

EUGENE WEDOFF
Distinguished Service Award Introduction
2022

Presented by Hon. Elizabeth Perris

Colleagues, College inductees, ladies and gentlemen, and family and friends of Judge Wedoff.

It is a privilege to be with you this evening. For many of us just being here is an accomplishment. Being able to introduce Judge Wedoff makes the evening a special one for me.

I want to comment on what makes Judge Wedoff so special based on my experience, but before I do so I want to make a few comments on Judge Wedoff's background that makes him such a worthy recipient of the Distinguished Service Award.

Judge Wedoff, like many judges in the Seventh Circuit, was not a bankruptcy practitioner, when he took the bench in 1987. Instead he was a commercial litigator at the Chicago office of Jenner and Block. He quickly established himself as having bankruptcy expertise. By 2002 he became chief judge of the court. He served as chief judge for five years and as an active judge for 28 years.

I first became aware of Judge Wedoff when he and Judge Small redrafted the bankruptcy amendments that would later become Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act in an effort to have the legislation clearly accomplish its goals. According to Judge Small Congress couldn't believe that they wouldn't change the meaning. He and Judge Small did not succeed, but they tried. For those of us that had to interpret BAPCPA, I wish that Judges Wedoff and Small had cleaned up the drafting problems. It would have made the job of the judges easier.

When BAPCPA became the law he was a member of the Advisory Committee on

Bankruptcy Rules and involved in the creation of the means test form. For those of you that do not practice consumer bankruptcy law, let me say that reducing the means test to a form was a challenge but Judge Wedoff and his colleagues were up to the challenge. Judge Wedoff lectured far and wide about the means test at a time when it was new to all of us in the field.

One of the things that is remarkable about Judge Wedoff is how he ends up in leadership in every organization that he has any interest in.

The College - he served on the Admissions Council for the 7th Circuit and was a speaker on 7th Circuit and national panels.

National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges - he served as president, on the Board of Governors, and as associate editor of the NCBJ's American Bankruptcy Law Journal.

American Bankruptcy Institute. He served in various leadership capacities culminating in the presidency of the ABI. In the years leading up to his presidency he shepherded the ABI Consumer Bankruptcy Commission.

National Bankruptcy Conference - he served on the Executive Committee in addition to contributing to the consumer bankruptcy proposals.

Federal Judicial Center - he served on the bankruptcy judges' education committee for six years and regularly educated judges.

Advisory Committee on Bankruptcy Rules - Judge Wedoff served ten years, four of which were as chair.

Those of us who served with him would say that there are three reasons for this. One is hard work. A second reason is Judge Wedoff's enthusiasm. The third and final reason is that Judge Wedoff is a really nice person.

I'd like to discuss all three. Lest you think I'm not qualified to comment, I worked closely with Judge Wedoff as the chair of the Forms Modernization Project of the Advisory Committee on Bankruptcy Rules while Judge Wedoff was on the Committee and then the chair of the Committee. This was followed by the ABI Consumer Bankruptcy Committee which I co-chaired while Judge Wedoff was the incoming president, president and former president of the ABI.

Judge Wedoff became chair of the Advisory Committee on Bankruptcy Rules when we were part way through the Forms Modernization Project. Nonetheless, he dove into the project and contributed to it. We would have regular calls at 6 am Pacific time, 8 am Central time to work on the forms. Judge Wedoff regularly attended those meetings and contributed to the efforts.

Part way through the project Judge Wedoff's participation was interrupted by a serious bike accident. Judge Wedoff had lost his phone while going to the post office and retraced his steps sans helmet to get it. On the way he had a serious injury that left him cognitively impaired. We were all amazed how quickly he recovered.

I got to watch Judge Wedoff closely in my role as co-chair of the ABI's Consumer Bankruptcy Commission. Judge Wedoff had the concept of the Consumer Bankruptcy Commission, but the devil is in the detail. First, Judge Wedoff located the chairs and a reporter. The four of us met as an executive committee throughout the project. Judge Wedoff contributed to each step. He often redrafted funding proposals and the report itself.

I have given you some examples of Judge Wedoff's hard work and enthusiasm, but I'd also like to comment on what a nice person he is. Every year the Advisory Committee on Bankruptcy Rules would get one or more new members. Judge Wedoff went out of his way to make sure that they felt welcomed. He made sure that we had meals together and bonded. When we were in Chicago, Judge Wedoff even arranged a dinner at one of his favorite place.

Lest you think Judge Wedoff was superficially nice, I learned otherwise when my spouse was dying. Judge Wedoff expressed his condolences and asked how I was doing. It would have been easy to avoid the topic, but not Judge Wedoff.

Since his retirement Judge Wedoff did pro bono consumer bankruptcy appeals. He has

had more time to devote to his family, including his grandchildren and his beloved wife Peggy.

He also has time to bake bread and cake. I'm told that he never eats the latter.

Judge Wedoff, please come forward to accept this most deserved recognition - the American College of Bankruptcy Distinguished Service Award.