



# **Attorney Ben Allen Of Alton Moves On, But Business Continues**

by Sanford Schmidt  
July 22 2021 5:30 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - It's not often a defense attorney gets a standing ovation when he disposes of a court case, but that's what happened when Ben Allen of Alton appeared for the last time on a case.

Circuit Judge Kyle Napp, after accepting the plea agreement at a recent court session, stood up and said, "Anyone who has been such a good lawyer and such a good man deserves a round of applause."

She applauded, and the rest of the attorneys and others stood and gave Allen a hand.

The case involved a man accused of unlawful use of a weapon for allegedly firing shots in the air. Allen explained in a recent interview that his client had shot into the air as a warning to some people, and he had no prior criminal record.

Allen worked out an agreement with a prosecutor to allow his client to serve a term of probation, with a provision for a reduction to a misdemeanor if he completes the probation requirements. The prison sentence would have been between four and 15 years.

“It was a fair outcome, and that’s all I ever wanted was a fair outcome,” Allen said. He has tried at least 100 murder cases and at least 1,000 total criminal cases.

Allen said between 90 and 95 percent of criminal defendants are good for the crimes of which they are accused, but his job has been to get the best outcome possible for his clients, who are entitled to a fair trial.

Veteran Assistant State’s Attorney Susan Jensen said Allen is one of two lawyers she would hire if she ever got in trouble.

Allen, 81, had been practicing law for 53 years. He is not practicing law anymore, but he is not retired. He said he will continue to develop property in and around Grafton when he is not busy tending his lawn. He also plans to keep his job as a Godfrey Township Board of Trustee member. Allen is one of six who serve as Village of Godfrey Trustees.

Allen could write a book about his many strange experiences. He started out as an assistant state’s attorney and served with the late Bob Trone, also a legendary prosecutor.

He also worked with Allen Dixon, later the Illinois treasurer and U.S. senator.

He also, along with Trone, opposed the famous F. Lee Bailey, who represented Barbara Jean Boyle, an accomplice to the notorious Dr. Glennon Engleman, also known in the national media as “Dr. Death.”

Boyle was convicted and served a 50-year prison term. Engleman was convicted but died in custody before sentencing.

Allen also worked in the state’s attorney’s office with future judges Willaim Beatty and John Gitchoff.

After serving two-and-a-half years with those veteran prosecutors, he grew restless with being “second chair” to the more experienced colleagues. “Those guys were at the top of their game,” he said.

Trone encouraged him to switch sides and go into criminal defense practice. At first, he did take on divorce cases, but there was one case that prompted him to quit family law. He had worked out an agreement whereby the husband got a color television, and the wife got custody of their daughter.

Later the daughter was accused of murder, but Allen let it be known that authorities should look at the mother who hired a hitman to kill her boyfriend. That was his last divorce case. He said that 90 percent of his practice was criminal defense.

He also defended then Wood River Police Chief Junior Valentine. He said the chief was indicted on 19 counts, but most of them were subject to the statute of limitations. He said he filed individual motions to dismiss those cases until the case went to trial.

Valentine was convicted of only one count and was sentenced to probation and ordered to pay about \$3 in restitution.

Allen disputes the notion that time in custody of the Department of Corrections fails to correct inmates.

He said he had a client who was an energetic drug dealer but not a user. He said the man was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison. The client would write him once a year to update the attorney on his progress.

The client received a master’s degree while in prison and avoided some of the rough treatment to which some inmates are subject. “He was a tough guy and huge,” Allen said.

Once he got out, he went to work at Allen’s Loading Dock in Grafton, but later got into the real estate business in another state. “He’s becoming rich,” Allen said. The list of adventures goes on for a considerable length.

Allen graduated from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. He earned his law degree from the University of Oklahoma. He worked his way through SIUE, working for National Marine, an inland transportation service company in Hartford.

He realized that the company had entered bankruptcy proceedings, so he bought the company loading dock in Grafton at a good price. (National Marine is now called National Maintenance & Repair.)

He said Grafton was not considered a place to visit in those days, but he spent 15 years developing the building into The Loading Dock, a restaurant, bar, and meeting center.

He was a pioneer in the development of Grafton, which is now home to upscale condominiums and dozens of restaurants and other attractions. He also developed Grafton Hills, a residential subdivision.

He said he plans to continue in the property development and is hoping to develop a hotel in Grafton, adding that he is grateful to Grafton and Jersey County officials for their cooperation.

“When I bought the Loading Dock, everybody thought I was crazy,” he said.