

Bench & Bar

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Bench & Bar Section

The Longest Serving Illinois Judge Retires

BY HON. ALFRED SWANSON (RET.)

Judge A. Andreas Matoesian retired July 1, 2019, as a circuit court judge in Madison County. Normally the retirement of a judge is not worth an article. But, for Judge Matoesian—Andy to his friends and colleagues—this retirement is noteworthy. Judge Matoesian entered judicial service on November 19, 1965, and served in Madison and Bond counties until his retirement. That is 53 years, 225 days as an active judge. The longest tenure of any active judge in Illinois.

When we spoke briefly on the phone, Judge Matoesian said simply: “I don’t grant interviews.” So, details on Judge Matoesian’s judicial career come from his wife, Julie; his daughter, Jane; and some of his many friends and colleagues. All told me that response was typical Andy Matoesian.

His father was a barber. Judge Matoesian went to barber college, got his license, and started cutting hair as a

Continued on next page

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1

Recent Appointments and Retirements

1

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1. Pursuant to its Constitutional authority, the supreme court has appointed the following to be circuit judge:

- Hon. Douglas E. Lee, 15th Circuit, July 9, 2019
- Hon. Mark R. Gerhardt, 22nd Circuit, 4th Subcircuit, July 15, 2019
- Jody P. Gleason, 23rd Circuit, July 15, 2019
- Teresa Molina, Cook County Circuit, July 24, 2019

• Patricia M. Fallon Cook County Circuit, 12th Subcircuit, July 26, 2019

2. Pursuant to its Constitutional authority, the supreme court has assigned the following judge to the appellate court:

- Hon. Mary Ellen Coghlan, Appellate Court, First District, July 30, 2019

3. The circuit judges have appointed the following to be associate judges:

- Theresa M. Friel Draper, 15th

Circuit, July 30, 2019

- Elaine L. LeChien, 20th Circuit, July 31, 2019

4. The following judges have retired:

- Hon. A. A. Matoesian, 3rd Circuit, July 1, 2019
- Hon. Joyce Marie Murphy Gorman, Cook County Circuit, July 1, 2019
- Hon. Mark R. Stanley, 2nd Circuit, July 1, 2019

Continued on page 3

The Longest Serving Illinois Judge Retires

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

teenager. Then it was off to college at the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University. He received his J.D. from Washington University School of Law in 1964, was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1965, and practiced briefly in East St. Louis. As Justice Thomas Welch recalls, he and Andy thought they were interviewing for the same job as a magistrate judge in Madison County. To the surprise of both, there were two positions and they were both hired and sworn in the same day. That was November 19, 1965. Justice Welch, however, is not close to Judge Matoesian's tenure because he resigned as a magistrate to enter law practice and become states attorney before being elected to the Fourth District Appellate Court in 1980 where he still sits.

Judge Matoesian served as a magistrate until the Illinois Constitution of 1970 abolished the position and all magistrates who wanted to stay in judicial service became associate judges. He served Madison County as an associate judge until he was elected circuit judge in the third circuit in 1980, a position he held for nearly 39 years until he retired on July 1st.

Judge Matoesian's daughter, Jane, recalls that her father presided over virtually every type of case—from civil to criminal, family to probate. In his tenure on the criminal bench, she told me that her father presided over several death penalty, and many other criminal and civil cases.

Perhaps the most notable criminal trial was the Paula Sims murder case, which was tried in Peoria instead of Madison County because of the pretrial publicity. Mrs. Sims was accused of killing her two daughters in separate incidents a few years apart when the girls were only a few weeks old. Jane Matoesian told me her father never discussed the specifics of this or any case, whether he thought defendant was guilty or not. But, she told me he did discuss the process. She recalled her father taking her and her sister to the courthouse to observe cases. She told me he related one thing that happened with jury selection

in the Sims case. Almost everyone in the first panel tried mightily to get out of jury service. When the second panel of jurors was brought into the courtroom, she said, her father decided to give a civics lesson. He told them about the jury system in the United States, that every defendant has a right to a jury trial, and the importance of jury service to the court system. After that lesson, he told her only a couple of jurors tried to get out of service. Jane Matoesian said what her father appreciated most about being a Judge “was the opportunity to serve the people in a judicial system that doesn't exist in many other countries.”

A former colleague and attorney who tried several cases before Judge Matoesian, Edward Moorman, told me the judge was always appropriate in court, but as an individual he was relaxed and with a good sense of humor. Sometimes that humor carried over into his Madison County courtroom. Don Weber, who prosecuted the Sims case, said sometimes lawyers would prank judge Matoesian. “We would make faces at him while he was on the bench. When he could no longer control his laughter, he would bend down and pretend to tie his shoe although he was laughing all the time.”

Another friend and frequent lunch companion of Judge Matoesian is Steve Selby who related the Saturday morning “court security” meetings the judge would periodically call to take place at his home. That “security meeting” was actually when judge Matoesian took the participants to his basement where he had all the tools and would give haircuts. Moorman related the time Judge Matoesian had let his barber's license lapse and he had to study and take a new exam to regain his license. Moorman recalled that Judge Matoesian studied very hard and passed the exam. But, he also recalled that Judge Matoesian told him he was more nervous about retaking the barber's test than he was taking the bar exam.

Selby and others all agreed that Judge Matoesian was a very fair trial judge.

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OFFICE

ILLINOIS BAR CENTER
424 S. SECOND STREET
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62701
PHONES: 217-525-1760 OR 800-252-8908
WWW.ISBA.ORG

EDITORS

Evan Bruno
Edward M. Casmere

PUBLICATIONS MANAGER

Sara Anderson
✉ sanderson@isba.org

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They agreed that the judge had no problem handing out a stiff sentence when that was warranted. But, there was also a lighter side to Judge Matoesian. Selby recounted that when handling adoption cases he would sometimes bring the child onto his lap and let the child see the courtroom from that perspective to provide the child with a good feeling about judges and the judicial process.

Besides being a licensed barber, Judge Matoesian was an excellent wood turner. His daughter, Jane, told me her father frequently arose at 4:30 in the morning to go into his workshop and work for a couple of hours where he made gavels, pens, bottle stoppers, and key chains that he gave to people. Many judges, including this author, received gavels soon after they were sworn in. Moorman told me Judge Matoesian gave gavels to almost every judge in the 3d Circuit, the fifth district appellate court, some supreme court justices, to court visitors from other countries who came to Madison County to learn about the American judicial system, and to scores of other people. He gave ink pens to jurors in cases in his courtroom. Jane

described the pens as being fashioned out of wood with a hole lengthwise that would hold a Bic pen that could be removed and replaced with another pen when the ink ran out. Judge Matoesian was strictly a wood-turner. Weber told me the judge did not do flatwork because “he considered that less of a challenge.”

Chief Justice Lloyd Karmeier described Judge Matoesian as “a very nice individual, caring, always diligent in his work, always interested in how other people are doing, an all-around good guy.” Chief Judge William Mudge of the third circuit told me Judge Matoesian will be missed because he had experience in every type of case and because he is a people person.

Judge Matoesian is a man of many talents. As his daughter, Jane, told me what her father enjoyed most was being a judge in “a beautiful system.” A. Andreas Matoesian, now retired after nearly 54 continuous years on the bench. ■

This article was previously published in the summer 2019 editions of the Illinois Judges Association publication, The Gavel.



A gavel made by Judge Matoesian.

Recent Appointments and Retirements

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

- Hon. Paul L. Mangieri, 9th Circuit, July 3, 2019
- Hon. Larry Axelrod, Cook County Circuit, 9th Circuit, July 4, 2019
- Hon. Charles Clayton Cavaness, Associate Judge, 1st Circuit, July 8, 2019
- Hon. Daniel J. Fish, 15th Circuit, July 8, 2019
- Hon. Timothy J. McCann, 23rd Circuit, July 10, 2019
- Hon. Sharon Prather, 22nd Circuit, July 12, 2019
- Hon. Adam Bourgeois, Jr., Cook County Circuit, July 15, 2019
- Hon. Mary Anne Mason, Circuit Judge Assigned to the 1st District, Appellate Court, July 26, 2019
- Hon. Stuart P. Katz, Associate Judge, Cook County, July 31, 2019
- Hon. Mary Katherine Moran, Associate Judge, 16th Circuit, July 31, 2019
- Hon. Thomas D. Roti, Cook County Circuit, July 31, 2019
- Hon. Esteban F. Sanchez, Associate Judge, 7th Circuit, July 31, 2019 ■