

Then & Now

BY HON. PATRICIA K. NORRIS


In 1977, fresh out of law school, I joined the court for a one-year term as a law clerk to Judge Mary Schroeder. Then, after a 25-year detour as a lawyer with Lewis and Roca, I returned to the court as one of three judges appointed by the governor in 2003.

A few “then” (1977) and “now” (2005) observations are in order.

Then, the court was hardly on the technology cutting edge. Most of the judges drafted their decisions in longhand. Judge Schroeder was one of the few judges using dictation equipment, but the equipment provided by the court appeared to have been used by Fred McMurray in the 1944 movie hit *Double Indemnity*. *Now*, the judges and, of course, their law clerks are computer savvy and networked together.

Then, the court was located on the first floor of the executive tower attached to the State Capitol. The judges and their clerks worked in offices that were windowless and, consequently, very dark. The dim was not helped by the navy blue and black checkered carpeting. *Now*, the court is located on the third floor of the State Courts Building and windows, natural light and brighter carpeting abound.

Then, lunchtime posed a special challenge. Restaurants were few and far between. *Now*, restaurants are still few and far between, but downtown Phoenix is only five minutes away via the Dash.

Finally, then, the briefs submitted to the court were good and bad, and occasionally downright ugly. Collegiality was high, and every week brought new cases with facts to unravel and issues to be decided. *Now*, the briefs are still good and bad, and occasionally ugly, collegiality is high, each week brings new cases with facts to unravel and issues to decide, thus, calling to mind Yogi Berra’s comment “It’s déjà vu all over again.” 

Hon. Patricia K. Norris was appointed to the Arizona Court of Appeals, Division 1, in 2003.