

Resolution No. 534



A resolution of the City of Forks paying tribute to the late Susan J. Owens by designating the District Court II Courtroom in City Hall as The Susan J. Owens Courtroom

WHEREAS, Susan J. Owens passed away in 2025 and during the past year, discussions on ways to honor her life and legacy have occurred; and,

WHEREAS, in 1976, Susan Owens moved to Clallam County after graduating from the University of North Carolina School of Law at Chapel Hill, worked as a Legal Aid attorney, and established a law firm with Karen Unger in Port Angeles; and,

WHEREAS, in 1981, Susan Owens was appointed as the first judge of Clallam County's District Court II in Forks and then was elected to six terms to serve the West End in that capacity; and,

WHEREAS, Susan Owens was also the Chief Judge for the Quileute Tribe and served in a part-time capacity for five years with the Quileute Tribe; and,

WHEREAS, Susan Owens was also the Chief Judge for the Lower Elwha S'Klallam Tribe and served in a part-time capacity for six years with the Lower Elwha S'Klallam Tribe; and,

WHEREAS, in 2000, Judge Owens was elected by the people of Washington to serve as a member of the State Supreme Court, becoming the seventh woman elected to the Supreme Court; and,

WHEREAS, Justice Owens was a strong advocate for both rural and tribal courts emphasizing the important impact of these court systems across the state; and,

WHEREAS, Justice Owens advocated for education and reforms associated with the impact of domestic violence, the need for treatment, and became a nationally recognized educator to the judiciary and the entire legal community; and,

WHEREAS, in 2015, Justice Owens arranged for the Washington State Supreme Court to hold court within the newly built Rainforest Arts Center, and also ensured that her fellow justices toured "her courtroom" during the Court's visit; and,

WHEREAS, Justice Owens served on the Supreme Court until she reached the mandatory retirement age for a justice, being the first woman to do so, and retired in 2024 ending a 44-year legal and judicial career in Washington; and,

WHEREAS, Susan Owens was a proud advocate for her beloved West End where she raised her children, and developed and maintained long friendships and ties to many here; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Forks wants to ensure that Judge and Justice Susan J. Owens' legacy and memory be acknowledged within the District Court II courtroom; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Forks also wants to recognize the role that Susan Owens played outside the courtroom here on the West End, in Clallam County, and throughout the State; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FORKS, THAT

1. The City Council takes this action in honor of, and in tribute to, Susan Owens and the legacy that she created not only within the legal community of the State of Washington, but also as a proud advocate for the West End and all of its communities.
2. The City Council hereby designates that portion of the building that serves as the District Court II courtroom as the Susan J. Owens Courtroom.
3. The City Council further authorizes the Mayor and staff to obtain signage that reflects this designation to be placed in the foyer of City Hall, allowing the public to find this location. Such signage may also include "District Court II" to avoid any confusion by the public.
4. The City Council further approves the inclusion of a photograph of Susan Owens, her biography as printed by the Washington State Supreme Court, and any additional tribute that pays respect to Susan Owens' life and career. A reasonable amount of funds may be expended on the framing of such materials or in association with the installation thereof.

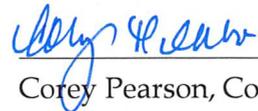
Passed this 9th day of March 2026 by the City Council.

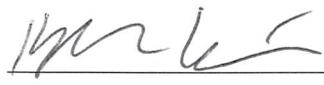
  
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Joe Soha, Councilmember

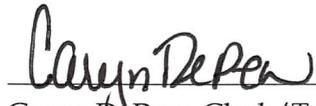
  
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Tim Fletcher, Mayor

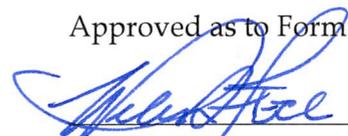
  
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Jeff Gingell, Councilmember

Absent  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Vilkesh Patel, Councilmember

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Corey Pearson, Councilmember

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kaylan Kimball, Councilmember

Attested and Authenticated To:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Caryn DePew, Clerk/Treasurer

Approved as to Form:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
William R. Fleck, City Attorney



## Washington Courts: News and Information

### Retired Washington Supreme Court Justice Susan Owens Passes Away March 28, 2025

Former Washington Supreme Court Justice Susan Owens, who retired from her 44-year judicial career at the end of Friday morning, March 28, in California, where she was visiting family. She was 75.

"Justice Owens was a true original and a good friend. Though she had been in declining health recently, she never lost her strong sense of justice," said Washington Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Stephens on Friday. "The world is a better place with her in it."

"Susan made a positive difference in people's lives, on and off the bench. She was so genuine and easy to love. Her work touched through her work and in the community will feel her loss deeply," said Washington Supreme Court Justice Debra Stephens. She was on the Court in 2000 when Owens became a justice.

Owens was elected to the state Supreme Court in the November, 2000 general election, becoming the seventh woman to serve on the Court. Prior to the election, she had served for 19 years as a judge on the Clallam County District Court. She had been on the court when she was appointed to a new part-time judicial position in 1981, then was elected to six terms.

Owens was a champion of rural and tribal courts, founding the Rural Courts Committee of Washington's District Association (DMCJA). She taught on the subject of rural courts at the state's Judicial College. She had also served both the Quileute Tribe for five years, and the Lower Elwha S'Klallam Tribe for more than six years. As a Supreme Court justice, she was active on Washington's Tribal State Court Consortium.

Another focus of Owens' career was improving judicial education on domestic violence cases. In her time on the court, the cases were prevalent, and the same people and situations kept returning again and again. There was little education or understanding or handling these cases, and "people were being injured," Owens said in 2024 just before her retirement. "We all needed education."

She joined numerous committees to gain knowledge, then became a national trainer on the topic. She lectured at the Prosecuting Attorneys' Domestic Violence Conference, and co-authored the Northwest Tribal Judges Domestic Violence Manual.

Now with a great deal more education available for judicial officers, benchbooks that are regularly updated, numerous treatment options for offenders, "it's 200 percent better than it used to be," Owens said in 2024.

She became the first woman on the Supreme Court to serve until the mandatory judicial retirement age of 75. Following her retirement in December, 2024, Owens' colleagues at the Supreme Court talked about her natural love of story-telling and her love of coming to court, her easy way of speaking and listening to others, her love of mentoring new lawyers, and her perspective on who comes through the door.

The Supreme Court will be planning a memorial for Owens, Stephens said.

#### JUSTICE SUSAN OWENS CAREER TIMELINE:

- 1971 – Graduated from Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
- 1975 – Earned J.D. from University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

- 1975 – Admitted to Oregon Bar
- 1976 – Admitted to Washington Bar
- 1976 – Moved to Port Angeles, worked as a Legal Aid attorney, one of first women attorneys working in the
- 1981 – Appointed by Clallam County Commissioners to new part-time judge position on Clallam County Dis
- 1982 – Elected to the new judge position, and subsequently re-elected to five additional terms.
- 1987 – Accepted position as part-time chief judge for Quileute Tribe, and later accepted position on Lower
- 1990 – 2000 – Active in District and Municipal Court Judges’ Association (DMCJA), serving as board membe  
president and president-elect prior to joining Supreme Court. Co-Founded DMCJA Rural Courts Committee.

