

# MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



## *Office of Public Information*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **JUDGE MICHAEL R. SMOLENSKI MOURNED BY MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT, COURT OF APPEALS; REMEMBERED FOR LOVE OF LAW AND OF PEOPLE**

LANSING, MI, June 2, 2009 – Court of Appeals Judge Michael R. Smolenski, who served on the Court of Appeals from 1994 until his retirement on January 1, 2009, was “a judge’s judge – fair-minded, courteous, straightforward, and with a deep knowledge and love of the law,” said Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly. “On behalf of the Michigan Supreme Court, I extend my deepest sympathies to his wife Kathleen, their seven children, and all Judge Smolenski’s family and friends.”

Smolenski, who died on May 30, is remembered by colleagues on the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals not only for his legal expertise, but also for his good humor and resolute spirit, even when stricken with multiple system atrophy, a rare neurological disorder.

“First and foremost, he loved to be with people,” said longtime colleague Court of Appeals Judge Joel P. Hoekstra. “He had the gift of making people feel at ease; he loved a good time and a good laugh. Even with all the difficulties from his illness, he never lost the ability to laugh. My Court of Appeals colleagues and I mourn him and will miss him.”

“Judge Smolenski,” Kelly said, “had the law in his blood.” The eldest of 10 children, he is the son of former District Judge J. Robert Smolenski and the late Mary Burkholder Smolenski; his sister, Sara Smolenski, is a 63rd District Court judge.

“Judge Smolenski believed that the law was to be honored and followed, and he certainly lived by that principle,” Kelly said. The Chief Justice noted that Smolenski served as a judge of the 61st District Court in Grand Rapids and as a Kent County Circuit judge before being elected to the Court of Appeals in 1994; he was re-elected in 2001.

A former Kent County commissioner, Smolenski received both his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Michigan. Following his graduation from law school in 1969, he served as an officer with the Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Marine Corps from 1970 to 1973. He was active in the Grand Rapids community, having helped found the Stepping Stones Montessori School in 1982.

Visitation will be held on Tuesday, June 2 and Wednesday, June 3 from 2 to 4 p.m. and from 6 to 8 p.m. at the O’Brien Gerst Funeral Home located at 3980 Cascade Road SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan. A funeral service will be held on Thursday, June 4 at 11 a.m. at St. Andrew’s Cathedral, 301 Sheldon Boulevard SE, Grand Rapids. Bishop Walter Hurley will preside.

As an alternative to flowers, the Smolenski family welcomes donations for Multiple System Atrophy (MSA) research to the University of Michigan Health system, Department of Neurology, 1500 E. Medical Center Drive, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-0316.

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