

# Appointment of Judge John Catsanos SC to the District Court of New South Wales

**Helen Wall**  
Henry Parkes Chambers

On 5 August 2024, John Catsanos SC was sworn in as a judge of the District Court of New South Wales. The ceremony was attended by the Hon Chief Justice Bell, President Ward, Chief Judge Justice Huggett, the Attorney General of New South Wales and other members of the judiciary. Also in attendance were his Honour’s wife, Ruby, their children, Christian and Clementine, his mother, Merrelyn, and his sister, Melissa.

The Court heard that his Honour grew up in Newtown, the son of Chris (now deceased), who came to Australia from Greece in the mid-1950s, and Merrelyn, a fifth-generation Australian. His Honour paid tribute to his parents, who worked hard to provide him with opportunities they never had. His Honour was educated at Newtown Primary School and Fort Street High School. He had a deep love of sport, including rugby league, cricket, soccer and karate. His Honour also had a love of music that, as the Attorney General noted, included the music of his hero, Bruce ‘the Boss’ Springsteen.

His Honour revealed in his speech that his childhood ambition was simple: to play first grade football for Newtown. However, as time passed, his Honour looked further afield and developed an interest in law, eventually attending the University of Sydney Law School in Phillip Street. There, his Honour made close friendships that have lasted for over 40 years.

In 1987, his Honour was called to the Bar and practised from First Floor University Chambers on Phillip Street, eventually moving to the Seventh Floor of those chambers. In 1996, his Honour joined Henry Parkes Chambers and remained there until his appointment to the District Court. His Honour spoke warmly of his long-time clerk, Mark Dalley, and his fellow floor members.

His Honour also paid tribute to his two pupil masters, the late Peter Dent QC and



the late Peter Seery, who themselves had both sat as judges of the District Court.

His Honour’s practice at the Bar was initially broad before focusing on the areas of public liability, industrial accidents, motor accidents and professional negligence. His Honour took silk in 2019.

The speakers referred to his Honour’s skills in cross-examination. However, his Honour, in his customary self-deprecating way, recounted humorous stories of cross-examination and court appearances in his early days at the Bar that did not always go according to plan.

His Honour’s remarks during his swearing-in ceremony demonstrated his strong sense of family, his deep gratitude to his mother for all the sacrifices she had made, and his regret that his late father, Chris, was not able to observe his elevation to the Bench. His Honour spoke of his father being a larger-than-life character with an

indomitable spirit, who was proud of his family and worked very hard to provide for them. His Honour spoke with great pride of his children and thanked his wife for all her support over the years.

His Honour expressed gratitude for the assistance that all his professional colleagues had given him throughout his time at the Bar, in particular his instructing solicitors and fellow barristers.

His Honour concluded his remarks with typical commitment to his position by expressing his pride in his appointment and a commitment that he will do his best to live up to the standards of the Court and the fine judges whose ranks he now joins.

With his Honour’s experience, knowledge and professionalism, the District Court has gained a humane, fair and learned judge whose appointment to the Court will be a significant contribution to the administration of justice in New South Wales. **BN**