

# Senior Judge Profile

*Gregory M. Culet*  
*Former District Judge*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District*



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“Lights! Camera! Action!” Well, minus the camera maybe, could easily replace “Please Rise” in the life of Greg Culet, District Judge in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District and a thirty-one year veteran of the Idaho Judiciary. With a passion for theater and a love for his work, family and community, Judge Culet’s only problem is finding enough time to do all of the many things he would like. Maybe now that he has accepted Senior Status the time will present itself.

However, in the beginning it was not Judge Culet’s flair for the dramatic that lead him to law school. Rather it was his great sense of volunteering, another role he continues to fill today. After college Judge Culet became a VISTA volunteer and was assigned to work as a paralegal at Idaho Legal Aid. That experience provided him the opportunity to observe the legal system in detail and influenced his decision to attend law school more than any other. Judge Culet’s resume is replete with his dedication to the service of others and involvement in his community.

Whether it is in his community or for the Idaho Courts, if you can name it Judge Culet probably has helped with it: Kiwanis President, Lions President, Wieser High Boosters President, Scoutmaster, Coach, Mentor, and Hospital Foundation Board member. And let us not forget his love for theater. Stagecoach Theater in Boise Board of Directors and the Weiser Little Theater where Judge Culet has acted in a number of productions and has also directed such classics as *Steel Magnolias*, *The Sunshine Boys*, *The Odd Couple (female version at that!)* and *On Golden Pond*, just to name a few. And this just in his “spare” time, remember?

Most of his time has been involved in serving the people of the State of Idaho. Between his tenure as a Magistrate and a District Judge, Judge Culet has spent over half of his life on the bench. Having graduated from the University of Idaho, College of Law in 1978, Judge Culet was appointed as the Magistrate for Washington County in June of 1980. He served in that capacity until he was appointed District Judge for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District in Canyon County in 2001.

Professionally his resume is once again filled with duties taken on in addition to being a full time judge: President of the Magistrate Judges Association; Chair of the Legislative Review Committee, the Idaho Network for Children, Region Three Mental Health Advisory Board, and the Washington County Coalition for Empowering Youth. Judge Culet has served on, co-chaired or chaired too many Supreme Court Committees and Task Forces to even count. And on the bench, in addition to his allotted cases, Judge Culet has presided over Felony Drug Court and Family/CPA Drug Court. One can get tired just reading about it, let alone doing it.

But not Judge Culet. Known in the Judiciary for his great sense of humor and daunting smile, he always approaches the heavy work load with a positive attitude...and a bit of flair. At conferences he is joined by his wife Paula, a welcome and popular figure by his side. Balancing work, community and family seems to have suited them well. Not to say life as both a Magistrate and a District Judge was without its challenges.

Judge Culet says that during his tenure as a Magistrate the most difficult cases were high-conflict child custody cases. Dealing with the physical and emotional toll those cases present was the most challenging aspect of being a Magistrate. When successful, though, it was also the most rewarding. Judge Culet remembers that, “on a number of occasions I was actually able to make a positive difference in people’s lives.”

As a District Judge, Judge Culet enjoyed the fascinating legal issues presented by the diverse civil caseload. He notes that he was impressed with the high level of skill and intelligence of many of the attorneys who appeared in those cases. The most challenging aspects, “without a doubt,” of the District Court bench are the gravity of the significant issues in death penalty cases. “Virtually any ruling the judge makes will be scrutinized for the next two decades by a variety of state and federal courts, all of which places significant responsibility and stress on the presiding judge at every step of the case.” As a close second, Judge Culet cites the sheer volume of time and energy required just to keep up with the caseload.

Judge Culet offers the following sage advice to a new judge, whether Magistrate or District Court: “There are three fundamental steps that, while obvious to anyone who assumes the bench, can become difficult to maintain in a high volume court: 1) Always take the time and energy to be prepared for every court proceeding; 2) Always objectively consider each party’s case and position; and 3) Always make the most objective decision that you can after considering each party’s position and the existing law, uninfluenced by passion, prejudice or other irrelevant external factors. By maintaining this simple approach, a judge will generally be regarded as competent, fair and honest by the litigants and lawyers who appear in court, regardless of the actual outcome of the cases.”

To that end, Judge Culet notes the significant progress the judicial system has made in several areas during his thirty-one years on the bench. Progress that he admits, although making the judges more effective, have at the same time provided additional challenges and in some circumstances changed the role of judges. As examples, he cites a more comprehensive understanding and approach to the cause, effect and distinctive nature of domestic violence, the collaboration of the bench and bar, along with other disciplines to protect children and families, and the development of problem-solving courts such as drug courts and mental health courts. These courts, states Judge Culet, provide greater insight and understanding but also are generally additional caseloads, work and stress for those involved and by their very nature change the judge’s role to a certain extent in the case.

Still, Judge Culet has never shied away from accepting all that his work has required of him. But then again, with a flair for humor and drama, Judge Culet is not often viewed as “shy.” At some point during his career, Judge Culet began to try and work famous, or perhaps infamous, phrases or quotes from literature into his rulings. “But only when that particular quote served to describe or deliver the message better than any other method, and only if it did not diminish the importance of issues before the court.” With his love of theater he eventually included phrases from movies and advertising as well. Typically, this occurred when some attorney or litigant just couldn’t seem to comprehend what he or she was being told. An example? How about this one ...”This isn’t Burger King, you cannot ‘have it your way!’”

Maybe now with his retirement Judge Culet will finally be able to share more of his talent with the community. The caseload has kept him from local theater for too long. Although no longer acting or directing, he serves on the board of the Stagecoach Theatre in Boise which is actively involved in constructing a new theater. He notes there is an extremely competitive quality to both acting on stage and trying a case before a jury, and both the actor and the lawyer must be prepared to adjust when things go wrong, and at the same time continue to persuade the audience (jury) of the truthfulness of their story.

The Judiciary wishes him well, thanks him for his dedicated service to the Courts and the citizens of Idaho. Now, Judge Culet ...”Lights, Camera, Action!!!”