

## Catherine Stone Chief Justice, 4th Court of Appeals District

The Fourth Court of Appeals reviews the decisions of trial courts in a thirty-two county district that includes much of the Hill Country and South Texas. The civil and criminal cases reviewed by the Court include divorce and custody disputes, contract and property suits, oil and gas disputes, and drug, murder, and child abuse cases. Very few of the cases reviewed are appealed to any higher court, so the Fourth Court decisions become the final ruling law in the thirty-two counties of the district.

The Chief Justice of the appellate court is often referred to as "the first among equals." That is because the Chief Justice, like the other six justices on the Fourth Court of Appeals, has just one vote when making decisions. Yet the Chief Justice is the Court's leader and spokesperson ... the person who sets the tempo and the vision for the Court. The position of Chief Justice requires experience, leadership, and detailed knowledge of the appellate court system. I am running for Chief Justice because I have the qualities needed to be an effective Chief for the



Fourth Court of Appeals.

**Experience:** I have served as a Justice on the Fourth Court for more than 14 years. I have written more than a thousand legal opinions and I have participated in thousands of appellate cases. Before joining the Court in 1994, I worked for 13 years as an attorney focusing on appeals of civil cases. In 1987 I became one of the first lawyers in the State of Texas to gain board certification as a specialist in appellate law. My entire 26 years as a lawyer have been devoted to the practice of appellate law.

**Leadership:** During my 14 years on the bench I have worked with three different Chief Justices, and I have assisted each of them in any way possible. I head up the Court's alternative dispute resolution program, reviewing hundreds of cases every year for possible early settlement of appeals. I have chaired numerous committees at the court, from personnel selection committees to our space planning and refurbishing committee. In short, I have given my all to help the Court serve the public efficiently and with respect. Beyond my work at the Fourth Court, I have served on various state-wide judicial committees, including the Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care, the Texas Multi-District Litigation Panel, and the Judicial Curriculum Committee.

**Knowledge:** The Chief Justice of any appellate court must not only know the law, but also know how to

administer the law in an effective manner. Each year the Fourth Court issues opinions in approximately one thousand appeals. The Court is among the most timely and efficient of the fourteen courts of appeals in the state. This record is the result of the hard work of the seven justices and the twenty-nine other Court employees. I have a detailed knowledge of how to do the job and do it well.

**Community and Family Commitment:** Throughout my adult life I have been active in my community. I have served on the school board of St. Luke's Catholic School, and as president of the Pastoral Council at St. Luke Catholic Church. I continue to volunteer in various capacities at St. Luke's. I have also volunteered my time at various other non-profit organizations. I have been married to my husband, Dr. Tom Stone, for thirty-one years, and we are the parents of three sons. The Court needs experienced leadership to help it best serve the citizens of the Fourth Court district. I ask for your support in this important judicial race.



## Amber Liddell Alwais District Judge, 37th Judicial District

Amber Liddell Alwais is no stranger to hard work.

It is a trait she learned early on in life from her father, Tom Liddell, a Vietnam veteran who put himself through law school on the GI Bill and is now a long-time family law attorney in Houston, Texas.

"My father was adamant in his belief that all of his children be prepared to work hard," Amber says now, "and so I knew very early on that I would never have anything handed to me."

"If I wanted something, I had to work for it." What Amber wanted was a college education, and she worked to get that, taking such early jobs as a stocker at a Target and also working at Western Auto.

This experience, coupled with her hard-working nature, has helped Amber tremendously through her rising career in the legal profession. "I have been one of those people who has struggled to make ends meet, and I've never forgotten the experience," she says, "I understand how difficult it can be to balance work with the other things that come up in life, and how something like a legal dispute can make things more difficult."

Amber graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1993 from Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas with a degree in Spanish. She went on to obtain her law degree from St. Mary's University in 1996. Amber worked throughout her law school career, and after graduation joined with local attorneys Edward Pena and Dan



Krueger, where she worked on both federal and state litigation in a variety of areas. It was during this busy time that Amber ran across an ad in the San Antonio Express-News that would change the entire course of her legal career.

"I had been thinking about ways of becoming more involved in the community," Amber recalls, "when I saw an ad listed by Bexar County looking for a staff attorney for a new assignment at the courthouse." In 1998, the Bexar County District Judges created a staff attorney position to help them handle the growing pro se docket; cases in which an everyday person represents him or herself in a lawsuit without the benefit of an attorney. Amber saw it as a perfect opportunity to accomplish her goals.

During her seven years as the Bexar County Civil District Court Staff Attorney, Amber would take on many additional responsibilities beyond those she was hired to do. Eventually this included assisting several of the sitting District Judges with research related to rulings they had to make on many different types of civil cases. Indeed, Amber's position with Bexar County was so unique that the State Bar of Texas profiled her job, and a typical busy day at her office, on its website in 2002.

In 2003, Amber was chosen as the Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year by the Bexar County Women's Bar Association. Recognition by her peers meant a lot to Amber, as she said, "To be recognized by other lawyers for doing a job I loved and worked so hard at, and one in which I was able to give back to the people of Bexar County, was one of the proudest moments of my life."

One of the other things that meant a lot for Amber was serving on the Board of CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocates). CASA's purpose and mission is to monitor

the interests of abused and neglected children in court cases. "Both in my private practice as well as working for Bexar County, I saw many tragic cases of child abuse and neglect," Amber recalls, "and through my work on the CASA Board I was able to do something to ensure that these children got the representation they needed to help them have a chance for a better life."

In 2006, Amber left her position with Bexar County and returned to private practice with the renowned family law firm of McCurley Orsinger McCurley Nelson & Downing, L.L.P. Amber works closely with Richard Orsinger, who is regarded by the Texas Lawyer legal publication as one of the top 5 family law attorneys in the state.

Although she enjoys advocating for the rights of her clients in difficult family law cases, Amber now once again wants to give back to this community she loves so much. "My time as a Bexar County attorney was one of the most rewarding in my life, and I could not have asked for a better opportunity to help people while also serving the law," Amber says, "I was able to gain so much first-hand knowledge not only about the law, but about the effect that it has on everyday people's daily lives and what it takes to be a fair and effective judge."

"I am ready to work hard for the people of Bexar County, and bring my experience and commitment to benefit them, and as this campaign continues I hope to meet and hear from as many of them as I can. I think it is time for a renewed energy and deeper commitment in the 37th District Court, and I hope you will support me as the right candidate at the right time."