



# THE IOWA LAWYER

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MEET THE 135<sup>TH</sup> ISBA PRESIDENT

# ANJIE SHUTTS

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# Shutts never stops giving back to the profession she sees as a “gift”

By Melissa Higgins, Communications Director

If you spot Anjela (“Anjie”) Shutts around town, it may just be as a blur. She is likely running from a client meeting to a board meeting or darting from the courthouse to the field to watch her kids play soccer. She has a busy family, a busy family law practice and a constant drive to give back to the profession she loves.

This upcoming year might be her busiest yet, as she prepares to assume

the role of the 135th president of The Iowa State Bar Association. Shutts is no stranger to bar activities, previously serving as Polk County Bar Association president, and for many years as a board of governor and officer.

She has also been actively involved in the Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission, the Iowa Organization of Women Attorneys, the Polk County Women Attorneys, the State

Judicial Nominating Commission for Polk County, the Iowa Family Law Case Processing Reform Task Force and the Iowa Center for Children’s Justice board. She did stints on the school PTA and volunteers regularly with her church.

“My husband would say that I can’t say no,” she said, with a laugh. “But I think it’s ingrained. My dad was a public servant. He was a cop in Grinnell, where I grew up. He retired when I was in high school and then worked for the county – getting elected to the county board of supervisors where he served until his death. He served on all the community boards. He was a true public servant.”

An experience all the way back in sixth grade solidified Shutts’ desire to step up when needed. The Grinnell school system was considering getting rid of middle school athletics because of budget cuts, but her parents came up with the idea to start a concession stand to raise money to support the athletic programs. Her family ended up running the concession stand for five years.

“We did the set up and clean up and food ordering and found all the volunteers. If there was a tournament in town, we woke up at dawn to pick up the coffee and donuts and the whole family went to set it all up,” she said. “It taught me as a kid that one person can make a difference. You just need to show up and do it.”

Shutts’ busy schedule took a little bit of a slowdown over the last year because of COVID. She worked from home, even conducting trials remotely, which allowed her to spend more time with her husband and two daughters, albeit in cramped quarters. Her

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“I started riding my bike a lot during the pandemic. I ride it to the Iowa Women of Achievement bridge in downtown Des Moines to just be there and look at the names. Some of them I didn’t know until I read them on the bridge. To think about that woman doing something so novel during that era, it’s amazing. They were the first. They showed up to do something people told them they couldn’t do. It’s very inspiring.”

husband, Peter Kitundu, is also a lawyer. He is chief compliance officer at Wellmark.

“My husband was working in our bedroom. I was in the spare bedroom. Our girls were in their bedrooms doing virtual school. We were home together all the time,” she said.

Her daughters, age 17 and 14, eventually went back to in-person school at Des Moines Roosevelt High School. But Shutts has remained working from home.

“I discovered I like working from home. I get more done. I am more efficient, and it has allowed me to see my kids a lot more,” she said. “We’re on borrowed time. They will be graduating high school soon.”

Shutts maintains a divorce and family law practice at Whitfield & Eddy and has witnessed that the extra burdens placed on families over the last year has meant more stressed-out clients calling her. So how does she handle what can often be a contentious area of law?

“I am the quintessential middle child,” she said. “I’m not going to start the fight, but I won’t back down either. My approach is to try to resolve things for people. It’s less of a strain on them financially and less of a strain on their children if we can work it out.”

Shutts did not anticipate she would end up in family law. She started at Whitfield as a clerk while attending Drake Law School, and then started full time when she graduated in 1996.

“I went to law school because I wanted to work for the county attorney’s office. But I started working at

Whitfield the summer after my first year of law school because it was an actual paying job. I really liked the people a lot,” she said. “Then I second-chaired a custody trial during an internship at Iowa Legal Aid and I thought, ‘Wow, I could do this.’ I could help people, but also be intellectually challenged, in family law.”

Family law was also a way to have her own files and clients right from the start.

“I wanted to be in the courtroom and handle my own cases. I didn’t want to research and write for the next four years before even taking a deposition. It was a way for me to have client contact right away,” she said.

Shutts knew she would become a lawyer at about nine years old. “My mom would say I was argumentative. I don’t think that’s true, but I always questioned the ‘why?’ I had a strong sense of justice about what was or wasn’t right,” she said.

That sense of right and wrong has most recently led Shutts to focus on diversity and inclusiveness issues. She is spearheading the ISBA’s plans for a Centralized Diversity Initiative – which she hopes will eventually lead to financing a full-time employee focused on diversity efforts in the legal profession.

“We have first formed a committee to decide how to set up that entity and how to fund it. I hope that by the time I end my presidency, we can announce this has been created,” she said.

She also plans to spend her presidency promoting participation in the Young Lawyers Division Diversity Pledge (more info at [iowabar.org/diversitypledge](http://iowabar.org/diversitypledge)). Diversity and inclusivity efforts are very personal to Shutts. Her husband is black, and her children are biracial.



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## Q&A WITH ANJIE SHUTTS

### What is your number one goal during your year as president?

"One word to talk about my goal is outreach – to lawyers, making sure we are encouraging membership; to the underrepresented, to encourage diversity and recruitment and retention of diverse lawyers; and to the public, to promote access to justice."

### Who is your mentor?

"I owe a lot to Maureen Tobin. She is the reason I'm at Whitfield to begin with. Her nanny and my sister were good friends. Her nanny got me an invitation to dinner at her house and we hit it off. She had just gone back to work after having her third child and had just made partner. I had not been exposed to female lawyers before, so I asked her a lot of questions. I asked her about the balance or if she felt overwhelmed. What I learned by watching her and the diverse group of female attorneys at Whitfield is that there is no right or wrong way to navigate being a female attorney. What works for one may not work for someone else. You have to find your own path."

### What has been your most meaningful volunteer activity?

"I was involved in the steering committee when Kids First in Cedar Rapids wanted to expand to Des Moines. I was involved in raising the money to open that. Then I became really involved as it evolved into a separate organization called the Iowa Center for Children's Justice. It was not an easy thing to make that transition, especially during a pandemic, but I felt very fortunate to be alongside people who felt just as strongly as I did that that organization needed to continue."

### Why do you enjoy serving as a bar association leader?

"I have found being involved in bar association activities to be a huge professional challenge. Some of the times I have been challenged the most have been in those leadership roles. It is hard leading a bunch of lawyers. I'm also an extrovert. I like meeting people and learning about them and their practice and making those connections."

### What do you do to relax?

"I love to read. Even in law school, with all the reading you do, I would read at night. I read fiction; nothing too heavy. It's a nice way to unwind my day."

"Having two parents who are lawyers, it is very natural for us to talk to our kids about current events issues," she said. "But the events of last summer with the murder of George Floyd really woke my children up to an interest in social justice. They go to a very diverse school, which we wanted, so they are exposed to all the ways you can exist in the world."

It is also important to Shutts that her children travel the world and experience different cultures. Kitundu's father was originally from Tanzania, Africa and retired there, so the family made regular visits as the kids were growing up.

"Travel is really important to us," she said. "It's not something I did as a kid. We are fortunate we have gotten to go to these places and the kids have had those experiences."

Travel and soccer go hand in hand for Shutts and her family. They have a goal of attending a game in every single major league soccer stadium in the world. They even got to witness the U.S. women win the World Cup in France in 2019.

Both of her girls are big into soccer and hope to play in college. Shutts secretly hopes they attend Luther College, her alma mater, which she remains very connected to – currently serving on its Board of Regents. She played softball while she was an undergraduate student there. The college awarded Shutts their Distinguished Service Award in 2018, one of many accolades Shutts has received over the years which also include receiving the Willie Stevenson Glanton Award, Supreme Court Voice of Justice Award, Polk Co. Bar Award of Merit, recognition in the Des Moines Business Record Forty Under 40 list and the Des Moines Register's "15 people to watch."

But it is not about the accolades or recognition for Shutts. She simply wants to keep giving back.

"I feel very fortunate I have a law degree and could become a lawyer," she said. "I don't come from a family of lawyers. My parents didn't go to college. So, I feel I have been given a gift and I want to use that to the best of my ability. That's why I stay so involved."



Shutts' family is pictured outside the first pediatric hospital in Tanzania. Her mother-in-law, Mary Ellen Kitundu, was a nurse and helped open this hospital. The maternity ward is named after her.



Shutts' family pictured in Belgium in June 2019.