



Hon. Gregory A. White

U.S. Magistrate Judge, Northern District of Ohio

At a recent “brown bag luncheon” hosted by the Northern District of Ohio Chapter this past January, U.S. Magistrate Judge Greg White opened with a light-hearted question to the audience: “How is a law career like baseball?” The answer: “When you can’t practice anymore, they put you on the bench.” All kidding aside, Judge Gregory A. White has now been on the federal bench for over five years after a long and storied career as the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, and before that as the Lorain County, Ohio, prosecutor. Did you also know that Judge White would be perfectly happy and capable of *building* the bench, too? More on that later.

Judge White’s career path has had a decidedly west-to-east direction across the state of Ohio. He was born in Huron County, Ohio, then moved east to Lorain County, where he graduated from Oberlin High School in 1967 and later served for 22 years as Lorain prosecuting attorney. He finally settled even farther east in Cuyahoga County, first as the Northern District of Ohio’s U.S. attorney for six years, and now sitting as a U.S. magistrate judge, with his chambers located at the Cleveland, Ohio, federal courthouse. Despite the earlier west-to-east move across the state of Ohio, Judge White has no current plans to move farther east and take over Youngstown; he says he’s at the Cleveland courthouse to stay. That’s a good thing, as he is also an active and dedicated member of the Federal Bar Association’s Northern District of Ohio Chapter Board of Directors, where he continues to add valuable direction to the chapter’s many programs and activities, including helping to coach the Garrett Morgan High School Mock Trial team over the past three years in connection with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s Mock Trial Tournament.

Judge White began his journey after high school by



joining the U.S. Marine Corps, serving his country for two years, from 1968–1969, including a Vietnam tour of duty with the Ninth Infantry Regiment. While in the Marines, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal (for “gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States”), the Bronze Star Medal (for “heroic achievement or service”) with a “V” designation (indicating “valor,” resulting from an act of combat heroism), and the Naval Commendations Medal (for “distinguishing oneself by heroism, meritori-



James W. Satola is one of the FBA circuit vice presidents for the Sixth Circuit and a past president of the FBA’s Northern District of Ohio Chapter. A version of this article appeared in the Spring 2012 issue of Inter Alia, the quarterly newsletter of the FBA Northern District of Ohio Chapter.

ous achievement, or meritorious service”), also with the “V” designation. It is clear from talking with Judge White that his military service is central to who he is today, as he notes: “The USMC gives you a perspective on life” that he has carried with him throughout his career.

After leaving the Marine Corps, Judge White began work in Lorain’s steel mills, while also taking classes at Lorain Community College. He later enrolled at Kent State University, where he graduated in 1973 with a B.A.

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in criminal justice and police administration. He jokes that it was advice given by one of his former accounting professors that had him “giving serious thought toward going to law school.” Judge White took that advice, and entered Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 1973, where he com-

pleted his J.D. in 1976, graduating magna cum laude. While studying at Cleveland-Marshall, Judge White also worked days as a carpenter, and he still enjoys wood-working, spending many a winter afternoon in the garage pursuing the craft. As indicated earlier, Judge White not only sits on the bench, but he can build it too.

Judge White began his legal career as a solo practitioner, sharing an office with, and “given a desk and chair” by, Lorain County solo practitioner Hub Wilcox. A short time later, in 1979, when the city of Elyria’s then-law director was appointed to the bench, Judge White made his first foray into Lorain County politics, seeking, and being appointed by Elyria’s mayor to, the open law director position. However, later that same year, the mayor lost a re-election bid by 61 votes, which, as a result, carried with it the end of Judge White’s law director appointment. So, in 1980, just three years out of law school, Judge White ran for Lorain County prosecutor and won, a position he held for the next 22 years. While serving as county prosecutor, he was active in the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association and served as president of that organization from 1989–1990. He was selected Outstanding Prosecuting Attorney of Ohio in December 1995. While county prosecutor, Judge White served for 10 years on the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission, helping to revise Ohio’s criminal code. He also chaired a statewide Victims of Crime Task Force, which made recommendations to the Ohio governor resulting in new laws relevant to the investigation and prosecution of crimes perpetrated against mentally challenged and disabled individuals. For eight years, he also chaired the Ohio attorney general’s Victims of Crime Advisory Board.

In November 2002, Judge White received a call from the White House that would change his career and propel him toward the federal legal arena. He was nominated to the position of U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Ohio. Judge White recalls fondly the honor of being named the district’s top law enforcement officer, and particularly the experience of his interview at the U.S.

Department of Justice, including the majestic sight of seeing the inscription ringing the walls of the alcove outside the attorney general’s office in Washington, D.C., stating: “The United States Wins Its Point When Justice Is Done Its Citizens In The Courts.” The position of U.S. attorney is perhaps best described in a paragraph written by U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice George Sutherland more than 70 years ago:

The United States Attorney is the representative not of an ordinary party to a controversy, but of a sovereignty whose obligation to govern impartially is as compelling as its obligation to govern at all; and whose interest, therefore, in a criminal prosecution is not that it shall win a case, but that justice shall be done. As such, he is in a peculiar and very definite sense the servant of the law, the twofold aim of which is that guilt shall not escape or innocence suffer. He may prosecute with earnestness and vigor—indeed, he should do so. But, while he may strike hard blows, he is not at liberty to strike foul ones. It is as much his duty to refrain from improper methods calculated to produce a wrongful conviction as it is to use every legitimate means to bring about a just one.

Berger v. United States, 295 U.S. 78, 88 (1935).

While serving as the U.S. attorney, Judge White was appointed by the U.S. attorney general to the Attorney General’s Advisory Committee, and served as chair of the Law Enforcement Coordinating, Victim, and Community Issues Subcommittee. He also served on subcommittees addressing terrorism and national security, border issues, and violent crime. On top of this, he is a past chairperson of the Cleveland Federal Executive Board.

At the recent Federal Bar Association “brown bag luncheon,” Judge White humorously noted: “Public corruption has followed me throughout my career.” Thankfully, not instigating it but rather prosecuting it! First, there were various investigations of public corruption relating to Lorain County affairs while he was Lorain County prosecutor; then, as U.S. attorney, the prosecution of former East Cleveland Mayor Emmanuel Onuwar along with businessman Nate Gray in connection with a long-term bribery scandal that sent both men to federal prison; on through to participation in the investigation and prosecution of Tom Noe and other persons involved in investment improprieties with the Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation funds; and, most recently, the early stages of the wide-ranging Cuyahoga County corruption investigation, which, has to date, resulted in over 40 convictions. To quote Judge White: “It was a historic ride.” His favorite part of the work as U.S. attorney was working in the neighborhoods—“dealing with guns, gangs, and the like”—while helping those neighborhoods to better address their problems and to thrive.

Then, in 2008, after “27 years of stomping out fires” as a county prosecutor and U.S. attorney, Judge White

arrived at what he describes as “five years of very quiet.” On March 1, 2008, Judge White began his duties as a U.S. magistrate judge for the Northern District of Ohio, the culmination of a rigorous and extensive vetting process leading to his selection as a magistrate judge by the district judges of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio. He describes the docket he now oversees as a “large dose” of state habeas corpus cases and Social Security Administration benefits appeals, the latter of which often involves a process that can be “very trying for people” in light of how long it takes for such cases to work their way through what can be many levels of review.

Perhaps his favorite part of being a U.S. magistrate judge is participating in the mediation process, especially the personal interaction with lawyers and litigants, where for many of them it represents “their first real chance to say their peace.” One particular case that stands out is the recent \$4 million settlement mediated by Judge White, involving the death of famed R&B singer Sean Levert in the Cuyahoga County jail, awarded to Angela Lowe, Sean Levert’s widow. The case stemmed from facts showing that after Levert entered the jail on charges for a non-violent crime (failure to pay child support), and after he gave the authorities his anxiety disorder medication (Xanax), he was placed in a restraint chair, then later died from withdrawal symptoms. Lowe has since testified before the Ohio House of Representatives in support of passage of “Sean’s Law,” dealing with the treatment of inmates who have drug prescriptions when admitted into custody.

While Judge White’s service as a magistrate judge primarily involves civil litigation—dealing with his own docket of cases as well as matters referred by district judges for a “Report and Recommendation”—he notes that “civil practice attorneys sometimes can be tougher than criminal lawyers to work with.” He also has a criminal case rotation, involving two-week stints on the criminal docket, handling arraignments, traces, warrants, and occasionally pleas, followed by six weeks off the criminal case rotation. He particularly enjoys the civil practice, finding it a satisfying intellectual experience. As to opinion writing, he describes himself as “an editor as much as anything else,” with his longtime law clerks preparing first drafts of the many orders and opinions that issue from his courtroom, then refining them to reflect his considered decisions. Judge White describes the general docket of the district court as “very busy,” and thinks that the Northern District of Ohio’s emergence as a venue for multidistrict litigation (MDL) is a great asset to the district.

Yes, it has been a “historic ride” for Judge White, first as county prosecutor, then as a U.S. attorney, and now as a U.S. magistrate judge. We can be sure that it will continue to be an interesting ride for Judge White while at the Cleveland federal courthouse ... unless, of course, he changes his mind about taking over Youngstown. ☺