



Judge Youlee You serves Multnomah County as the first Korean-American judge in the state court system.

Making the Courtroom More Diversified

First Korean-American judge promotes fairness

BY CHARITY PRATER
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It is an amazing responsibility and accomplishment to be the first Korean-American judge and the first Asian-American judge to be appointed to the state court system in Oregon.

Youlee You of Portland said it has also been a big role reversal from her days practicing law. "I was so accustomed to being an attorney

for such a long time that I really had a hard time trying to not critique the attorney in trials," says You. "I had to get used to not litigating for them."

You said she pursued her February appointment because she was drawn to being a person that applies the law in a correct way, preserving dignity in the courtroom and working with other professionals like her.

She has followed other female judges and minorities into the courtroom, like Kenneth Walker of Portland and Betty Roberts with a strong determination and perseverance.

"I grew up with a strong sense of Asian culture in my family," says You. "That is a big part of who I am and I am happy to make the courtroom more diversified."

You has spoken at the Korean-America Youth Conference to encourage children to find careers that they love. She also spoke at the Oregon Minority Lawyers Luncheon, which is a non-profit organization that helps find scholarship money for people of color who are taking the Bar.

You earned a Bachelor of Arts in economics and urban planning from Wellesley College in Massachusetts in 1986. After that, she attended the University of Washington School of Law to earn her J.D. in 1989.

After college, she worked as a staff attorney at the Metropolitan Public Defenders Office in Portland for four years. There she worked as a

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criminal attorney defending clients that had felonies in homicide, robbery, and drug offenses. She then worked as the Assistant Attorney General at the Oregon Department of Justice in Salem where she also worked on criminal and civil appeals.

Before taking her seat on the bench, You worked for the Oregon Department of Justice in Salem representing the state in trial proceedings that involved challenges to criminal convictions, many of which included death penalty cases.

"There is no way that I can take all the credit for where I am today," says You. "My family, which migrated into the country, worked very hard."

Growing up, she lived in an extended family that included her brother, mother, father, grandmother and aunt.

"My family worked hard to get into the country and did not take any of it for granted," says You. "My mother worked to become a Ms. Korea finalist just so she could get an academic scholarship into the United States."

You plans to use her time on the bench to become as knowledgeable about the law as possible, apply the law correctly, become more enlightened on different people's situations, and make the right decisions about their cases. She wants be make sure that all people are treated equally and are heard in the courtroom.

Her new job keeps her very busy. Some days she can have more than 200 pre-trial issues on the docket and mountains of files.

"I plan to keep loving this job and I want to share my story with others, especially young girls from diverse communities, to encourage them to consider law as a profession," says You.