

Lynn Fontaine Newsome, widely respected matrimonial attorney, to receive NJSBF 2021 Medal of Honor

When Lynn Fontaine Newsome became president of the New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA) in 2007, civil unions had recently been legalized in New Jersey. Months later at a state hearing held on the impact of the law, she stood firmly behind the podium at the New Jersey Law Center and said true equality was the only appropriate path and declared the law “a failed experiment.”

Newsome’s words were heard and felt far and wide, generating headlines at a time when support for marriage equality was still controversial. It was a notable moment in a lifetime of leadership and service, and an example of Newsome’s principles and contributions to the justice system.

Thomas H. Prol, a former president of the NJSBA, praised Newsome as a “leader of leaders” who “stepped out in front and took up the charge” for marriage equality. “She doesn’t back down from a fight. She really seizes on issues, not just legal matters, but moral matters.”

On Sept. 28, Newsome, who also served as president of the New Jersey State Bar Foundation (NJSBF), will receive the 2021 Medal of Honor, the Foundation’s most prestigious award. The NJSBF is the educational and philanthropic arm of the NJSBA.

The awards dinner will be held at the Park Chateau in East Brunswick where the recipients of the 2020 Medal of Honor, Susan A. Feeney and retired Judge John E. Keefe Sr., will also be recognized after last year’s awards dinner was postponed.

“Lynn is a shining example of what the Medal of Honor stands for. She has made exemplary contributions to the justice system and to enhancing New Jersey’s legal legacy. The Foundation is pleased to recognize her with its highest honor,” said NJSBF President Kathleen Fennelly.

“I’m so honored and thrilled to receive the Medal of Honor, and for the nominating committee and Foundation to honor me this way. I’m so proud to



stand with the other recipients of this award. They are all wonderful lawyers and good people who are committed to the profession,” said Newsome.

Compassionate and keen sense of analysis

Newsome, a widely respected matrimonial attorney and a partner at Newsome O’Donnell in Morristown, said she knew she wanted to be a trial attorney after participating in a family law clinic in her third year at Seton Hall Law School. The mentorship she received early in her career proved to be pivotal—first as a clerk for Superior Court Judge George P. Helfrich in family court in Morris County, and working with Katharine Hayden, then a matrimonial attorney who hired Newsome to work at her firm in Chatham after her clerkship.

Now a U.S. district judge for the district of New Jersey, Hayden said she knew early on Newsome had what it took to excel as a divorce attorney.

“Lynn is committed to the highest ethics and skill level in what I think is one of the most difficult types of practice, family law. She is able to analyze a case almost instantly and form a strategy, and at the same time have immense compassion for the person who is seeking representation, as well

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—NJSBF PRESIDENT KATHLEEN FENNELLY

as for the person who is on the other side,” she said.

Newsome said she has never forgotten the advice from another judge who reminded her that family law practitioners are dealing with people who are experiencing one of the worst times in their life, and that as a lawyer, she could make a difference.

“There’s a trust, and I’ve never taken it for granted,” she said.

After leaving Hayden’s firm in 1991, Newsome continued to devote her career to matrimonial law and in 2012 co-founded Newsome O’Donnell.

“When Lynn and I founded Newsome O’Donnell, one of our core goals was to have a firm that valued service to the organized bar and the concomitant advancement of the legal profession and our system of justice. Over her career, there has not been anyone more dedicated to this mission than my partner. The Foundation’s recognition of Lynn with the Medal of Honor is well deserved,” said Edward J. O’Donnell.

A desire to improve organizations

Friends and colleagues describe her as a good listener who is thoughtful and deliberate in her reasoning, and as someone who believes a variety of people should have a seat at the table.

Paulette Brown, a former president of the American Bar Association (ABA), said Newsome is not someone who seeks credit for herself, “but is always thinking about the best interests of the bar and people in general. She has a real sense of humility. She doesn’t make a lot of noise, but she is effective in advancing the Association and Foundation. She is always asking, how can we improve, how can we be better?”

Brown recalled that at an ABA meeting shortly after U.S. District Court Judge Esther Salas’ son was gunned down in an attack at her home, and her husband critically wounded, Newsome, an ABA delegate since 2006, told Brown, “We have to do something about this. We have to make sure there is a resolution passed by the ABA that deals with the safety of judges and their families.”

As a result, the NJSBA delegates co-sponsored an ABA resolution that urged Congress to pass the judicial security bill.

NJSBA, NJSBF provided opportunity

A self-described joiner, Newsome has been heavily involved with the organized bar at the county and state level since graduating law school.

“Thirty years ago, there weren’t many leadership opportunities for

women, but there were in the bar association. I learned a lot from my peers at meetings and social gatherings, and it made me a better lawyer joining the Association and Foundation,” said Newsome, who was one of the first women presidents of the Morris County Bar Association.

Over the years, she was chair of the NJSBA Family Law Section and has received numerous awards, including the section’s Tischler Award and the NJSBA Distinguished Legislative Services Award and Distinguished Service Award for Excellence in Continuing Legal Education.

Newsome’s dedication to the ABA also began during law school. She has been a member of its Family Law Section; Litigation Section; and General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division. She just concluded a term on the Board of Governors, and since 2007, she has

been a fellow of the American Bar Foundation, a research institute for empirical and interdisciplinary study of the law. A former member of the Advisory Committee to the Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs, Newsome is the New Jersey Lawyers Assistance Program’s board vice chair.

Thomas Curtin, a former president of the NJSBA and NJSBF, said Newsome is well-deserving of the Medal of Honor because of her years of tireless service and dedication to the legal profession and as someone “who has earned people’s trust, who cares about them and the profession, and is committed to doing the best job she can.”

It has been a long journey for Newsome, who grew up with humble roots in Essex County and was the first in her family to become a professional. A moment that brought that accomplishment home, she recalled, was shortly

after she became president of the NJSBA and she and the Executive Committee met with then New Jersey Supreme Court Justice James R. Zazzali in a conference room, he at one end of the long table, she at the other.

“That was a profound moment for me,” said Newsome.

Teacher, mentor, leader

Newsome said she is proud to be a lawyer and sees the profession as a way to give back to society. She’s been committed to developing the next generation of lawyers through the NJSBA, the NJSBF’s mock trial program and Seton Hall Law School, where she is on the board of visitors.

“I think a lot about role models and people who I hope our students will emulate, and Lynn springs readily to mind,” said Seton Hall Law School Dean Kathleen Boozang.

“She is a woman who has been incredibly successful in her practice and who has her own small business but is always giving back and contributing to that which is greater than her own personal gain,” she said.

Boozang added that Newsome is “an outstanding teacher” who spoke to one of her professional responsibility classes this year about managing professional ethics in a small law firm setting.

Newsome is the mother of two sons, Daniel, an actor, and Brian, who joined her firm after graduating from law school two years ago.

“You couldn’t ask for a better teacher, mentor and leader,” Brian Newsome said. “She is the definition of dedication and hard work, not just as a mother but also as a partner and educator of young associates such as me.” ■

New cannabis regulations announced last week set stage for adult-use cannabis in NJ

The New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission (CRC) unanimously voted to adopt initial rules outlining the cultivation, manufacture and sale of adult-use cannabis. The New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA) submitted a number of suggestions in its report and recommendations to the CRC in July, in anticipation of the adoption of the rules.

“The regulations adopted today reflect the CRC’s commitment to transparency and social equity,” Gov. Phil Murphy said. “Prioritizing applications from women and minority entrepreneurs, from business owners living in economically disadvantaged communities, and from small business owners will ensure the market grows the way we envisioned—in a way that is socially equitable and reflective of our state’s diversity.”

According to the CRC’s press release, the rules “address barriers to entry that have plagued some cannabis markets across the country.” The rules prioritize applications from certified minority-, women- and disabled veteran-owned businesses, and applicants who live in or will operate in an impact zone or economically disadvantaged area; flexible application requirements for certain businesses;

and low application fees.

The rules are effective immediately. The NJSBA is continuing to monitor the issue during implementation of the rules and in anticipation of further clarification of the rules if and when necessary.

which addressed future proceedings in the areas of civil, criminal, family, landlord tenant, municipal court, taxation, real estate, trust and estate, immigration and workers’ compensation, offered additional recommendations for consideration.

and all proceedings be accessible to the public.

Dispositive motions and settlement conferences in the Civil Part were two other areas where the NJSBA advocated for in-person proceedings over a remote format, citing greater effectiveness and swifter resolutions with in-person negotiations.

“The NJSBA stands ready to assist the Judiciary in whatever way it can as we adapt to a post-pandemic world and attempt to retain those practices that benefit litigants and enhance their access to justice, without sacrificing their rights to a fair resolution of their grievance,” NJSBA President Domenick Carmagnola said.

For more information and to view the NJSBA’s comments, please visit njsba.com.



CAPITOL REPORT

NJSBA comments on post-pandemic court operations

“The Judiciary at all levels successfully adapted to remote operations during the extended COVID-19 crisis,” noted the Judiciary in seeking comments on a proposal for certain court events to continue in a remote format. The proposal, titled the Future of Court Operations, included motion arguments, criminal hearings, landlord tenant proceedings, civil arbitrations and mediations, a number of Family Part proceedings and most hearings in municipal court.

The NJSBA, noting that it had previously submitted its Practice of Law Subcommittee Report to the Judiciary,

The NJSBA urged particular attention to municipal court matters, advocating for more concise guidelines to be established for municipal court matters to ensure uniformity throughout the state. Testimonial proceedings in those courts should be required to be in person unless the parties consent to a virtual format, and all parties, including witnesses, should be required to appear, the NJSBA said in a letter to Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. The letter further urged that municipal court judges be required to consult with counsel in connection with any other municipal court matter before deciding whether to proceed virtually,

This is a status report provided by the New Jersey State Bar Association on recently passed and pending legislation, regulations, gubernatorial nominations and/or appointments of interest to lawyers, as well as the involvement of the NJSBA as amicus in appellate court matters. To learn more, visit njsba.com.

New Jersey State Bar Foundation

MEDAL OF HONOR AWARDS DINNER

Honoring Medal of Honor Recipients



Lynn Fontaine Newsome, Esq.
2021 Recipient



Hon. John E. Keefe, Sr. (Ret.)
2020 Recipient



Susan A. Feeney, Esq.
2020 Recipient

Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Cocktails at 6 p.m. • Dinner and Awards at 7 p.m.

Park Chateau Estate and Gardens

678 Cranbury Road • East Brunswick, New Jersey

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