



Angela with  
her dog, Ziggy.

# Angela Bartell

A trailblazer takes a break

By Amanda N. Wegner

**A**ny interview that begins by turning the tables on the questioner is sure to be an interesting one.

And with Angela Bartell, former Dane County Circuit Judge and Chief Judge of the Fifth Judicial District, that's certainly the case. "So what do you want to know? So many of my stories have already been shared," she says. "My life has been an open book."

Angela, who retired (or as she says, "graduated") from the bench in February 2008, has an impressive résumé that includes a long list of firsts, and is no stranger to telling the story of balancing her professional and personal lives, including five children. Coming into a law career at a time when few women were in the field and women were generally discouraged from professional organizations and high-profile positions, Angela has always been a go-getter, a pioneer, blazing a trail for others to follow.

Those generally aren't words she uses to describe herself though. "I was just doing what I wanted to. There wasn't a road map and few role models, so I figured it out as I went. And it worked."

Since her retirement (and her husband's retirement from the law firm of Quarles & Brady in September 2008), Angela has remained active, but she's given herself more time to take it easy, enjoy life and "get a good night's sleep."

### An impressive picture

Angela didn't grow up wanting to be a judge or lawyer. In fact, an accordion player, she turned down a scholarship to the Northwest Music School and instead came to UW-Madison from the Milwaukee area, to pursue degrees in German and psychology.

While at UW-Madison, she met Jeffrey, who was in his second year of law school at the time, and would sit in some of his classes. But her own foray into law studies wasn't initially driven by a desire for a law career.

"That time sitting in his classes painted a very impressive picture. But as much as any-



**Angela and Jeff Bartell with their grandchildren (l-r) Eloise, Audrey, Sawyer, Nolan, Margo, Ayden and Giles.**

—Provided photo

thing else, I didn't want to be ignorant of what Jeffrey was learning."

From the beginning, the Bartells' relationship has been one of partnership; Angela's decision to go to law school was borne from a desire for professional overlap in their lives ... and "the fact that there were precious few women in law at the time." Angela notes that her success has long been supported by Jeffrey's role as an equal household partner, and vice versa.

"We've appeared to play unusual roles through the years," says Angela.

### New venture

Now, that strong partnership has extended into their personal lives. Following Angela's retirement (and a brief hiatus to the family's Tucson home), the couple founded Bartell Dispute Services, which offers mediation and arbitration services.

Angela explained the difference between the two services: Mediation assists the involved parties in finding an acceptable resolution to their dispute; in arbitration, parties present their positions to an arbitrator and agree to abide by the arbitrator's decision.

Angela says her arbitration and mediation work allows her to get to know clients on a more personal level. This fact alone, she says, leads to greater satisfaction.

"I really enjoy the personal contact in an

informal setting. This provides a higher level of satisfaction as the clients get a chance to talk. You're a partner in the discussion and decision instead of being told what to do."

Compassion and an open ear have always been hallmarks of Angela's practice. With a bachelor's degree in psychology, Angela's time on the bench "was a lesson in fellow man, good and bad, including myself. ... I wasn't predictable, but I was not unpredictable. I was willing to listen and give everyone a channel to be heard."

She adds: "I also learned a lot about myself; most of all, that it wasn't about me. Nothing in life is ever wasted. It all comes back to who we are and the ability to understand someone else's situation."

### The world is a present

The Bartells' dispute resolution service is booming, which, ironically, means time remains a limiting factor. The Bartells continue to be active in the community; Jeffrey is on the Board of Regents, and Angela is on the board of directors of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. She says she plans on doing even more volunteer work in her retirement ... but later on.

For now, the Bartells are getting reacquainted with Madison and Dane County.

"During my career and raising a family, we never had a chance to explore."

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Recreational motorcyclists, the Bartells particularly enjoy hitting the open road (when the weather allows) for “mini adventures” to discover the area’s gems.

“The area is really a paradise to explore, especially via the highways and byways.”

Plus, with five children and seven grandchildren spread across the nation, travel is a priority, including regular trips to Tucson. The couple also visited Turkey last year.

“We want to see the world, and trips like the one we took to Turkey open your eyes in a lot of ways.”

And oftentimes, taking a step back to examine your immediate, everyday surroundings opens your eyes as well.

“My theory has always been that the world is a present ready for me to unwrap,” says Angela. “After a successful career and grown family, that’s taking on a great new meaning.”



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# A Quick Glance Back

## HIGH-SPEED RAIL IN DANE COUNTY !



Photo provided by the Wisconsin Historical Society, image #1913.

Yes, it was exciting then – and now! This 1873 photo of the wood-burning Minnesota and St. Paul steam engine arriving at Middleton Station was created by esteemed Dane County photographer Andreas Larsen Dahl. In the late 19th century, this was the high-speed rail (HSR) of the day. Now, 137 years later, Wisconsin will get some \$810 million in federal stimulus dollars to construct a new HSR system as part of a Midwest Regional Rail Initiative designed to connect nine states with a 3,000-mile rail network. Work is projected to begin this year and the estimated completion date of the Madison-Chicago link is 2013. Gov. Jim Doyle signed a \$47 million contract in 2009 to purchase aluminum passenger cars being manufactured in Spain by Talgo Inc. Assembly facilities are to be established in Wisconsin, creating an estimated 80 jobs. The cars will be pulled by existing diesel engines and current conditions will limit top speed to about 79 miles per hour, though additional rail upgrades could allow speeds as high as 110 mph. And now the discussion turns to “Where will the train station be located?” County Executive Kathleen Falk prefers the Dane County Airport, but Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz is weighing-in for the Fiore Center on the corner of East Washington Ave. and First Street. Stay tuned. There’ll be plenty of excitement before the first new train arrives and the “All aboard!” is heard — somewhere in Dane County!

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