

By Rochelle Olson, Star Tribune

Last update: November 29, 2010 - 4:49 PM

Having covered trials in Hennepin County District Court for three years now, I consider myself a connoisseur of litigation and lawyers.

I would pay admission to hear these two in their meticulous verbal eviscerations of hostile witnesses.

Assistant Hennepin County Attorney Judy Johnston handles many of the high-profile murders and sex crime cases against children. In 2007, Johnston successfully prosecuted Eugene Fort for killing 11-year-old Marcus Potts in his Minneapolis bedroom in 1990. She's leading the sexual-assault prosecutions of former Park Police Capt. William Jacobs and Wayzata businessman William Wanner.

When she is questioning a vulnerable child, her tone is calm, almost soothing. But her cross-examinations are withering. With deadly precision, she inserts and twists the verbal knife into a hostile witness before the target realizes he's been wounded. She is the master of the understated slap. I have seen her make the words "thank you" sting.

Assistant Hennepin County Attorney Andy LeFevre, head of the gang unit, also brings a subtle but brass-knuckled style to trial. He fills a courtroom with a combination of politesse and understated machismo.

LeFevre isn't a trial-by-fireworks lawyer. He

methodically entangles defendants into deadly webs of facts.

In civil cases, Donald Chance Mark Jr. is the man. He slips into a courtroom rather than fills it. His endless preparation devastates opposing witnesses. Earlier this year, Chance Mark roasted University of Minnesota athletic director Joel Maturi and basketball coach Tubby Smith to a point that even the audience felt the discomfort. When one of the men squirmed out of a direct response, Chance Mark shot back with a cool, "And the answer to my question is what?"

He won a \$1.25 million jury verdict for former Gophers assistant basketball Coach Jimmy Williams, who claimed Maturi and Smith unfairly rescinded a job offer.

Rochelle Olson • 612-673-1747

