

TRIBUTE
TO
THE HONORABLE DICKINSON R. DEBEVOISE

*Ronald J. Riccio**

It is my privilege and honor to join in publicly recognizing the distinguished legal career of Judge Dickinson R. Debevoise. I know of no finer lawyer or judge.

My first awareness of Judge Debevoise dates back to 1971 while I was clerking for the late and beloved United States District Court Judge Lawrence A. Whipple. One day I asked Judge Whipple to name the attorneys he most admired. Prominent on his list was Dick Debevoise. Judge Whipple regarded him as "the consummate professional, always well prepared, courteous and respectful." I did not realize that within six months after my clerkship I would be representing a defendant in a major trademark infringement case and that plaintiff's counsel would be none other than Dick Debevoise. It was, needless to say, a daunting assignment for me, as it would be for any lawyer.

I soon discovered that Judge Whipple's high regard for Dick was well deserved. He represented his client skillfully and zealously, but he also exhibited the utmost integrity and treated me with respect and courtesy. Despite his much greater experience and stature, he was never condescending, egotistical, or rude. Judge Debevoise's example taught me early in my career the important lesson that our adversarial system can work, that strong advocacy and civility are not mutually exclusive, and that the practice of law is indeed a dignified profession. For that important lesson I will always be grateful to Judge Debevoise.

Dick's tenure on the federal bench has been brilliant. He is a favorite of lawyers practicing in the District of New Jersey and has received rave reviews for his judicial temperament and legal scholarship. The following are some examples:

"He's very friendly."

"He's great. He has a sense of humor and a good judicial temperament."

"He's a real gentleman — he wouldn't humiliate or embarrass people. He's the best federal judge in the country."

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"He's a gentleman, and a fine man. I've never heard anybody criticize him."

"He's very, very evenhanded."

"He's principled."

"He's very fair."

"He's extremely bright, and a very practical guy. If you have a technical argument he'll cut through it and find practicalities."

"He's astute in the law and reaches the right result in his legal analysis."¹

A few years ago I imposed upon my friendship with Judge Debevoise and invited him to join our faculty as an adjunct professor of Constitutional Law. To my great delight he agreed to do so. He has been both a popular and demanding professor, serving our school and our students with great dedication for which I am most thankful and deeply appreciative.

I have always regarded Judge Debevoise as a wonderful role model for lawyers, especially in his commitment to the service of the public interest. He has distinguished himself as Chairman of the New Jersey Disciplinary Review Board and as President of the Newark Legal Services Project. I know he is held in especially high regard by the public interest Bar nationwide.

The descriptions "lawyers lawyer" or "judges judge" are reserved only for the most accomplished and distinguished of our colleagues on the Bench or at the Bar. To be known as one or the other is a goal of many, but attained by few. I am proud to say I know a lawyer and a judge who is worthy of both lofty titles. He is, of course, Judge Debevoise.

There is one final matter. While watching the ceremony surrounding the 50th anniversary of the Normandy invasion, the television camera scanned some of the veterans in attendance. To my surprise I saw the familiar face of Judge Debevoise. He was there to commemorate his own landing on Utah Beach as part of the Army's 294th Engineer Combat Battalion A Company. When asked what it was like that fateful day 50 years ago, his response was typically understated: "I was a very lowly sergeant. We were the lowly

¹ALMANAC OF THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY, 3d. Cir. Section, at 10 (1994).

people who did the lifting and carrying."² The actual facts reveal otherwise. Judge Debevoise exhibited great courage in defense of our country. He received five campaign stars and the Bronze Star — hardly the accomplishments of a "lowly sergeant."

I know Judge Debevoise will feel honored that the *Seton Hall Constitutional Law Journal* has dedicated this volume to him. He'll probably say it's an honor undeserved. Great persons often react that way. But we all know this honor is well deserved, earned by Judge Debevoise during a lifetime of accomplishments and achievements which will endure for generations. Thank you Judge for all the good you have done for so many!

²Dana Coleman, *District Court Judge Returns to Normandy Invasion Site*, N.J. LAW., June 27, 1994, at 13.

