

Lawyers Association of St. Louis  
Memorial Service  
May 24, 2018

Judge Mullen, Mr. Varadachari, Members of the Bench and Bar, Friends and Family of the Deceased.

Today we come together to remember those St. Louis lawyers who left us in 2017. We gather not to grieve, but rather to celebrate the careers of, and to honor, applaud and express our gratitude to those members of the bar.

A roll of those individuals has been prepared. And, in a few moments, the roll of those who passed away will be read; the group totals nearly 40 in name and includes prosecutors and criminal defense lawyers, judges and a police officer, politicians and veterans, general practitioners and businessmen. These lawyers grew up here, went to our schools, and served us and those in our community.

Some names you will recognize. Most you may not. But, all these men and women were lawyers, St. Louisans, individuals who moved forward our neighborhoods and communities in ways that only lawyers and people with legal training might do.

Next year this Association will celebrate 85 years of existence. The Association was formed in November 1934.

Before that time there was no organization within our profession that offered membership to lawyers without regard to race, color, religion or specialty of practice. The Bar Association of St. Louis was then a “selective” association. That group systematically denied membership to black lawyers and lawyers engaged in criminal defense and the prosecution of bodily injury claims, attorneys to whom some in our State might now mockingly refer as “trial lawyers”.

So, this Association served a noble purpose in its infancy. Progressive lawyers came together to do what they believed necessary and right. Members provided legal services to the indigent before the days of the public defender system and hosted seminars and “legal institutes” prior to mandatory legal education.

But, in fact, this Association shined its brightest when it took the lead to end racial discrimination in the predecessor to today's Missouri Bar Association. This Association petitioned the Missouri Supreme Court to promulgate a rule integrating the Missouri Bar. Following argument, the Court took the issue under advisement, later creating a Committee on Bar Integration. That committee's actions led to the adoption of a rule by the Court establishing and providing for today's integrated Missouri Bar.

Today this Association is known by most in our profession as the association of trial lawyers – in truth, those that try cases to the bench and juries and those judges that referee those disputes.

It is, in many respects, a social association. Yes, our members volunteer their services and offer each other regular education programs. But, in the end, this group is one in which those who try disputes in this courthouse and with our neighbors in Clayton, Hillsboro, St. Charles and others nearby come together to break bread, bond and commiserate, to be friendly and become friends.

So, remembrance begs us come together this afternoon. In doing so, we not only honor those who left us, but look back to our roots. We celebrate all those who have chosen to pursue and attain a law degree no matter how they chose to make a living. We celebrate today not just the trial practice, but the nobility and promise the law offers to our everyday lives.

This courthouse has seen its share of controversy in the last five months. Our profession has never been more under attack, especially by those entrenched in Jefferson City who have directly challenged the work done in this building. But, today we recognize the promise lawyers make to support the Constitution, conduct ourselves with dignity, maintain respect for the courts, its officers and each other, and practice law to the best of our knowledge and ability.

We are members of a unique profession; a profession which seriously governs its members and the way in which those members interact with the public. We take seriously our duty to each other and the process. And our approach – our attitude and life's perspective – permeates all that we do both in the practice and without it.

Family (and friends) of the deceased, know that we recognize your loved ones today for one of the hats they wore in life – lawyer. But, we also recognize those on our roll are sons and daughters, spouses and parents. We don't diminish those roles, but merely acknowledge that which they did in their professional lives for our community.

Members of the Bench and Bar, we come here today to recognize those that chose a shared profession. We think kindly to those with whom we practiced, those we know well who've passed away, and those whose paths we crossed during our own careers. We also read the biographies of those not known to us, pause and acknowledge the nobility of a life dedicated to legal service, no matter how such service was put in practice.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us then leave here today not with a sense of loss, but rather with a sense of gratitude for the services to society which our fellow lawyers have rendered.