Passages: Retired Justice Donald F. Shea

August 15, 2019: Retired Rhode Island Supreme Court Justice Donald F. Shea, 93, of Providence and formerly East Providence, died on Wednesday evening, August 14, the judge’s family has announced.

Justice Shea served as Associate Justice on the Superior Court from 1972 to 1981 and on the Supreme Court from 1981 until 1995. He continued to serve the Judiciary in retirement, most recently as a mediator in appellate cases in the Supreme Court.

“Justice Shea was the epitome of what a judge should be,” said Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell. “He was a true gentleman, he was kind and patient, and he leaves the legacy of his work for the court.”

Justice Shea authored more than 500 opinions during his Supreme Court tenure, ranging from issues involving private citizens, industry, and criminal law to the media and municipal government.

Born in Pawtucket, he graduated from Providence College in 1950. He received his law degree from Georgetown University School of Law.

His career as an attorney began in 1955, and he remained in private practice in Providence until 1968. He served in the Rhode Island House of Representatives from 1960 to 1968. He was appointed executive assistant to then-Governor Frank Licht in 1968.

He was the husband of the late Ursula Rafferty Shea, who died in 2015. They were married for 65 years. The Sheas had 5 children, 11 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

The funeral will be Tuesday, August 20, at 10 a.m. at St. Sebastian’s Church in Providence. Calling hours will be at the W. Raymond Watson Funeral Home in Riverside on Monday, August 19, from 3 to 7 p.m.

A 2016 photograph of Justice Shea is attached to this e-mail.

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