

Judge Hodges honored at reception

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Judge William Terrell Hodges (JD 58) was honored Nov. 2 at the Thomas Center in Gainesville. (Photos by Haley Stracher)

By Richard Goldstein

When U.S. District Judge William Terrell Hodges (JD 58) was nominated to the federal bench in 1971, he assumed his robes in the middle district of Florida before the age of 40, and 41 years later he holds the same job, now as a federal judge on senior status in Ocala.

A remarkably stable career one might conclude.

But it was clear during a Nov. 2 reception at the Thomas Center in Gainesville sponsored by the North Central Chapter of the Federal Bar Association that Hodges did not stand still during his long tenure.

As protégé of former Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Hodges rose to lead policymaking body for the administration of justice in the federal courts, becoming chair of the Judicial Conference of the United States. Hodges and District Judge Anthony Alaimo lodged the complaint that would result in the impeachment and removal from office of U.S. District Judge Alcee Hastings, who had been acquitted by a jury of soliciting a bribe in a mob case. And he mentored decades worth of law clerks.

Those clerks were present in force at the Thomas Center to praise their former boss.

Scott L. Whitaker (JD 76), who clerked for Hodges from 1976 to 1978, said Hodges took seriously his duty to dispense justice and to guard against abuse of power.

"I watched him struggle every time he had to pass sentence," Whitaker said. "His humility in all things is beyond anything I've ever seen. He always used to say, every time you use a little power, you lose a little power. I've never seen him abuse it once."

Still, one story of the way Hodges exercised power elicited knowing laughter from the audience that included UF Law students.

Judge Gerald Bard Tjoflat of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals explained that Tampa maintained a bus stop immediately in front of the courthouse steps while Hodges was chief judge of the middle district during the 1980s.

"The city of Tampa had a bus system and they had a monstrous bus stop at the base of the old federal courthouse in Tampa. All the buses came there and the jurors would have trouble getting up there" to the courthouse, Tjoflat said.

Hodges sent a letter to the mayor demanding that the bus stop be moved. When no action ensued, Tjoflat said, federal marshals dismantled the offending public transportation facility with blow torches.

Sitting on a dais with Tjoflat, Hodges accepted laconically the stories and praise offered during the "Toast to Judge Hodges" event.

"That was the result of deputies who volunteered; no order was given so it was unappealable," Hodges deadpanned.

Last year Hodges served as the Peter T. Fay Jurist-in-Residence at UF Law speaking with students and faculty about judicial clerkships, trial advocacy and legal careers.

Hodges was appointed by President Richard Nixon in 1971. He served as chief judge from 1982 to 1989 and has maintained senior status since 1999.

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Judge William Terrell Hodges (JD 58) was honored Nov. 2 at the Thomas Center in Gainesville. (Photos by Haley Stracher)