

HON. ROBERT H. OLIVER, RET.

Of Counsel

Baker Manock & Jensen

Why did you chose law as your career?

After college, I spent five years in the insurance business selling life insurance, and had the opportunity to observe various attorneys in the community. I appreciated their compassionate yet competitive nature and the idea they helped people with their problems. For me, it was a natural progression from what I was then doing, helping people plan for their futures.

Before you were appointed to the bench, how many years did you practice law and what did you specialize in?

I practiced law for 22 years as a business, transactional and estate planning attorney, which involved planning, anticipating issues, solving problems, and doing deals. I am a Board Certified Specialist in Estate Planning, Trust, and Probate Law.

What was your most memorable case on the bench?

I cannot pin point one case. Rather, I recall my cases as a montage of plaintiffs and defendants, civil and criminal cases, victims and families of both victims and defendants whose lives are forever changed by the actions of a defendant found guilty. In three particular cases, I met defendants who completed their time and were out of prison. They individually approached me and said, "You probably don't remember me, but you saved my life by sending me to prison. That experience made me realize that I did not want to continue the life I was leading, and I thank you for that."

In your 40 years in law, what are the biggest, most significant changes you have witnessed?

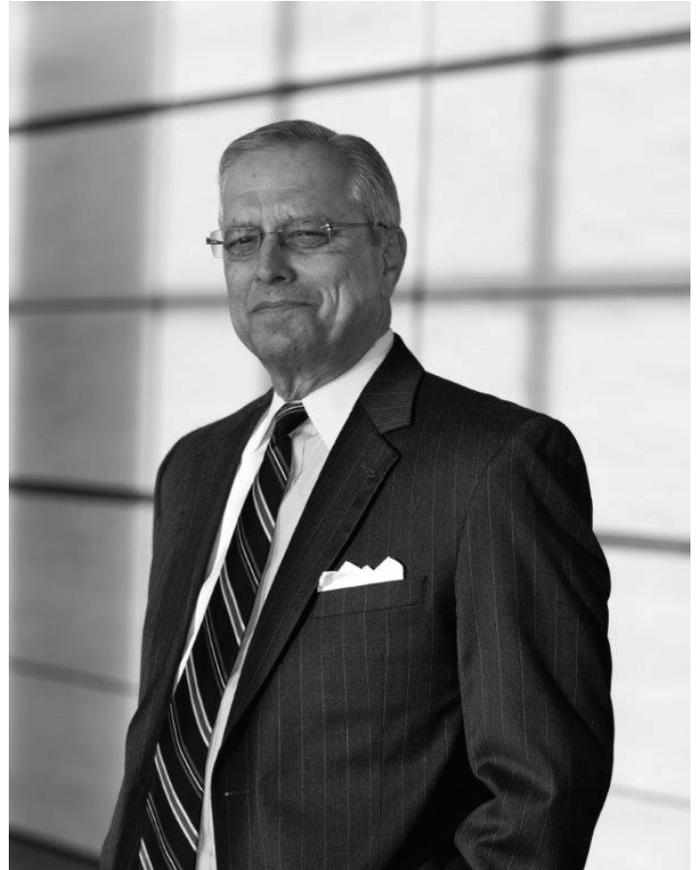
I believe there have been two significant changes: First are technical advances allowing attorneys to provide legal services more efficiently and cost-effectively. Second is the increasing inability in the criminal justice system to effectively rehabilitate and appropriately hold accountable those who engage in criminal behavior. But one thing that has not changed in my 40-year career is the high caliber of lawyers who practice in Fresno and in the Valley who are professional, ethical, and highly competent.

Why do you see mediation as a valuable tool to help resolve issues between people and organizations?

The mediation process provides people with a neutral environment to productively engage in a course of voluntary self-determination. This process, when effectively utilized, enables the parties to reach the best decision possible after being guided to consider alternatives, and to better understand the stated as well as unstated positions of the "other side," evaluating the risks, both known and unknown, of trial.

What are your roots in the Central Valley?

My grandparents came to Tulare County in 1905 to farm. I have a picture in my office of my dad and uncles as children standing in one of their fields eating the biggest, and probably sweetest, watermelons you have ever seen! My grandfather, R. B. Oliver, in addition to farming, served on the Board of Supervisors for Tulare County for 22 years. In observing my grandfather's tenure on the Board, I was given an opportunity at an early age to observe public service in action.



What I do at Baker Manock & Jensen: I am Of Counsel, focusing solely on mediation, helping businesses and individuals reach voluntary solutions to commercial and interpersonal disputes.

Education: Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, Pepperdine University School of Law; Golden Gate University School of Law (JD); Air War College of the U.S. Air Force — seminar program; and California State University, Fresno, (BS in business administration).

Age: Age is dictated by a state of mind, not a calendar.

Family: I have been married to Stephanie for 43 years; we are blessed with a wonderful family: two sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren.

What was your first job and what did you learn from it?

At age 14 I started my own business doing custom tractor work in the Sunnyside neighborhoods. I learned that superior customer service=satisfied customers=repeat business=priceless word of mouth advertising. I also learned that "gross does not equal net."

What do you do in your spare time?

I continue to be involved on various boards in the community, such as the California State University Fresno Foundation, the Fresno Historical Society, and the San Joaquin College of Law. But for fun, I study free-style piano where the teacher will give us a melody line and some chords, and we develop our own music. It stimulates my creative side.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Two of my mentors, Frank Caglia and Bud Richter, as well as my dad, told me: "Work hard, admit your mistakes, under-promise and over-deliver."

Which honors are you the most proud of?

I am honored to be among a group of distinguished citizens awarded the Leon S. Peters Award for business leadership, ethics, and public service, the Hon. Blaine Pettit Mentor Award given by the Fresno County Young Lawyers, and the Bernard E. Witkin Lifetime Achievement Award given by my peers and colleagues of the Fresno County Bar Association.