



Notable women leaders in Iowa's legal community

BY LORRAINE MAY AND ELIZA OVROM

Eight exceptional women have served at the highest levels of the judiciary and bar leadership in Iowa: four on the Iowa Supreme Court and four as presidents of The Iowa State Bar Association.

Linda Kinney Neuman was the first woman appointed to the Iowa Supreme Court in 1986. She served until her retirement in 2003.

Prior to her appointment to the Supreme Court, Neuman served as only the second woman district court judge in Iowa. While on the Supreme Court, she chaired the Commission of Planning for the 21st Century. Several of the committee's recommendations serve as the foundation for the Iowa court system to this day.

At Neuman's first interview with the district court commission in the 1980s, almost all the questions focused on how she would be able to do the job when she had young children at home. At subsequent interviews the questions were more focused on her experience

and qualifications. She said she was welcomed by the other justices when she joined the Court. "I was lucky to serve with such wonderful people."

In retirement she spends time between Colorado and Arizona.

Marsha Ternus served on the Iowa Supreme Court from 1993 to 2010. In 2006 she was voted Chief Justice by the other members of the Court, the first woman to hold that position.

Justice Ternus participated in the design of the Iowa Judicial Branch Building, reform of Iowa's child welfare system, implementation of the Iowa courts' electronic documents management system, and increased access to justice in the state.

In 2009, the Iowa Supreme Court issued its unanimous decision in *Varnum v. Brien*, which allowed same-sex marriages in Iowa. There was a backlash against the Court in the wake of *Varnum*, and in 2010



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Linda Neuman



Marsha Ternus



Susan Christensen



Dana Oxley

Ternus, along with colleagues Michael Streit and David Baker, were not retained in the November retention election. All three were later awarded the Kennedy Profile in Courage award for “political courage and judicial independence.”

Susan Larson Christensen is Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court. She was appointed to the court in 2018, and the members of the court elected her as Chief Justice in 2020. She is the second woman to serve in that role.

Prior to her appointment to the Supreme Court, she served as both district court judge and district associate judge in western Iowa. Before becoming a judge, she practiced law in Harlan for 16 years. Justice Christensen has a passion for child welfare and juvenile justice and urges judges to find a work-life balance. She has five children and nine grandchildren.

Justice Christensen’s late father, Jerry Larson, served on the Iowa Supreme

Court, and her brother Jeff Larson is Chief Judge of the Fourth Judicial District. Former Justice Linda Neuman gave Christensen a copy of her father’s remarks from Neuman’s retirement ceremony. They highlighted the need for women on the Supreme Court, and the balance that a woman’s presence brings to deliberations.

Dana Oxley was appointed to the Iowa Supreme Court in January 2020. She practiced with Shuttleworth & Ingersoll PLC in Cedar Rapids and served as law clerk on the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals before her appointment.

Justice Oxley grew up on a farm near Greenfield and earned an accounting degree from the University of Northern Iowa. She learned she was pregnant with her first child just before being admitted to law school. “I almost quit,” she said. But she went on to graduate third in her class and had her second child during her third year of law school.

Justice Oxley had extensive experience in appellate work in both the Iowa and federal appellate courts, which has “helped immensely” in her work on the Supreme Court. She also values being a consensus builder on the court.

Carroll J. Reasoner was president of the ISBA from 1991-1992, the first woman to serve in that position. Reasoner practiced law with Shuttleworth & Ingersoll in Cedar Rapids and later was General Counsel at the University of Iowa.

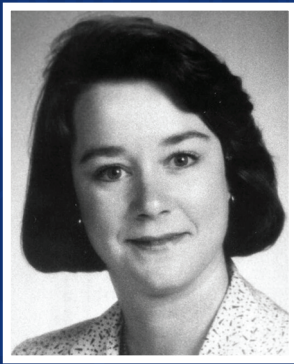
During her term as bar president, Reasoner faced questions as to whether the bar was ready for a woman president, and whether she should be spending more time at home with her children. At national meetings she was often mistaken for the wife of the bar president.

Reasoner notes that much has changed since her presidency. The percentage of women in the profession is now approaching 50%, and she emphasizes the importance of leaders from diverse backgrounds being involved.

Jane V. Lorentzen was ISBA president from 2009-2010. She practices with Hopkins & Huebner, P.C. in Des Moines, in the area of workers’ compensation.

Lorentzen is a third generation ISBA Board of Governors member. Her grandfather, Charles Van Werden, served on the Board of Governors in the 1940s. Her father, James Van Werden,

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served on the Board of Governors, and practiced in Dallas County and later in Polk County at Hopkins and Huebner. “It was my father who taught me the importance of the profession and being an active member of the ISBA,” she said.

Lorentzen was president when the legislature sharply reduced the Judicial Branch budget, forcing layoffs, furlough days, and reductions in the office hours of clerks of court. Lorentzen’s darkest day as ISBA president came in November 2010, when three Iowa Supreme Court justices were ousted from the bench in their retention election.

Cynthia Moser was president of The Iowa State Bar Association from 2012-2013. Moser practices with the Heidman Law Firm in Sioux City.

Moser’s goals as president reflected the issues of the time: provide meaningful services to ISBA members in the wake of a rapidly changing legal environment; assist new lawyers entering the profession; and identify and implement new ways to address escalating student loan debt.

Most significantly, the ISBA supported Iowa’s judicial system in the wake of the 2010 retention election that resulted in the removal of three Iowa Supreme Court justices.

Anjela Shutts served as ISBA President from 2021-2022. Shutts practices with the Des Moines law firm Whitfield and Eddy, specializing in family law.

People who know Shutts are amazed at her busy schedule. She has a robust family law trial practice, is involved in numerous legal and community organizations (several of which she chairs) and is raising two equally busy daughters with husband Peter Kitundu, who is also an attorney. Shutts is proud that the ISBA created a position to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion during her time as president.

All four female ISBA past presidents encourage other women to become involved in ISBA activities. “There

are so many women lawyers in Iowa who have the experience and ability to be great leaders, but they have to be willing to raise their hands and pursue the opportunities offered by the ISBA” Moser said.

“I served because someone said to me, ‘you would be good at this,’” Shutts said.



Eliza Ovrom is a retired district court judge. She lives in Des Moines.



Lorraine May graduated from Drake Law School and passed the Iowa bar examination in January 1976. Since

that time, she has been engaged in the private practice of law working generally in the fields of insurance law, civil liability and racing and gaming law.



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