

## ROBERT J. CURNAN

### IOWA JUDGES ASSOCIATION MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

The judges of the First Judicial District mark with sadness and grief the passing of the Honorable Robert J. Curnan. "Bob," as he was known to his colleagues, passed away on January 24, 2018.

Robert Curnan was born on December 5, 1938, in Davenport, son of Clem and Vera Curnan. He married Judy Meyer on August 19, 1961, in Macomb, Illinois. They stayed married for over 56 years.

Judge Curnan graduated from Coe College in 1961 and from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1964. He began the practice of law joining the O'Connor, Thomas law firm in 1965. Bob continued in private practice, and beginning in 1972, was elected and served eight years as the Dubuque County Attorney. In 1980 he was appointed to the District Court bench by Governor Robert Ray, where he served for 30 years, the longest serving Dubuque County District Court Judge to date.

Judge Curnan brought a well-balanced and extensive career in private practice to the bench. He was widely respected throughout the entire judicial district by attorneys and judges alike. Among his judicial traits were a broad-based knowledge of the law and an outstanding judicial temperament. He was highly skilled but flexible in his approach; he was fair-minded but decisive; he was patient but firm.

One of Bob's favorite stories was how he returned from lunch one day to find a team of Chicago lawyers looking over the afternoon schedule. "What's going on, fellas?" Bob asked amiably, as he came upon them. One of the lawyers said "Oh we're just here for a motion with some judge who has his head up his (use your imagination.)" Unfortunately for the lawyers, Bob was the judge they had come to see. "Well, good luck," Bob replied cheerfully as he walked off toward his chambers. When

he entered the courtroom in his robe moments later and called the case, the offending lawyer's face fell. After whispering with his colleagues, he asked Bob to recuse himself. "Why?" Bob replied. "Because of the comments in the hall, which I apologize for." "What comments were those?" Bob asked, forcing the lawyer to state on the record exactly what he had said, and knowing that he already had a colleague standing in his chambers ready to step in for him. With a suppressed grin and his head squarely on his shoulders (as opposed to anywhere else), Bob granted the motion and stepped aside, lest anyone think he ruled based on anything other than the merits.

The Iowa Code of Judicial Conduct states that a judge is to perform his judicial duties competently. This was never a concern with Judge Curnan. Attorneys always assumed, and rightly so, that his ability as a judge was well above the level of competency. Judge Curnan had the legal ability to be on top of every legal issue, regardless of its complexity.

Judge Curnan was an advocate for trial judges throughout the state when he saw what he perceived as a lack of fairness to the judiciary, even if it meant ruffling some feathers along the way. He was also an advocate for judges in more personal ways. For example, when a group of students would appear at one of the courtrooms for a tour, Judge Curnan would always jump at the opportunity to give them an informal lecture about the judicial system. He would sit on the bench and his first question would always be: "Do any of you know why judges wear black robes?" From that point on, he had their undivided attention.

Judge Curnan was a member of the Iowa Judges Association and the Dubuque County and Iowa State Bar Associations.

As a member of the community, Bob served as President of the Dubuque Noon Lions Club and was also one of the founding members of Thunder Hills Golf and Country Club, where he served on various boards and committees. Bob and Judy were devout members of their local church.

Bob's personal life reflected his friendly, outgoing personality. He and Judy were very active socially and enjoyed numerous close friendships, both within and outside the Thunder Hills Community. Bob was a highly competitive golfer who regularly braved the elements in the late fall to complete one more round before closure of the course. The annual Summer Judges' Conference was one of Bob's favorite places to enjoy a good round. Many years back, this caught the notice of his friend and colleague, Judge Alan Pearson, who asked him "What do you think the Chief Justice would say about you skipping out of the afternoon CLE to go golfing?" Without missing a beat, Bob replied "If I'd known you were interested, I could have asked. He was in the cart next to me."

Bob also enjoyed card games, particularly hearts and bridge, with his friends on a regular basis. His card sense was unmatched. At any social gathering, his friends were guaranteed of being treated to one more of his Ole and Lena jokes. Bob's sports passion was without question the Minnesota Vikings. Vikings' games were always watched and recorded and, depending on the outcome, viewed more than once. He was known to willingly place a friendly wager on any NFL game. Most importantly, Bob was always an attentive and devoted husband, father, and grandfather. He will be missed by many, forgotten by few.