

...President's Desk (from front page)

It is refreshing to know that this type of commitment to public service is alive in the IE.

It is with much sadness that the legal community mourns the loss of Judge Roberta McPeters - and sends condolences to her family and loved ones. Judge McPeters passed away on May 18, 2006.

Judge McPeters was the first and the only female Presiding Judge in San Bernardino County. She was the child of "cause-embracing parents" and worked through her adult life to champion important causes. Prior to serving on the bench her practice emphasized family work and criminal, probate and contract cases. As a Judge, she worked diligently to handle the enormous case load that she and her other bench officers deal with in this County.

Please see the tribute in this issue by J' Amy Pacheco and also the SBCBA's web page for the wonderful profile of Judge McPeters prepared by Ed Butler in 2004.

Judge McPeters, we'll miss you.

Lawyer Referral Service

needs additional panel members for all areas of practice including employment, general civil, contract, real estate, personal injury/medical-malpractice, and estate planning/probate.

JOIN a public service activity
GAIN new clientele
CALL for an application

909/884-0273

Legal Community Mourns Death of Roberta McPeters

Veteran Jurist Remembered as 'Tremendous Person,' 'Tremendous Leader'

By J' Amy Pacheco

Flags in front of county buildings flew at half-staff this week in honor of San Bernardino Superior Court Judge Roberta "Cookie" McPeters, who died last week following a battle with cancer. She was 64.

Presiding Judge Larry Allen described her death as "a tragic loss to all of us."

"Judge McPeters has been a very important part of our courts," he stated. "...She was a very hardworking, very respected person. We're all saddened by her loss. We're all going to miss her."

McPeters sat on the bench Tuesday, and was hospitalized that night. She died Wednesday, stunning her colleagues and friends.

Former Presiding Judge J. Michael Welch, who was McPeters' partner judge, said he was in San Francisco when he was notified.

"It's a huge loss for us," he said. "Judges like her just don't come along - they are very few and far between. I really feel bad."

Welch described his colleague as a "tremendous person" and a "tremendous leader."

"She was a tremendous advocate for the judges of San Bernardino County," he said. "She loved the judges of San Bernardino County." McPeters, who served as the county's presiding judge from January 2000 through December 2001, "went right back into the trenches" and was recently reelected to the Court Executive Committee.

"Historically, former PJs don't do that," he pointed out. But she was right back in there, giving her all. She was truly a wonderful colleague, a fantastic leader, and was recognized statewide for those qualities. She stands out as a judge in the state that judges should look up to. She should be the standards bearer."

McPeters graduated from Fontana High School in 1958. A school counselor discouraged her dream of pursuing a legal career, and McPeters

instead worked while her first husband attended law school and began work as a tax attorney.

She returned to school, attending community college classes in San Bernardino County, and later California State, Long Beach, and the University of California, Riverside.

She attended law school as a single mother, and earned her law degree from the University of La Verne College of Law in 1977. She partnered with John Wade, who she later married. Both became San Bernardino County judges.

McPeters became a court commissioner in 1986, and was appointed to the Municipal Court bench in 1990. She was elevated in 1994.

Court Executive Officer Tressa Kentner said McPeters was "a really wonderful person to work for."

"She always listened, and was always available," Kentner recalled. As presiding judge, the jurist was the catalyst for the seismic retrofit of the central courthouse, and deserves credit for moving the project forward, Kentner said.

McPeters also was very involved with CJER, the college for judges, where she chaired the Presiding Judges' Education Committee, Kentner said.

Chief Justice Ronald M. George lauded McPeters' contributions to statewide judicial education, and described her as "an outstanding person, and somebody who really sought to work well with others to make the justice system work."

"She really was one of our best judicial administrators in the state," he said. "Her work benefited courts outside her home county of San Bernardino."

Judge James McGuire described McPeters as the epitome of both a judge and a friend.

"It's just such a loss," he said.

McGuire said he met McPeters before she became a judge, but got to know her when he was a judge and she was a commissioner.



"She just zoomed up the judicial ladder," he said, crediting her honesty and her people skills for her success.

"Her people skills were unsurpassed," he said. "I'd be angry, I'd call her, and she would explain how she would handle a situation. Personally or professionally, she could review a situation with an innate intelligence that allowed her to analyze situations so well."

"She was probably the warmest, most understanding friend a person could ask for," he added. "It didn't matter how bad things might go for her, you as a friend came first. She faced that horrible, horrible disease head-on."

McGuire recalled McPeters having helped him cope with his mother's illness, often putting his concerns before her own health concerns.

"That was just Cookie," he said. "A friend to the greatest degree. I lost one heck of a friend. I think she'll be truly, truly missed -- as a friend and a judicial colleague. She leaves a tremendous void on the bench."

Those sentiments were echoed by Judge Paul Bryant, who began working with McPeters in 1990.

"She was just a delightful human being," he said. "She was a wonderful commissioner, and judge. I'm very sorry she is no longer with us. She was an absolutely delightful, wonderful human being."

Former Presiding Judge Joseph Johnston, now a private arbitrator, called McPeters "one of the finest judges that we had."

"She never hesitated to do what she

was asked to do," he said. "As PJ, she did a great job. Above all that, she was a wonderful person. She will be dearly missed by everyone."

Judge Rex Victor remembered McPeters as a "wonderful person," "kind, warm, thoughtful," and "always willing to assist."

"It is a terrible, terrible loss," he said. "She was a fine colleague, and always reliable. It is a great loss to the community."

Roberta Shouse, executive director for the Legal Aid Society of San Bernardino, said she knew McPeters for about 20 years.

"She was one of the most decent women I've ever known," she stated. "She was just a good person. Professionally, she was always prepared."

"She and I had many dinners together, and discussed many things," she added. "I learned a lot from her. I wish I'd learned it earlier in my life."

Shouse described McPeters as someone with an "innate goodness" that "always tried to do the right thing.

"I don't always meet that kind of person," she said. "Personally and professionally, I will miss her very much. She was the epitome of a role model for women. She will be greatly missed by many people; certainly by me."

Doreen Simmons, who served as McPeters' bailiff for 13 years, called McPeters "definitely an asset to the justice system."

"I never worked for anybody more honest or hardworking," she said. "She believed in her job, she had no color lines. I can honestly say it would be my honor to give my life for her if anything would have happened in our courtroom."

Simmons said McPeters had a "large impact" on her and her children, for whom McPeters was named godmother.

"My mother taught me there was no such thing as a perfect person, but she was darn close to me," Simmons said. "She was respected by all who knew her."

McPeters helped Simmons through the death of her own parents, and "always had words of comfort."

"She made me proud to be a deputy sheriff working in her courtroom," Simmons said. "I worked for other judges before, and it was definitely an honor to be there in her presence. I learned so much from her over the years about being a good

person, professional, how to carry myself; she was like a mother to me."

"There'll never be another one like her," she added. "She will definitely be missed. It is a definite loss to the justice system. ... I don't think there are enough words in the dictionary to describe the things I want to say. She was just great on the job, always a professional -- a great woman."

Prosecutor Cheryl Kersey met McPeters as a 25-year-old brand new deputy district attorney.

"It was always a pleasure to be in her courtroom," she said. "She maintained a really nice balance. She was pleasant, respectful, patient - just an incredible woman."

Kersey said she was also "incredibly fond of her grandchildren," and said she spent a great deal of time with them, and traveling.

"She had an incredible life making sure she did what she wanted to do," she said.

Lynn Poncin, a prosecutor in the District Attorney's Office Family Violence Unit called McPeters a "great motivator for women attorneys."

Poncin, who served as the jurist's calendar deputy, said McPeters encouraged her to seek a judicial post.

Poncin described McPeters as "gracious," and a "very good mediator."

One of her strongest points, she said, was her ability to interact with victims and their families in court.

"She always took the time to thank them, to make sure they knew how important it was to her that they contributed to the legal system."

"It was a great loss to many people that she died so soon," she added.

Welch said that McPeters continued to work as her illness took its toll on her. Even after going through chemotherapy, she would return to the bench, he recalled.

"I would say, 'Cookie, why are you doing this? Why don't you take a break?'" he recalled. But McPeters didn't want to make more work for other judges.

"That was her whole attitude," he said. "She was my favorite -- just a super person and a great colleague."

J'Amy Pacheco is Editor of the San Bernardino Bulletin, a Metropolitan News publication.