

Serving Northeast Kansas

Weingart regularly sought after to mentor others.

By Angela Lutz

As a district judge in rural northeastern Kansas, **John Weingart**, '77, logs a lot of travel time. The 22nd Judicial District comprises four largely rural counties: Brown, Doniphan, Marshall, and Nemaha. Weingart estimates he spends 200 hours per year on the road traveling to hear cases.

“One of the biggest challenges is getting to all of the various courts and getting the cases heard,” Weingart said. “Weather often presents a challenge. But it’s satisfying because we work with many different court professionals on a daily basis. I quite honestly feel I’m blessed to be in this judicial district. My 20 years have just flown by.”

“Washburn is totally responsible for my career preparation. I was fortunate that I went to a good office and had good mentors, but I was prepared in terms of theory and knowledge from Washburn. I’m very grateful to the law school, and I’ve been blessed in my career. The only thing I’m upset about is that it went too fast.” - John Weingart

In his role as a district judge, Weingart hears a wide variety of cases, including felonies, civil suits, medical malpractice, and domestic issues such as divorce and child custody. At its core, Weingart said the role of a trial judge is not complicated: “You follow the law as best you can and take care of your cases,” he explained.

“I think my most important role when I go into court is to treat all people well and make sure all of the litigants feel like they’re being heard,” Weingart added. “Then of course an important part of our relationship with the bar is that

we’re consistent. If we’re consistent, the experienced attorneys understand that. They’re able to take that consistency and talk to their clients and let them know what to expect.”

Another challenge Weingart faces as a district judge is the sheer volume of cases he hears. In Weingart’s district, child support enforcement alone has approximately 1,600 open cases – and when Weingart started 20 years ago, there used to be a paper file for each one. Paperless electronic files have made managing a dense caseload easier and allowed Weingart remote access to cases in all four counties, though he said learning how to use the technology was a bit of a transition for him and some other longtime judges.

“I get probably 200 notices of electronic filings on a daily basis,” Weingart said. “I don’t see how we could do the number of cases we do as efficiently as I think we do them without electronic filing and improvements in technology.”

Having worked at a private practice in Hiawatha, Kansas, for 24 years before being elected judge, Weingart is well known and respected in the community. “My general practice was pretty much a county seat general practice,” he said. “We did a substantial amount of real estate work, some family law, some criminal law. As small town lawyers do, we did a little bit of everything.”

His expertise is sought after in the legal realm as well. In 2018, the Kansas Supreme Court appointed him to the Judicial Education Advisory Committee, which recommends and organizes education and training for appellate judges, district judges, and district magistrate judges in the state. The Kansas Supreme Court has also called on Weingart to assist with deliberations and decision drafting on more than one occasion.



John Weingart, '77, in Hiawatha, Kansas. Photo by Nick Krug

Weingart credits his time at the Washburn University School of Law with setting him up for career success, especially since he attended the school at what he calls an exciting time. During the 1970s, Washburn saw an influx of veterans coming out of the Vietnam War, as well as the emergence of gender equality and more women enrolling at the law school. Several long-term Washburn professors were also getting started at that time, including Carl Monk, **Linda Elrod, BA '69, JD '72, David Pierce, '77** (as Weingart's classmate), and James Concannon. Weingart and his classmates worked hard, of course – but they had a lot of fun, too.

“I was in a pretty ornery class,” Weingart recalled. “One of our classmates took his final exam for himself and submitted another final answer booklet on behalf of a fictitious student. It

drove Professor Concannon nuts. He even wrote it left-handed so it couldn't be traced back to him. That was our class. But the professors were very approachable and concerned about us learning – and some of them are still there.”

Weingart has also stayed connected to Washburn over the years, especially in one very important way: His daughter is also a Washburn University School of Law graduate.

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