

UNDERSTANDING OUR CHANGING COMMUNITY

with

JUDGE PATRICK F. FISCHER

As explained by Bill Santen in the July issue of the CBA Report, the Senior Lawyers Division will be publishing a series of articles, each written by a veteran lawyer, seeking to reveal who the author really is, what s/he really wants in life, and how we are going to achieve an even better community.



My name is Pat Fischer. I currently serve as a judge on Hamilton County's First District Court of Appeals. Before becoming a judge, I was a partner at the law firm of Keating Muething & Klekamp, concentrating on litigation involving class actions and financial institutions. I previously served as president of the Ohio State Bar Association and the Cincinnati Bar Association. I am married, have one daughter who is an attorney, and two of my brothers, one now deceased, practice or practiced law, and also are/were public officials in their communities. I also have spoken many scores of times to lawyers and civic groups on attorney professionalism, and on the reasons judges matter. I think the vast majority of lawyers are smart, interesting people with diverse backgrounds, who did a pretty good job in 1787 putting together the United States Constitution.

I think there are two critical issues that many people in our community are not facing today that need immediate change. For if we do not solve these two issues, we will not be able to solve any of the many problems facing our community and nation.

First, there is a lack of civil discourse in our body politic. My father worshiped Franklin Roosevelt and my mother thought Barry Goldwater was right until she died. While they often disagreed on political issues, I never heard a harsh, mean, or degrading comment between the two of them. So I learned how people can disagree without being disagreeable. We have lost that most important concept of decorum, respect, and civility in our public discussions. One area group, led by many lawyers and judges as well as others, called Beyond Civility, has begun an effort to educate public officials on how to disagree on policies, without being disagreeable about personalities. While president

of the Ohio State Bar Association, I would often say it is incumbent upon us lawyers to lead our community and nation back to respectful conversations on political issues of the day. For if we cannot do that, and we are trained to be able to argue any side of an issue, then no one can do it. I urge all lawyers to participate in all such endeavors, and ask that our fellow citizens follow the lead of lawyers and judges in this effort. This educational effort will not only enhance public discussion which could then lead to the resolution of our society's problems, but it also will raise the level of respect that citizens have for lawyers, which would be good too.

Second, I heartily urge Ohio's State Board of Education, and all local boards of education, enforce the teaching of civics in our schools. We have high school graduates who believe that the three branches of government are Republican, Democrat, and Independent — when we all know that those branches are legislative, executive, and judicial. This lack of understanding of the basics of how our government works is destroying public discussion during important policy debates. For if our citizens, and the reason we have public schools is so we have an educated citizenry, do not understand the most basic ways in which our government operates, we will never, as a nation or community, be able to resolve our most pressing problems. Without a basic understanding of civics, our nation cannot survive in the long-term. I urge all citizens to demand that all of our schools teach basic civics.

In summary, if we lawyers can lead our fellow citizens to a better understanding of how our governments work, and to a more respectful discussion of policy issues, then I believe our communities, state, and federal governments will be able to solve the many issues we face everyday

Judge Fischer serves on Hamilton County's First District Court of Appeals.