

DEBRA HOMAN MCGOVERN
Memorial Resolution
Dauphin County Bar Association
April 19, 2017

President Judge Lewis, Members of the Bench and Bar, Debbie’s beloved husband Mike, who is also a member of our Bar, and friends of Debbie McGovern, we are here today to look back on the life and outstanding career of Debra H. McGovern who passed away on January 8, 2017 after battling a disease that has taken far too many at an age too young.

Debbie was born on March 13, 1955, in Kane, PA. She was the daughter of Stanley and Imogene Homan. She was the youngest of six children with her oldest sibling 18 years older than Debbie. Her older brother remembers that little smiling child whose smile continued to light up a room wherever she went in life. In Kane, she sang in the church and school choirs and also was a soloist at a classmate’s wedding. She graduated from Kane High School, Villa Maria College and the Dickinson School of Law.

Of course, Debbie had to suffer good natured ribbing about coming from Kane, a town few people had heard of and no one seemed to have a clue where it was located. She actually was able to use her knowledge of the northern rural parts of Pennsylvania to her advantage while doing a college honors summer internship with the GSA in Washington, DC. It seems that she was reviewing plans for a new post office for Dubois and said something to one of the employees about Dubois getting a new post office. The employee of GSA quickly corrected her and said that it was “Dubwah” that was getting the post office. Debbie proudly announced that she was from the area and that the correct pronunciation was Dubois.

She graduated from Dickinson in 1980 and her classmates remember her smile, friendliness, warmth and her ability to destress the stress. She never uttered an unkind word about anyone. You could always count on her walking through the law school with a smile and a friendly “hello” that would brighten

everyone's day. In class, she would provide thoughtful insights on the legal issues being studied.

After graduation, she clerked for Judge Newton Taylor in Huntington County and then came to Harrisburg where many of us got to know her. She worked for the Pennsylvania Bar Association and then served as law clerk for Judge Andy Natale for the majority of Judge Natale's county judicial career. She also clerked for the Dauphin County Senior Judges. She was very diligent and professional in performing her duties for the court, treating everyone with her friendly and cheerful demeanor.

It was her almost 20 year tenure as Executive Director of the PA Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, commonly known as PACDL, however, that Debbie made a profound impact on many of us and on our legal careers. Josh Lock had suggested Debbie apply for the full time position at PACDL.

Picture, over twenty years ago, a ragtag statewide group of over 500 criminal defense lawyers in need of an Executive Director. To give you an idea of what she was walking into, I ask you to look around this courtroom and spot your favorite criminal defense lawyer. Think about that person's ego and multiply that ego by over 500 times. Add to that equation, that a third of that group consisted of Philadelphia lawyers. Debbie, "What were you thinking?"

At that time, the President of PACDL was J. Richard Gray, now a third term Mayor of the city of Lancaster. He has stated that:

Debbie organized the Association to provide meaningful legal education for the criminal defense bar. She did this while dealing with the renegades of the bar, our membership. Due to her dedication, the Association continued to grow stronger.

Anyone who was a member of the Association quickly saw the impact Debbie had on every aspect of the Association. Whether it was seeing that the Amicus briefs were done on the important criminal issues of statewide importance, making sure that the publications were proofread, or setting up

statewide meetings, she and her staff got it done in a way no one could ever match.

The Honorable Joseph M. Cosgrove, now Judge of the Commonwealth Court was a former Board member and Past President of PACDL. His words summarize it best:

As a relatively young lawyer, just nominated to a seat on the board of PACDL, I was more than a bit intimidated. These were the giants of the profession gathered around me, and they had serious business at hand. And while I was eventually welcomed to this roundtable, it was Debbie McGovern who offered her warm outreach and made me feel comfortable right from the start.

That was her way.

Harnessing lawyers, especially criminal defense lawyers, can be tough business, but no one has ever done it with more grace, patience, and good will than Deb...

Deb handled things with a quiet calm, accommodating anyone and everyone, and never taking credit.

Debbie didn't limit her vision just to PACDL. She was a welcome statewide resource for all criminal defense attorneys and she provided valuable assistance to the Public Defender Association of Pennsylvania. Taylor Andrews, Past President of that Association noted she provided the support:

...in a very effective and gracious way. Unlike PACDL, PDAPA had no staff. For the many years that PACDL and PDAPA convened a joint meeting, Debbie and her staff managed all the logistics for the public defenders to attend the conference. Debbie was warm and welcoming to all public defenders regardless of their membership in PACDL. Debbie was an accessible problem solver.

Of course, dealing with all these defense attorneys at a weekend seminar and having to travel back to Harrisburg with some of them, could affect one's sanity. After a weekend seminar in Pittsburgh, she did forget her luggage at the hotel and had to go back to get it. But, that could have easily been attributed to the fact that Joe Curcillo was her driver.

Debbie was a tireless advocate for the criminal defense attorney. From the mid 90's to the fall of 2015, her steady leadership of PACDL was a much needed guiding light for all who wanted to improve our legal profession.

Even Debbie's personal life had a legal connection. She met her husband Mike at the 1987 Dauphin County Bar Association picnic. While Mike was clerking for Gary Lightman, Mike stated a desire to go to the Bar picnic. Gary couldn't make it so they arranged for Mike to go with Harold Tull, an older lawyer who was renting an office in the same building. When Harold and Mike arrived at the picnic, Mike spied a table of three attractive women. Mike told Harold before the picnic was over, he was going to go over to that table to meet them. A short time later, Mike looked over at the table and there was Harold with a big grin on his face inviting Mike to join them at the table. Imagine, if you can, Harold Tull as a matchmaker! Three years later, in 1990, Debbie and Mike, now a lawyer at the Turnpike Commission, were married.

That fairytale marriage almost didn't happen, however, since prior to meeting Mike, Debbie had a previous fiancé. That guy messed up when Debbie, the dog lover, was told by that fiancé that she would have to choose between him and Debbie's Labrador retriever. Well, she chose the Lab and Mike's later appearance in her life was secure.

In her spare time, Debbie enjoyed knitting, crocheting and Penn State football. She had a closet full of Penn State clothes and memorabilia to prove it. There is no current evidence as to Judge Natale's reaction to Debbie's admiration for Penn State, but that lack of evidence is probably a good thing.


Debbie also enjoyed traveling with her husband. Frequent trips to California to visit relatives and trips to Ireland, Scotland and France were wonderful experiences they shared together. Mike made frequent appearances at PACDL events to support Debbie even though he was not a criminal defense attorney. Their deep love and affection for each other was unmistakable and obvious to all. The last stages of her life were not the easiest but Mike supported her with that love and deep sense of caring. Mike was always there for her.

As we honor Debbie's memory and legacy with this resolution, we mourn her passing, and paraphrasing Judge Cosgrove's remarks and echoing the sentiment of the memorial committee, we pay tribute to Debbie with these words:

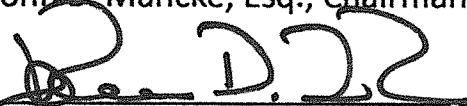
We will never forget the wry, bemused little smile Debbie always greeted us with. The memory of that smile will always ignite a smile in return.

And now, be it resolved, that this resolution be made a part of the records of the Dauphin County Courts and Dauphin County Bar Association and that a copy be transmitted to her beloved husband, Mike.

Respectfully submitted,



John B. Mancke, Esq., Chairman




Joshua D. Lock, Esq.



Royce L. Morris, Esq.



Joseph A. Curcillo, III, Esq.



David L. Schwalm, Esq.



Barbara A. Zemlock, Esq.