

ALUMNI PROFILE: MARY JANE THEIS '74

Alumna Appointed to Illinois Supreme Court

BY SAMANTHA BRONSON

Five times a year, Mary Jane Theis '74 travels from her Chicago office to Springfield, Ill., for two weeks. There, she joins the six other justices of the Illinois Supreme Court to hear oral arguments on 24 cases, vote on which of the 500 cases before them to hear next time, and review drafts of opinions on cases heard the previous session.

"The fact is I love being a judge very much. I love the intellectual part of it," said Theis, who was sworn in last October. "But most importantly, I have an opportunity to shape the law that affects the lives of the people of Illinois."

Theis began her career as an assistant public defender in Cook County (Chicago), first gaining experience through the USF School of Law's criminal law clinic.

"I was able to represent clients in misdemeanor cases and it was an opportunity for me as a law student to be able to pull together all the academics I had learned in class, to pull those things together and understand the role of a lawyer as an advocate for a real human being," Theis said.

As a public defender, she found herself in court all day, making it her de facto office. Intrigued by the experience of being in a courtroom so much, Theis decided to pursue a judicial career and in 1983 began serving as an associate judge for the Circuit Court of Cook County. She was elected



a circuit judge in 1988. In 1993, Theis was assigned to the First District Appellate Court and was elected to that position in 1994, where she served until her current appointment.

When it comes to the cases before her as a justice, Theis stresses the importance of educating herself about the particular case and that area of the law. "I need to know as much, if not more, about the case than the lawyer does," she said.

Theis said an important part of her decision-making process is determining the right rule, not just for a case at

hand, but also for the future. "In each case, you have to think, 'This might be the right rule here, but how will this stand up in the future?'"

Theis' law school days are not far from her mind as she hears reports about today's graduates facing the most challenging job market in 35 years. That, she said, was the market she entered as a young attorney. Finding work then was extremely difficult, but Theis likes to think her story can serve as a hopeful one for recent graduates.

"I started where they are today and it's taken me to the Illinois Supreme Court," Theis said. "I do want to encourage people that you happened to have hit the wall, but there is hope on the other side. It happened to me." [USF]

published in the *Houston Chronicle* and *The Miami Herald*.

Birte Scholz '99 and Jeffrey Kaloustian '09 presented at a Human Rights Advocates event in celebration of International Human Rights Day.

2000

Ioana Mondescu '00 has been promoted to special counsel in Archer Norris' Walnut Creek office. She specializes in complex litigation, product liability, and com-

mercial disputes. Mondescu also defends manufacturers in toxic tort cases, including asbestos-containing products and chemicals.

2001

Toshi Kawaguchi '01, formerly of VeriSign, Inc., is senior corporate counsel in Symantec Corporation's Legal and Public Affairs Department, following Symantec's acquisition of VeriSign's identity and authentication security business division.

Richard D. Pio Roda BA '97, JD '01, has been promoted to principal at Meyers Nave. He specializes in municipal law, public contracts and construction, education law, election law, and corporate law. Pio Roda also serves as the assistant city attorney for the City of San Leandro, general counsel for the Mendocino County Community Development Commission, and as special counsel to other public agencies.

2003

Yesenia Gallegos '03 was one of 50 Latina lawyers nominated to participate in the inaugural class of the Association of Corporate Counsel's and the Hispanic National Bar Association's Value-Based Training Skills Program. Gallegos focuses her practice on labor and employment law in Fox Rothschild LLP's Los Angeles office.

Loretta James '03, previously with Wendel, Rosen, Black & Dean, has joined Hanson Bridgett LLP as an