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Judge Kimberly A. Wanker a Star in Her Own Right

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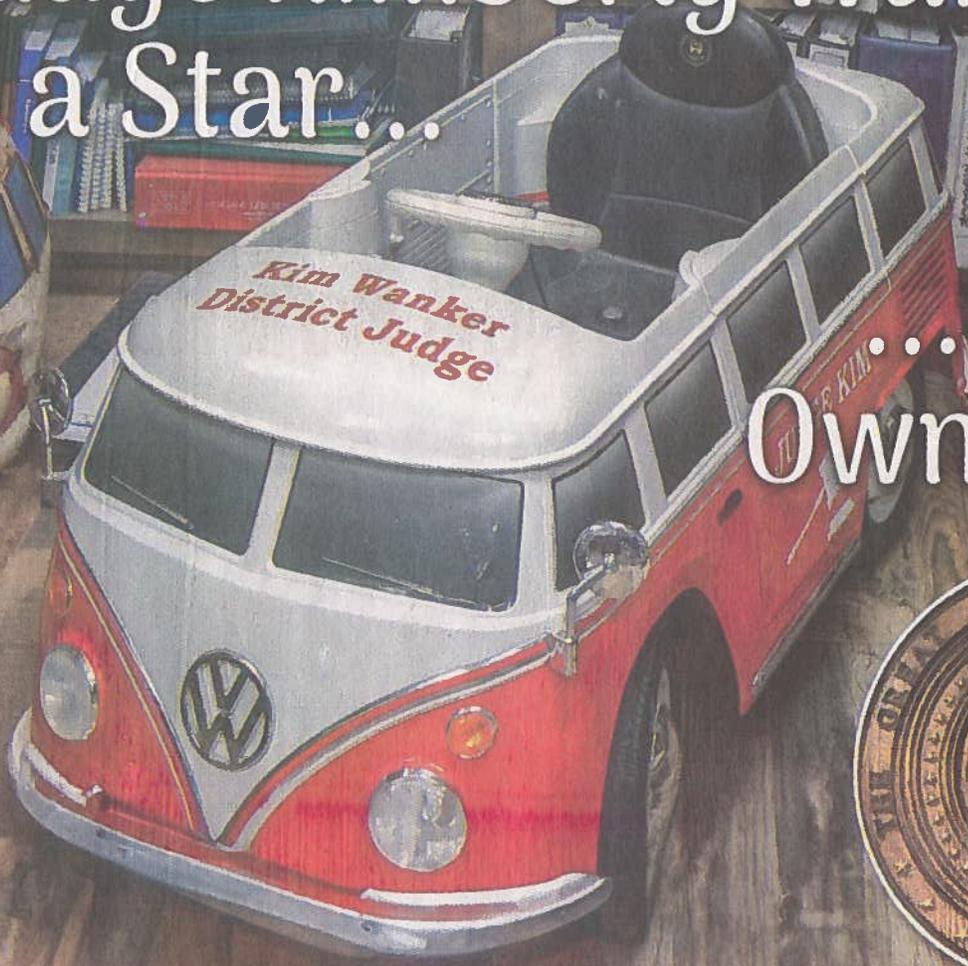
DR. TOM WATERS

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Judge Kimberly Wanker is a Star...

...in Her Own Right



By Christine Butler

If you haven't heard by now, our very own Judge Kimberly A. Wanker, the current District Court Judge of the Fifth Judicial District Department 1 of Nevada, has her very own movie. The movie reflects her life as a traveling circuit judge and how she became known as "The Hammer." In fact, that's the film's name, *The Hammer*, and her part is played by the popular actress and singer Reba McEntire. It can be viewed on several live-streaming apps.

There's definitely a Hollywood twist to the movie plot, but the gist of the Judge's character is true. She did get the

nickname "The Hammer" early in her judicial career from her no nonsense, tell it like it is, attitude. Although the movie was filmed in Canada for the most part, the Historic Goldfield Court House, with its interesting cast of characters, located along State Highway 95 in Esmeralda County, prominently appears throughout the movie. I don't want to spoil the movie plot for you, so I won't describe it anymore other than to say it is well worth watching.

Who is the Real Judge Wanker?

In real life, on May 24, 2011, Judge Wanker was appointed to the Fifth Judicial District Court, Department

1, by then Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval. She followed in the footsteps of the long-serving District Judge John P. Davis, who died of cancer while he was still in office. Her first day on the bench was July 1, 2011, and Judge Wanker was the first rural woman district court judge in Nevada. She did face some challenges because of that, but having practiced law for 24 years before taking the bench, handling it was not a problem. Very few women were practicing lawyers or judges when Judge Wanker went to law school, so blazing her own trail and putting up with many unsupportive men became necessary. But she survived and proved that she belonged in the field of law. Judge Wanker has been a lawyer now



The Honorable Judge Kimberly A. Wanker presiding

for thirty-six years. In addition to Nevada, she is also licensed to practice law in Colorado and Arizona.

In rural Nevada, her territory covers Esmeralda and Nye Counties and is the third-largest judicial district in the country. Judge Robert W. Lane oversees Department 2 of the same district, and according to Judge Wanker, they make a great team. They spend a lot of time traveling between Pahrump, Tonopah, and Goldfield and are one of the few traveling circuit district courts left in the country. She and Judge Lane have both received death threats, so they both carry guns for their own protection.

Judge Wanker grew up in western Nebraska, where she developed her

“She did get the nickname ‘The Hammer’ early in her judicial career from her no nonsense, tell it like it is, attitude.”

love for small towns. This was one of the main draws for coming to rural Nevada. To her, this is still the wild west, and she enjoys being a part of it.

Being outdoors where she can enjoy mother nature is very important to her. Away from work, you can usually find Judge Wanker participating in some type of outdoor activity. And, just like the pilots in Top Gun, Judge Wanker has “the need for speed.” For years she participated in the Sports Car Club of America and Porsche Club car events, and she owns her own race car and racing kart. She likes to drive fast. It helps relieve some of the tension of overseeing some of the unpleasant cases she deals with regularly.

Judge Wanker also has a love for classic cars, and still has the first car she learned to drive, a 1965 Mustang convertible, with 71,000 original miles. The car was purchased by her parents



in 1965 and she has retained the original Nebraska title. Perhaps her favorite ride is a 1967 21 Window VW Bus that she bought in 2009. She is the 3rd owner of the bus and has been restoring it for years. When the interior is finished, the bus will be show-room fresh.

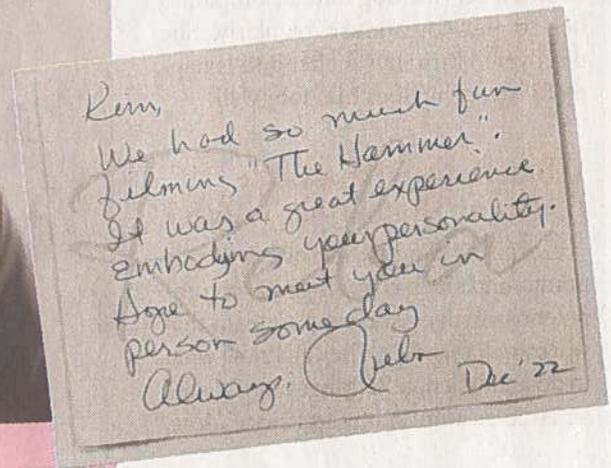
This Judge Rarely Sits Still

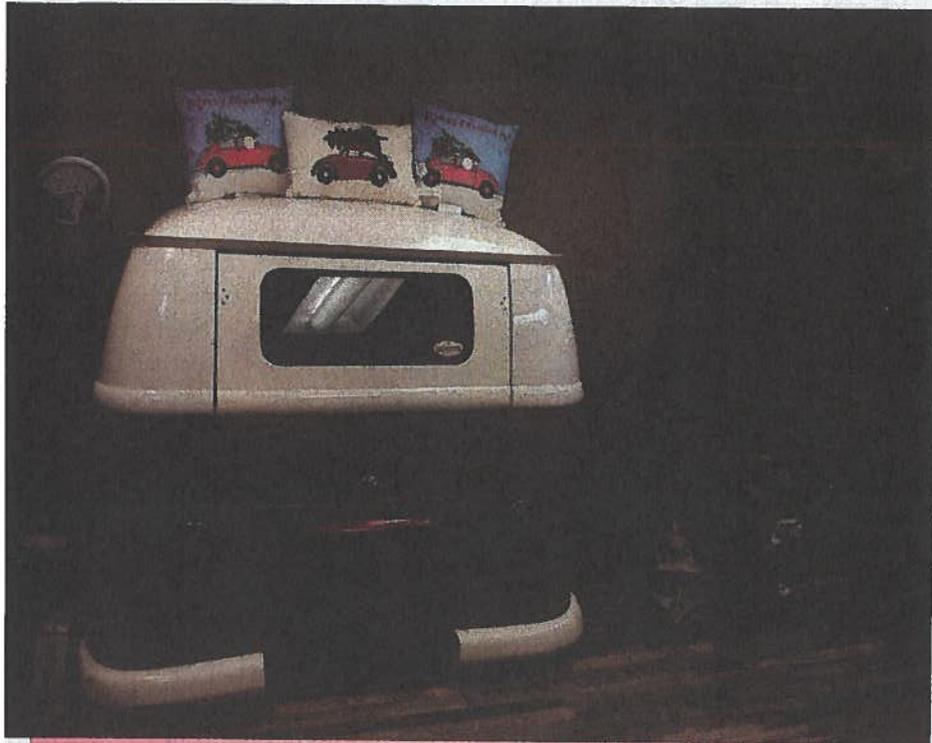
The Judge is an active person while working but also when she is not on the bench. She has many interests and hobbies, is an avid bicycle rider, and enjoys riding everywhere. Growing up in Nebraska, a bike was her main source of transportation. Volkswagens have also become a passion; if you visit her office, you’ll learn that immediately. There are various Volkswagens everywhere. Her entertainment center, a toaster that leaves the VW logo on the bread, several coolers, wall hangings... you name it, she’s got one in the shape or likeness of a VW bus. Her new transportation in parades is a modified golf cart which looks like a split window VW bus.

She also loves to go to flea markets,



Reba McEntire plays the Judge in the movie “The Hammer”





Judge Wanker's Volkswagen entertainment center

farmers' markets, and other places to hunt for treasures. She's on the constant lookout for anything VW. Her favorite flea market is First Monday Trade Days in Canton, TX, which claims to be "The World's Largest Flea Market." She's been attending it for 40 years. Buying and selling "quirky" things is another one of her hobbies.

Her Home Life

The judge's first Pahrump property was in Mountain Falls, and although she still owns it, she lives on ten acres with her five Labs. One of her dogs, Leo, is a service dog and accompanies her to the courthouse regularly. She discovered him in a shelter and is happy to report he does his "job" well.

What Makes Her a Little Different Than Other Judges?

Team building is one of her strong points, and she has put together a competent and successful support team that works well together. They all know what to do and when, talk things out if there's an issue or a question, and share ideas.

They support the Judge and each other.

The Judge has firm yet down-to-earth beliefs that set her apart from other judges. First of all, her attitude is that she works for the people and does what she can to be kind and reasonable but stay within the law. She feels it's not her responsibility to agree with every law, but her job is to apply it. She does all her own research, so she's highly knowledgeable and informed about each case she oversees. She is known for being fair and thoughtful in her decisions. Her constituents know that and are appreciative. It doesn't mean

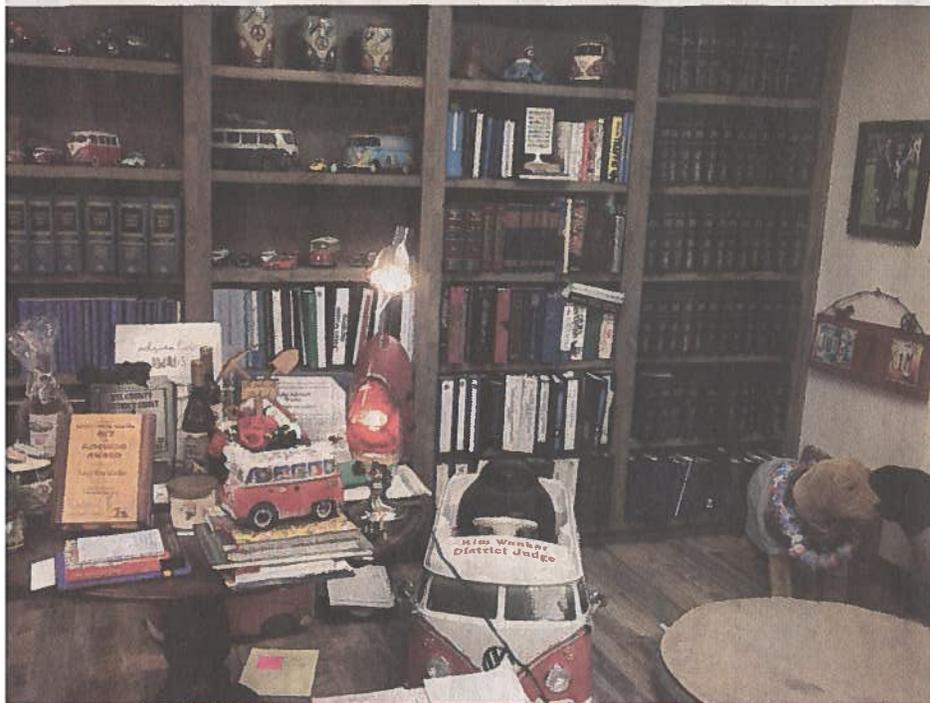
"One of the first assignments she received...was being responsible for Drug Court... It is designed to provide an alternative to incarceration."

everyone who comes through her court likes her, and they may not like the outcome, but she is fair.

She enjoys being involved with all the communities in which she serves. If she hears of an event, she becomes a part of it. Every year she participates in the parades held in the small communities of the district, and recently drove her VW bus golf cart in the 4th of July parade. In 2012 when Friends of the Belmont Courthouse was formed to restore the first courthouse of Nye County, she became involved and participates as a board member of the group which is actively engaged in the courthouse restoration. She attends every event she can across her district. She wants to be a part of all the communities and get to know the people that she serves. She is also involved in various community organizations, including Rotary and Soroptimist.



Christmas in the Judge's office



VWs are found throughout her office

Drug Court

One of the first assignments she received when she came to the district court was being responsible for Drug Court. Judge Robert Lane created it in 2002 as an “alcohol and drug intervention program for adults and juveniles, developed to channel chemically dependent, non-violent individuals into substance abuse treatment services.” It is designed to provide an alternative to incarceration. It is a program that she is involved with that makes her very proud. She says 95% of crimes are committed by individuals with substance abuse disorders, and it is her goal is to help as many of them as possible turn their lives around to become productive members of society.

One of the Fifth Judicial District Court Adult Drug Court successes is Melissa Stepp. She came to the Drug Court in 2004 after losing custody of her two daughters because of her drug usage. When she was offered a chance to participate in the Drug Court, she decided the choice to turn her life around was in her hands. After 20 months of getting through the three phases of the program, she graduated from Drug

Court and has custody of her daughters again. She celebrates that day as a significant milestone in her fight against drug addiction. Because of her success with the program, her determination to straighten her life out, and her continued demonstration of changing her behavior for the good, in 2014, she was chosen to be Judge Wanker’s secretary.

Soon after that, the job was expanded to include the responsibilities of the Drug Court Coordinator, and before long, she became a role model for the participants in the Drug Court. The Judge is extremely proud of the success of this program and Melissa.

Final Thoughts About Judge Wanker

Besides her reasonable attitude and fairness in the court, the Judge says sometimes it pays to be just a little crazy, especially with the type of job she has. She’s a happy person and claims she can entertain herself forever. Being busy is important, as is meeting people throughout the area. She was appointed Judge in 2011 and had to run for the seat again in 2012, 2014, and 2020. She plans on running again for office in 2026 as her current term expires in January 2027. Besides racing cars and biking in her spare time, she loves to restore old cars and enjoys karting, wakeboarding, and watching Nebraska football games. When asked what she might do after being a judge, she says, “Who knows, I might be a jet ski salesperson or sell electric bikes.” It remains an open question.



Wall hangings in her office