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The Delaware Judiciary mourns the passing of retired Court of Common Pleas Judge Merrill C. Trader

The Delaware Judiciary mourns the passing of retired Judge Merrill C. Trader on October 10, 2024. Judge Trader, 92, was appointed in 1972 to the Court of Common Pleas, where he served three consecutive terms before retiring from the bench in 2009.

“Judge Trader left an indelible mark on the court. Even now, 15 years since his retirement, the court still follows practices implemented by Judge Trader,” said Court of Common Pleas Chief Judge Carl C. Danberg. “The Court of Common Pleas is honored to count Judge Trader among its own.”

During his 36 years on the bench, Judge Trader developed a reputation as a strong jurist who worked tirelessly, prepared carefully, and was the consummate professional, and he demanded nothing less from the attorneys who appeared before him. “Judge Trader was very direct, sometimes feared, and always respected for his knowledge of the law and his ability to push attorneys to resolve their cases in a way that was fair to the parties, the defendants, and the victims,” said Court of Common Pleas Judge Anne E. Hartnett.

Judge Trader was also remembered as a thoughtful mentor, a quality which led to him being named judge of the year for outstanding judicial service. “One thing I valued the most was that he was a mentor to all of us. It was like I had a legal encyclopedia in the office right next to me,” said retired Judge Charles W. Welch, III.

Judge Trader also devoted much of his time and efforts to improving the functions of the Court of Common Pleas. Retired Chief Judge Alex J. Smalls recalled Judge Trader was “committed to excellence in terms of management and improvement of the court. He was dedicated to moving from paper to partially electronic systems, and he embraced the idea of bringing on commissioners.” Judge Smalls also noted that Judge Trader “made sure everyone who was brought before the court felt heard.”

After earning a degree from Western Maryland College in 1954 and graduating from Washington and Lee Law School in 1958, Judge Trader worked in private practice before pursuing a career in state service. Prior to joining the Court of Common Pleas, he served as Assistant Deputy Attorney General from 1963 until 1969, and as a Master in Family Court from 1969 until he was elevated to Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in 1972. In all, he served the citizens of the state for more than 40 years.

The Delaware Judiciary’s thoughts are with Judge Trader’s family, friends, and those who had the opportunity to work alongside him during his decades-long service to the state.