
What Becomes a Legend Most?

FBA Presents Jurisprudence Award to Local Legend Hon. Johanna L. Fitzpatrick

by Yvonne C. McGhee, FBA Executive Director



The Fairfax Bench has always been the source of envy, pride and legends. Judge Johanna L. Fitzpatrick's exemplary career is one of the main factors in creating our legend, so it should come as no surprise that the Fairfax Bar honored her upon the occasion of her retirement as Chief Judge on the Virginia Court of Appeals with its highest accolade: the FBA Jurisprudence Award.

On the evening of November 27, 2007, approximately 360 lawyers, friends, and family of Fitzpatrick gathered to pay tribute to this distinguished jurist. "We are very pleased to have the opportunity to honor Judge Fitzpatrick and appreciate all of the members of the bench and bar who attended the event," noted Steve W. Ray, FBA President.

The event began with presentations from other associations. Fairfax J&DR District Court Chief Judge Teena D. Grodner presented Fitzpatrick an award on behalf of the Virginia Association of Women Judges and Mary Catherine H. Gibbs was the spokesperson for the Virginia Women Attorneys Association, Northern Virginia Chapter. The presence of these two groups highlighted the significant role Fitzpatrick has played for women in the law and on the bench.

Other notable legends of the Fairfax bench were on hand to recall and celebrate Fitzpatrick's career. The "benign roast" began on a high note when Moderator Chief Judge Michael P. McWeeny of the Circuit Court took to the podium with his unique mix of humor and sincerity that gave the attendees an affectionate overview of Judge Fitzpatrick's service on the Fairfax Circuit Court Bench.

Following McWeeny was Chief Judge Richard J. Jamborsky (Ret.), another peer of Fitzpatrick during her

term on the Fairfax Circuit Court Bench. Jamborsky related Fitzpatrick's labeling him as her "babysitter" in her judicial screening interview to counter queries on her ability to juggle her role on the bench with the needs of her small children. Fitzpatrick's dynamic sense of humor was a recurring theme throughout the evening.

Virginia Supreme Court Justice Barbara M. Keenan, a 1995 recipient of the Jurisprudence Award, rounded out the legends of Fairfax assembled to honor one of their own. Keenan reminded the attendees of the early years she shared with Fitzpatrick when the Fairfax bar was much smaller overall, and infinitely smaller for women. The two became fast friends and shared a rich history as they both rose to lead the way for women in the legal community within the Commonwealth.

The keynote speaker was Governor Timothy M. Kaine. Kaine was introduced and brought to the podium by colleague Paul Ferguson. Kaine, who spoke without any notes, shared his unique perspective on women on the bench from his marriage to the Hon. Anne Holton, a Richmond J&DR Judge who resigned once her husband became Governor. Kaine expressed his support of the independence of the judiciary in Virginia. Acknowledging his awareness of the Fitzpatrick legend, Kaine revealed to the honoree and the attendees that he had been advised by a highly regarded peer that if he wanted to have a top-notch ticket in Virginia, he would select Fitzpatrick as his running mate for the position of Attorney General!

Fitzpatrick provided a rebuttal to the friendly roast, returning affectionate and benign jabs to her peers. Regarding the event, Fitzpatrick confided to the crowd that her only choice for keynote speaker was Gov. Kaine,

and she was elated that he was able to join us on this occasion. Fitzpatrick was surrounded by her family as well as her many bar friends and colleagues as FBA President Steven W. Ray presented the FBA's Jurisprudence Award.

The "Jurisprudence Award," affectionately called the "Giants of Justice" award, is the highest honor bestowed by the Fairfax Bar Association recognizing exceptional contributions to our legal system. A singular honor, it is not presented annually, but only upon such occasions as the FBA may find a fitting an appropriate candidate. Judge Fitzpatrick joins ranks with a select group of prior recipients: the late William G. Plummer (1991), former judge of the 19th Judicial Circuit; Justice Barbara Milano Keenan (1995) of the Supreme Court of Virginia; famed Richmond civil rights attorney Oliver White Hill (1996); Senator Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr. (2001); Honorable Harry L. Carrico (2003), Senior Chief Justice, Virginia Supreme Court; and most recently Judge Rosemarie Annunziata (2005), Court of Appeals of Virginia.

Judge Johanna L. Fitzpatrick has been a dominant figure on the Virginia legal landscape. Judge Fitzpatrick has been a member of the Court of Appeals of Virginia since September 3, 1992, and was elected by the Court to be its Chief Judge in 1997. From 1982-1992 she served as a Circuit Court Judge for the 19th Judicial Circuit and was a Judge on the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court from 1980-1982.

Carol Schrier Polak, FBA Past President stated: "Fitzpatrick embodies the spirit of the Jurisprudence Award. She was honored for her work not only as a Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court, Circuit Court and Court of Appeals jurist, but also as a major contributor to community activities."

Fitzpatrick continues to actively participate in her community. Over the past several years, she has given over 150 speeches and educational presentations. Additionally, she taught Trial Advocacy at the University of Virginia Law School. Judge Fitzpatrick has been active in the ABA as a member of its Standards Committee and Chaired the White Paper on "Youth in the Criminal Justice System: Guidelines for Policy Makers and Practitioners." She was the 2004 Chair of the Education Committee of the Council of Chief Judges of State Courts of Appeals, is a founding member of the Board of Directors of the National Center for Family Law, and has served on numerous legislative and state bar committees, state and federal judicial committees, including the Judicial Council of Virginia, the State-

Federal Judicial Council, and the Judicial Performance Evaluation Project.

In addition to the FBA's Giants of Justice Award, Judge Fitzpatrick has garnered many accolades for her service, having been named the Virginia Women of Achievement in Government, the Outstanding Woman Attorney of the Year in Virginia, and Woman of the Year by the Fairfax Commission on Women, The Virginia Women's Attorney's Association, and a Fellow of the Virginia Bar Association. ■



The Fairfax Bar would like to thank the Task Force that planned the 2006 Jurisprudence Award Dinner honoring Chief Judge Fitzpatrick:

- R. Mark Dare
- Paul Ferguson
- Sandra S. Marchenko
- Steven W. Ray
- Carol Schrier Polak

The Fairfax Bar also thanks the following law firms for their generous sponsorships to defray the costs of this event:

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