



A Tribute TO JUDGE JOHN W. DARRAH

*By Jim Dvorak**

The Honorable John W. Darrah of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois passed away on March 23, 2017, following a tough-fought battle with a yearlong illness. Jack, as his friends and family called him, was a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and an outstanding lawyer and jurist.

Judge Darrah was born on December 11, 1938, on Chicago's Southside. He graduated from Mount Carmel High School and received his degree in philosophy from Loyola University. In 1969, Judge Darrah graduated from the Loyola University Chicago School of Law. Following graduation, Judge Darrah served as an attorney advisor at the Federal Trade Commission from 1969 through 1971. From 1971 through 1973, Judge Darrah served as a deputy public defender in DuPage County, Illinois.

Judge Darrah then went into private practice from 1976 through 1986. He broke from private practice between 1973 and 1976, during which time he served as a DuPage County Assistant State's Attorney. In 1986, he was elected a Circuit Court Judge in DuPage County, Illinois. On May 11, 2000, he was nominated by President William J. Clinton to succeed Judge George M. Marovich on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Illinois. His nomination was confirmed by the United States Senate on June 30, 2000; and he received his commission on July 14, 2000. Judge Darrah served as an active member of the court until he took senior status on March 1, 2017. Judge Darrah continued as a senior judge until his death.

Judge Darrah was a member of the faculty of the National Institute for Trial Advocacy. He also was the founder and former Co-Chairman of the DuPage County Bar Association Trial Advocacy Workshop and was awarded the DuPage County Bar Association Board of Directors Award. He was also a member of the American Judicature Society, Federal Judges Association, Federal Circuit Bar Association, Assembly of the Illinois State Bar Association, Past President of the DuPage County Bar Association, Past President

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**James Dvorak currently serves as the Supervising Staff Attorney for the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and served as Judge John W. Darrah's elbow clerk for eight years in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.*



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of DuPage American Inns of Court, and Past President of the DuPage County Legal Aid Society.

Judge Darrah was an Adjunct Professor of law at Northern Illinois University College of Law from 1976 to 2006. He taught Criminal Law, Property, Trial Advocacy, Agency/Partnership, Future Interests, Illinois Civil Procedure, Administrative Law, Real Estate Transactions, Evidence, Constitutional Law, Consumer Protection, Advanced Criminal Procedure, and Unfair Trade Practice. In addition, he coached the NIU National Moot Court Competition and received the NIU Professor of the Year Award in 1992 and 1995. More recently, Judge Darrah taught Accelerated Trial Advocacy and Trial Lawyer-Evidence at The John Marshall Law School.

Judge Darrah was admired and loved by those who knew him and worked with him. He treated his staff with the utmost respect and valued their opinions. Judge Darrah treated his staff as though they were part of his family. He always showed genuine interest in his staff's life outside of the courtroom and supported his staff in any manner that he could.

He was well respected by counsel who appeared before him, and he treated counsel with respect as well. He also treated the *pro se* parties who appeared before him with respect and compassion. He acknowledged that they were often not well versed in the law but, nonetheless, were engaged in their right to file a lawsuit to try to remedy a wrong they believed they had experienced. He always treated the *pro se* parties with compassion and patience. His compassion also showed through at sentencings; where he would often comment that sentencing a defendant was one of the most difficult tasks he had to perform.

Judge Darrah was dedicated to the administration of justice and worked meticulously to ensure fair and impartial decisions. He took seriously every matter before him, whether small or large, simple or complex and strived to ensure that he made proper, well-reasoned and just decisions. He loved the practice of law and readily delved into a party's argument, carefully analyzing the facts and the law. Judge Darrah was always a dedicated and devoted student of the law. For him, practicing and teaching the law were not simply his chosen professions, they too, were also his passions. He was a non-judgmental, compassionate man who always reveled and took great delight in witnessing the success

and joy of others. He took particular delight and pleasure in watching others grow and succeed in their professions and personal lives. The lawyers who practiced before Judge Darrah are better lawyers after doing so, as are those who were lucky enough to have him as a professor and those who served as one of his law clerks or externs.

Some of Judge Darrah's higher profile cases included: *Nilssen v. Osram Sylvania Inc.*, 01 CV 3585, a patent-infringement lawsuit in which Judge Darrah found that Nilssen's inequitable conduct rendered eleven patents unenforceable; *USA v. McCaffrey*, 02 CR 591, sentencing a former priest to the maximum term of imprisonment for possession of child pornography; *Cancer Treatment Centers of America, Inc. v. USA*, 03 CV 2958, litigation arising from the airplane crash and resulting death of Chicago radio host, Bob Collins; *Fox v. Sheriff of Will County*, 04 CV 7309, civil lawsuit arising from the wrongful arrest and prosecution of a father for murder of his daughter; *USA v. Klein*, 11 CR 401, ex-prison chaplain admitted to conspiring with convicted Chicago Outfit hit man Frank Calabrese Sr. to recover a supposedly rare 18th century Stradivarius violin said to be hidden in the mobster's vacation home; and *Friends of the Parks v. Chicago Park District*, 14 CV 9096, litigation stemming from the previously planned George Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Chicago, Illinois.

The importance of family was one of Judge Darrah's cornerstones. He is survived by his wife Jeannine, three daughters, two sons, three stepdaughters, two stepsons, nineteen grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He glowed when he spoke about his family, and his love and devotion to Jeannine was obvious. He took pride in his children and stepchildren and cherished every moment he was able to spend with his family. Thanksgiving and Christmas were two of Judge Darrah's favorite holidays because he knew that he would be surrounded by family.

Judge Darrah was an avid Chicago White Sox fan and tried to attend as many games as he could. His yearly Crosstown Classic event was enjoyed by family, friends, and colleagues. He was also an avid fisherman – be it a bi-yearly fishing trip with the guys or a last-minute trip to the lake.

A memorial service was held for Judge Darrah on June 22, 2017. Those who filled the James Benton Parsons Memorial Courtroom at the Northern District of Illinois Courthouse heard remarks from over a dozen, varied speakers who paid tribute to a man who had such an impact on their personal and professional lives. He was remembered as a 12-year-old catcher in Southside sandlot games, a young law student who supported his growing family by working in a pipe yard by day while attending school at night, a dedicated lawyer, a devoted father, a sage grandfather, an inspirational teacher, a public servant, a mentor, and a friend. His life was a life well lived. All who knew him, loved him. We will all miss him.