience with a judge who had ethics problems. On one occasion, I was handling a sexual battery case and the judge didn’t want to hear my side. Instead, he assailed my character and my intelligence. He also threatened to hold me in contempt of court. I was incensed and vowed that I would never treat anyone in that way.”

In an interesting twist of fate, that same judge found himself in front of Judge Bagley five years later. “He had lost an election and had to appear before me on a matter. I listened and was fair in the matter. I gave him the respect that I would like to receive. After the matter was over, this former judge thanked me and praised the manner in which I conducted myself.”

Though Judge Bagley retired four years ago, he hasn’t left his passion and commitment to justice behind. He became a certified mediator and in April 2018, opened up JB Mediation Services.

“What is most important as a lawyer is your reputation and your work ethic. I encourage young lawyers to make themselves available and get as much trial experience as possible.”

“Respect your colleagues, your victims and witnesses. They *will* remember what you do. Your actions will be remembered and that can either be the path to greater success or not.”