

Washington State Bar Association

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Hon. Kathleen O'Connor (Ret.) Receives Outstanding Judge Award

Spokane superior court judge honored for her 37-year judicial career

SEATTLE, WA [Sept. 30, 2016] — The Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) presented Superior Court Judge Kathleen O'Connor (ret.) with its 2016 Outstanding Judge Award. The award is in recognition of her groundbreaking 37-year judicial career. WSBA President **Bill Hyslop** presented the award at the WSBA Annual Awards Dinner on Sept. 29, 2016, at the Sheraton Seattle.

O'Connor first made headlines by opening the first women-owned law firm in Spokane with her law partner D. Jean Shaw, focusing on family, real estate and civil law. In 1979, O'Connor became the first full-time female superior court commissioner in Spokane County. In 1988, she became the county's first female superior court judge. Upon her retirement in January 2016, Judge O'Connor was the most senior sitting judge in Washington state.

O'Connor spent much of her career as a trial judge adjudicating complex civil and criminal cases, such as the civil commitment trial for South Hill rapist Kevin Coe, and the class-action lawsuits filed against area utilities after the 1991 Ponderosa firestorm that destroyed more than 100 homes in eastern Washington.

A founding member of the Spokane chapter of Washington Women Lawyers, she regularly hosted social events to foster camaraderie and connection among younger women lawyers. She also founded a group for women judges in Spokane County to promote and preserve excellence in the judiciary, which now has over 30 members. Throughout her career, O'Connor has mentored many externs.

"The example that Judge O'Connor set has created the standard for excellence in our legal community, and she deserves every accolade for her commitment to the law," said **Emily Arneson**, president of the Spokane chapter of Washington Women Lawyers. "She set the bar for lawyers and litigants at the highest level, and demanded preparation, civility, professionalism, and respect for the judicial system."

Judge O'Connor was also active in the Superior Court Judges Association as chair of the Family and Juvenile Law Committee, Legislative Committee and as president-judge. She chaired subcommittees for the Supreme Court on the Presiding Judge Rule and Water Courts.

In 2009, O'Connor received the Gonzaga University School of Law Award for Distinguished Judicial Officer. In 2008, she received the Washington Women Lawyers Foundation Award.

"Thank you to the WSBA for this award and a very special thanks to the Spokane Chapter of WWL for nominating me," said Judge O'Connor. "We have come a long way since six women started the Spokane Chapter. I must also acknowledge the support of all my judicial colleagues in Spokane and around the state. It was my honor to work with you."

About the Washington State Bar Association

The WSBA is part of the judicial branch and is authorized by the Washington Supreme Court to license the state's 37,789 lawyers and over 1,000 other legal professionals. In furtherance of its obligation to protect and serve the public, the WSBA both regulates lawyers and other legal professionals under the authority of the Court and serves its members as a professional association — all without public funding. The WSBA's mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, to ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice.

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