

The Quintessential Public Servant

Based on an Interview of Judge William Murphy by Alissa N. Hudson in December 2000

William R. Murphy spent most of his life devoted to public service, and says of his work, "There is no better thing to do." A 1948 graduate of William & Mary, Murphy's first job was as a high school coach and teacher of American History. He refers to teaching as "the best job I ever had." While teaching, he went to night school to earn a Master's in Education and Administration, which helped to better prepare him for service as the principal of Osbourn High School, (1954-1963.) Wanting to provide more income for his family, Murphy, along with many of his contemporaries, attended law school at night, earning first his LLB and then his JD from American University.

His first job as an attorney was with Gibson, Hicks, et.al., a law firm in Falls Church, that later opened a branch office in Manassas. Murphy, and future partner, Paul Ebert, opened the Manassas office in 1964 and a couple years later, left Gibson, Hicks to form their own firm. After running Ebert's successful election campaign for Commonwealth's Attorney, Murphy worked part-time as an Assistant CA indicating, "...it was good experience." Work as an ACA paid about \$12,000 a year and required 12-15 hours a week in court, leaving Murphy and the other prosecutors time to continue their private law practices. During this time, Murphy also served on the local school board, and as the first fire commissioner in PWC. As fire commissioner, he and others worked to inspect and inventory area fire houses, to help them qualify for insurance. He also worked to get radio towers built to aid fire fighters with communications.

In 1970, Murphy was elected to the state legislature, where, amongst other works, he was the patron of a bill that resulted in the handicapped accessible corners we now have on all public sidewalks. He also supported legislation to build state police radio towers, and sponsored several bills to enhance the justice system. He is a proponent of civil liberties and worries about their "erosion with the passing of each new bill." In 1976, he went on the bench as a General District Court Judge in what he terms the "people's court", and summarizes his responsibilities as interpreting the law, assessing penalties, and setting a good example for others. He retired from the bench in 1989, though he continues to serve as a substitute Judge, traveling over much of the state. He loves his work saying, "It keeps my mind alert."

When asked what message he would leave with the younger members of the Bar, Murphy focused on the importance of personal accountability, and correcting your mistakes. "Everything you do in life will have an impact" and carry with it a memory. You should therefore always conduct yourself in a responsible manner. Murphy spoke lovingly of his parents, and his marriage of 52 years, his children and his church. He has worked hard all his life to accomplish good for others, and has enjoyed every opportunity he has been afforded along the way.