

Coming Clean

Mediator Jonathan Cannon places an emphasis on candor, honesty

By Henry Meier
Daily Journal Staff Writer

ORANGE — There isn't a single formula that will resolve all disputes before him. But with trust and honesty as parts of the process, cases are more likely to end in settlement, according to JAMS mediator Jonathan H. Cannon.

ADR Profile

"[Parties] have to trust me, to be honest with me," he said. "If you can be upfront and honest sooner rather than later, it's better for everyone. Tell me the facts, tell me the legal issues and tell me what the law is concerning those issues."

Attorneys who have used Cannon as a neutral said the former Orange County Superior Court judge makes exercising trust and honesty easy, mostly by practicing what he preaches.

"He's extremely forthright," said Gary Waldron, a partner at Weintraub Tobin Chediak Coleman Grodin Law Corp. in Newport Beach. "That's not a slam on other mediators, just a particular style I appreciate. He tells you what he thinks will work and [what] he thinks won't, and he'll tell you when he doesn't know."

J.D. Turner, a partner and defense attorney at Lorber, Greenfield & Polito LLP who has used Cannon for several matters, said being open during a mediation with the neutral is crucial.

"He can do wonders as long as you're communicative with him," she said. "He has a lot of integrity and makes some tough calls that are correct. I trust him because I know he's not going to screw me by making me pay too much or by making the plaintiff take too little."

Even with trust established, Cannon said there is no substitute for spending time with the parties to cre-

ate a better rapport, and even then, there's still some reading of the tea leaves that goes into making a settlement happen.

"It helps if I can read between the lines," he said. "But the biggest thing is talking to people for long enough that I can understand their position and what they are looking for."

To broker deals, Cannon also relies on his multifaceted experience as both a former judge and politician. As the former mayor and city

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councilman in Garden Grove, Cannon uses his knowledge of public entities to better serve parties that come from that arena.

"One of the things I've been doing lately is working as an arbiter between cities and government agencies," he said. "I understand the way local political organizations work and know who has what responsibilities."

One such dispute involves three Southern California counties that have been in a dispute "boiling" since 1972. While Cannon couldn't discuss the details of the case, he and two other mediators were able to successfully get the case settled in mediation.

A graduate of Long Beach State University, Cannon worked as an accountant in the oil drilling industry before attending Southwestern Law School, where he graduated in 1971.

After a brief stint as a city prosecutor in Long Beach following grad-



Henry Meier / Daily Journal

Jonathan H. Cannon

JAMS
Orange

Area of specialty: family law, complex business disputes, construction, government agencies

uation, he joined the firm of Grisham, Vandenberg, Nott & Conway as an associate in 1973 and became a name partner two years later. After seven years with the firm, during which time he served on the Garden Grove council and as mayor, he left to set up a smaller shop with one of the other partners.

In 1987, he was elected as a judge of the West Orange County Municipal Court. After two years on that court, he was elevated to a Superior Court judgeship, where he remained for another 18 years until he stepped down to join JAMS in 2007.

Cannon's experience as a family law judge — a post he occupied for around eight years, including four as the county's supervising judge — has helped him forge an active mediation practice in the arena and attorneys said he is deft at maneuvering around thorny situations.

Waldron, who used Cannon in a multi million-dollar, multi party family law dispute recently, said the neutral's ability to keep the different sides calm and informed ultimately helped settle the dispute.

"The strongest skill set that helped that mediation in particular was his ability to keep the parties calm until he could identify issues and find common ground," Waldron said.

Cannon, drawing on his accounting experience, is also knowledgeable about the financial and technical side of things, according to lawyers.

"He's adept financially," Waldron said. "He understands those issues better than many. Don't be afraid to present that type of information, especially if it will streamline the process."

Outside of his ADR practice, Cannon said he dotes on his two granddaughters whenever he gets the chance. He and his wife Linda, whom he met when he was 16, have also joined up with friends recently to buy and race horses and have seen some success, although Cannon said it's more of a hobby than a retirement plan.

Here are some attorneys who have used Cannon's services:

Gary Waldron, Weintraub Tobin Chediak Coleman Grodin Law Corp. Newport Beach; Thomas Stabile, Stabile & Cowhig, APC, Orange; Judith Curtin, Phillips, Whisnant, Gazin, Gorcezyca & Curtin, Newport Beach; Joseph Forbath, Woodruff Spradlin & Smart, Costa Mesa; Richard Sullivan, Jarvis, Krieger & Sullivan, Irvine; Teresa Libertino, Lattie Malanga Libertino, LLP.