



Judge V. Franklin

November 29, 2011

Robert V. Franklin, Jr., 85, a retired judge of Lucas County Common Pleas Court who during his decades in the judiciary remained a volunteer leader in community and civic organizations, died Tuesday in Mercy St. Anne Hospital. He had been in declining health, his son Gary said.

Judge Franklin of South Toledo was a former president of the Toledo branch of the NAACP and was an officer at the state level.

He was active for years in the Old Newsboys Goodfellow Association. In a 1971 biographical sketch he submitted to The Blade, he said he was a board member for 25 organizations and institutions. He had been a trustee of Morehouse College in Atlanta, his alma mater, and was chairman emeritus of the Boule Foundation of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity Inc.

Volunteering despite other responsibilities "was based in his upbringing from his mother, his Christian upbringing," his son said, "and the admonition to give back to your fellow man, that you just don't go out and get what you can for yourself. You're part of the community and should act accordingly."

Judge Franklin was the fourth black in Ohio to become a judge when Gov. Michael V. DiSalle appointed him in 1960 to the Toledo Municipal Court bench. He was elected in 1968 to a new Common Pleas Court judgeship and was re-elected in 1974 and 1980. He was the first minority-race member of either bench. When he retired at the end of 1985, he told The Blade he hoped his service helped other minorities in their careers.

"I am just so indebted to the contributions he made that opened doors to me,"

said Charles Doneghy, who is African-American and who followed Judge Franklin on the Municipal Court bench, retiring in December, 2010, as a Common Pleas Court judge. "He was an outstanding jurist. He had a lot of firsts."

Judge Franklin was generous with his counsel when Judge Doneghy was appointed to the Common Pleas Court bench. But Judge Doneghy's education began years earlier, when he was a county assistant prosecutor. "You learned he ran a very strict courtroom," Judge Doneghy said. "That standard made you well prepared when you worked in his courtroom."

Judge Franklin was firm, fair, and consistent, said Alan Konop, a defense lawyer. "I thought he treated people with a great deal of courtesy," Mr. Konop said. "He thought very deeply about what he should do in terms of sentencing, and his rulings during a trial. He was a man of great integrity."

In retirement, Judge Franklin sat regularly, by appointment of the Ohio Supreme Court, as a visiting judge in courts around the state. For a time in the 1990s, he monitored and coordinated lawsuits filed in Lucas County Common Pleas Court that alleged harm by asbestos.

"I keep busy -- busier than I really should," Judge Franklin told *The Blade* in 1996 as he was honored at the Thurgood Marshall Law Association scholarship dinner. "But it turns out to be very rewarding." The late Thomas Moyer, chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, said then, "If every judge were like Judge Franklin, we wouldn't have any worries about the judicial system."

Judge Franklin was a 1987 recipient of the Distinguished Toledo Attorney from the University of Toledo Law Alumni Association and the 1987 Order of the Heel from the Toledo Junior Bar Association. He was a former president of the Ohio Common Pleas Judges Association.

He was personable -- an "everyday kind of person," Judge Doneghy said -- and in demand as a public speaker.

"Bob was a wonderful speaker," Judge Doneghy said. "His speeches were well prepared, and he had a beautiful sense of humor. It was refreshing, and

he had his stock of jokes he knew quite well."

A Toledo native, he was a graduate of Scott High School and Morehouse College, Atlanta, where Martin Luther King, Jr., was in the class a year behind him. He was a graduate of the University of Toledo law school. He was an Army sergeant in the Korean War. He returned from his service to a law practice with J. Slater Gibson and William N. Thomas. He was a former Toledo city prosecutor and a former assistant city law director.

A former Defiance College trustee, he was appointed in 1988 by Gov. Richard Celeste to a nine-year term on the UT board of trustees.

His son Jeffery died in 2006.

Surviving are his wife, Kathryn, whom he married Aug. 3, 1952, son Gary, and sister, Marie Evans.

Visitation will be from 3-6 p.m. Sunday in the Dale-Riggs Funeral Home.

Services will be at 11 a.m. Monday in Third Baptist Church, where visitation will begin at 10 a.m.

The family suggests tributes to the Boule Foundation of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity Inc., the Morehouse College Scholarship Fund, and Third Baptist Church building fund.

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Tribute Wall

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“ Judge Franklin was a mentor to many of us young Toledo trial lawyers in the 1960's and 1970's. I was privileged to learn much from him during my years as a law student, when he first came to Common Pleas Court in 1968. He had a quiet but effective presence in his courtroom. His soft chuckle, so often heard, was contagious, but he did not need to raise his voice when he wanted to be emphatic. He was considerate of all litigants, judicious in his legal rulings, attentive to complex civil issues and a true credit to our entire Toledo community. Judge Franklin commended Jas. Slater Gibson for the 1981 UT Distinguished Alumni Award in words which also applied to himself: "He is an innovator in the field of law and a pioneer in developing new approaches to difficult legal problems. For many years, he has received, earned and enjoyed the respect of the entire bench and bar of this state..."

Tom Pletz - December 08, 2011 at 05:18 PM

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“ Thank you for all you have done over many years for the citizens of Toledo. We have lost a great citizen, leader and judge. May you rest in peace.

Mark Schreiner - December 04, 2011 at 04:15 PM

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“ The Coleman family wishes to extend condolences to Kathryn and Marie at this difficult time. We thank him for his commitment to public service. We will forever appreciate Judge Franklin's enduring friendship. Respectfully Submitted, John & Joan Coleman Dr. Linda (Coleman) Carter & Family Jeffrey Coleman & Family Mayor Michael B. Coleman, Columbus, OH

Mayor Coleman, Cols. - December 03, 2011 at 06:35 PM