

## NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

# Meet Justice Linda Bell:

## Giving Back by Focusing on Mentorships

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**Growing up, Linda Bell did not foresee herself becoming a lawyer. She did not think she fit the lawyer mold. Now, after 20 years as a civil litigator, public defender, and district court judge, Justice Bell is starting her first term on the Supreme Court of Nevada.**

A third-generation Nevadan, Bell was raised primarily in Reno before graduating from Bonanza High School in Las Vegas. She worked throughout high school, having jobs at a deli and a fabric supply store, among others. A self-described shy and studious teenager, she had a passion for animals and the arts. She dreamt of becoming a veterinarian.

After high school, Bell moved back to Reno to attend the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). She initially pursued a degree in biology, but soon discovered that biology was not the path for her. She switched majors to psychology and adjusted her sights from a career as a veterinarian to a career in mental health.

During college, Bell gained extensive real-world experience in the mental health field, working full time at an alcohol detox facility and a suicide hotline. Throughout her

last two years of college, she worked the graveyard shift, with classes throughout the day. Despite the challenging schedule, she graduated with honors and completed a minor in studio art.

Toward the end of college, Bell was at a crossroads. Her passion for a career in mental health was waning. Law school was not on her mind. But during a dinner with her father, he mentioned the possibility of law school. She took the LSAT on a whim, did well, and decided to give law school a shot.

Bell attended University of San Diego School of Law. She loved her time there. She served on law review, participated in moot court, and found a passion for criminal law after completing internships with the Clark County District Attorney's Office and the San Diego County Public Defender Office.

Following law school, Bell returned to Las Vegas to clerk for the Honorable Sally Loehrer in the Eighth Judicial District Court. After her clerkship, she spent a few years in civil litigation before joining the Clark County Public Defender's Office. There, she gained valuable experience in the courtroom, attended hearings on a daily basis, and tried more than 10 jury trials.

After five years with the Clark County Public Defender’s Office, the Federal Public Defender recruited Bell to handle non-capital post-conviction cases. In this role, she developed a deep appreciation for appellate work. She had the privilege to argue in front of the Nevada Supreme Court and Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals more than a dozen times.

In 2008, Bell announced her intention to run for an open seat in the Eighth Judicial District Court. In fact, it was the seat her father, Judge Stewart Bell, vacated when he retired. Becoming a judge had long been a dream of hers, since she heard then-Judge —and later-Justice – Deborah Agosti speak about her experience as a judge at a UNR career event. Bell won her election and took the bench in 2009.

As a district court judge for 14 years, Bell had many roles while presiding over civil and criminal dockets. For several years, she ran all the specialty courts, including DUI, Adult Drug, Juvenile Drug, Veterans, Mental Health, and Opportunity for Probation Enforcement Nevada (OPEN), among others. She also helped start the Gambling Diversion Treatment Court. She said she particularly enjoyed her time with the specialty courts, as it called upon her training and experience as a lawyer, judge, and mental health professional.

In 2019, Bell was elected chief judge. During her tenure, Bell led the court through the COVID-19 pandemic. In recounting her experience with the pandemic, she recalled the scale and unforeseeability of the disruption that would come to pass. She credits her fellow judges and the entire court staff for rallying together to implement critical solutions, both temporary and permanent, to keep the district court open and the wheels of justice turning throughout the pandemic.

Last year, Bell ran unopposed for Seat A on the Nevada Supreme Court. She said she is looking forward to the new challenge and returning to appellate work.

“Justice Bell has all the qualities to be on our state’s highest court,” the Honorable Jennifer Togliatti said. Togliatti was a colleague of Justice Bell’s during her time at the Eighth Judicial District Court. “She is experienced, intelligent, thoughtful, and kind. She has given her time to be a valued mentor to many young attorneys serving as law clerks or interns for the district court. Most importantly in my mind, she has the integrity and judicial independence that the lawyers and citizens of our state deserve.”

Throughout her career, Bell has placed a special emphasis on mentorship. She says she felt privileged to have impactful mentors who helped her develop her skills and self-confidence as a lawyer. Given this opportunity, she has always tried to provide mentorship to the next generation, whether to the young attorneys at the Federal Public Defender’s Office, where she oversaw the externship program, or to her judicial law clerks over the years. For a decade, she has taught criminal law and criminal procedure to undergraduate students at University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

In addition, Bell has provided countless hours of community service and pro bono efforts. She is a past chair of the National Conference of State Trial Judges, former chair of the American Bar Association’s (ABA) Judicial Division Ethics and Professional Responsibility Committee, past president of the Nevada District Judges Association, and past president of the Howard D. McKibben Chapter of the American Inns of Court. She has volunteered with Trial by Peers, being named Judge of the Year in 2011; Project Real; numerous mock trial competitions at the high school, college, and law school level; and as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). She served on the boards for Family and Child Treatment, Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorneys, and Nevada Attorneys for Criminal Justice. She is also a 2008 graduate of the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Leadership Las Vegas program and remains an actively involved alumna.

In 2019, Bell received the prestigious Clark County Law Foundation Liberty Bell Award. In 2021, she received the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorney’s annual Miriam Shearing Award.

A proud dance mom, Bell is the mother of three daughters. She has also been able to keep up with her passions for animals and the arts. While she currently only has one pet, a pug named Jackie Chan, she has had several pets in the past. In her free time, she enjoys drawing and print-making. She also loves puzzles, cooking, and baking. As a fun fact, during her senior year of high school, Bell sewed her own prom dress.



Justice Linda Bell (second from right) spends time with her parents and siblings Kristen Bell (from left), Greg Bell, mother Jeanna Bell, father Stew Bell, and Steve Bell.



Judge Jacqueline Bluth (from left), Justice Linda Bell, Judge Cristina Silva, and Judge Tierra Jones celebrate after Justice Bell’s Nevada Supreme Court Investiture ceremony.



Mary Bacon (from left), Vandana Bhalla, and Michelle Wilson present a rose bouquet to Justice – then Judge – Linda Bell after she was honored with the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorney’s Miriam Shearing Award.



Justice Linda Bell sewed her own prom dress.