ILLINOIS JUDGES ASSOCIATION

THE GAVEL

SPECIAL EDITION SPRING 2026 Hon. Celia Gamrath, Editor

The Gavel is a periodical designed to inform, engage, and connect members of the Illinois Judges Association.

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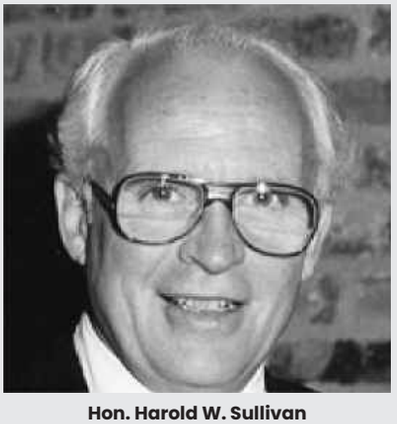
55 Years and Counting for the IJA

This special edition of *The Gavel* celebrates the legacy, leadership, and enduring mission of the IJA. It contains a history diligently researched and thoughtfully compiled by IJA member and retired judge Al Swanson.

(See page 2)



Hon. Harold W. Sullivan

Remembering Harold

by Hon. Gino L. Divito

From the Illinois State Bar Association's Bench & Bar newsletter, May 2010. Reprinted with the permission of the ISBA.

THE ILLINOIS JUDGES ASSOCIATION (IJA) and he were synonymous. He assisted in its birth. He was its key strategist. He was the center of its activities. He had the institutional memory concerning all of its efforts. He was IJA's heart and soul.

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The Illinois Judges Association: 55 Years Working for Illinois Judges and Illinois Courts

by Hon. Alfred Swanson (ret.)

From the beginning, the Illinois Judges Association (IJA) has strived to unify the judges, strengthen the judicial system in Illinois, and improve the lives of judges professionally on the bench and personally off the bench.

Harold Sullivan - IJA founder:
Judge Harold Sullivan was never president of the IJA. Instead, he served several terms on the Board of Directors. While leaders came and went, the one constant of the IJA in its early years was Harold Sullivan. For many, he was the IJA. Perhaps Judge Sullivan's most lasting contribution to the IJA was his ability to encourage others to take on leadership roles.

One of Judge Sullivan's close friends, Justice Gino DiVito (ret.), told me you couldn't have a lunch or dinner gathering, a meeting, or a phone conversation with Judge Sullivan without discussing the IJA and ways to improve the judiciary and to help judges improve. One of Judge Sullivan's initiatives was a judicial performance evaluation program. He convinced the Supreme Court to establish a voluntary program that is now a required program for trial court judges. The IJA has recognized Judge Sullivan's commitment to judges and the judiciary by naming and funding a scholarship in his honor. In 1990, the IJA awarded its first Lifetime Achievement Award to Judge Sullivan.

IJA leaders have followed several paths in attempting to fulfill Judge Sullivan's vision of maintaining a fair, professional, and independent judiciary. Following those paths has inspired the IJA positions on compensation, judicial pensions, judicial and public education, and community involvement. Another consistent goal has been to support the ability of judges to work in a professional and fulfilling atmosphere.

Unification - one organization, a unified voice for all judges:
Sweeping changes to the Illinois courts came in 1964 as the Illinois court system was unified. The new Illinois Constitution in 1970 brought more significant changes to Illinois courts. Judge Harold Sullivan and several other prominent Illinois judges led the effort to merge the several associations of judges that existed at that time, including the Illinois Associate Judges Association, into a single association. Their goal was to unify the judiciary to match those sweeping legislative and constitutional changes. They formalized the IJA with the merger of the associations in late 1971.

However, the new IJA did not include all judges because its initial bylaws only granted membership to elected judges. Associate judges were appointed by the circuit judges. Nor were the elected justices of the Supreme Court eligible to be members of the IJA. This was not in keeping with the goal of full unification of all judges. Soon after its founding, the IJA bylaws were amended to allow associate judges to become members. In 1985, Hon. Roland J. DeMarco became the first associate judge to be elected

ILLINOIS JUDGES ASSOCIATION

Enjoy the benefits of IJA membership.

Join or renew today

President of the IJA. When Judge Thomas Moran, who had been active in the IJA, became a Supreme Court justice in 1976, he continued his IJA membership. Thereafter, other Supreme Court justices joined the IJA. Five IJA presidents later became justices of the Supreme Court: James D. Heiple, Joseph F. Cunningham, Thomas R. Fitzgerald, Robert L. Carter, and Mary Jane Theis. Three of those justices (Heiple, Fitzgerald, and Theis) also served as Chief Justice. Two IJA presidents have been active members of the Supreme Court during their IJA terms: Justices David Overstreet and Elizabeth Rochford.

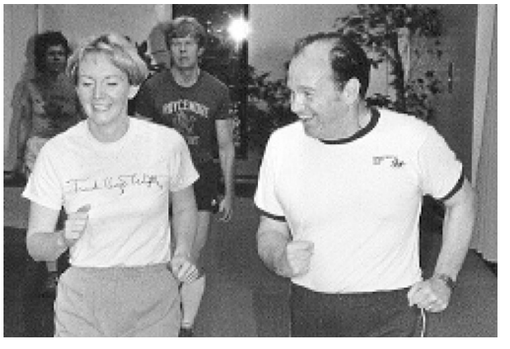
An independent judiciary - with fair compensation for all Illinois judges:

From the beginning, compensation of judges has been a consistent and at times contentious issue facing the IJA and its leaders.

In the early 1970s, there was a significant discrepancy in compensation between downstate judges and the higher paid judges in Cook County. It was a very divisive issue which generated bitter debates within the membership. Downstate judges resented being paid less than their Cook County colleagues. Cook County judges, who were dual employees of the state and county, strongly opposed equalizing compensation, fearing it could lead to the loss of health insurance benefits they received through the county.

Dedicated efforts of IJA Presidents Philip Benefiel (1975) and Joseph Power (1974) accomplished a resolution. They assuaged downstate legislators who had resisted any judicial pay raise and enlisted the political help of Cook County legislators who were sympathetic to increasing judicial pay. In 1974, the General Assembly approved a compromise to remove the pay difference between downstate and Cook County judges. Equalization affected both circuit and associate judges, helping to foster a more unified judiciary and united IJA membership.

However, the judicial compensation issues were far from over. Following pay increases effective July 1, 1975, judicial pay remained stagnant until November 1978 when salaries at all three levels of the judiciary were increased. Judicial salaries then remained unchanged for another four years. But there was a problem.



To put this into proper context, by the early 1980s, the salaries for Illinois judges were among the lowest in the nation for state court judges and drastically lower than judicial pay for federal judges. For example, a federal magistrate judge was earning more per year than an Illinois Supreme Court Justice. Again, IJA leadership faced an escalating problem. Judicial morale was low. Resignations were becoming too common as judges facing college expenses for their children left the bench and returned to private practice to earn more money.

The IJA enlisted the assistance of the Chicago and Illinois State Bar Associations to increase judicial salaries. The combined force of these associations was formidable. They launched a major public relations campaign in the legislature to raise judicial salaries. Those efforts produced in 1990 the single highest judicial salary increase up to that time.

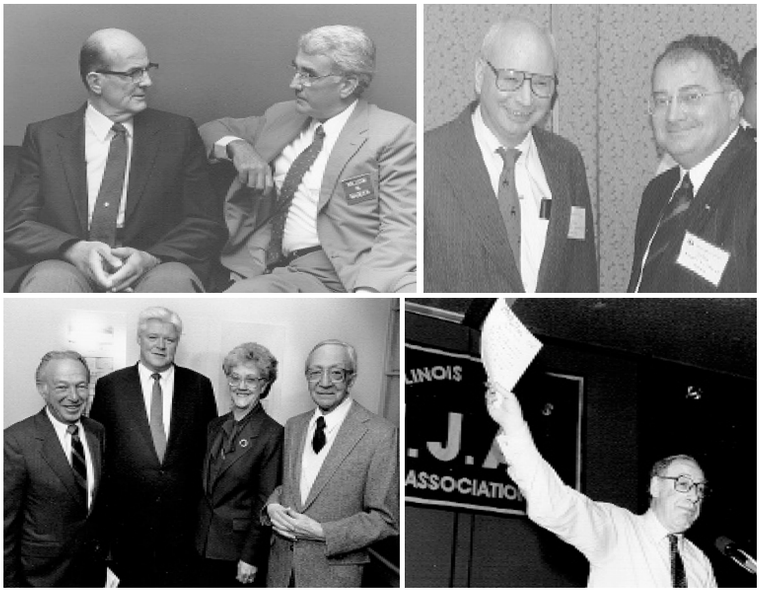
Although these efforts accomplished a pay raise, the judiciary was still not an independent third branch of state government. The legislature rejected a proposal to grant judges an annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) based on the Consumer Price Index. The IJA's goal in pushing for a COLA was to have the judicial branch become independent from the executive and legislative branches. This continued need to ask the legislature and governor every year or two to grant an increase in pay renewed a concern that inflation would soon erode the financial gain and bring back decreasing morale and increasing monetary needs. The proposed solution was a system of objective, periodic salary reviews designed to preserve the quality of justice in Illinois by keeping qualified and experienced judges on the bench.

By this time leaders of the Executive and Legislative branches of government became aware that the lack of competitive government pay was beginning to affect elected and appointed state officials and senior government executives. The compensation issue was no longer only about judicial pay. Other qualified, dedicated, and valued directors of critical state agencies were also resigning because state pay was not competitive with the private sector. A new approach was needed to fairly compensate and therefore retain elected and appointed senior government executives and judges. The IJA, CBA, and ISBA again combined resources in 1984 to support legislation that established an independent Compensation Review Board (CRB) with members appointed by the leaders of both houses of the General Assembly. The law required the CRB to report salary recommendations by January 1, 1985, and by May first of each even numbered year thereafter. However, the legislature continued to control any pay increases as the CRB's salary recommendations would only take effect if one of the houses of the General Assembly approved. Legislative approval of the 1985 and 1986 reports raised judicial pay by more than 25% within 30 months of the start of the new procedure.

The most significant change in determining judicial compensation came in 1990. That year the legislature rejected the CRB's salary recommendation but approved a separate Senate resolution for an annual cost of living adjustment. This meant that judicial compensation was no longer dependent on board recommendations and legislative action, and reaffirmed the independence of the judiciary, a goal long sought by the IJA. Judicial pay increases were now based on an annual cost of living adjustment based on the Consumer Price Index. Approval of the COLA was the single most important step to achieving fair and reasonable salaries for judges freed from dependence on the legislature. The COLA assured that their salaries would be protected against inflation. Equally significant was that the COLA removed the obligation of IJA leadership to seek approval for CRB pay recommendations from the legislature.

An increase in judicial pay came in 1994 under the leadership of then IJA President Gino DiVito. But the battles were not over. The COLA increases proceeded as intended until 2001 when the legislature adopted a bill that prohibited paying the COLA for judges and other covered state officials. As applied to judges, this law violated the provision in the Illinois Constitution that prohibited any diminishment of judicial pay during their term. The IJA helped educate members of the General Assembly to recognize that withholding the COLA was an unconstitutional reduction of judicial salaries. A key component of that education effort was that judges, as members of the third equal branch of Illinois government, were not like any other state

employee in the executive or legislative branches. Keeping the judiciary independent was necessary to maintain a fair and impartial judiciary functioning under the Illinois Constitution. The General Assembly agreed and in the next legislative session passed Senate Bill 100 which directed payment of the FY2003 COLA to judges. However, then Governor Rod Blagojevich vetoed the bill which left filing a lawsuit as the only recourse. While the IJA was not a party, then IJA President Ann Jorgensen and Immediate Past President Stuart Nudelman filed a class action lawsuit in the Circuit Court of Cook County on behalf of all but nine Illinois judges. The suit alleged Governor Blagojevich's actions barring payment of the COLA to judges was unconstitutional. Judge John Madden heard the case, found the law unconstitutional, and entered judgment in favor of the judges. Blagojevich and the state appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court. The Supreme Court affirmed and directed payment of the judges' COLAs for FY2003 and FY2004 to each judge in Illinois. See Jorgensen et al. v. Blagojevich, et al., 211 Ill. 2d 286 (2004).



Despite the Jorgensen decision, compensation-related issues continued. In 2009, the legislature began discussing plans to combine the five separate bodies governing pensions for state employees under one umbrella. To stay abreast of these and other legislative developments, IJA leadership retained a consultant to monitor discussions in the General Assembly that could affect judges and judicial pensions.

In 2010 IJA leaders went to Springfield to address the looming creation of a second tier for judicial compensation and pensions. After no changes were made to the legislation, litigation ensued.

On March 5, 2026, the Illinois Appellate Court rejected a challenge to the Judicial Retirement System's denial of Tier 1 pension benefits to individuals with prior Tier 1 status from other state pension funds who had become judges after December 31, 2010. See Kievlan v. Judges Retirement System of Illinois, et al., 2026 IL App (1st) 250150. The IJA is not a party to the litigation but will continue to monitor developments.

The Evolving IJA - community involvement and education:
Beginning in 1999 and 2000, the IJA began getting more involved in community activities and in education. In 2002, the IJA had its own cable television program, hosted by the IJA president and featuring panels of judges with specific expertise. The goal of the program was to educate the public and foster a positive view of the judiciary and Illinois courts. A focus of these efforts was emphasizing that the courts function independently of the other branches of government. In recent years, advances in technology have increased the public's ability to access information about the courts. Technology has also increased communication between the IJA president and IJA members making it easier for current and retired judges to participate in the work of the various IJA committees.

The IJA has been particularly active in public education and judges being a positive and visible presence in their communities. A very successful program for high school students is "Seven Reasons to Leave the Party," a program geared to educate students about the hazards and consequences of alcohol or drug use. Another initiative, "Courtroom in the Classroom," is a program in which active and

retired judges speak to elementary school students about the courts and the judicial system. This initiative includes providing books and materials for the students and their teachers.

In 2007, the IJA formed the Illinois Judges Foundation (IJF). The IJF is the charitable arm of the IJA that funds educational, civic, and scholarship projects. The goal is to advance the rule of law, the legal profession, the administration of justice, and encourage judicial participation in these endeavors. The IJF also administers the Harold Sullivan scholarship program, which makes grants to deserving students attending Illinois law schools, to transmit ethical values.

IJA - wellness, security, and education on and off the bench:
Another long-standing focus of the IJA has been the welfare of judges both sitting and retired. The Wellness Committee offers frequent seminars via Zoom and in person on physical and emotional health.

The Security Committee explores ways to improve security with a focus on courthouse issues. This Committee also provides information to both active and retired judges to improve their personal security at home, including providing tools and information to protect their personal information in the internet age.

The Education Programing Committee encourages lifelong learning by offering continuing education programs at the IJA/ISBA Mid-Year Meeting in December. These programs explore topics that make judges and lawyers better at their jobs and help them be better people.

Other committees are committed to encouraging judges to participate in pro bono activities that benefit people or groups in their communities as well as educating sitting and retired judges of the ethical rules that may involve those activities. Another provides resources and guidance to judges seeking retention on the bench.

Through a committee of experienced and retired judges the IJA provides guidance to aid a judge who has been subjected to unfair comment or criticism. The committee may ask someone to respond on behalf of the judge and to ways to help a judge deal with and correct any concerns that have resulted in legitimate critical commentary. Another committee informs newly elected or appointed judges on the benefits the IJA provides.

IJA - after retirement:
The Retired Judges Committee offers and encourages judges to continue to be active in the IJA. This committee sponsors a yearly seminar with an update on pensions and insurance benefits. The committee also provides a program with CLE credit for retired judges who choose to remain active in the practice of law. These and other committees facilitate the IJA in doing the work necessary to remain a visible voice for judges and the judiciary.

From its humble beginnings, the IJA has been a voice for Illinois judges in keeping their independence as the third branch of Illinois government. It has worked to improve the professional and personal lives of judges at all levels of service. In its first 55 years, IJA leadership and members have worked to raise the standing of judges and the judiciary in our communities and to enhance the public's view of the courts we serve. The IJA has just begun the continuing effort to carry forward the vision IJA founder Harold Sullivan articulated at the birth of the IJA in 1971.

Hon. Alfred Swanson (ret.)

The author wishes to thank IJA President, Justice Elizabeth Rochford, for suggesting this article. The author also thanks several past IJA presidents, especially Justices Mary Jane Theis (ret.), Ann Jorgensen, and Gino DiVito (ret.), and the chairs of IJA committees who provided insight, information, and materials. In particular, the author also thanks Kevin Forde, the long-time chairman of the Compensation Review Board, and John Lupton, the chair of the Supreme Court's Historic Preservation Commission. The assistance of these people was invaluable.

(Remembering Harold continued from page 1)

Those attributes could apply to only one person: Judge Harold W. Sullivan who, on March 22, 2010, just a month shy of his 84th birthday, ended his earthly journey and began a new one.

Since 1971, one could not be a judge in Illinois without appreciating Harold Sullivan's impact. That was the year in which, with other giants of the judiciary, he co-founded IJA, based on the premise that judges united in a common cause could obtain appropriate benefits for themselves while achieving great benefits for the justice system as well. The premise was valid then and it remains so today.

IJA has a history of uniting judges in seeking and sometimes obtaining fair compensation, including annual cost of living allowances that had to be secured through a difficult legislative process and then had to be reclaimed through court proceedings that ended favorably in the supreme court. IJA has secured pension benefits that provide retired judges and their widowed spouses at least some financial resources during their final years. It is ironic indeed that the General Assembly should reduce pension benefits for future judges over Harold's dead body, two days after his death—when his voice could no longer be raised in protest.

In addition to compensation and pension benefits, IJA was, and is, the go-to entity for judges for insurance benefits, for fairness in disciplinary proceedings, for responses to unfair criticism, and for safeguarding the judicial independence that makes possible the attainment of justice. And right in the middle of all the efforts of IJA—indeed, leading the charge—was Harold Sullivan.

Members of the board of directors, officers, and presidents come and go, but the one constant was Harold. He lived to ensure that IJA would thrive. When it was time to select leaders, he was ready, bolstered by a wide circle of "advisors." A typical phone conversation with him might begin with: "What do you think of Judge X for that spot?" The position referred to as "that spot" might have been an IJA committee chairmanship, membership on the board, an office, the presidency. Every candidate had to be fully vetted. Never occupying the office of president himself, he preferred working to ensure that worthy judges attained that position. He observed. He listened. He remembered. He looked for and, with input from others, he found leaders. Leaders among leaders. All for the benefit of IJA—for the judges. All for the benefit of the justice system—for the people.

You could not have a discussion with Harold—on the phone, at a meeting, over a meal—without his steering the conversation to something of concern to judges. He would rail about "what 'those guys' [usually meaning legislators, or the news media, or members of the Judicial Inquiry Board] were doing to us." Or he would pontificate about "what 'those guys' should be doing for us." Discussions were never one-sided. He invited input. Yes, he had his viewpoint, and it was passionately presented. But he genuinely wanted to know the thoughts of others about every issue. And, after there was consensus about a goal or a problem, there had to be agreement on how to address it; there had to be agreement on the strategy for resolution.

There were countless discussions, one-on-one or in innumerable meetings, that proceeded in the same

fashion: identification of the issue; consultation with, and inclusion of, others in addressing it; agreement on the solution; and strategizing on achieving the goal. This is how dedicated judges, frequently involving non-judges as allies, strived to reach articulated goals. That is how Harold animated the leaders that he carefully assembled. In that fashion—through "Harold's method"—he got results.

In the struggle, it was important to involve others. There are limits to what judges can do on their own. We needed allies. We needed to let others know what was important to us. We needed to inspire others to action. And we needed to know what was important to those who worked with us. In short, we needed to work collaboratively. All of which explains Harold's passion for working with the organized bar. All of which explains why he served on ISBA's Board of Governors for six years and, when he was termed off the Board, why he enlisted me to replace him and, when I was termed off after six years, why he returned to the Board. It was simple: share with your allies your needs and desires and learn theirs, and then work jointly to achieve each other's goals. Harold and I shared 18 years of ISBA Board membership, and that's what we did. That's how the joint conventions of IJA and ISBA came into being, as the very manifestation of cooperation. Since then, others who are passionate about addressing the interests of judges and those of the bar have carried on the tradition—the tradition of applying Harold's method.

The same process had been followed with the Chicago Bar Association. Harold served on the CBA Board of Directors for a two-year term starting in 1972, a year after co-founding IJA and during a period when it was not fashionable for judges to be actively involved in bar association governance. His successor on that Board was Gene Wachowski, another judicial legend, a co-founder of IJA, and its first president. The pattern of cooperation with the organized bar was set during IJA's infancy. From that time, IJA has focused on having not just a freelance judge on the CBA Board, but one who would collaborate to attain its goals—one who cares about the interests of judges, of lawyers, of the people, of the justice system.

Judicial discipline was another focus for Harold. Through him, IJA leaders had regular and formal dialogue with the Judicial Inquiry Board. The goal was not to obstruct required discipline, but to ensure that judges received due process. IJA succeeded, and judges facing disciplinary proceedings today are the beneficiaries of his efforts. Harold saw, too, that sometimes disciplinary proceedings were initiated in matters where ethical requirements were uncertain. His solution: the creation, with the cooperation of ISBA and CBA, of the Joint Judicial Ethics Committee. Finally, judges had, and continue to have, a place where questions related to judicial ethics could be addressed.

Judicial Performance Evaluation, now embodied in Illinois Supreme Court Rule 58, was Harold's brainchild and is a perfect example of the application of Harold's method. It came about because he felt that judges needed both mentoring and feedback about their performance on the bench—mentoring and feedback that would occur before retention-related bar evaluations, and that would have a positive impact both on judicial performance and on such evaluations. He knew that positive reports from lawyers would provide incentive for judges to continue good practices, especially when it was rare to receive prompt and favorable feedback; and he knew that negative reports would provide an opportunity for conscientious judges to acknowledge the unacceptability of poor performance and try to make necessary corrections. It was as simple as that.

After he convinced the supreme court of the merits of his plan for performance evaluation, but before the court adopted a rule related to it, he went about the task of implementation. He first enlisted administrators and faculty at Loyola University to gather reports from lawyers about individual judges and, for comparison purposes, about other judges presiding over the same type of cases. He told them what the reports needed to address, and then left it to them to assemble usable and credible reports for evaluation purposes. Then, in typical fashion, he assembled those that he knew would be appropriate facilitators for the evaluation process. Those persons, judges and non-judges, once informed of the concept and the processes to be followed, became stakeholders. They

were trained to facilitate the evaluations—to encourage best practices, and to work to repair negative performance, with follow-up meetings if necessary, while always upholding confidentiality.
The evaluation processes that Harold put in place in those early years continue today. The goal is well stated by the supreme court in its rule on the subject: "There shall be a program of judicial performance evaluation for the purpose of achieving excellence in the performance of individual judges and the improvement of the judiciary as a whole." Illinois Supreme Court Rule 58(c). "Achieving excellence," or at least striving to do so, was Harold's lifetime passion.

Harold's method was not restricted solely to achieving the goals of IJA. It was his modus operandi, the method he used to achieve all his goals. For all the years that he was the presiding judge of the circuit court of Cook County's 2nd Municipal District, he used the same procedures with the judges he supervised: regular monthly meetings; assignments to research and discuss with colleagues relevant substantive and procedural issues; inclusion and consultation; and obtaining consensus about best courtroom practices.

When he began work on the design of the new courthouse scheduled to be built in Skokie, he involved others in his construction plans. He discussed with trial lawyers and trial judges the location of jury boxes, witness stands, counsel tables. He wanted the courtrooms to be user friendly—for everyone. And he focused on important details. The fact that there were tennis courts near the building that was to be the "house that Harold built," did not escape his attention. An avid tennis player who lived across the street from public tennis courts, he invited me to experience the courts in a spirited tennis match before construction of the courthouse began—to ensure that they would be acceptable for lunchtime play. It is not by happenstance that the presiding judge's restroom in Municipal District 2 is equipped with a shower.

Skiing was another passion of Harold. His two favorite mountains were Vail and Steamboat Springs. Although I shared his love for Steamboat, where one of my brothers lived for some time and where all three of my daughters learned to ski more than 30 years ago, we never skied it together, merely sharing stories about our experiences there. But we managed to get together a number of times on the vast and magnificent slopes of Vail. Just as in other matters, I heeded his call to "follow me," as he led me down break-neck, double-black-diamond runs. He knew that skiing was a great metaphor for life in many ways, but he knew particularly—despite his goal-driven nature—that the goal of skiing is not to get to the top or the bottom of the mountain, but just to ski, just to enjoy it with loved ones, just to enjoy the journey. He truly enjoyed the journey.

The father of 12 and grandfather of 40, Harold spent a lot of time with his offspring, enjoying the journey on tennis courts, golf courses, and snow-packed mountains. At his funeral mass, it was said that, in his almost-60 years of marriage to his beloved Mildred, they never had an argument—because he knew that she was always right. This was a man, "called to the service of others" in the words of Jim, his last-born, who, while jogging his "maintenance mile" on his way to daily mass a short distance from his home, would pick up his neighbors' newspapers at the end of their driveways and place them near their front doors. This was a man who knew how to build community, who truly worked at serving others.

IJA has recognized Harold's accomplishments in many ways. Among them was the naming of the scholarship awarded to a different Illinois law school each year as the Judge Harold W. Sullivan Scholarship. That scholarship award, given in Harold's name by IJA for many years and indicative of his commitment to the legal profession and the judiciary, is now funded and will continue to be given in his name by the Illinois Judges Foundation. In 1990, IJA presented Harold its first Lifetime Achievement Award. To say that it was a fitting honor would be a gross understatement.

For many years, starting well before he retired from the bench in 1999, Harold met with selected judicial colleagues, active and retired, for monthly lunches at Roditys Restaurant in Greektown, an accessible location because of its proximity to the Loop and to the Kennedy Expressway. Before his retirement, he would

choose a date for the luncheon and send invitations from his office. After his retirement, he asked me to take over the responsibility of sending the invitations. I enjoyed doing so because, when he called me each month, two or three weeks before his targeted date, I was able to ensure that the date we selected was a date on which I could attend. Soon after taking over the task, I began referring to the event as the "Sullivan Invitational Luncheon."

Not surprisingly, the luncheons followed the same pattern as every meeting with Harold: his steering the conversation and leading us in passionate terms about what "they" were doing to, or should be doing for, judges. In recent times, however, due to assaults on his physical and mental health, the tenor of the luncheons changed. To be sure, the group still talked about the same familiar topics, now related to current events, but Harold no longer led the discussions. He became a passive participant, a listener. Nevertheless, it was interesting to witness the familiar fervor from the attendees—from the leaders that Harold had cultivated.

Something else was different. We no longer planned a specific action, because everyone knew that a different and younger generation of IJA leaders was in charge and would do the right things—after all, they too were subjected to Harold's influence. Indeed, the retired and active judges who attended, some of whom have passed on, did so not for a cause, but out of a sense of camaraderie driven by genuine affection for Harold, and because it was good to be in the company of a giant, even a diminished one.

On April 27, 2010, we will meet again, on Harold's 84th birthday—just as we did for his 83rd and almost every month for so many years. This time our focus will be to reminisce about our departed friend. Sure, we'll discuss current and relevant issues. And we'll have to decide whether we will continue to meet for the Sullivan Invitational. I believe I know what the group's decision will be. It will be to do what Harold would have wanted.

Gino DiVito was a beloved retired circuit and appellate court judge and former president of IJA. He passed away on April 20, 2026.

Presidents of the IJA

1972	Eugene L. Wachowski*
1973	John Massieon*
1974	Joseph A. Power*
1975	Philip B. Benefiel*
1976	Charles P. Horan*
1977	John A. Krause*
1978	Richard J. Fitzgerald*
1979	James D. Heiple *
1980	Jerome C. Slad*
1981	Joseph F. Cunningham*
1982	David J. Shields *
1983	John P. Shonkwiler*
1984	Anthony J. Scotillo*
1985	Roland J. DeMarco*
1986	Mel R. Jiganti
1987	Tobias Barry*
1988	Rosemary D. LaPorta*
1989	Horace L. Calvo*
1990	Thomas R. Fitzgerald*
1991	Richard P. Goldenhersh
1992	Sophia H. Hall
1993	Jack Hoogasian*
1994	Gino L. DiVito*
1995	Robert L. Carter
1996	Harvey Schwartz*
1997	William G. Schwartz
1998	Mary Jane Theis
1999	Timothy J. Slavin
2000	Patrick E. McGann
2001	Stephen C. Mathers
2002	Stuart A. Nudelman
2003	Ann B. Jorgensen
2004	John O. Steele
2005	James M. Wexstten
2006	Jesse G. Reyes
2007	Mark A. Schuering
2008	James R. Epstein
2009	Ronald D. Spears
2010	Lewis M. Nixon
2011	M. Carol Pope
2012	Rita M. Novak
2013	Mary S. Schostok
2014	Michael B. Hyman
2015	Robert J. Anderson
2016	Israel A. Desierto
2017	John P. Coady
2018	James E. Snyder
2019	Margaret Mullen
2020	Diane Shelley
2021	Barbra Crowder
2022	Eileen O'Neil Burke
2023	David Overstreet
2024	Mary Colleen Roberts
2025	Elizabeth Rochford

*deceased

Honoring the Life and Legacy of Justice Gino L. DiVito (ret.)

by Hon. Celia Gamrath

We offer this tribute to Justice Gino L. DiVito (ret.), who died in April and whose life's work stands as a model of excellence, service, and enduring contributions to the IJA and the legal community.

In the words of Illinois Supreme Court Justice and IJA president Elizabeth Rochford, "There are some immutable truths: the sun always rises in the east; our earth is round; and everyone loves Gino DiVito!"

Gino L. DiVito's career spans more than six decades of service to the law: as prosecutor, judge, educator, reformer, mediator, and appellate advocate. Licensed in 1963, he tried more than a hundred felony jury cases as a Cook County assistant State's Attorney, created the Felony Review Unit, and ultimately led the Criminal Division, supervising more than 330 attorneys. In 1977, he joined the judiciary, serving twelve years as a trial judge and eight years on the Illinois Appellate Court, where he became a presiding justice and a member of the court's Executive Committee. As IJA president, he secured fair pay for Illinois judges. Since retiring from the bench in 1997, he has built a distinguished practice in complex civil and appellate litigation with Tabet, DiVito & Rothstein, and has been repeatedly recognized as a Super Lawyer and Leading Lawyer.

Justice DiVito's contributions extend far beyond the courtroom. He played a central role in some of the most consequential reforms in Illinois law. He co-chaired the CLEAR Commission, whose comprehensive revisions to the Criminal Code and Unified Code of Corrections were enacted almost unanimously by the General Assembly. As inaugural chairman of the Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, he helped shape statewide sentencing policy for more than a decade. He served on the Special Supreme Court Committee on Illinois Evidence, whose work produced the Illinois Rules of Evidence in 2011, and he authored the widely used color-coded evidence guide relied upon by judges, lawyers, and law students across the state. In January, at the spry age of 88, Justice DiVito authored a scholarly article in the Illinois Bar Journal on other crimes evidence, underscoring that his intellectual rigor and commitment to the law remain undiminished.

A gifted teacher, mentor, and friend, Justice DiVito spent more than 35 years on Loyola University Chicago's adjunct faculty, leading its Advanced Trial Advocacy program and teaching generations of lawyers and judges. He has taught at the National Judicial College, the Illinois Judicial Conference, NITA, IICLE, and law schools across the country. His expertise has also been sought in high-stakes matters, including his 176-page investigative report as special assistant State's Attorney in the Ford Heights Four case, which helped expose wrongful convictions and systemic failures.

Justice DiVito's service to the profession is matched only by the recognition he has received: the Loyola Medal of Excellence, the Illinois Judges Foundation's Judicial Icon Award, induction into the ISBA Academy of Illinois Lawyers, the Leonardo da Vinci Award for Excellence in Jurisprudence, and numerous honors

from bar associations and civic organizations. Through it all, he has remained grounded in the Jesuit values that shaped him as a person committed to justice, integrity, and the betterment of the legal system and society in general. His legacy is felt in the courtroom, the classroom, the law books, and the countless lawyers and judges he has mentored along the way. I am honored and blessed to be one of them.

I can attest how Justice DiVito's love of family, love of the law, warmth, and generosity of spirit set him apart. He gave freely of his time, knowledge, and encouragement, and made opportunities happen for young lawyers, especially if they were Italian Americans. He took great pride in his Italian heritage, often sharing that pride in ways that brought people together and reminded us of the importance of community and tradition. He was effortlessly affable, with a big genuine smile that lit up the room, and many of us stand where we are today because he saw potential in us before we saw it in ourselves.

Justice DiVito's legacy lives on in every lawyer he taught, every judicial opinion he wrote, the law firm that bears his name, his extraordinary wife Rita of 50 years, their three accomplished daughters, and loving grandchildren. We are better advocates, better stewards of justice, and a stronger IJA, because of Justice DiVito. And for that, we are profoundly grateful.

Justice Celia Gamrath is the editor of *The Gavel* and a member of the Illinois Judges Association Board of Directors.

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