

An Impact on and off the Bench

Based on an interview of Judge Richard B. Potter by Greg Porter in January 2016

Manassas was a very different community when Judge Richard Potter began his practice here in 1972. Prince William County was in the same circuit as Fairfax County, and there were just two circuit court judges, with Arthur Sinclair being the primary Prince William judge. William May was the only judge in the newly created General District Court.

Judge Potter graduated from Annandale High School in 1965. He earned both his bachelor's and his law degree from William & Mary, finishing in 1972. After a few months on active duty in the Army, he began his practice with the firm of Compton, Latimer, Compton and Compton.

During his sixteen years as an attorney, Judge Potter represented clients in a far wider variety of cases than most attorneys who started their practice later. His range of cases included criminal law, contract law, zoning, domestic relations, personal injury, wills and trusts, collections and other civil cases.

In 1988 he left private practice to take the bench as a General District Court Judge. After almost three years, he was selected to succeed the late Percy Thornton, Jr. as a Circuit Court judge. Judge Potter retired in 2015 after 27 years on the bench.

Judge Potter was busy off the bench as well. He taught business law at Strayer University for 20 years. He was active in many civic organizations as well, including the Kiwanis and the Sons of the American Revolution. He has been a pillar in his church as well, serving as deacon, trustee, elder and Sunday School teacher for more than 20 years.

While attending Annandale High in the mid-sixties, Judge Potter met and fell in love with the former Sharon Rogers. They were married after he completed his undergraduate studies. They have two children, Brad and Ann, and two grandchildren, Preston and Lily. Nothing in his professional or civic activities has brought him as much joy as his wife, his children and his grandchildren.

Judge Potter has remained active in the law after his retirement, serving as a substitute judge in various circuit courts, and as a mediator. But for the most part, retirement has meant more time with his family, and more time for reading. He has an amazing knowledge and appreciation of history.

When asked about any particular recollections from the bench, Judge Potter cites the case of an Army sergeant who came before him on a felony charge about three years ago. After the case, the sergeant wrote a letter to Judge Potter thanking him for being his judge. He stated that he knew that Judge Potter could have been more severe with him, but that he had received a significant break. The sergeant went on to say that it had been a very difficult time for him, but through the programs into which he had been directed, his life had been changed. He reunited with his wife, and they now have a child. He has been promoted to Master Sergeant, and he just wanted to thank Judge Potter for his contributions in turning a very negative situation into a positive, life-transforming event.

In reflecting upon this story, Judge Potter realized again why he had become a judge.