

Focused on Community

Boehm serves as youngest district judge in Kansas.

By Sarah Towle, BA '07

In her relatively short tenure since graduating law school in 2012, **Courtney Boehm** has had a storied and varied career leading up to becoming the youngest district court judge in Kansas. She served as a public defender from 2012-14, worked with Brooks and Dame, and started her own practice, Cottonwood Law Group with her husband in 2016 before she was elected Marian County Attorney in 2017. In 2019, she became a district court judge, and she discussed what it is like to serve at that level. Her husband **Joshua Boehm, '12**, works as an attorney with Weary Davis in Junction City, and they have a 5-year-old son, Declan.

What led you to your current position as a district judge? I had been a public defender and prosecutor and enjoyed being in the courtroom. As a judge you get to look at everything, apply it, and reach the decision which is very different than how a lawyer assumes the role in the courtroom. It's enjoyable to not take one side or the other and give everyone a chance to argue before the court and then make my decision.

At the age of 33, you are the youngest district judge in Kansas. What advice do you have for law students who want to go in the same trajectory? Getting in the courtroom and getting the experience of thinking on my feet helped me as a judge because I know what it's like to be a lawyer. I also made community involvement a priority – whether it was the Kiwanis, starting a young professionals group, or serving as president of a local business chamber. This helped me get to know others in the community and it got my name out there.

You originally set up to practice law as part of the Cottonwood Law Group in Hillsboro. Why did you choose that location in central Kansas? As my husband and I went through law school together, we knew we could really see the use of technology in our practice in a positive way, so we started a regional practice where we could be paperless. Ultimately, my husband was able to grow the firm and do work in numerous counties. It was cost efficient for clients to do some things remotely and use technology. We also hired **Joe Aker, '18**, and he had quite a bit of the rural law education that Washburn Law now provides such as oil and gas and agriculture. When I became a judge, my husband was commuting over an

hour though to Hillsboro, so he has closed the practice.

As a district judge, you see a wide range of cases. What do you enjoy tackling the most? I hear the child in need of care case docket, which has been a challenge. There are so many cases, and so the days go long and we have a lot of people in the courtroom. There are two roads which I've enjoyed – when parents can pick themselves up, make improvements, and kids can go back home. If the kids are not able to go back home, I'm able to do adoptions. It's emotionally draining, but also emotionally rewarding. I also hear the federal criminal docket and the domestic docket as well.

What's important to you as a judge in how the community views the courts? I want to always show as a judge that I'm not playing favorites, everyone has the opportunity to say their piece and make their statements and arguments in a respectful way. Even if they don't win their case, I want them to know they were still heard. I don't want them to feel like it was rigged or that one side always wins.



Courtney Boehm, '12. Photo submitted