



# REMEMBRANCE OF JUDGE WILLIAM LEE WIMBISH

by John M. Oakey Jr.

ON MARCH 12, Virginia lost a dedicated public servant who passed away after an extended period of declining health. For more than three decades, William L. Wimbish served the commonwealth and the City of Richmond in several different capacities. His motto was, “Do it right!” This principle benefitted his family, Richmond, all those who appeared in his courtroom, the legal profession, and all who knew him.

Judge Wimbish was born on July 27, 1930, in Martinsville. After living in several localities in Western Virginia, his family moved to Richmond where he graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in 1949. He entered the University of Richmond the following year, but his studies were interrupted by four years of service in the United States Air Force. He was fortunate enough to be stationed in Germany, where one of his friends and a member of his unit turned out to be none other than the later-to-become famous musician, Johnny Cash. They developed a friendship that was renewed when the singer performed many years later in Richmond. Bill had many talents, but needless to say, none of them involved singing.

Bill graduated from the T.C. Williams School of Law in 1958 and began working for Traveler’s Insurance Companies, as did many of his law school friends. He remained there for nine years. Although offered several opportunities for promotion, Bill did not accept them so that he could remain in Richmond.

Bill then made a significant career change by joining the Richmond City Attorney’s office as an assistant city attorney in 1967. At the time, Richmond was facing many challenges, the area was growing rapidly, and he was able to make a significant contribution in many different projects that have been very beneficial to the citizens of the city. His service and insurance background served him well. Probably his biggest venture was to assist in establishing the Greater Richmond Transit Company, now known as The GRTC Transit System, for Richmond and the surrounding area. He served as the agency’s general counsel for many years. He also was involved in the construction of the Richmond Coliseum and was the attorney who signed the contract on behalf of the city. He was involved in the efforts to establish the Port of Richmond and also in the consol-

idation of most of Richmond’s courts into the John Marshall Courts Building at Ninth and Marshall streets.

Bill was extremely hardworking and meticulous, and he was the person people would go to when they had a problem with the city. He served as the acting city attorney for well over a year.

In 1985, the legislature added an additional civil court judgeship to the Richmond General District Court, and Bill was elected to that judgeship. He was a strong supporter of what he called the “people’s court” and took great pains and spent a lot of time to ensure that people who rarely went to court realized they were respected when they were before him. Although this was not a court of record, he probably wrote more decisions than any other district judge in the area. He wanted to make sure that everyone had their day in court and that the rules of law were properly applied to all of the litigants. Although it may have bothered the attorneys to have to wait for the decision, Judge Wimbish made sure that every litigant received justice under the law. He was also a strong advocate of the small claims court, where litigants could resolve their disputes without any attorneys.

When he turned 70, Judge Wimbish did not really want to retire, but under the judicial rules he was required to do so. He had served as the chief judge of the Richmond General District Court for the last two years of his tenure.

Though Judge Wimbish was a great city attorney and judge, he was not all work and no play. Three of his best friends went with him to Pinehurst once a year to play golf and most of their stories would fill an entirely separate remembrance. Although his golf skills may have declined slightly with age, he always remained the best putter of the group. But, his greatest accomplishment was that he could beat just about anybody in checkers — most of his friends wouldn’t even play him.

Judge Wimbish loved the law, loved writing opinions, and was a true public servant to the City of Richmond. His accomplishments in the city attorney’s office were numerous and he certainly set an example for the judges in the General District Court. He is greatly missed.

Judge Wimbish is survived by his wife Judy, three children, and eight grandchildren.