**REVIEW OF DECEMBER BRUNCH**

Our December 7th Brunch was enlightening as well as delightful. One of our members coordinated and led a panel discussion with three judges. Their backgrounds and contributions are so impressive that introductions are included here.

**The Honorable Margaret Chutnick**

The Honorable Margaret Chutnick is a 1984 graduate of the University of Michigan Law School. Following graduation, she served as a law clerk for the Honorable Diana E. Murphy, who was then a judge on the USDC-MN. Before being appointed to the bench in January 2012 she practiced law for 25 years, first for 14 years as a Deputy AG in the Minnesota AG's office, including serving as a deputy AG of the Law Enforcement Section. She was a federal prosecutor, focusing on violent crimes. Later she was in private practice for five years. She served three years as an Assistant Dean at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. In 2012, she was appointed to the Minnesota Court of Appeals by Governor Mark Dayton.

Judge Chutnick is active in human and civil rights, is a former director and current member of the Advisory Council for the Advocates for Human Rights and a member of the International Woman’s Forum.

**The Honorable Gary Larson**

The Honorable Gary Larson is a long time resident of Christmas Lake and has been in public and private practice in our community. He graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1967, then served as a judicial clerk for Judge John F. Cahill before starting private practice in Excelsior in 1968. Judge Larson practiced in partnership with other local attorneys and as a solo practitioner between 1968-1985. He also served as city attorney for the cities of Tonka Bay, Shorewood, Excelsior, and Laketown Township. In 1985, Gary was appointed to the Hennepin County Bench by Governor Rudy Perpich. He was re-elected in 1986, 1992, 1998, 2004 and 2010.

Judge Larson served in a wide variety of capacities on the bench, including Assistant Chief Judge, Presiding Judge of the Drug Court, and on the court’s executive committee.

In 2011 he retired from Hennepin County’s 4th Judicial District, but he now serves as a statewide senior judge, traveling all over the state hearing cases. Judge Larson also privately mediates civil cases. When he retired in 2011 the Minneapolis Star and Tribune called him an “admired judge” with a “big hearted presence on the bench.”

**The Honorable Tony Leung**

The Honorable Tony Leung currently serves as a U.S. Magistrate Judge for the District of Minnesota. He graduated from New York University School of Law and in 1984 joined the Minneapolis law firm of Faegre and Benson, now Faegre Daniels, where he practiced in the areas of real estate transactions and became an equity partner in the firm. In 1994 he was appointed to the Hennepin County District Court Bench by Governor Arne Carlson, where he served for 17 years. At the time Judge Leung was the first Asian American judge in Minnesota.

In April 2011, he was sworn in as a US Magistrate Judge for the US District Court for the District of Minnesota and has the distinction of being the first Pacific American to serve on the Federal Bench in Minnesota. He will serve a term of eight years and is eligible for reappointment. He won the 2000 Trailblazer award from the National Asian Pacific Bar Association and is a founding member of the organization’s Minnesota chapter.

**Panel Discussion**

The judges were asked about their concerns about law and the judicial system. Concerns included having too many law schools in the state, misleading data on placement rates and lack of jobs for those graduating from law school--50% of the students in last year's graduating class do not have a job. Their biggest concern was the politicizing of the process of choosing judges. Minnesota governors currently continue to choose judges from a pool provided by the merit selection commission and there is also a gender and racial equity statute requirement. However, now judges are often affiliated with political parties and if they have opponents in elections they will have to run campaigns and raise funding.

Judge Leung noted that there is a Federal Selection process and three types of judges:

1) District Court: appointed under the United States Constitution, and nominated by the President. Article #3, confirmed by the US Senate.

2) United States Magistrate Judges: They try to facilitate and process local cases. They make the cases and life of a District #3 judge more manageable.

3) Bankruptcy Judges: Nominated by the 8th Circuit.

Judge Chutnick stated that the Minnesota Court of Appeals is an Intermediate Court with 19 judges currently on the court, all appointed by the Governor. They serve six-year terms and must run for re-election. Family Court judges get complaints about ethics issues.

Judge Larson discussed Hennepin County's *boutique* courts like the drug courts and the vets court, that handle special issues. The St. Stephen's Court deals with people who are homeless and underserved.  His compassion for the people who come into those courts and his admiration for the workers at St. Stephen's was apparent. He also said that the veterans' court continues to see a lot of Vietnam vets and will be seeing more vets in the coming years because of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.  He added that we have too few judges at the District Court level resulting in a growing logjam of cases.  Broken politics is a big reason for the problem.

Judge Chutnick mentioned that as an appeals court judge she was in a different position than the other two judges because she was looking at cases that had already been decided at a lower level rather than deciding guilt or innocence, or liability.  She also said that the Minnesota Appeals Court judges worked in rotating teams so she isn't always sitting on the bench with the same people.  She commented that when she's deciding a case, her decision is based solely on the law and not on her personal opinions. Another benefit of being an appeals court judge is that you don't get phone calls in the middle of the night to sign search warrants.  You get your cases for the week on Monday and go home Friday with a clean slate -- weekends off.

We left with a better understanding what judges do and how important they are to our democracy.