



Shirley Fulton, photo
courtesy Tin Fulton
Walker & Owen

Judge Shirley Fulton, NC Superior Court, retired

When **Judge Fulton** breaks a barrier, she always holds the door open for others. At 16, she left her family's farm in Kingstree SC to enter college at NC Central. When she graduated from Duke University Law School, she was recruited to be Mecklenburg County's first African American female prosecutor. One of her earliest cases was the shoot-out at Fairview Homes between Money Rock and Big Lou. Dressed in jeans and sneakers, she tackled the hard task of interviewing witnesses in a housing project way too burdened by crime.

Shirley left the DA's office to sit on the bench for over 20 years. In 1988, when she became the first black female on the Superior Court bench in North Carolina, she remarked she would have preferred not to have broken the barrier. "It made me feel shame for society that we had come that far, and we were just getting Black females in the role." While on the bench, Shirley led the courts in developing a system-wide strategic plan, successfully campaigned for bonds to build the current Mecklenburg County Courthouse, and developed programs to address the needs of non-English speaking court participants.

Along the way, she served on numerous boards, led the Bar Association, successfully battled breast cancer, got an MBA at Queens, converted a duplex in Wesley Heights into her single family home, organized a group of inner city neighborhoods and lovingly restored the Wadsworth House into a conference and event center for Charlotte's Westside. In typical understatement she noted, "I guess a lot of things fell into place for me," "But sometimes I had to push them into place."