

Anderson To Fill Late Husband's Role As Harris County DA

By **Jeremy Heallen**

Law360, Houston (September 24, 2013, 8:24 PM ET) -- Former Harris County District Judge Devon Anderson was appointed Tuesday by Texas Gov. Rick Perry to succeed her late husband as the county's top prosecutor, a decision hailed by former prosecutors and defense attorneys as bringing a well-rounded perspective to the office.

Anderson picks up the torch Mike Anderson was forced to relinquish in August when he died of cancer after just eight months in office. Her colleagues say her impressive resume as a prosecutor, criminal district judge and defense attorney make Anderson the first "triple threat" to serve as district attorney in the past 30 years.

Andy Drumheller of [Rusty Hardin & Associates](#), who worked under Anderson when she was a felony prosecutor in the mid-1990s, describes his former boss as conscientious, ethical and fair. Drumheller was still learning the ropes at the district attorney's office when he was assigned to Anderson, which he says influenced his career by "watching someone do things the way they should be done."

"Devon, as a prosecutor was very careful, thoughtful and deliberate," he said.

Not long after her 1991 graduation from the University of Texas School of Law, Anderson accepted an offer from hard-nosed prosecutor Johnny Holmes Jr. to join the Harris County DA's office. Over the next 12 years, Anderson forged a reputation as a methodical and poised assistant district attorney who wasn't afraid of the courtroom.

Anderson's time in the DA's office reached its apex when she served as chief prosecutor in the capital murder trial of Angel Maturino Resendiz, the notorious "Railroad Killer" who was linked to 15 murders that occurred across the U.S. and Mexico in the 1990s. Resendiz was convicted in 1999, and he was executed in 2006.

After Holmes retired in 2001, Anderson continued her work with the DA's office under Chuck Rosenthal until her own political aspirations came calling. In November 2004, Anderson, a Republican, won the race for the 177th Judicial District Court and took the bench the following January.

As a felony district court judge, Anderson presided over a heavy docket of cases ranging from white collar offenses to violent crimes. In 2007, Anderson became the presiding judge of one of the county's STAR Drug Courts, where she worked to help offenders trying to recover from dangerous addictions.

But her judicial career lasted only four years, coming to an end in 2008 when she and a number of the county's elected officials were swept out of office by a record turnout from Democratic voters.

Anderson's political success and the humility of her subsequent defeat make her a "seasoned" choice for the DA's office, according to Drumheller. If she wants to hold the office, Anderson will have to enter the campaign fray soon, as Gov. Perry has promised to set a special election in 2014 so voters can decide who will finish out the remainder of her husband's four-year term.

After leaving the bench, Anderson teamed up with former Harris County District Judge Brock Thomas and set up shop as a criminal defense attorney.

Jimmy Ardoin of [ArdoinLaw PLLC](#) shared office space with Anderson for 2 1/2 years while she was in private practice, and said she made a seamless transition to the defense bar. Ardoin said Tuesday that he hadn't spoken with Anderson in a while and was caught a little off guard by the governor's appointment.

But he added that it seemed like a way for Anderson, who lost her 57-year-old husband just more than three weeks ago, to carry on the mission he started to turn around the DA's office, which has been besmirched by controversies involving prior district attorneys Rosenthal and Patricia Lykos.

"She has the respect of the people who work in the office," Ardoin said. "She's been there her entire legal career and will be able to continue boosting morale. She knows how to lead the office."

Phillip Hilder of [Hilder & Associates PC](#) says those crucial years Anderson spent with the defense bar give her an added dimension as district attorney that none of her predecessors over the past 30 years had.

"It gives her a better handle on the criminal justice system," Hilder said.

Hilder observed Anderson's acumen as a defense attorney up close when they represented a pair of co-defendants. Although he declined to get into specifics about the case, Hilder said Anderson was a zealous advocate who "very much cared about her clients."

Her experience in private practice will enable Anderson as district attorney to relate to the challenges defense attorneys face and avoid the "us versus them" mentality that past officeholders seemed to encourage, Hilder believes.

"She has a wealth of experience having been a prosecutor, judge and a defense attorney," he said. "She can analyze situations from different perspectives."

--Editing by Richard McVay.