

TRANSCRIPT: **LISA TANNER** **INTERVIEW**

Mrs. Lisa Tanner · Texas Assistant Attorney General

TRANSCRIPT

An interview with Mrs. Lisa Tanner, Texas Assistant Attorney General. Tanner is a 1987 graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

This video was posted November 20, 2014 on the Tyrus R. Timm Registry YouTube Channel.

Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career?

My name is Lisa Tanner. I graduated from Texas A&M in 1987 with a degree in Agricultural Economics. After graduation, I went on to law school. I didn't really know what kind of law I wanted to practice initially, but I knew I wanted to probably be in the courtroom. I had been very active in FFA in high school and in fact came to A&M on an FFA scholarship. I really enjoyed the leadership activities, the parliamentary procedure, the extemporaneous speaking, and things like that, and that led me to the courtroom. When I was in my second year of law school, I began to realize that what I really wanted to do was be a prosecutor. I was intrigued by the fact that a prosecutor's only job is to seek justice—not to obtain convictions and not to win but to seek justice and that seemed to fit nicely with the Aggie Code of Honor that had been instilled in me here at Texas A&M.

When I graduated from law school in 1991, I came back to Aggieland, and I went to work at the Brazos County District Attorney's office. I prosecuted felony offences, major felony—serious offences for three years. It was a wonderful start to my career and a wonderful job opportunity, and after I had been here just short of three years, an opportunity came up in Austin at the attorney general's office in the prosecutor assistance division. I accepted that opportunity and moved to Austin at that point. I began to have to learn to live with burnt orange which was quite different, and I have been in the attorney general's office ever since. I am still in the criminal prosecutions in the prosecutor assistance division where I handle cases all over the state of Texas whenever a district attorney cannot handle a case, whether he has a conflict of interest and needs someone to come in and take over his role or if he needs particular assistance if for instance he is a small town district attorney, and he has a big, major case that is particularly complex, he calls us in, and we can assist. I primarily handle forensic cases. I was very fortunate early in my career here in Brazos county to handle one of the very first DNA cases that ever came up. I had to learn forensic DNA at that point which was daunting since I had not taken chemistry at Texas A&M, but I did, and have been able to be involved in DNA and forensic work ever since, and that is an area that I am very involved in. I have sort of morphed over from that, and my niche is that I handle a lot—of pretty much all of the cold cases that come into our office. For instance, I just finished a trial this past year from a capitol murder case that occurred in 1975. I have one upcoming from 1976. I have handled several from the 1980s, and so my career has been pretty much seeking justice for the victims who have been violated in the worst ways imaginable.

Could you tell us a little about your experiences at Texas A&M?

My experiences at Texas A&M were just wonderful. I was here in the mid to late 80s, so for football purposes those were the halcyon days for the football team. I was involved in college FFA for a time here at A&M. I was in the Agricultural Economics Department starting my second year of my freshman year. I actually started here in the Agricultural Education Department as realized that that wasn't gonna be a good fit and transferred over. I was one of those students that didn't have a lot of money, so I had to work throughout my college career here and I drove one of the campus buses for the last three years for all of my freshman year here which actually was a wonderful job, but I was very fortunate that I had chosen a degree plan that allowed me to fairly easily transition into a pre-law path. I found agricultural economics to be great because it was a solid business degree, but there was also a tremendous amount of free elective hours that were permitted. That allowed me to take courses in political science, sociology, and psychology and all of those other pre-law kind of things, and so I found it to be the perfect degree path and such a wonderful camaraderie within the ag eco department that moving over to law school was an easy, easy transition.

Can you describe your early career?

My early career was with the Brazos County DA's office. I handled—I went in. I started about two days after I took the bar exam. I had just a third year bar card at the time, so I wasn't a licensed lawyer, and everything I had to do, I had to do with a supervisor for several months until I got my license. I just tried every case I could try, and it didn't take too long before I started getting to handle some pretty, pretty big offences. One of the most exciting things about my early career was while I was at the DA's office in Bryan, two different occasions I had Ag Eco[nomics] professors end up on my juries. That was awfully

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daunting to have one of your former professors and someone you respect that much on a jury, but it turned out well, and it was a true honor.

What advice do you have for students of Agricultural Economics?

The advice I would have for students of Agricultural Economics are that you have chosen a degree path that allows you to go on all kinds of different directions, and I am certainly a testament to that based on what I have done with my Agricultural Economics degree and to explore all of your options. You don't need to be shoe-horned into any particular area, and if you find something that you have a passion for, go for it, and explore all your options every chance you get because there really are a lot of neat things you can do with your degree.

How were you able to manage time for family, work, and other priorities throughout your career?

I think the most important thing in managing your time is realizing that your career isn't everything, that your job isn't everything, that family is important, that personal time is important, that friends are important, that hobbies are important, and make time for those things. In my career, what I do is can be very, very stressful, very, very exhausting, and very, very time consuming. It's necessary to just take time out and just "Today I'm not gonna be a lawyer. Today I'm gonna be a member of the family, or I'm gonna be a person, or I'm gonna be a person who goes out and does this different thing," and take time for yourself. I think that is one of the most important things you can do. And like I said the most important thing is to—one of the many things is to have interests outside of your job. One of the best things for me is when I've just finished a horribly tragic case and an exhausting trial, you'll find me out in my garden just gardening my heart away to get it all out. I think whatever it is for someone, find that passion, and follow up on it.

In your opinion, what does it take to achieve success?

In my opinion, to achieve success the most important thing I think is to have integrity and to always follow your ethics. It's easy not to do. It's easy to take the shortcut or to take the easy way, but the most important thing is to always, always, always do the thing that seems to be the right thing to do, and by right I mean the ethical or moral thing to do. Obviously to achieve success, you have to have goals, and you have to have drive, but I would say the most is to maintain your integrity.

What are your thoughts on being selected to the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry?

When I was notified that I was selected for the honor registry, my first thought was that I was—it was unexpected, and it was quite a surprise, and it was a tremendous honor. I am humbled not just by the selection process but by looking at the biographies of all the other people that are in the registry, the successes that they have achieved, and it is just an amazing honor, and I'm very, very proud and as I said very humbled.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I would like to thank the—not just the College of Agriculture but the Department of Agricultural Economics for giving me a great education and a great springboard to do a lot of really neat, wonderful things with my career and to get to know some amazing people and thank this registry for selecting me to be a part of it.

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