



Sitting Judge Profile

*Henry “Hank” Boomer
Valley County Magistrate Judge
4th Judicial District*



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If anyone epitomizes the true Idaho “outdoorsman,” one who loves to fish, hunt, ski, hike, camp and raft, it is Valley County Magistrate, Judge Hank Boomer. Some people live to work, but Judge Boomer has the common sense to know that one works to live. And he does.

Raised in American Falls, Judge Boomer’s love for the outdoors came at an early age. Or as he puts it, “since the day I got out of diapers and went hunting and fishing and backpacking with my father.” After seven years of not being able to fish or hunt while working his way through college and law school, his “greatest priority” in the fall of 1975 was to live in an area where he could not only practice law, but also pursue his recreational interests with as much independence as possible.

The place for that? The small town of Kamiah on the banks of the Clearwater River as a sole practitioner. As the outdoorsman in him describes it, “The community was friendly, the lumber mills were running around the clock, and loggers were busy in the woods. The elk and deer were pretty cooperative; I had pheasants and quail in my back yard, and a good steelhead hole within walking distance of my house.” He modestly says he was able to carve out a decent living in his solo practice even with the ups and downs of the area’s economy.

Judge Boomer had a varied and general private practice and also served as a conflict public defender and served as a deputy prosecutor. Eventually he succeeded one of his mentors, Dennis Albers, as prosecuting attorney for Idaho County. The demanding work at the prosecutor’s office, combined with the 45 minute commute from Kamiah to Grangeville, caused Judge Boomer to reconsider his options.

An invitation from American Falls’ attorney, Ben Cavaness, changed everything. With Mark Beebe joining the judiciary, there was lucrative legal work back at home. Since his wife was also from American Falls, the lure of family and friends caused them to leave their wonderful home in Kamiah for the high desert joining Ben.

In American Falls, Judge Boomer had the pleasure of representing the county, the city and also the nearby cities of Aberdeen and Rockland. His practice eventually evolved in to a solo practice once again. He calls his emphasis “agri-law” which included farm and ranch transactions, entity formation, wills and estates, and water law.

Judge Boomer’s wife had been encouraging him for years to apply for the judiciary. When the magistrate position in Valley County became vacant in 2000 Judge Boomer took his wife’s advice and applied. Appointed to the position, he was sworn in in February 2001 and moved his lot to Valley County. A career move he states he has never regretted and even with family and friends in American Falls, Judge Boomer plans to stay in Valley County upon retirement.

Looking back on his colorful career, Judge Boomer admits that the people who most influenced his decision to study law were fictional characters. Growing up without a television, he watched Perry Mason win every case he ever tried on a neighbor's. However it was an afternoon at the movies watching "To Kill a Mockingbird" that had Judge Boomer leaving the theatre knowing he wanted to be a lawyer. As he puts it, "Atticus Finch clinched it for me." If he had not become a judge, Judge Boomer states he would still be practicing law and doing mediation work. For newly appointed judges, Judge Boomer's advice is to "simply be themselves," and above all be patient. Most laymen who come before a judge are scared to death; let them know that you have heard their arguments and concerns, even if you are ruling against them on a particular issue. Judge Boomer views the justice system with an outdoorsman's eye. "Every case is like a snowflake--they're all different. So I try to do my best to treat each and every individual that comes before me with respect and the recognition that out of the many cases and lives that I touch each day, this is the most important case for them and their loved ones."

Looking back on his eleven years on the bench, Judge Boomer recalls the challenges as well. Child custody cases are always challenging and often heart-wrenching according to Judge Boomer. "I hate the feeling that I sometimes get in a high-conflict custody case, that no matter what I decide, or how much I exhort the parties to keep their children's best interest in mind, the kids may be doomed to continuing parental conflict." Sentencing is sometimes difficult as well continues the judge, who wishes he had a crystal ball in order to see what will make a difference in a defendant's approach to life. Like many trial judges, Judge Boomer states he simply does the best he can, hoping he has made the right judgment call, based many times on less-than-complete or perfect information.

Judge Boomer sites the explosion of cases where litigants represent themselves as making the role of a trial judge more demanding and challenging than ever before. It is a pleasure to have well-prepared, professional attorney trying a case and the Bar has many in Idaho. For his first day, however, it was the pro-se that kept him on his toes. Judge Boomer recalls not making the greatest first impression, leaving everyone standing at attention for some time before he got a little red in the face and realized he had not given the official, "please be seated" to the crowd. His day ended with him trying to explain to a man that an unlawful detainer action only applied to "real property," not the travel trailer he had sold on contract. The man indignantly replied, "Oh, it's *real* all right, Judge, and I've got the photos and the tax notices here to prove it!" Again, patience

Perhaps it is because of recollections such as these that Judge Boomer states, "I will never cease to admire the members of the Idaho Judiciary. Idaho Judges and Justices continue to amaze me and humble me with their intelligence and their dedicated service to our system of justice." He feels honored to have been "one of the group." A group that will miss Judge Boomer greatly upon retirement and his chance to spend more time with his family. Or as his wife might add for our outdoorsman, and time for skiing and hiking and hunting and fishing and rafting Best of luck and thank you, Judge Boomer!!!