

# Oregon BENCHMARKS

THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT OF OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



*"Energy, Good Judgement and Humor"*

## Thoughts on Renowned Mediator Sid Lezak

*Remembering Sid Lezak isn't difficult, but getting it down on paper can be. We look forward to running a longer article based on his oral history, but in the interim, Benchmarks asked several people to share some thoughts and memories of working with Sid Lezak at various times throughout his long career.*



Sidney Lezak,  
1924 – 2006

### Remembering Sid Lezak by Heather Van Meter

Sid Lezak, "a brave and brilliant man" as noted in an *Oregonian* editorial, passed away on April 24, 2006. A memorial was held for him at the Portland Hilton on May 4, 2006. There were federal and state court judges, lawyers, friends, family and others in attendance at the packed ballroom wanting to pay their respects to Oregon's longest-serving U.S. Attorney and father of mediation in Oregon. The memorial was filled with heart-warming remembrances of Lezak's youth in Chicago, his move to Oregon, his time as U.S. Attorney, and his dispute resolution practice. Speakers included Chicago friends Peggy Weil and Mike Katz, former law partner Verne Newcomb, former law clerk and mediation cohort Susan Hammer, former law clerk and Oregon U.S. Attorney Kris Olson, and long-time friends Fran Storrs and Norm Sepenuk. Stories included Lezak's 1972 resignation from the Portland City Club over their refusal to admit women, trips to the Middle East to assist with the peace efforts between Palestine and Israel, his promotion of indigent legal defense and an enlightened drug policy while U.S. Attorney, his support of the Campaign for Equal Justice and Planned Parenthood, and serving as the first chair of the Oregon Dispute Resolution Commission. Family members Anne Lezak, Miriam Lezak, Adrian Chen, and David Lezak relayed touching and funny stories of their time and relationship with Lezak. Rev. Rodney Page led the memorial by noting that fairness, compassion and justice were Lezak's stock in trade, and so shall he be remembered.

### Sid Lezak: One of the "Good Guys" of Oregon's Justice System

By Judge Donal Sullivan

Sid Lezak was one of the "good guys" of Oregon's justice system. He was chosen by President John F. Kennedy to be Oregon's U.S. Attorney in 1961 but owing to a dispute over prerogatives among the Oregon senatorial and congressional delegation, his appointment was not confirmed by the Senate for a number of years. During this period, he represented the United States in criminal and civil matters in Oregon as "acting" U.S. Attorney. He always acted with intelligence, firmness, and good humor even though his appointment was in limbo at first. He was a kind person.

One of the earlier important criminal cases was a mail fraud case, which the district court scheduled for trial before a jury in Pendleton, Oregon. The night before trial and after driving from Portland, Lezak inspected the new courtroom. Because of the number of participants, he commenced rearranging the furniture. During the midst of this process, the judge, who was known for both good humor and temper, came in and rather vociferously objected to Sidney's rearrangement of the furniture. Needless to say, the furniture was restored to its initial placement. The district judge's refrain "This is my courtroom!" still echoes in the halls of the Pendleton

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Sid Lezak (center) enjoying a USDCHS picnic flanked by (from left) his wife, Miriam, Jack Collins, Judge Alfred Goodwin and Judge Ancer Haggerty.

## President's Message



The Society has had a busy spring and looks forward to an even busier summer. As a supporter of the recently released biography by Harry Stein, *Gus J. Solomon: Liberal Politics, Jews and the Federal Courts*, the Society co-sponsored the book release party. Harry noted that very few biographies district court judge have been published. The book is available through the Oregon Historical Society, and soon, through a link from our website. It is also reviewed in this newsletter. (If you haven't visited the Society's website you should—[www.usdchs.org](http://www.usdchs.org)).

By the time you receive this newsletter, the summer associate program for law clerks will have occurred at the U.S. District Courthouse. Currently we expect 140 law students to participate and learn about federal court practice—our largest program yet. The law clerk program is followed by our annual Bench and Bar Social. I hope I saw you there. Thanks to the event co-chairs, **Kristin Hazard Hamilton** and **Kari Furnanz**, for planning both those events. You should be marking your calendars for the **USDCHS annual picnic on August 20 at Judge Leavy's hop farm**. It is a wonderful family event, and if you are too old to ride the ponies, Judge Leavy will take on a hayride.

Sadly, **Sid Lezak** and **Judge Juba** both passed away since the last newsletter. Sid Lezak is best known as a long-time U.S. Attorney for Oregon (1961 – 82). I never knew him in that capacity; I first met him as a mediator when he convinced me with wit and charm to settle a case. Thereafter I was fortunate to see him at many other Bar events and I think he may have had a tale to tell on each of you. But I don't recall ever hearing any mean gossip from Sid, just clever, funny tales that conveyed his enjoyment of life and the practice of law. This newsletter contains remembrances of Sid Lezak by some of his colleagues.

Sid Lezak also hired Judge Juba at one time in the Judge's career. However, any work Judge Juba may have done as an assistant U.S. Attorney is completely overshadowed by his impact as Oregon's first magistrate. It wasn't until I talked with one of his peers that I learned that Judge Juba defined the word magistrate—literally.

When Judge Juba became magistrate there was not a clear job description. Judge Juba encouraged parties to consent to a magistrate before the idea of consents was ever heard of, much less codified. With the full cooperation of the three Oregon federal judges, Judge Juba handled any aspect of cases not expressly forbidden by law. When the judicial committee reviewed magistrates, the "Oregon way" was codified into law. Though you do hear that in other districts magistrates are still not utilized to their full potential. Maybe those districts needed Judge Juba.

Enjoy the Oregon summer and I look forward to seeing you at our annual picnic.

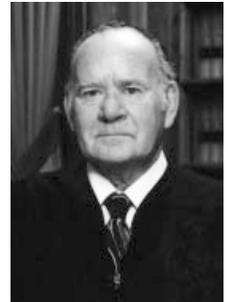
Jenifer Johnston, President

## Magistrate Judge George E. Juba

by Janice Dilg

**G**eorge E. Juba, the first federal magistrate judge in the state of Oregon, died June 6, 2006. During the spring of this year, Judge Juba added his oral history to the ongoing project of the U.S. District Court of Oregon Historical Society. Over three interview sessions he recalled his long and varied career in Oregon's legal community, both at the bar and at the bench.

Born in Washougal, Washington on January 11, 1928, Juba left the area during a two-year stint in the U.S. Navy. Using the GI Bill, Juba earned a degree in business administration at Willamette University. He soon returned to



Judge George Juba.  
1928 – 2006

Willamette Law School and graduated with honors in 1956. During his college years, George Juba met and married Suzanne Mellor, and together they raised two children, Karen Hanson (Portland) and David Juba (Bend).

George Juba began his legal career at the firm of Miller Nash. In the late 1950s he left that firm to become an assistant U.S. attorney in Portland. Three years later he fulfilled a life-long ambition when he joined the FBI. His postings included Denver, New Orleans, and Biloxi, Mississippi. By the mid 1960s, Juba and his family returned to Portland and he returned to the US Attorney's office, then under the leadership of Sid Lezak. As governor, Mark O. Hatfield appointed George Juba to serve as a Multnomah district court judge. He followed his time there with several years in the Multnomah County District Attorney's office as George Van Hoomissen's chief deputy.

George Juba's lasting contribution to the judicial system of Oregon was

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# Oregon's Groundbreaking Federal Drug Court

By Adair Law

*2006 has been an important year for first Federal Drug Court Program in the United States. While drug courts have been in use throughout the United States at state and local levels since the late 1980s, Oregon is the first district court to set up a federal program and launch its first graduates, two in Eugene and eight in Portland.*

## HISTORY

Oregon's Drug Court grew out of a drug summit that was convened in January 2004. The idea for the summit was spearheaded by Judge Ann Aiken. It brought together representatives from the District Court, the U.S. Attorney, the Federal Public Defender, the U.S. Probation Office and treatment providers to look at alternate ways to deal with the increase in drug cases. Federal Public Defender Steve Wax suggested organizing a federal drug court and Judge Ann Aiken, who'd had prior experience with drug courts on a state court level, helped to get the ball rolling. Most of the participants came to the meeting well aware that the Federal Judicial Conference didn't really want a specialized court, and that, in the words of Portland Federal Probation Officer Eric Suing, "If you're looking for more money, forget about it." They also knew that they needed to find some new options for drug cases. With hard work and an impressive amount of collaboration among all the parties concerned, the first Federal Drug Court program in the United States was up and running in Eugene in January 2005 (presided over by Judge Ann Aiken) and in Portland in May 2005 (presided over by Judge James Redden).

## WHAT IS DRUG COURT?

Drug Court is a one-year minimum, voluntary program. Successfully completing Drug Court can reduce a participant's term of probation or supervised release (usually between 24-36 months) by 12 months. To join Drug Court, an individual's history is



*Judge James Redden (left) asked "the boss" Chief Judge Ancer Haggerty to say a few words to the first Drug Court graduates. Photo by Bryan Thompson.*

evaluated and the candidate is interviewed by the Probation Officer. For those chosen to join, all parties execute a standard Drug Court contract which transfers the participant's supervision from the Probation Office to the Drug Court Team. Each drug court team

includes a U.S. District Court Judge, an assistant U.S. attorney, an assistant federal public defender, a U.S. probation officer and a treatment provider. Decisions are made by consensus of the team. They work together to help

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## Annual Picnic Celebrates Longevity in Law Partnerships



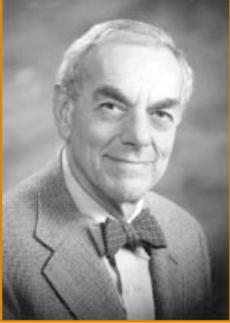
Mark your calendars for the **annual United States District Court of Oregon Historical Society Picnic: Sunday, August 20, 2006**, starting at **1:00 p.m.** The picnic will be held at the Leavy family hop farm near Champoeg Park.

We are contacting law firms throughout the state to identify lawyers who have been in one or more partnerships for over 25 years. We want to honor these long-term partners at the picnic. If you know of partners that meet this criteria, please contact Mary Ellis in Judge Leavy's chambers at (503) 833-5350. In addition to the individual honorees, there will be visual and written displays of law firm history.

This event is free, with food from Cathy's Texas Bar-B-Q and music from Lisa and Her Kin. We'll have a program for the honorees, as well as activities for children, including pony rides and crafts. Honored partners are encouraged to invite any clients who may be interested in attending. This event is always well-attended and enjoyed.

Please RSVP by emailing Linda Sherry at [Linda\\_Sherry@ord.uscourts.gov](mailto:Linda_Sherry@ord.uscourts.gov) or calling (503) 326-8150.

## Remembering Sid Lezak continued from page 1



courthouse. It took months for Sidney to overcome his annoyance at the judge's reaction.

An example of Lezak's courage came when early on, he received instructions from no less than the Attorney General to discharge an assistant in his office. Allegedly, the person behind the demand for discharge had been indicted for racketeering offenses in the state court and years before had been an informant for the U.S. Senate Rackets Committee while the assistant was with the Oregon District Attorney's Office. Lezak disagreed with the instructions from Washington and would not comply even though he himself risked discharge. Eventually, Sidney prevailed.

According to one source, Lezak met the Attorney General at a reception on his first visit to Washington. Lezak, standing in a reception line noticed that the zipper in the Attorney General's trousers was half open. Although many people in line had to have noticed the potential embarrassment to the Attorney General, it was Lezak who, in putting forth his hand said "Mr. Attorney General, your fly is open." Lezak received a cold response.

There was rarely a public gathering where people were not naturally crowded around Sid Lezak, regardless of the occasion for the gathering. Sid had a magnetism that attracted people, who, in turn, always left with a smile. All who knew Sid Lezak are richer for having known him. Most of all, the State of Oregon will miss him. He was a gentleman.

*Judge Donal Sullivan worked in the U.S. Attorney's office from 1961-63. He was Clerk of the Court under Judge Gus Solomon and was made a federal bankruptcy referee (and later, judge) in 1969.*

### **Sid Lezak, HURRAH!** By Jack Gore Collins

Sidney I. Lezak remains a storied figure in the legal history of Oregon. His three careers as trial attorney, United States Attorney and mediator are stories of energy, good judgment, and humor. He had one rule for his Assistants, "Don't do anything that you would not want my mother to read about in the *Chicago Tribune*;" and later the *Los Angeles Times*, where she lived. A corollary to his rule was, "If you don't understand this rule, you should not be working here."

His second longest tenure as a United States Attorney (1961-1982) was due to his own good work, that of his office, and an insistence in remaining apart from the notoriety of politics. He did not go to political dinners or rallies. On a rare exception, he took me along to a rally for Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who had appointed me as an assistant United States Attorney in 1963. Sid occasionally referred to the final line of my job application, "I want to join the New Frontier." They were exciting, forward-looking times. We did not ask what our country could do for us.

Sid was among the first to hire women as Assistant United States Attorneys, the first to frequently use agency lawyers as Special Assistant



*An enthusiastic participant in the Oregon State Bar tent shows in the late 1950s, Sid Lezak (far right) sings with (from left) Richard Helgeson, Edwin Peterson and Donald Krause.*

*Photo courtesy of the Oregon State Bar.*

United States Attorneys, to undertake large federal white-collar crime prosecutions in Oregon, and to mediate the local violence of the Vietnam era. During that time, he was asked, "Why don't you resign?" He replied, "I could do more on the inside than on a picket line." And he could and did. A by-product of his employment of large numbers of law clerks is an extended alumni organization.

At the close of his tenure as United State Attorney at age 58, he began an active career as mediator. He became known for being very good at helping parties voluntarily resolve their differences. In doing so he had a "magic question." After appropriate preparation, he would ask each party "Would you consider...?" Often it was something neither had thought of.

In Oregon, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) has become and integral part of the judicial system. Sid Lezak had a lot to do with that. Each year an award is presented in his name to an outstanding mediator.

If you will step back from your immediate disagreement with one of Sid's decisions, you will join a large majority who agree, it was the right thing to do.

*Jack Collins worked in the Oregon U.S. Attorney's office on a range of cases and in a variety of capacities from 1963 - 95.*

### **He Made The Whole World Kin**

By Kris Olson

Much is made of Sid the Mediator, and deservedly so, yet Sid was truly omnidimensional, and relished a good fight for a just cause. As a matter of fact, he often said, "That's what really gets my juices flowing!"

Sid looms large on our civic landscape because he was not one to shrink. He tackled the difficult issues: the need for an enlightened drug policy; reproductive rights; death with dignity; campaign finance; Palestinian rights; and reform for Draconian sentencing schemes. He promoted women litigators and flexible ways to work, before OWLS was a glint in anyone's eye.

Sid held the power of prosecution, but his hallmark was using discretion. When he felt his hands were tied, he

reached out afterwards to assist former defendants. “I believe in redemption!” was one of his mantras. And he practiced it, by participating in the Oregon State Penitentiary’s “Lifers” Club” and adopting a “Cottage” at the McLaren detention facility for juvenile boys. Before long, they were all calling him “Uncle Sidney” as well.

The concepts of justice and fairness became goodwill and generosity on Sid’s ground. He could connect with anyone, find common lingo. Jazz and blues were a good medium for Sid, because he was constantly adjusting, playing off another’s riff. His life was the best sort of improvisation.

Sid’s omnivorous nature was apparent when I was sorting through his books with his family. His shelves were filled with history, politics, Yiddish texts, art, music, theatre, and human rights treatises. The biggest category was law, but not the legal tomes you would find in a practicing lawyer’s office. Instead, it was the politics, psychology, and sociology of legal principles. The largest number—by far—was one-of-a-kind, defying categorization, like Sid himself.

One book stood out, obviously well-loved and often read: a collection of essays by Clarence Darrow. Unusually for him, Sid had signed it, underlined some of its pages. It readily fell open to a coffee-stained page, marked with a corner of a forty-year-old page from the *Oregonian*. When he was about ten, Sid met Clarence Darrow in a pharmacy in his Chicago neighborhood. Darrow became Sid’s hero, a gladiator who fought for social justice. This particular essay, written for *Scribner’s* magazine in 1932, is entitled “Who Knows Justice?”. It seems no accident that Sid highlighted this last passage:

*Justice never can be a lofty ideal. It has no emotions nor passions. It has no wings. Its highest flight is to the Blind Goddess that stands on the courthouse roof. It savors of syllogisms and fine distinctions which have no meaning or value in the important matters of life. But there is no uncertainty in the meaning and effect of charity, of*

*sympathy, of generosity, or of understanding. Without these, man is dead....These emotions grow from his associations with his fellow-man. They are the children of imagination. They spring from sensing the weakness, the troubles, and the sorrows of all those who live. They make the whole world kin.*

*Kris Olson served as assistant U.S. Attorney for Oregon from 1974 –84, and as Oregon’s U.S. Attorney from 1994 – 2001. She is the author of the biography Standing Tall: The Lifeway of Kathryn Jones Harrison.*

### Reflections on Sid Lezak By Susan Hammer

Except for my own father, Sid Lezak had the greatest impact on my life of any man from his generation. Although I feel incredibly lucky, I am not unique; quite the opposite. During his lifetime, Sid adopted hundreds of us. He became “Uncle Sidney”—the one who advised us at every stage of our careers and at every milestone in our personal lives. He helped us find jobs, introduced us to his enormous network of friends, found some of us mates, and helped some of us through divorces, deaths in the family and illnesses. He was among the first to celebrate our little life victories and provide comfort, humor and perspective when we were down.

I clerked in the U.S. Attorney’s office in 1974 and 1975. Afterwards, Sid wrote an over-the-top letter of reference that I read again and again, wondering how he could say these

things with a straight face. He could see my value when I couldn’t. I later learned that this is what a mentor and friend at his/her best can do.

As I look back, I remember a 32-year running tutorial on social justice and civic involvement. Sid was my own historian. He was full of tales of political struggles that made a difference, challenges to discriminatory practices at Portland’s clubs (City Club, Arlington Club, University Club, MAC), stories of the presidents he served, and colorful descriptions of J. Edgar Hoover. It was all fascinating. He pushed me to become involved in non-profit organizations, bar activities and political campaigns. To my surprise, he urged me not to work very hard at planning my life but just to embrace those things that were worthwhile and interesting, letting “serendipity” take care of the rest.

Sid opened too many doors for me to name here, but I will mention one. In 2001 he nominated me to be a fellow with the International Academy of Mediators, giving me an unequal opportunity to meet colleagues and form friendships with leaders in the emerging profession of mediation. I thanked him profusely. He said, “You know, you are part of my legacy.”

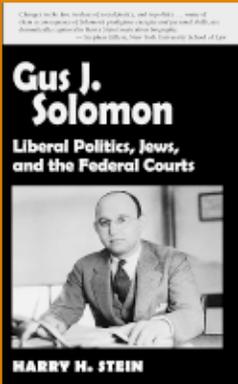
This is perhaps the most powerful thing that any of us can say to a younger person in our life. It’s irresistible. Sid inspired me to mentor others and to continue the tradition.

*Susan Hammer is a Portland attorney and mediator. She is the 2006 recipient of the Judge James Burns Federal Practice Award.*

## CALENDAR

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>August 20:</b>    | <b>Annual USDCHS Picnic</b> (see page 3 for details)<br>1:00 – 4 p.m., Judge Leavy’s Farm                               |
| <b>September 21:</b> | <b>Famous Cases</b><br>4:00 – 5:45 p.m.<br>Confirm date and topic at <a href="http://www.usdchs.org">www.usdchs.org</a> |
| <b>October 26:</b>   | <b>Annual Meeting and Dinner</b><br>5:30 p.m. No-host Cocktails<br>6:30 p.m. Dinner                                     |

## ON OUR MEMBERS' BOOKSHELVES



### Gus J. Solomon: Liberal Politics, Jews, and the Federal Courts

By Harry H. Stein  
Oregon Historical Society Press, 2006

Reviewed by Mary Ellen Farr

In this very engaging work of local history, Harry H. Stein documents the life of one of Oregon's most memorable jurists, Gus

Solomon, the forces that shaped him, and his impact on the federal court in Oregon. Stein uses a number of the oral histories collected by the U.S. District Court Historical Society as sources for this history. The book is worthwhile not only because of what the author tells us about Solomon, but also because of its insights into the political history of Portland and Oregon.

Solomon was born in Portland in 1906 to a family of Eastern European Jewish immigrants during an era when Jews were not welcome in many of Portland's professions and social organizations. Throughout the book, Stein uses Solomon's own quotations to illuminate the discussion. Stein charts the effect Solomon's family's background had on him, inculcating his sense of patriotism, intolerance for injustice, and commitment to the weak and oppressed of society. Stein also documents the challenges Solomon faced as a Jewish lawyer committed to social activism in the first half of the twentieth century in a conservative city and state.

Stein devotes considerable space to discussion of Solomon's activism and support of free speech. Of particular interest is Solomon's involvement with groups considered to be Communist before World War II. Although Solomon worked with those groups and supported them in their struggle to exercise their civil rights, Solomon himself was strongly opposed to the philosophy they espoused. Stein's discussion of the

causes for which Solomon worked in the first decades of the 1900s reveals much about the changes which Oregon, its businesses, and its legal community confronted during that time. In addition to civil rights groups like the ACLU and Jewish groups, Solomon helped to establish a meaningful Legal Aid program, and worked to develop public power. Stein's analysis of the development of the New Deal mentality is fascinating, and Solomon's own belief in the power of government to solve societal problems provides an apt starting point for the discussion.

Stein portrays Solomon as a dedicated civil rights pioneer who could also acknowledge his own flaws, admitting his failure to stand up against the internment of the Japanese during World War II. Although Solomon spoke out against the internment from time to time, he later castigated himself for not being more forceful and for not realizing that he would have had allies in such a fight. Stein notes that groups which were committed to fighting discrimination, including several in which Solomon was active, were quiescent about the internments. Against this Stein also credits Solomon for his later actions in supporting women and minorities in the court and the legal community.

The "campaign" of Solomon and his friends, particularly his law partner Ray Kell, from early 1949 until June 1950, to put Solomon on the bench demonstrates the nature of local, national, and court politics at the time. Stein does a good job of pointing out the ironies in Solomon's personality: on the one hand, he was irascible and intolerant in court; on the other hand, he was engaging and ultimately revered. Solomon became presiding judge in 1958 in a court that was seeing ex-

ponential growth in the number of cases and virtually no growth in judicial or support personnel.

Solomon's judicial philosophy of "pragmatic justice" allowed him to keep the court calendar moving at an impressive rate. For example, Solomon tried an obscenity case scheduled for five weeks of trial in California in fewer than four trial days. Stein also sets out Solomon's philosophy about what the role of a judge should be. Solomon did not believe in so-called activism on the bench:

*Solomon's legal philosophy was rooted in his earlier legal realism, a strong sense of individual responsibility, and a keen regard for active government. He firmly believed that judges ought to be cautious and self-effacing and restrain their adjudication. . . . Judges, he believed, ought to furnish workable decisions and avoid statements of transcendent principles.*

Stein's discussion of Solomon's tenure on the federal bench is peppered with anecdotes about life in Portland's legal community and in the court. For example, Stein notes that the three federal judges in Portland's court did not begin wearing black robes until 1950. Through his discussion of Solomon's judicial career, Stein also documents such things as the adoption and implementation of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the later local rules. Although the subject may seem dry and arcane, Stein does an excellent job of putting these in a context of the development of the judicial model which holds sway in the federal courts today.

Even after Solomon reluctantly took senior status in 1971, he continued to work at least fifty-hour weeks. Solomon died in 1987 at the age of eighty. Stein concludes that "Solomon passed into legal folklore as a just, smart, capable, and unusually tough judge . . ." Stein's book is an excellent tribute to the man, the judge, and the court.

## Federal Drug Court continued from page 3

participants maintain sobriety and achieve personal and program goals. The team meets prior to each semi-monthly court session and reviews the participant's progress based on reports from treatment providers, probation officers, employers, and others. During the hearings, participants are reward or sanctioned based on their performance. Sanctions can include watching the sentencing of others or going to jail.

### LEARNING TO CHANGE

At the Portland graduation ceremonies, Judge Redden pointed out that Drug Court is "no stroll in the garden." The men and women participating in Drug Court are working hard to overcome addiction and often long ingrained patterns of dysfunction. Eugene U.S. Probation Officer Mark Walked noted, "The piss and vinegar has been taken out of them in prison. They've had a chance to take a stark look at themselves and are convinced that it's really time for a change."

The program holds participants accountable in a very real and humane way. Participants attend court at least once a month for a minimum of 12 months, attend individual or group treatment, submit to multiple, random drug and alcohol tests and comply with the standard or special conditions of their supervision. At the Portland graduation ceremonies, Judge Redden noted that "What they really want is help to return to society." Through their hard work, accountability to, and encouragement from the Drug Team, they are making strides in that return. According to the *Eugene Register Guard*, when one of the first two graduates from Drug Court received a hug from Judge Aiken, his response was, "I never thought I'd be hugged by a Federal Judge. Sentenced maybe."

### GRADUATION AND FORWARD

The Portland Drug Court graduation took place in the Ceremonial Court Room of the Mark O. Hatfield Courthouse. The first Drug Court started with 19 participants. On May 25 there were eight graduates, six had



been terminated from the program and five are looking toward a later graduation. Letters of encouragement came from Gov. Ted Kulongoski, U.S. Senator Gordon Smith, and from U.S. Reps. Earl Blumenauer, Darlene Hooley, Greg Walden and David Wu. Sam Wedge from the U.S. Probation office said "Your success means the success of this program." Assistant U.S. Attorney John Diets passed out "before" mug shots of the graduates, noting that, "I'm proud that you're succeeding today." When asked if there were words from family or friends, one mother stood up and said, "I'd like to thank all of you for giving me back my son."

Because of favorable early results, another Drug Court will start in Medford in June. There are also many other states that are interested in what Oregon has done. In mid June 2006, Judge Aiken and Judge Redden along with members of the Drug Court Teams from Eugene and Portland attended the inaugural Federal Drug Court Symposium in Seattle.

## Judge Juba continued from page 2

his pioneering role as the first federal magistrate judge in the state. Appointed in 1971, Juba and district court Judges Robert Belloni, James Burns, and Otto Skopil were instrumental in developing the scope of the magistrate system. Juba served as a full-time magistrate judge until his retirement from the bench in 1993.

A more complete accounting of George Juba's life and legal career will be published in these pages in an upcoming issue.

## Civil Rights Exhibit at the Courthouse

By Heather Van Meter

The Oregon Council for the Humanities recently sponsored a traveling exhibit titled "**The Road to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement**" and "**Perspectives in the 1990s.**" The exhibit was displayed at the United States District Court for the District of Oregon during Black History Month, February 2006. The 40-panel exhibit featured photographs, key documents, quotations and discussion of the American civil rights movement from the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955 through the tragic death of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The exhibit traced Martin Luther King, Jr.'s rise as a major civil rights leader and included information and photographs of Rosa Parks, Barbara Jordan and the King Center.

Readers may be interested in the following facts and statistics: The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was decided on May 17, 1954. NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall argued the case for Brown. Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat in Montgomery, Alabama on December 1, 1955. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have A Dream" speech at the Washington Monument on August 28, 1963. The poll tax was abolished by the 24th Amendment on January 23, 1964. The Civil Rights Act was signed by President Johnson on July 2, 1964. As of July 1, 2004, the estimated population of black residents in the United States was 39.2 million (including those of more than one race), approximately 13.4 percent of the total U.S. population. As of 2002, there were 1.2 million black-owned businesses, up by more than 370,000 since 1997. There are approximately 2.4 million black military veterans in the United States. There are 50,600 black physicians and surgeons, 69,400 black postsecondary teachers, 44,800 black lawyers, and 53,800 black chief executives.

(sources: census data, Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 2006).

In 1994, Jim Westwood (currently a partner at Stoel Rives) was involved with the District Court Historical Society, and suggested that I take Velma Jeremiah's (or VJ as she's known to most) oral history. Westwood told me that VJ was the first woman to make partner in a large Oregon firm and he was clearly impressed by her, as is everyone else. At the time I took the oral history, I was a relatively new attorney and her story had a great impact on me. It is a pleasure to revisit this oral history and reconnect with VJ.

Velma Jeremiah is probably best known in the legal profession as the first woman to make partner at a large Oregon law firm. But there is much more to her life than that, as she shared in an oral history recorded in February 1994. She was born Velma Julia Staples to Pearl Agnes Kemplin and Franklin Ercy Staples in 1921 in a little house at the foot of Skinner Butte in Eugene. In the spring, the slopes were covered with buttercups, which she enjoyed picking to bring to her mother. As the third of eight children, she recalled that to feed them all, her mother made eight to ten loaves of "The most wonderful bread in the world" every two days.

The family moved to Oregon City when Jeremiah was young. They struggled financially, and she and her siblings regularly worked the harvest. During her twelfth summer in the early 1930s, the only work her father could find was cutting wood in Estacada. The family lived in the forest and her mother continued to bake large quantities of bread in an outdoor wood



*Graduation from Northwestern School of Law, 1968*

stove while watching a one-year old child in a playpen built out of wooden logs. Although it was a difficult time for her parents, it was a "wonderful summer" for the children who enjoyed playing in the woods. The hard times continued when they returned to Oregon City. When Ms. Jeremiah was thirteen or fourteen years old, she was waiting in line for four hours to

## Velma Jeremiah:



### Pronto Pups, Trail Blazing, and Stand-up Comedy

By Youlee You

pick up the family's government food allotment when she fainted from the heat. After she came to, she had to go back to the end of the line because no one had saved her place.

Growing up, Jeremiah loved school and going to the library. She brought home as many books as she could carry and, when the family could afford electricity, she stayed up reading them long after she was supposed to go to sleep. She resented that the girls were told in school to consider teaching or nursing as professions. After doing some research on her own, she decided she would become an architect.

Jeremiah graduated from high school in 1938, and worked for a year to earn money for college. She saved \$75, and hitchhiked to the University of Oregon. She attended through the 1939-40 school year but was forced to drop out of college during fall quarter 1940 for financial reasons and got a job as a waitress. She returned to school for spring quarter 1941, but then left again to make more money.

When World War II began, Jeremiah went to Camp Cooke in Santa Maria, California, where various army armored divisions were based. She worked as a clerk typist, a waitress at a chicken dinner inn, and a cashier at a military base store. When she asked to be promoted to manager of the store,

she was told that women were permitted to work only as cashiers. Bored with being a cashier, Jeremiah was looking for something interesting to do when she saw an advertisement from the army that said they were looking for civilians to train cryptographers. It sounded challenging and she applied. The army provided a six-week training course in Seattle, then she went up to Anchorage, Alaska to work. She recalled that during the war, "people worked around the clock" and "everybody put up with the hardships."

In Alaska, Ms. Jeremiah met a "handsome sailor," Neil Willis Jeremiah, whom she married. She went to work for a lumber company in Seattle doing invoicing and typing while her husband served in the military. When the war ended, they moved to San Francisco where she and her husband opened an ill-fated Pronto Pup luncheonette. The restaurant had five stools and three booths. She and her husband lived in the back of the store. Her husband was still in the military, so she ran the business alone. In eighteen months, she "aged ten years" and they "lost all our money."

Ms. Jeremiah's husband Neil wanted to become a teacher so they moved to Washington where he attended school and found employment. In 1949, they had a son, Neil, and Jeremiah stayed at home with the child. When the boy turned four or five, she returned to work part-time as a bookkeeper. She recalled that "hiring help to take care of a little child was not easy." She could not "think of anything worse for a mother than to have to hunt somebody



*Velma (left) with Judge James Crawford on his 83rd birthday at the Moot Courtroom dedication at Northwestern School of Law. The woman on the right is Judge Crawford's daughter.*

else to take care of their little child, especially little ones.”

They moved to Portland from Snohomish, Washington so her husband could take a job as a principal. She was replaced at her job as a full-charge bookkeeper in a retail furniture store by a man who was paid more for the same responsibilities. When she asked her employer why he was paying the man more, he responded that he was a “man and had a family.”

In Portland, Ms. Jeremiah worked as a bookkeeper, payroll clerk, and billing clerk. In 1963, she and her husband divorced. Her son was thirteen at the time. She obtained a job as the personal secretary to Harold A. Miller, the president of Stimson Lumber Company. He treated her so well that she stayed with the company for seven years. Miller gave her raises on his own initiative and also nicknamed her “VJ.”

During this time Jeremiah decided to attend law school. She was 42 years old, and realized that while she was in her marriage, she never thought about a career for herself. She’d believed it was her duty to help her husband achieve his career goals. Now that she was no longer married, she took a look at her job and realized that she wanted to do more. She chose to study law because she believed that, although she could never learn everything, she would never be bored.

Jeremiah attended evening classes at Northwestern School of Law of Lewis and Clark College while she continued to work for Stimson Lumber. As a woman, older than the other students and divorced, she felt self-conscious and timid. She typically would “slink to the back seat in the back corner, and never open my mouth if I didn’t have to.” There were very few women in her class, but she developed friendships with some of her classmates, including Kathleen Nachtigal, a “very handsome red-headed woman who sat right up front and was always participating.” The two of them took criminal law with George Van Hoomissen, who was then the District Attorney of Multnomah County (and later served on the Oregon Supreme Court). When they received their exams back, Jeremiah’s had a notation that read,

“Best paper, but see Nachtigal.” Nachtigal’s exam had a similar notation, “Best paper, but see Jeremiah.” Nachtigal did not know who “Jeremiah” was, and went home and looked in her Bible. The notes on their exams caused them to meet each other and become friends. (Kathleen Nachtigal later served as a judge on the Multnomah County Circuit Court.)

The same year her son graduated from high school, 1968, Jeremiah graduated from law school. She was fourth in her class and it took her a year to find a job. She was the first Northwestern Law School graduate to be hired at Davies Biggs (now Stoel Rives) the city’s biggest law firm. Previously, the firm had recruited primarily from Eastern law schools. Initially, she hadn’t considered applying at there. The firm represented Stimson Lumber Company. Frederick Torp and Brian Booth got to know Jeremiah while she was working at Stimson, and encouraged her to apply. Although she was not the first woman attorney to be hired at Davies Biggs, she was the first one to stay around for more than a short while. She was hired as an associate lawyer in 1969, a position that, at that time, wasn’t intended to lead to partner status. When Jeremiah started as an associate, the secretaries were not

allowed to address the attorneys by their first names. However, she had a “little conspiracy” with the receptionist who would address her as VJ when no one else was around. Davies Biggs changed their position on offering partner status to associates, and after Jeremiah completed her six-year tenure, she became the first woman partner in 1975. She was heavily involved in bar activities and many professional organizations including the Queen’s Bench, where she served as president in 1975 and 1976. Queen’s Bench, she recalls, was “wonderful” because “The older women lawyers with experience would help young women.”

However, she found that certain positions of bar leadership were not available to women. The Multnomah Bar Association, for example, would not promote women beyond secretary. She accepted a position as secretary in 1971. After being passed over for vice-president, she declined the offer to serve as secretary the following year, telling the male leadership she would not be “smart” to take a dead-end job again.

Jeremiah also recalled an experience at a popular lunch restaurant in downtown Portland. The restaurant had a large round table that seated approxi-

*Continue on page 10*



*Meeting Justice Sandra Day O’Connor at the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.*

## Velma Jeremiah continued from page 9

mately twelve people. One time, she asked the men at the table whether an empty seat was taken, and they told her it was “reserved.” She found a place at another nearby table and noticed that no one ever sat down in the empty seat. She returned on a later date and asked to be seated at the round table. She said, “It was the most boring lunch I’d ever had.” Every “once in a while,” however, she would “go sit at the round table to let the men know they could not exclude women.”

Ms. Jeremiah retired in 1986 when she was 65 years old. At her retirement party, one of the female partners thanked her for opening the door for the women at the firm. Ms. Jeremiah thought it was “very nice” but modestly stated that it would have “happened sooner or later.” She just “happened to be the one.”

After retiring, Ms. Jeremiah went on a trek in Nepal and became an active cross-country skier. When ski season was over, she took a class on stand-up comedy. She regularly performed at open mike night at the Silver Dollar Saloon and Pizza restaurant and sometimes even acted as emcee. She also appeared at the Comedy Underground in Seattle and the La Fiesta in Vancouver.

She chose old age as a theme for her comedy, and started her routines by saying, “I know you don’t think an old lady can be funny.”

Her work as a stand-up comedienne attracted the attention of the producers of the “To Tell the Truth” television show. She appeared on an episode where she was asked to tell two stories and a contestant from the audience was supposed to guess which was one true. In one of the stories, she claimed to be a stand-up comedienne, which was true. In the other, she claimed she invented the pop-up turkey thermometer. She said she worked as chemist and her company asked her to invent something that would encourage women to buy turkeys. When one of the celebrity panelists asked her, “How do you know when the turkey’s done?” she responded, “Well, when the little red button pops up.” The contestant picked the false story and Ms. Jeremiah won a thousand dollars.

During her retirement, Ms. Jeremiah has also traveled to Estonia and China with other attorneys and law professors. Additionally, in 1991, she became the chairwoman of International Mensa. Not surprisingly, she was the first woman to hold that position.

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