

IN Northern District Senior Judge Lee dies at 85

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KEYWORDS [OBITUARY](#) / [SENIOR JUDGE WILLIAM LEE](#) / [U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA](#)



IL file photo

Senior Judge William C. Lee of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Indiana has died, the court announced Friday.

Lee, 85, died Jan. 20, according to the court.

“Judge Lee’s commitment to the District Court and our community was unparalleled,” Indiana Northern District Chief Judge Holly Brady said in a news release. “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.”

Lee was born in Fort Wayne and graduated from North Side High School in 1955. He earned his undergraduate degree from Yale University in 1959 before getting his J.D. from the University of Chicago Law School in 1962.

Lee was former President Ronald Reagan’s first appointee to the federal bench in July 1981. He served as chief judge for the Northern District from 1997 to 2003.

Before taking the bench, Lee served as U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Indiana from March 1970 to May 1973, having been nominated for that position at the age of 31. He also practiced in Allen County from September 1962 to March 1970.

In January 1963, he was appointed deputy prosecuting attorney for Allen County. From January 1967 to September 1969, he served as chief deputy prosecutor.

Lee returned to the practice of law as a trial lawyer in May 1973 after his term as U.S. attorney. His reputation as a trial attorney grew, and he was nominated to a fellowship in the American College of Trial Lawyers in his first year of eligibility.

Throughout his career, Lee was involved with providing continuing legal education to practicing lawyers and legal services to the indigent, according to the federal court.

He served as the founding president of the Benjamin Harrison American Inn of Court and as chairman of the Indiana Pro Bono Commission at the request of then-Chief Justice

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Randall T. Shepard. Also, he was president of the Allen County Legal Aid Society and a board member for the Volunteer Lawyer Program of North East Indiana.

Additionally, Judge Lee co-authored “Federal Jury Practice and Instructions” 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.

In addition to his legal career, Lee was very active in community affairs, including serving on the boards of directors of over 20 different organizations.

That included arts organizations, where his love for the arts was 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, according to the federal court.

Also, 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.”

Lee was active in Trinity English Lutheran Church and served as a member of the church choir most of his life. He also loved stage performing and was featured in 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 Anne Frank,” “Harvey” and “Life With Father.”

According to the Northern District Court, Lee believed that Fort Wayne was an exceptional place to live, work and raise a family.

In honor of Lee, flags at the federal courthouses throughout the Northern District will be flown at half-staff Jan. 29-30.