



## NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

# Meet the Hon. Tierra D. Jones:

### Groundbreaking Judge went from Small Town to State's Largest Judicial District

BY RYAN GORMLEY, ESQ., AND MARY BACON, ESQ.

**Few would have predicted that Nevada's first African American female district court judge would have hailed from Hawthorne, Nevada, a town of a few thousand people about 130 miles south of Reno. But those people had not met Tierra D. Jones.**

Judge Jones attended Mineral County High School, where she excelled academically. To make a little extra spending money, she worked part-time at the local McDonald's. While Jones enjoyed her time growing up in Hawthorne, fondly recalling the tight-knit community, where everyone knew everyone, and the big event consisted of carpooling up to the mountainside "H" for a bonfire, she had her sights set on moving away for college.

After graduating from high school, Jones went to the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). Coming from a town with two lawyers, Jones did not always know she wanted to go into the law. Initially at UNR, she thought business was the path for her. But one too many classes about finance triggered her to seek a new path—a search that eventually landed on a degree in criminal justice and law school.

Jones would go on to be the first person in her family to graduate from college. In 2021, UNR named Jones the Alumnus of the Year for the College of Liberal Arts.

For law school, Jones headed south to the William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Prior to the start of her first year, she had been to Las Vegas for a school trip. While she found the initial transition challenging, she quickly grew to love Las Vegas. At Boyd, Jones developed her passion for criminal trial work.

After law school, Jones clerked for the Honorable Stewart L. Bell in the Eighth Judicial District Court. At the time, Bell took on the responsibility of clearing a trial backlog. Inundated with trial settings, Jones relished the opportunity to observe the trials and learn the inner workings of the court, which only reinforced her desire to pursue trial work.

Jones transitioned from her clerkship to the Clark County Public Defender's Office. She worked there for five years, trying several felony cases to verdict and spending one legislative session in Carson City, lobbying on the Public Defender's Office behalf. She then hoped to gain

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

# Meet the Hon. Tierra D. Jones

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

experience on the other side of the aisle. A hiring freeze in Clark County, however, led to her accepting a job with the Nye County District Attorney's Office. There, she continued trying cases before accepting a position with the Clark County District Attorney's Office in 2013.

In 2017, after trying more than 35 cases to verdict, including several high-profile matters, Jones pursued a new goal – joining the judiciary. When two judicial spots opened in the Eighth Judicial District Court that year, she threw her name into the ring. Ultimately, then-Governor Brian Sandoval selected her for Department 10. After running unopposed in 2020, Judge Jones' current term runs through 2027.

Following a stressful first day on the job—a trial was set to begin—Judge Jones has cherished her time on the bench.

“Being a judge is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life,” Judge Jones said. “I enjoy being a part of a system that has the potential to create positive changes in so many lives.

In the courthouse, Judge Jones has an all-criminal docket, where she manages the homicide unit, which also consists of judges Jacqueline Bluth, Michelle Leavitt, and Cristina Silva. She also serves as the presiding criminal judge for the district.

Outside of the courthouse, Jones is active in the community. Along with roles in the Las Vegas chapter of the National Bar Association, Junior League of Las Vegas, and Leadership Las Vegas, among others, she regularly volunteers at schools all over the valley and the law school. She has a policy of saying “yes.” And while this often results in an overwhelming schedule, she prides herself on taking every opportunity to serve as a role model, hoping that her presence on the bench might open a child's eyes to the possibility of becoming an attorney or serving as a judge one day.

Jones also emphasizes mentorship, considering the significant role that mentors played in her life. One of her mentors was Judge Bell.

“When Judge Jones first clerked for me, I recognized she was tremendously smart and going places,” Bell said. “When she told me she wanted to be a judge, I knew she had the background and demeanor to be an excellent judge. And she has proven that to be the case. The lawyers I mediate cases for have a high regard for Judge Jones and she is one of my favorite people. The Nevada Judiciary is better because she is on the bench.”

Despite the demands of her judicial and community obligations, Jones has enjoyed trying to find time for her new COVID-19 adopted hobby, competing with her friends and colleagues in a Peloton group. Also, fun fact, Jones is the proud holder of a forklift license—a summer job between college and law school required her to obtain a license and operate a forklift.



Judge Tierra Jones is sworn in by Judge Linda Bell.



Tierra Jones (right) attends a Nevada Wolfpack football game with her cousin Rhonda Brantley.



Tierra Jones attends a Los Angeles Lakers game.