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ROBERT SHERAN 1916-2012



Sheran, a DFLer, was first appointed to the Supreme Court by a Republican.

Brilliant jurist remembered as a great listener

- He was appointed twice to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

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Minnesota Chief Justice Robert Sheran was a brilliant jurist, so respected that he was appointed twice to the state Supreme Court by two governors — one from a rival political party.

Still, those closest to Sheran say he was best defined outside the bounds of his distinguished legal career.

“He was truly a gentleman,” said Bob Hennessey, a partner at Lindquist and Vennum, where Sheran worked for two decades after retiring from the state Supreme Court in 1981. “Whether it was about your family or the cases you were handling, Bob was just a great listener.”

Sheran, who died Wednesday at age 96, had been living at an independent-living facility in Bloomington. He leaves a legacy of public service spanning from FBI special agent during World War II, to the state House (1947-49), to the state Supreme Court, where he served two stints, first as an associate justice, then as chief justice.

His first appointment, by Gov. El-

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High court pick was bipartisan

◀ SHERAN FROM B1

mer L. Andersen, came in 1963. Sheran was a DFLer who had run for lieutenant governor, while Andersen was a Republican. The appointment was unpopular with Andersen's partisan colleagues, who thought he should have named a Republican. But Andersen had no regrets about appointing the man he called "one of the most notable jurists in state history."

"I felt so good about strengthening the court by choosing him," Andersen wrote in his 2000 memoir, "A Man's Reach."

It was an era when Supreme Court justices were paid only about \$20,000 per year, and Sheran, a father of five, was trying to put his children through college. He stepped down in 1970, but three years later was appointed chief justice of the state high court by DFL Gov. Wendell Anderson, who called Sheran "my best appointment."

Anderson recalled sitting in on the state Board of Pardons with Sheran and then-Attorney General Warren Spannaus. All he had to do, he said, was listen to Sheran. "There's just something about him," Anderson

said. "In addition to being distinguished and bright, he had a certain character."

A gifted speaker, Sheran was national debate champion while attending St. Thomas College in St. Paul before he went on to law school at the University of Minnesota. His partner during those debates was the late Bob Short, once owner of the Minneapolis (now Los Angeles) Lakers and the Washington Senators (now Texas Rangers).

Associate Justice Paul H. Anderson of the Minnesota Supreme Court recalled Sheran as a man of a sharp legal mind who took an active role in improving the courts statewide. When the Supreme Court workload became too much, he helped create the state's Court of Appeals in 1982.

His accomplishments came from more than his drive and intellectual prowess, Anderson said. "He was always such a gentleman. So dignified," Anderson said. "He just had the type of personality that he was able to build an atmosphere of collegiality with the idea of working together."

Sheran's son, Thomas Sheran, an attorney at Moss & Barnett in Minneapolis, said

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Robert Sheran, right, with then-Gov. Rudy Perpich and Rosalie Wahl, the first woman appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

his father continued to work in mediation and arbitration well into his 80s and remained active by playing tennis.

"I know he is properly remembered as a gentleman in the very finest sense of the word," Tom Sheran said. "He was just a very humble guy who put people at ease. He always found the goodness in people."

In addition to son Tom, he is survived by two other sons, John and David; a daughter, Kathleen, a DFL state senator

representing the Mankato area; seven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his wife, Jean Brown Sheran, and a son, Michael.

Visitation will be held from 3 to 6 p.m. Sunday at Washburn-McReavy, 5000 W. 50th St., Edina. Services will be held at 11 a.m. Monday at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church in Edina, with visitation at the church one hour before services.

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