



Supreme Court of Illinois

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CHIEF JUSTICE THOMAS L. KILBRIDE NAMED 2012 ILLINOISAN OF THE YEAR BY THE ILLINOIS NEWS BROADCASTERS ASSOCIATION

Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride of the Illinois Supreme Court will be honored as the recipient of the 2012 Illinoisan of the Year award from the Illinois News Broadcasters Association (INBA) during its annual Fall 2012 Convention to be held September 22 and 23 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The honor is being made in recognition of Chief Justice Kilbride's several efforts to improve the efficiency of Illinois courts, initiating a pilot program to allow cameras in Illinois courts and increasing access to the courts for citizens.

"Chief Justice Kilbride was unanimously selected as our honoree for 2012," said Jim Gee, immediate past president of the INBA. "In addition to his work in creating a pilot program to allow cameras and microphones in Illinois trial courts, we are honoring Chief Justice Kilbride for his overall support of openness in government, including his advocacy for a commission to examine ways in which the courts can be made more accessible to the public."

The roster of previous awardees includes former Illinois Governors Jim Edgar and James Thompson; Mike Lawrence, former director of the Paul Simon Policy Institute; NBC News Anchor John Chancellor; former U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald; and the late Illinois Supreme Court Justice Seymour Simon.

"I am honored and humbled by the Illinois News Broadcasters award, and I accept it on behalf of the entire Supreme Court," said Chief Justice Kilbride. "As chief justice, I have recommended initiatives to further open the Illinois courts to the public, but these initiatives became reality only with the unanimous approval of my colleagues."

"It is truly an honor to join the elite company of past winners of this award, and it means much to me and to the Court because it comes from an association outside of the legal profession that examines us through a different lens from our colleagues on the bench and in the practice of law."

"Cameras in Illinois courtrooms is part of a pilot project now; but the indications are that the experiment is working well and, with the cooperation of the news media, is expanding across the state."

"I thank the News Broadcasters Association for their efforts and for this award."

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The INBA was founded in 1955 and remains one of the largest statewide broadcast news associations in the nation. The organization is made up of about 200 members from throughout Illinois and surrounding states.

Chief Justice Kilbride was elected to the Supreme Court from the Third Judicial District in 2000, retained by voters in 2010 and was selected by his colleagues on the court to be chief justice in October 2010.

His experience is unique in that he is the only one of the seven justices who had not served as a judge before joining the Supreme Court. He had practiced law for nearly 20 years, first as a legal services attorney for the poor, then for a mid-sized law firm, finally in a solo practice from a storefront office in Rock Island.

Since being chosen as Chief Justice, he has worked diligently to help bring Illinois courts into the digital age, expanding opportunities for transparency, efficiency and greater access. The pilot project to bring cameras inside of Illinois' trial courts is one of the most visible manifestations of those efforts.

Chief Justice Kilbride made the announcement on January 24. The Supreme Court had allowed cameras to broadcast its own oral arguments, and those of the Illinois Appellate Court, since 1983. At that time, however, the Court specifically rejected allowing news cameras during trial proceedings, and the issue made little headway until Chief Justice Kilbride and his colleagues on the Court took another look. To date, 13 counties in five Judicial Circuits have been approved by the Court to participate in this pilot project. Several more circuits and counties are expected to participate in the project by year's end.

Among other initiatives of Chief Justice Kilbride:

--The Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission, established in June, to work to remove barriers and increase the ease of interacting with courts by those persons who can't afford lawyers to represent their interests and needs.

--Formation of a special Supreme Court committee to propose new ways of doing court business through electronic means. The Illinois Supreme Court Special E-Business Committee has been working diligently since June 2011 to establish a statewide policy, eventually making e-business universal throughout the Illinois court system. E-filing is occurring in the Illinois Supreme Court and case records on appeal are now accessible electronically in several Illinois appellate courts. Chief Justice Kilbride has pledged to make Illinois court operations more efficient by implementing improvements in technology since becoming Chief Justice in October 2010.

Chief Justice Kilbride also has taken a personal interest in increasing the opportunities for civics education in Illinois schools. In 2007, he met former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor at a conference in Chicago and heard her warn about the lack of proper civics education in the nation's schools. Since that time, the Chief Justice has sought to take steps in a personal way to reverse that trend, which included traveling to schools within the Third Judicial District, explaining the judicial system in Illinois, and helping the Illinois Judges Association with its Project 225. That initiative, now underway, attempts to place judges in at least 225 classrooms in Illinois, explaining the importance of the Judicial Branch, in commemoration of the 225th anniversary this month of the signing of the U.S. Constitution.

Chief Justice Kilbride also was the moving voice behind the formation of the special Supreme Court Committee on Pro Bono Publico Legal Service, which was charged with studying and making

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recommendations on how to encourage every practicing attorney in the state to give some form of free legal work to those who cannot afford it. As a result, the Supreme Court announced new rules designed to encourage all Illinois lawyers to improve the delivery of legal services to the poor and to persons of limited means.

Chief Justice Kilbride also has been lauded by editorial writers and others for the way he has chosen to make recommendations for approval by the full Supreme Court to fill judicial vacancies. He urges public participation and gives local communities a voice by utilizing an independent evaluation committee composed of community representatives, lawyers and non-lawyers.

He has received numerous awards while serving on the Supreme Court. They include:

--The 2010 Award of Excellence in the Judiciary from the Illinois State Crime Commission “for his years of professionalism, integrity and superior performance in the court system in Illinois;”

--The Rock Island County NAACP, Justice 2010 Image Award;

American Board of Trial Advocates, Illinois Chapter, 2009 Judge of the Year. The group is a 50-year-old national organization of civil trial lawyers comprised of an equal number of well-respected, highly talented plaintiff and defense attorneys, whose primary focus is to preserve the right of a trial by jury in civil cases and the independence of the judiciary.

Other awards have included and been bestowed by Lewis University, an honorary doctorate degree; St. Mary’s University of Minnesota; the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois; the Freedom Award from The John Marshall Law School Alumni Association; the Harriet Beecher Stowe “Voices of Freedom Award.”; the Illinois Township Attorneys Association; Northern Illinois University; Southern Illinois University School of Law; the Illinois Bar Foundation; and the Illinois Institute for Local Government Law and the Community Caring Conference.

Chief Justice Kilbride has served as the Supreme Court Liaison to several important Supreme Court committees. He is a member of the Illinois State Bar Association; past president of the Illinois Township Attorneys Association and a past board member of the Illinois Pro Bono Center. For nearly two decades, he was a volunteer legal advisor to the Community Caring Conference. He also assisted the Quad-City Harvest, Inc; the Children’s Disability Project; and in organizing an interfaith coalition of church and community organizations in the Quad Cities area.

Chief Justice Kilbride grew up in Kankakee, received his B.A. degree magna cum laude from Saint Mary’s College in 1978; and his law degree from Antioch School of Law in Washington D.C. in 1981. While in law school, Justice Kilbride completed judicial internships for the administrative assistant to the Chief Justice (Warren Burger) of the United States Supreme Court and for U.S. District Court Judge Joyce Hens Green.

The Third Judicial District, from which he was elected, is comprised of 21 Illinois counties straddling Interstate 80 from Indiana to Iowa. Those counties are: Bureau, Fulton, Grundy, Hancock, Henderson, Henry, Iroquois, Kankakee, Knox, LaSalle, Marshall, McDonough, Mercer, Peoria, Putnam, Rock Island, Stark, Tazewell, Warren, Whiteside and Will.

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