

**Memorial Resolution of the Allen County Bar
Association for the Honorable William C. Lee
June 3, 2024**

WHEREAS, we meet today to honor and pay our respects to the memory of our colleague, mentor, and friend, William C. Lee who passed on January 20, 2024, at the age of 85; and

WHEREAS, Judge Lee treasured his family and was preceded in death by his wife, Judith, and his son, Mark, and is survived by his daughter, Catherine, son Richard, and granddaughters Katie and Carly; and

WHEREAS, this occasion allows us to recount, acknowledge, and celebrate Judge Lee's contributions to his community, the Nation, and the law, we do so in the following manner:

The building in which we are gathered was relatively new when William C. Lee (known to his friends and colleagues as "Bill") was born on February 2, 1938, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the only child of Russell and Catherine Lee. Bill was the paternal grandson of a teamster -- whose last job, Bill would proudly recall, was delivering steel for the construction of the Lincoln Tower -- and who in his spare time read the complete works of Shakespeare. When Bill was three his mother died. By the time he was seven, he was living with his widowed, maternal grandmother, Caroline Zwick whom everyone called "Lena," and who at age sixty-four was still working for a local dressmaker. Bill lived there until he was married.

Thus it can be said that Bill's family was, as most were in those days, of modest means. Which is to say, at least on the face of it, Bill's early prospects surely could not have included any of the learned professions. Put another way, the likely horizons for such a boy did not extend to the federal courthouse on Harrison Street.

Bill, however, was a confident lad who possessed a powerful intellect, and this challenging combination was recognized early in grade school. As a result, he skipped a grade and ended up in a fourth-grade classroom occupied by his future wife, Judy Bash. For both, it was fortuitous. They ultimately married on September 19, 1959, and it was a loving and supportive partnership until Judy's death on July 4, 2019.

But first, there was school. Bill graduated from Northside High School and then attended Yale University and the University of Chicago Law School on full scholarships. With such a resume, Bill could have gone anywhere but both duty and destiny drew him and Judy back to Fort Wayne in 1962 where his prospects were not particularly bright. After all, he had no powerful friends or family and the timing was bad. As Bill would later remember, Fort Wayne's economy had still not fully recovered from the Great Depression. Yet, Bill was undaunted, so he hung out a shingle, shared office space with some other lawyers, and proceeded to climb the sometimes slippery rungs of the legal profession ladder.

Before long he was recognized as an up-and-comer which led to his appointment as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for Allen County and then Chief Deputy. It was a remarkable rise for a

young man still relatively new to the profession but a testament to Bill's formidable and growing legal skills. A man with that much talent deserved a bigger stage and in 1970, having just turned 32, he became United States Attorney for the Northern District of Indiana. During his three years there he is best known for resurrecting a dormant statute which led to the aggressive, and successful pursuit of water polluters including US Steel and DuPont Steel in Hammond, Indiana. As a result, the Izaak Walton League awarded him its national conservation award in 1972.

Faced now, however, with the responsibilities of a young family, Bill returned to private practice and took his legal skills and talent to the prominent law firm that ultimately became Hunt, Suedoff, Borrer, Eilbacher, and Lee. It was a happy and profitable interlude until public service once again beckoned. By now Bill was a fully mature lawyer with a reputation for winning tough cases. He could have easily said no, but Bill saw a position on the United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana as a call to duty. Others saw it as destiny, one of those too-few instances when the man and the moment meet.

On July 28, 1981, Bill was President Reagan's first judicial appointment to the federal bench serving on the United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana from August 19, 1981, until his death. Between 1997 and 2003, he was the Court's Chief Judge and on February 3, 2003, he achieved senior status. Thereafter, and until he died, Bill remained a contributing member of the District Court.

While on the bench, Bill was a visionary, something rare in a profession guided by, if not chained to precedents, traditions, and rules. He saw the role of the judge as an instrument for improving the administration of justice. This led to his implementation of a formal process of court-sponsored Alternative Dispute Resolution that ultimately became the model for the entire state. He also devised an effective form of "rocket docket" that was hailed as revolutionary. And, at a time when computerization was relatively new, Bill was both a pioneer and an advocate for the use of courtroom technology to make trial presentations more effective and efficient. It was no wonder then that Bill was asked to serve as one of the authors of a treatise entitled, *Federal Jury Practice and Instructions*, now in its sixth printing. Bill had done and seen it all.

This is not to say that Bill eschewed the fundamental day-to-day work of a judge. Far from it. As someone who had seen something of life's economic vagaries, Bill took the oath of the district court judge, to "do equal right to the poor and to the rich" as a serious injunction. Everyone was to be heard, everyone was allowed to state their case and everyone was to receive a respectful audience and careful consideration when entrusting their most important concerns to the American system of justice. He did not see himself as sitting in a limestone palace imperiously pronouncing revealed truths to lesser mortals. Rather, Bill stood here at the intersection where the Rule of Law meets the sometimes rough tug-and-pull of American society. The judicial system's integrity was at stake every day, and Bill was its faithful guardian.

Up to this point, the reader of this document might conclude that Bill was utterly consumed by the demands of the law. That person would be mistaken. Bill was a Renaissance man. He could talk intelligently about Muhammed Ali's boxing techniques, baseball's infield fly rule, or stock market investing, and then switch to the deeper meaning behind various Shakespearean plays, or the soothing nature of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5.

Bill would often say that a judge needed to be seen as a part of their community. A cynic might say in that respect he overdid it a tad. Let us highlight a few of Bill's extra-judicial activities. He served on multiple boards, including the Fort Wayne Ballet and the Fort Wayne Philharmonic. He enjoyed performing in local theater stage plays and musicals. He was active in the Trinity English Lutheran church, singing in the choir for 35 years, coaching basketball, and writing the church history. He was president of the Allen County Historical Society for two terms and a regular sponsor of their events. In 2005, he was co-chair of the book committee that produced a two-volume *History of Fort Wayne and Allen County, Indiana*. The list could have been much longer.

Today we have honored Judge William C. Lee by recounting just a few of his many tangible accomplishments. But what we also honor in equal measure are his intangible qualities. He was loyal, thoughtful, dignified, thoroughly decent, generous, charitable, kind, trustworthy, dedicated to his community, and devoted to his cherished family. Put all together, his community, the Court, the Nation, and indeed, all who knew him. are better because of William C. Lee.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the Allen County Bar Association, express our great admiration and respect for Judge William C. Lee, our deep sense of loss and sorrow upon his death, our appreciation for his contribution to the law, the Court and this community, and our gratitude for his example of a life well spent;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution be unanimously adopted by those present upon this occasion;

AND IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution be spread of record and become a part of the permanent records of the Allen County Indiana Bar Association, that a copy be transmitted to the members of the Lee family; and that the Resolution be spread of record in the permanent records of the federal and state courts of Allen County, Indiana to evidence the respect and admiration of the members of the Bench and Bar for their dear, departed friend and colleague, William C. Lee.

Dated this 3rd day of June, 2024 at Fort Wayne, Allen County, Indiana.

By: /s/ Andrew Teel
President of the Allen County Bar Association

By: /s/ Holly A. Brady
Holly A. Brady, Chief Judge
United States District Court
Northern District of Indiana

By: /s/ Frances C. Gull
Judge, Allen Superior Court

Resolution prepared by Hon. Roger B. Cosby