

# WSTLA's 2004 Judge of the Year Honorable Richard Jones

by *Lembhard G. Howell*

WSTLA's 2004 Judge of the Year Award, presented at WSTLA's May 13, 2004 Law Day Dinner, was presented to King County Superior Court Judge Richard Jones for his years of service to the judiciary, his exemplary handling of the recent Gary Ridgeway case and for his devotion to the community. Judge Jones is an example of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's advice that "The heights by great men achieved and kept, were not attained by sudden flight, but they while their companions slept, kept toiling upward in the night."

The news media, both locally and nationally, recently highlighted Judge Jones during his handling of *State v. Ridgeway*, the so-called "Green River Murder Case." With the world watching his every move, Judge Jones acquitted himself admirably and with dignity during these unprecedented proceedings. There was a demonstrated sensitivity by Judge Jones in his dealing with the families of the victims. The Judges' demeanor and understanding during the Ridgeway matter gave even the most jaundiced observer a splendid example of how the justice system should work.

Numerous commentators commented upon Judge Jones' dignified handling of the Ridgeway case, and the numerous families who had been affected by Ridgeway's heinous acts. CNN Anchor Miles O'Brien described it as follows: "We have been listening to Judge Richard Jones, King County Superior Court Judge, perhaps the most eloquent statement from the bench that I have heard in my lifetime, as he reads the names individually of all 48 victims of Gary Leon Ridgeway and imposes the sentence of life without possibility of parole on him."

During the sentencing, which was tele-

vised nationwide, Judge Jones said: "Now, normal protocol would dictate that I sentence you and address the family members at the end. But I'm not going to follow that process. I am going to address the victims' family members first. I do this out of my deep respect for the pain that they have endured and the loss they have experienced." Judge Jones went on to state that:

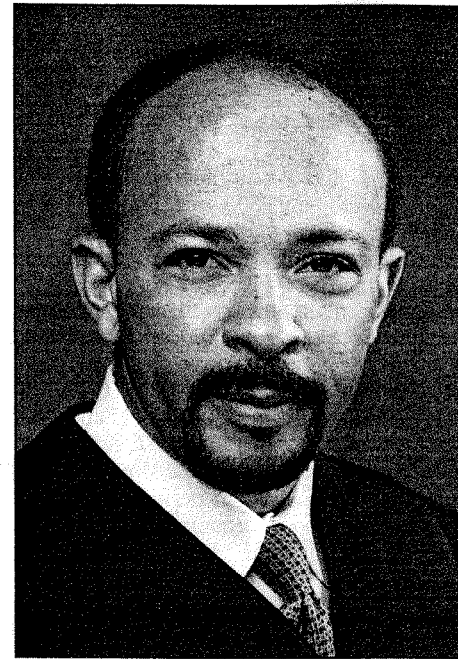
"For the past 20 years each of the young women who has died has been grouped, labeled and characterized as if the circumstances of their death was representative of the their entire existence.

I ask every family member, friend, and every member of our community to eliminate such stigma. I ask you to remember those 48 young women as people who had unexplored dreams, hopes, aspirations, and families who loved them deeply. Hold on to those memories; cherish those memories; and try to abandon the others.

If you have moments of grief, and I know that you will, I encourage you not to waste those on thoughts of revenge, hatred, or harm to Mr. Ridgeway; hatred and revenge are wasted emotions."

But what about the people who worked on the case? Paul Sherfey, the Chief Administrative Officer for the King County Superior Court, said that Judge Jones planned well in advance for the emotion that would be present in the courtroom at the time of sentencing. He allowed each victim's family up to ten minutes to speak at sentencing. He was organized and thorough, and Mr. Sherfey described Judge Jones as a wonderful judge to work with, i.e., he was on top of security arrangements; he was on top of the media issues and problems; and most impor-

(Continued on page 13)



*The Honorable Richard A. Jones  
King County Superior Court Judge.*

**MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS** ..... 22

**MISSION STATEMENT** ..... 23

**PAST PRESIDENTS** ..... 5

**PRESIDENT'S COLUMN**  
It's in Our Hands..... **front**

Wheels Fall Off Wells Fargo's  
Stagecoach..... **2**

**WSTLA AWARDS** ..... **5**

**WSTLA BY THE DECADES** ..... **6, 7**

**WSTLA FOUNDATION** ..... **26**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Location/CLE credits</u>
05/13/04	WSTLA 50th Anniversary and Law Day Dinner	SEATTLE: Westin Hotel
05/14/04	Workers' Compensation	Wash. State Convention & Trade Center
05/14/04	Head Injury Seminar	Wash. State Convention & Trade Center
05/21/04	Early Years of Litigation Practice	SEATTLE: Town Hall
06/18/04	Employment Law Seminar	Wash. State Convention & Trade Center
07/22-25/04	WSTLA's Annual Convention	STEVENSON: Dolce Skamania Lodge
9/22/04	Insurance Mix CLE	Wash. State Convention & Trade Center
10/15/04	Civil Rules & Procedure	Wash. State Convention & Trade Center
10/29/04	Tort Law Update	Wash. State Convention & Trade Center

## WSTLA's 2004 Judge of the Year Honorable Richard Jones

(Continued from page 1)

tantly, he dealt empathetically with the members of the victims' families, who had a wide range of feelings regarding the outcome of the case.

Sheriff David Riechert said that Judge Jones was "Cool, calm, collected – organized. He was in control and compassionate. Judge Jones set the whole tone of the proceedings. The atmosphere was electric. He started from the plea hearing which set its tone. While there may have been some thoughts by some people of disrupting it, the whole manner in which Judge Jones carried out the proceeding was admirable and even made it easier for the Sheriff's Department."

Mark Prothero, one of the lawyers who represented Mr. Ridgeway, also felt that Judge Jones did an excellent job, despite disagreeing with some of his rulings, noting that he felt that Judge Jones treated the parties with respect, found him to be personable, to have a good sense of humor and that he planned the proceedings carefully and with a great deal of forethought.

Captain James Gradden, who was the last Commander of the Green River Task Force said, "I cannot image a better judge or fairer judge in the trial of Ridgeway." Captain Gradden went on to say that: "I cannot express the respect I have for that man. He dealt with so many aspects of the case even though he had just been brought into the case within the last one or two years". Captain Gradden described Judge Jones as a "natural leader", and despite being quiet and unassuming, found that his leadership style commanded respect. "Judge Jones was not officious. He used powerful words in the sentencing. It was unbelievable, nobody stepped out of line." Captain Gradden said he could not think of a better representative of the judicial branch and the county, noting that Judge Jones was genuine in his feelings: "The Judge had no biases and he was always open to hear everybody out. He was always on top of security issues. He respected everyone's opinion, then he ruled, and it was obvious that it was well thought out for security and media processes and there was never any doubt that it was 'his' courtroom."

Tony Savage, another of Ridgeway's counsel, and a well-known and seasoned criminal defense lawyer, felt similarly about Judge Jones, stating: "He was just fine. He was organized. He was in control of the

courtroom, but not oppressively so. He gave direct rulings and his expectations. He was just a fine judge. I did not see how it could have been done any better."

Judge Jones graduated from the University of Washington School of Law, and in 1994 served as president of the UW Law School Alumni Association. He has in the past been President of Loren Miller Bar Association, President of Central Area Group Homes Board of Directors, President of the Board of Trustees of the YMCA of Greater Seattle and served on the UW School of Law Dean Selection Committee. He has served in numerous other roles both at the UW and Seattle University law schools, and presently serves on the Seattle University Board of Regents. He has also lectured extensively both to WSTLA and to State Bar groups.

Judge Jones has also received a slew of awards as a result of his longtime community commitment. However, in order to get a true sense of the type of person Judge Jones is, one must ask: "What is important to him, and what were the forces that shaped his commitment to justice, the law and to his community?" Judge Jones' favorite book is "Celestine Prophecy", which emphasizes that the people who you meet help to prepare you for the future. Judge Jones thus has used his unique life experiences to guide him during his career, both as a trial lawyer and now as a judge.

When asked who his heroes were, Judge Jones gave a very telling answer: "A combination of my parents, who had sparse education and raised eight kids in a small house. Mom was a maid and my father was a carpenter." He recalls that his parents used to emphasize to him that he should "Do the best that you can with what you have". They also taught him that you should "Do without what you don't need" and that "Once a task is once begun, be the labor great or small, get the job done your very best, or not at all". His parents also instilled in him a great sense of dignity and discipline that he carries with him professionally to this day. These qualities were never more evident than when the world's eyes were upon Judge Jones during the Ridgeway proceedings.

Judge Jones confesses that the *Ridgeway* case was his most challenging and taxing, emotionally, intellectually, and organizationally, stating that: "It was great pressure."

When not on the bench, Judge Jones enjoys jazz, and the music of Earth, Wind &

Fire. Another of his passions is Husky Football, and he also loves fishing. Finally, Judge Jones once restored a 1967 Austin Healy and won a prize for it.

By way of background, Judge Jones graduated from the University of Washington School of Law in 1975. Thereafter, he served as a Deputy King County Prosecutor and as an Assistant United States Attorney for the Western District of Washington. He was also a staff attorney for the Port of Seattle, and an associate at Bogle & Gates. Judge Jones was appointed to the King County Superior Court bench in 1994 by Governor Michael Lowry. He has, as noted above, given lectures before the Washington State Bar Association, King County Bar Association, Washington State Trial Lawyers Association and the UW. He had also been an instructor in the United States Attorney General's Advocacy Institute, the Executive Office of the United States Attorney in Washington and the Washington State Judicial College, where he served as Dean in 1997 and 1998. He is also a faculty member of the National Judicial

College. In 2001, the Loren Miller Bar Association recognized him with an Outstanding Achievement Award. If all of that is not enough, Judge Jones has also served on various committees of the King County Superior Court and the Superior Court Judges Association. Finally, one of the honors Judge Jones is proudest of is being asked to serve as commencement speaker for the University of Washington Law School.

As a lawyer, one of the cases Judge Jones is proudest of was when he represented his elderly 70-year old aunt back in 1980 on three Liquor Board violations charged against her tavern. This business was her primary source of income, and the charges were dismissed after trial. Richard said that the case was significant because it was his aunt's first encounter with the justice system and that her enjoying victory was more rewarding than any fee he could have earned.

Judge Jones has also been shaped greatly by his African-American heritage. He recalls

(Continued on page 20)

## It's in Our Hands

(Continued from page 1)

mitment to run for leadership positions within the Washington State Bar Association.

It is hard to imagine that the rights our forebearers fought so hard to win could ever be taken away, and yet many of these rights are under attack. The Patriot Act represents an unprecedented abrogation of individual privacy we thought was guaranteed by the Constitution. Tort reform is an ongoing challenge, on both the state and federal levels. Will the right to jury trial as we know it still exist in another 50 years? Will injured victims have even a hope of holding the wrongdoers responsible and of getting fair compensation for their injuries? To paraphrase Gerry Spence, it's in our hands.

This is not a battle we can win talking amongst ourselves. This is not a battle we can win one client or one jury at a time. We need to look outward and take action on a broader scale, making the personal commitment to help shape the processes that determine the outcome of the debate. I challenge every WSTLA member – and every member of the Bar – to get more involved: volunteer

in professional organizations, run for the bench or the legislature or a seat on the Board of Governors. Whatever your position, it's time to stand up and be counted so that the public better understands the valuable role of the legal profession.

This organization started as a handful of men whose primary purpose was the continuing legal education of its members, but over the years it grew to be a sophisticated political organization. Although much has changed since our inception, WSTLA's unwavering commitment to, and passion for, the protection of the rights of injured people and the integrity of the civil justice system has never changed. Will we be able to say the same thing at WSTLA's centenary? It's in our hands.

**Judy Massong**, WSTLA EAGLE member, is a partner in the firm of Peterson, Young, Putra, Fletcher, Zeder, Massong & Knopp, P.S. in Seattle. Her practice includes medical negligence, product liability, general personal injury and representation of physicians and nurses before various state agencies. Ms. Massong is President of the Washington State Trial Lawyers.

## WSTLA's 2004 Judge of the Year Honorable Richard Jones

(Continued from page 13)

being the only African-American in his class at St. Martin's High School in Lacey, and being subjected to numerous insensitive and racist remarks. However, these experiences, rather than embittering him, instead motivated him to become an advocate for diversity.

A product of Seattle's Central Area, Richard Jones was also stung by racism early in his legal career. At one major Seattle law firm, after Richard had interviewed well and one of the hiring partners had recommended that he be hired, at a later lunch meeting the hiring partner told Richard that the senior partners had rejected his recommendation because "the firm wasn't prepared to take on any blacks."

Judge Jones has since sought to ensure equality within the workplace. For example,

while serving as one of two staff attorneys for the Port of Seattle, he recommended the termination of a senior supervisor for sexual harassment. The recommendation was followed. That was 1978, when the law in the area of employment discrimination was just developing. It also set a firm precedent at the Port that discrimination and discriminatory conduct would not be tolerated.

Attorneys who have appeared before Judge Jones in civil and criminal matters know of his professional accomplishments. However, others may not know about his activities outside the courtroom.

This writer is envious of Judge Jones because he is generally recognized to have been the best President in the history of the Loren Miller Bar Association. As President, Richard instituted two traditions that continued long after his 1987 presidency. First, he started the Loren Miller Bar Association

(LMBA) Thanksgiving Food Drive. Thanksgiving food donations were collected and distributed through CAMP (Central Area Motivation Program). Through this innovation, the LMBA performed a useful service to the community.

Judge Jones' greatest contribution to the legal community was, perhaps, his creation of the Y Minority Job Fair Northwest. Since its creation, hundreds of minority lawyers have utilized the program, and numerous law firms participate in the program. Richard is a past chair of this event, and continues to be a member of the Job Fair Committee. Judge Jones was no doubt inspired to create the Job Fair by his earlier treatment when he sought employment with a large Seattle law firm, and felt the pain of racial discrimination firsthand.

Finally, those lawyers who attended the last King County Bar Association "Martin

Luther King, Jr. Celebration" lunch will not soon forget Judge Jones' talents as an MC, especially when he dramatically had the curtains part and the gospel choir emerged.

Judge Jones should not only serve as an inspiration to African-American lawyers and other minorities working within the legal system, but to all who aspire to bring dignity, professionalism and respect to this profession that we all hold so dear.

I, and the entire WSTLA organization, congratulate you, Richard, on being named WSTLA's 2004 Judge of the Year. It is an honor that is well deserved, and probably long overdue. Congratulations.

**Lembhard G. Howell**, WSTLA EAGLE member, practices in downtown Seattle and his principal areas of law are products liability, medical negligence, auto and construction site accidents.