

Off the Clock

By: Christian Moises, News Editor February 16, 2009 0



Catherine "Kitty" Kimball (Photo by Frank Aymami)

Age: 64

Family: husband, Clyde; children, Kevin, Catherine and Lyria; six grandchildren

Education: attended Louisiana State University; juris doctor, Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center

Hometown: Alexandria

Catherine "Kitty" Kimball never really thought she'd end up as chief justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court. She never intended to work, actually.

"I went to law school because I wanted insurance, so to speak, in case I ever came upon a time in my life where I may have to work, because I thought I would do as my mother did — get married, have children and stay home," she said.

"When I graduated from law school, I had this idea that I was going to be a stay-at-home mom. I soon discovered that other than my children, there really wasn't much about staying home that I enjoyed other than cooking, which led to eating, which was not a good thing."

So Kimball went to work clerking for a federal judge before climbing the ranks and running for state Supreme Court, which she joined as the first female justice in 1992.

Because the chief justice is named based on seniority, Kimball took over the seat in January after Pascal Calogero retired.

"One of the justices told when I first came here that I would become the chief justice because I was that much younger than the rest of them," she said. "In 16 years, I went through the whole gamut."

Why has it taken so long to get a woman on the bench?

I don't know. To my knowledge, there had only been two other women who had run and neither of them was elected. I may have only been the third woman to run. In those days, and even when I ran, people didn't really run for judge. They just kind of figured out who would be the heir apparent, and I kinda changed that mold.

What needs to be done to close that gender gap?

I think it's pretty well closed now. There's three of us on this court now. The judiciary nationally is fairly well represented with women.

Do attorneys get a bad rap?

I think they do. Some of them don't. Some of them get exactly what they deserve. There are so many hardworking attorneys who never get in any kind of trouble, they do what they're supposed to do, they have ethical practices ... for them to get the rap of the few bad ones, I do think the profession as a whole gets a bad rap.

What's the worst part of your job?

The new job is a little bit more minutia than I was expecting. Just daily things — they're necessary — but a lot of little things I'd consider on the minutia level.

Any advice for people taking the bar this week?

I think they need to relax and don't let the exam itself make them so nervous they don't do well. Obviously, they would have studied by now.

Which TV judge do you relate to the most?

I try to really not watch TV judges. Most of them I find very offensive. I think they do a great disservice to the judiciary because they give the public the idea that judges are ugly and mean and yell at people.

Where's your favorite place to watch a parade?

On my television. I'm not a big crowd person. When my kids come in, I give them my apartment here and I go home to New Roads.