

For Immediate Release  
January 26, 2024

**P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

**United States District Court  
Northern District of Indiana**

FORT WAYNE, Indiana (January 26, 2024): It is with deep sadness that the United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana announces the death of Senior Judge William C. Lee on January 20, 2024. Judge Lee passed away peacefully, ending over six decades of service to the legal profession and more than four decades of service to the court.

Chief Judge Holly A. Brady said, “Judge Lee’s commitment to the District Court and our community was unparalleled. After he served more than 42 years, the loss of his service to the Court leaves a void that will be difficult to fill. Each time I talked to Judge Lee he expressed how happy he was to continue to contribute to the Court. His happiness was no match for the Court’s gratitude for his continued service.”

Judge Lee was born February 2, 1938, in Fort Wayne, Indiana and graduated from North Side High School in 1955. He received his undergraduate degree from Yale University in 1959 before getting his law degree from the University of Chicago Law School in 1962. He married Judith A. Bash on September 19, 1959, and the couple spent the next six decades together, until she passed away on July 4, 2019. They had three children together – Catherine, Mark (who passed away last year) and Richard. They were blessed with two grandchildren whom they adored, Caroline and Katherine.

Judge Lee was President Ronald Reagan’s first appointee to the federal bench on July 28, 1981. Since August 19, 1981, he served his community, state, and nation with distinction as a United States District Judge for the Northern District of Indiana. From 1997 to 2003, he served as chief judge of the court. After assuming senior status on February 3, 2003, Judge Lee retained a substantial case load, working tirelessly as the dedicated public servant that he was, up to the date of his passing.

Judge Lee served as United States Attorney for the Northern District of Indiana from March 6, 1970 to May 7, 1973, having been nominated for that position at the age of 31. Judge Lee engaged in the practice of law in Allen County, Indiana from September 19, 1962 until March of 1970, and was appointed as Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for Allen County on January 1, 1963 and as Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney from January 1, 1967 to September of 1969.

Judge Lee returned to the practice of law as a trial lawyer in May of 1973. His reputation as an outstanding trial attorney grew and he was nominated to a Fellowship in the American College of

Trial Lawyers in his first year of eligibility for admission to that national organization. During his entire career Judge Lee was very involved with providing continuing legal education to practicing lawyers and legal services to the indigent. He served as the founding President of the Benjamin Harrison American Inn of Court, and previously served as Chairman of the Indiana Pro Bono Commission (at the request of then Chief Justice Randall T. Shepard); as well as President of the Allen County Legal Aid Society, and Board Member of the Volunteer Lawyer Program of North East Indiana. Judge Lee was the co-author of Federal Jury Practice and Instructions by O'Malley, Grenig and Lee, and Business and Commercial Litigation in Federal Courts, both published by Thomson West.

During Judge Lee's more than 60 years in the legal profession, he received many professional honors and awards, including two lifetime achievement awards, an honorary Doctor of Laws from Huntington College, Indiana Trial Judge of the Year, and others, that filled his walls.

In addition to his legal career, Judge Lee was very active in community affairs including serving on the board of directors of over 20 different organizations. His ongoing love and appreciation for the arts is reflected in his service to Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne, the Fort Wayne Fine Arts Foundation, the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre, the Fort Wayne Ballet, and the Fort Wayne Philharmonic. Judge Lee's intrigue and passion for history inspired him to author several works of local history, including Reaching Out, The First 150 Years of Trinity English Lutheran Church and the History of the Fort Wayne Federal Court.

Judge Lee was active in Trinity English Lutheran Church and served as a member of the church choir most of his life. Judge Lee's enchantment with the arts extended beyond his participation on community arts boards. His love of stage performing was evident in his performances in many musicals and plays, including playing major roles in: The Mikado; The Gondoliers; The Pirates of Penzance; HMS Pinafore; Princess Ida; Hello, Dolly!; Kiss Me Kate; Amahl & the Night Visitors; Diary of Ann Frank; Harvey; and Life With Father. His stage presence, like his community presence, had a life of its own.

Judge Lee believed that Fort Wayne was an exceptional place to live, work, and raise a family. He could often be found supporting local Fort Wayne events, whether it be as a spectator at a Fort Wayne Tincaps (Wizards) game, admiring the creativity of the Gingerbread Festival submissions, or catching the latest films at Cinema Center. He sat on the Fort Wayne Community Schools Scholarship Committee and enjoyed not only the quality submissions he received from the student applicants, but the opportunity to assist students in their higher educational pursuits.

On July 9, 2021, to honor the life, career, and legacy of the Honorable William C. Lee and to give testimony to his remarkable service to his community, the State of Indiana, and the United States of America, the United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana dedicated and

designated the 2nd floor courtroom in the E. Ross Adair Federal Building and United States Courthouse, 1300 South Harrison Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana, as “The William C. Lee Courtroom” outside of which is hung his official portrait and plaque memorializing the same.

Even though he was Ivy League educated and highly successful in his career, he remained a humble man filled with kindness, compassion, and respect for everyone. Throughout his life he stayed the Bill Lee that delivered newspapers in the Bloomingdale neighborhood and always cherished the community he came from.

In honor of Judge Lee, flags at federal courthouses throughout the Northern District of Indiana will be flown at half-mast Monday, January 29, 2024, through Tuesday, January 30, 2024.

Judge Lee served this Court, his community, his church, and his family with great dignity, love, and humility, and he will be missed by all.