



by SaMee C. Burrage and Nicole M. Whitaker

## Judge John F. Gossart, Jr. U.S. Immigration Judge, Baltimore Immigration Court

**H**on. John F. Gossart, Jr. is many things to many people. If you were to speak to those who know him well, you may hear him described as a proud veteran, an esteemed colleague, or a respected mentor. No matter whom you speak to, they will all agree that he is a great man. Throughout his distinguished legal career, Judge Gossart has impacted the careers and lives of many. As the third most senior immigration judge in the nation, he earnestly embraces the distinct privilege and solemn responsibility of serving as an immigration judge for the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review in Baltimore, Md.

### The Jurist

A native of Brooklyn, N.Y., Judge Gossart considers Maryland his home. He graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park in 1967 before proudly serving in the U.S. Army from 1967–69. Following a one-year tour of duty with a combat support unit at Camp Vayama in south-east Thailand, he attended evening classes at the University of Baltimore School of Law under the G.I. Bill as a Vietnam veteran—while working as an assessor for Montgomery County, Maryland.

Judge Gossart began his legal career by starting his own practice, with the dream of one day working in public service with the Department of Justice (DOJ), the world's largest law firm. In 1975, the opportunity presented itself and he started with DOJ as a general attorney handling naturalization petitions in the Washington, D.C., District Office of what was then the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Later, he served as a DOJ trial attorney, representing the government in Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Merit Systems Protection Board cases. He also wrote final administrative decisions for the attorney general.

After only five years of INS service, Judge Gossart was



selected as an assistant deputy commissioner for naturalization. In that capacity, Judge Gossart drafted regulations, implemented statutory changes, testified before Congressional subcommittees, and litigated immigration issues at the federal level. While working for INS, he quickly found that immigration was a “complicated area of the law” that satisfied his desires to both litigate and work in public service.

### Opening the Baltimore Court

In 1982, Judge Gossart was appointed as an Immigration Judge in Washington, D.C., by Attorney General William French Smith. Under the guidance of the late Chief Judge

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William R. Robie, he then opened the Baltimore Immigration Court. Once the single-judge court opened, its jurisdiction was quickly expanded to include Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and West Virginia. After his appointment, Judge Gossart was instrumental in maintaining judicial impartiality and upholding the public perception of the Immigration Court as an independent judicial entity.

In the early years, Judge Gossart and other judges appointed to serve in Baltimore were selected to “ride the circuit.” These judges were detailed to a number of locations to reduce the overburdened dockets of Buffalo, N.Y.; Hartford, Conn.; and Detroit, Mich. Judge Gossart has been detailed to the San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego Immigration Courts, as well as to San Juan, P.R., and Saint Thomas and Saint Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands—all of

which Judge Gossart describes as “pretty good duty stations.” The chief immigration judge has also appointed Judge Gossart to preside over special interest and attorney discipline cases throughout the country.

#### **Challenging Cases**

Judge Gossart particularly enjoys what he describes as the “diversity and challenges” of the cases that come before the Baltimore Immigration Court. The variety of applications submitted to the court and the variety of countries and cultures represented by the respondents are reflected

in some of Judge Gossart’s most controversial and widely publicized cases.

Judge Gossart has presided, for example, over deportation proceedings involving two war criminals who worked at Nazi concentration camps. In one case, Judge Gossart determined that the respondent “personally testified to his participation in a death march from Hersbruck to Auschwitz on which weakened prisoners were shot or left to die when they could not continue.” The longest decision Judge Gossart ever wrote, at 154 pages, resulted in an order of removal of a former member of the Nazi-organized Ukrainian police. Members of the press, as well as the Ukrainian National Congress and the Jewish Defense League, attended the nine-day hearing.

Additionally, Judge Gossart oversaw the removal proceeding of an alleged Caribbean presidential candidate and founder of a paramilitary organization. This organization was accused of committing thousands of human rights violations—including rape, torture, and murder—while the sitting president was in exile. Judge Gossart also oversaw the removal proceeding of an alleged Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorist. Several witnesses from Northern Ireland participated in the hearing.

#### **The Mentor**

Judge Gossart began teaching immigration law at the University of Baltimore School of Law in January 1997 after serving as a guest speaker for Professor Arnold Rochvarg and Professor Emeritus Noor Mohammad for several years. He believes that every practitioner should have at least a general knowledge of immigration law, an important and ever-changing area of the law.

The strong enrollment levels and high student evaluations for his *Immigration Law* course reflect the expertise and practical experience Judge Gossart shares with his students. Every semester, he invites a variety of guest speakers to class and facilitates a mock immigration hearing, where students serve as judges and counsel for the government and a fictitious respondent.

#### **“Read the Law. Do Justice.”**

These words are written on the chalk board before every class Judge Gossart teaches. Emphasizing ethics and practicing law with the highest standards of professionalism, Judge Gossart’s goal is to teach students to read and understand the law by learning what the law says before practicing it. Before allowing students to answer hypothetical questions in class, he often asks, “Did you read the law?” In an area of law where statutes can be particularly complex and clients can be especially vulnerable, his guidance and instruction have produced excellent immigration attorneys. He finds great satisfaction in having former students come before him in court.

A founding member and former vice justice of the LaBrum Chapter of the professional law fraternity Phi Alpha Delta, Judge Gossart is an active University of Baltimore School of Law alumnus. He earned the “Outstanding Adjunct Faculty Award” for his commitment to academia and dedication to the law school community. Often the only adjunct professor in attendance, Judge Gossart faithfully attends the graduation ceremony at the University of Baltimore School of Law every May.

Judge Gossart has been an outstanding role model and persuasive advocate for immigration judges. He has spearheaded many projects as the past president of the National Association of Immigration Judges and has been involved with various advisory committees, including the 2009–10 Chief Immigration Judge’s Advisory Committee. Judge Gossart was one of the authors of the *Immigration Court Practice Manual*, which provides clear, practical guidance for parties who appear before the immigration courts, and he continues to meet periodically with the other authors to update and amend the manual. He also helped to create the *Immigration Judge Benchbook*, which provides immigration judges with templates and resource materials to draft clear, concise, and well-reasoned decisions. Judge Gossart has written several chapters for the *Benchbook* over the years, including chapters on conducting merit hearings and adjudicating motions to reopen proceedings. Judge Gossart is also dedicated to teaching fellow immigration judges and young attorneys. He has served as a guest lecturer at the National Judicial College in Reno, Nev. He also

organized the *Subject Matter Mentor Directory* to provide support to immigration judges, and he is routinely called upon to train new immigration judges.

### **The Renaissance Man**

Judge Gossart is a family man who enjoys spending time with his children and grandchildren. He is also an avid outdoorsman who appreciates gardening and kayaking. He routinely attends sporting events, particularly baseball games. He is a fan of the Baltimore Orioles, the Washington Nationals, and the Los Angeles (Brooklyn) Dodgers. He has owned a baseball signed by several of the Brooklyn Dodgers (including Pee Wee Reese) and played in a men's softball league for 35 years.

The judge is also well known for his quick wit and good humor. Judge Gossart is always able to put those around him in good cheer, no matter the circumstance. He is a fan of good music, including

classic pop, rock n' roll, and the blues. Most notably, Judge Gossart is an Elvis Presley aficionado. Among his family photographs and Army decorations, his office is decorated with an abundance of Elvis memorabilia—including an Elvis clock that strikes at the top of each hour and a life-size Elvis cardboard cut-out.

### **Conclusion**

Judge Gossart is an exemplary judge who is respected and adored by his students, fellow judges, chambers staff, and attorneys. On Aug. 3, 2013, Judge Gossart will retire after more than 40 years of practicing law and serving as a U.S. immigration judge. The field of immigration law will continue to be shaped by his mentorship of all of those whom he has touched—and will continue to touch. His illustrious career in public service leaves a legacy of integrity, leadership, and compassion. He will truly be missed. ☺