

## Judge Dalila Corral Lyons seen as mandatory settlement hearing expert

By Ricardo Pineda

Daily Journal Staff Writer

**L**OS ANGELES — Judge Dalila Corral Lyons is glad she doesn't have to worry about who is right and wrong anymore. After 15 years of criminal and civil trials, she said, "My role is to facilitate an agreement despite the disputed facts and the disputed legal issues."

Since 2020, she has presided over mandatory settlement conferences. In order to resolve the case, she explained, "I help the attorneys assess the value of the dispute and what is the probability that a trier of fact may agree with one version versus the other."

She has loved both assignments, Corral Lyons said, "but I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoy this new and different role as a neutral. ... MSC discussions are more informal and reasonable among attorneys. Because I speak to them privately, they are not performing for the other side."

Nicole A. Nguyen of Session & Kimball LLP described in an email that Corral Lyons has a no-nonsense approach.

"She pairs warmth and humor with a laser focus on the crux of the issue, Nguyen wrote. "She's well prepared and decisive."

The attorney also praised the judge for her "tremendous work ethic and attention to detail."

"She irons out factual or procedural discrepancies to ensure a consistent analysis and even-handed



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treatment," Nguyen continued. "She takes a pragmatic approach to law and motion: while some discovery disputes are critical, others are unnecessary."

Keeping the bigger picture in mind, the judge "displays a firm command of appropriate valuation ranges and effective negotiation tactics," Nguyen elaborated. "She recognizes that settlement attitudes are related to externalities. Her realistic assessment means she knows when to push for settlement and when to allow a case to ripen."

Corral Lyons is also the site judge for the entire Spring Street Courthouse in downtown Los An-

geles. "We, as superior court judges, are tenants in this historic building," the Moderne-style structure that was built as a federal courthouse and post office in 1940.

There are some problems, as in every building. For example, the windows can't be opened, precisely because of the impressive facade: sandblasted aluminum spandrels.

Most of her work is done remotely from her spacious, well-organized chambers.

She looks through the window behind her desk and points out the nearby Edward R. Roybal Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse. "You know who lines up there?" she asks.



### Dalila Corral Lyons

Superior Court Judge  
Los Angeles County  
(Los Angeles)

#### Career Highlights:

Appointed a Superior Court judge by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, 2005; Chief Legal Adviser, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 1997-2005; senior deputy, Office of Los Angeles County Counsel, 1990-97; Litigation Associate, Rosenfeld Meyer & Susman LLP, Beverly Hills, 1987-90; Litigation Associate, Pettit & Martin, Los Angeles, 1984-87.

#### Law School:

UC Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law, 1984

“The immigrants who are going to get their U.S. citizenship.”

A native of Mexico herself, the view is always there to remind the judge that her father was once in that line. He moved the family when Corral Lyons was an infant in hopes of a better life and opportunity.

“During college, I gravitated toward issues that were of importance to me and turned out to be issues of access and justice,” she recalled, “but at that time, I didn’t know they were legal issues.”

Integrating and assimilating into a new culture and language in elementary school, she said, “I worked very hard and did the best I could and I always had in my mind of helping others and I thought of the legal profession as the vehicle to do that and being in leadership positions.”

She was the member of the family — and the one in the classroom — who would come into the middle of a dispute and try to solve the problem.

“I sometimes speak Spanish in the conferences and some attorneys, who are also native speakers, are relieved. They feel understood,” she said. But besides the language, the comfort is natural because the judge enjoys talking to people in general.

The judge handles two cases per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Sometimes it comes down to one, depending on the complexity and the number of parties involved. Some of her colleagues in trial courts are assigned up to five trial-ready litigations a day, she said.

“We are the valve of trial judges so they are not as congested,” Corral Lyons noted. “It’s important to me that I run my program as efficiently as possible so that I can do as many as I can and try to resolve as many cases.”

During the court shutdowns over COVID, she said, “we were the only show in town because there were no trials.”

The department was in high demand, the judge explained, so much

that at one point, the presiding judge required a mandatory settlement conference before any trial. (That is not the rule now.)

“I ended up training our judges on how to do MSCs,” she said. “The court came up with the program — called Resolve LA — where attorneys were volunteering as settlement officers. I participated in their training.”

An advantage of remote conferences for Corral Lyons is, “They can be more informal” and allow easier access to participants who would otherwise have to travel. She hears from insurance adjusters or attorneys from all over the world.

Sang I. Lee of Law Offices of Lee & Park has known Corral Lyons as a trial judge and a settlement mediator. In one complicated case, he said, the other side filed several motions that he “thought would take days and energy ... She read all those papers and she figured out what the issues were.”

He continued: “She took overtime. It’s a Friday. She’s supposed to work until 4:30 p.m. She stayed with us until it was resolved. Frankly, I didn’t think there was any chance to settle.”

Artin Gharibian of Gharibian Law APC also thought his case would not settle. But he found the judge is “smart, persistent, she cuts to the chase and appreciates counsel who are punctual and prepared. She’s creative in how she approaches legal issues, and has a unique way of getting the parties to find common ground.”

His partner in the law firm, Amber M. Tham, considers Corral Lyons one of the most effective mandatory settlement conference judges “due to her candor, quick wit and personality.”

“You should consider yourself lucky if you appear before her,” Tham suggested, but not without a warning. “You must be sure to follow her procedures to the letter because she will be tough on you if you fail. That’s what makes a better judge, one who makes you a better attorney.”

Lotfy Mrich of Vineyard Law Group offers a similar piece of advice: “Do the homework and respect her orders. She is very strict, procedure-wise. I find her adequate in analysis of the facts, and court etiquette, in all respects. She’s very generous with her time, and she’s not an impatient judge. Generally speaking, she is fair.”

There is no big secret to keeping Corral Lyons’ calendar moving. “It’s called preparation, more preparation ... Prep, prep, prep,” she insisted exuberantly.

She prepares as well as she hopes the attorneys prepare, and when they do the effort bears fruit.

“Everybody knows where the weaknesses and the strengths of their case are,” she explained. “I do, too, based on the briefs. By the time they get to me, I know everything I possibly can so that in the few hours that we have we can do the negotiation dance as efficiently as possible.”

She quipped that, “Sometimes it’s a cha-cha-cha, other times it’s a slow dance, a merengue. ... It depends on how the negotiation is going.”

The hardest part for her is the isolation of the judges. “I am a very social person and what I like the least is that, as a judge, you have a lot of restrictions.”

If she sees an attorney in the hallway, she said she would be very careful not to overextend a greeting “because it could be perceived as me talking, having an ex parte communication.”

So, are judges perceived as anti-social? “We’re restricted, the limitation of socializing, which are very good rules, I am not objecting to them. It’s just a matter of perception: not favoring one side or the other,” she acknowledged.

In her free time, the judge loves to travel. Hiking and reading (she praises “Lincoln Highway,” a novel by Amor Towles) are treasured hobbies. In her family, only one cousin, Eli Palomares of Sacramento, followed her footsteps in the world of law.

What Corral Lyons enjoys the most now and ever since her appointment to the bench, is “to be able to facilitate imparting justice on people.”

“It’s an awesome responsibility and an honor to be in this position,” she concluded, “and if I can help in any way to help people resolve their disputes in our system that we created, I think it is amazing because not all countries have this system.”

*Here are some of Judge Corral Lyons’ recent cases and the attorneys involved:*

*Gabriel Felix et al., v. County of Los Angeles*, 21STCV06285 — breach of contract

For plaintiffs: G. Anne Singer, A. Singer & Associates Inc.

For defendant: Vanessa A. Evangelista, Collins + Collins LLP

*Whetstone v. Grace Hope Treatment & Recovery Centers Inc.*, 20STCV30362 — wrongful death, negligence

For plaintiff: Amber M. Tham and Artin Gharibian, Gharibian Law APC

For defendant: Lotfy Mrich, Vineyard Law Group

*TNIS Systems Inc. v. HJC*, BC701011 — breach of contract, trade secret appropriation, unfair competition

For plaintiff: Sang I. Lee, Law Offices of Lee & Park

For defendant: Daniel R. Sallus and Mathew C. Chen, Stone & Sallus LLP

*Bui v. Vaynman*, 19SMCV01349 — property habitability

For plaintiff: Joseph W. Kellener, Dignity Law Group APC

For defendant: Kathleen M.K. Carter, Messner Reeves LLP

*Dufrenne v. CHA Hollywood Medical Center LP*, 28STCV39147 — employment discrimination

For plaintiff: Nicole A. Nguyen, Sessions & Kimball LLP For defendant: Linda B. Hurevitz, Ballard Rosenberg Golper & Savitt LLP

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