

City of Columbus, GA
Honorary Designation Application

(Please Print or Type)

APPLICANT NAME: Bobby G. Peters

PHONE NUMBER: 706-326-4131

ADDRESS: 832 1st Avenue, Columbus, GA 31901

NAME OF HONOREE: Honorable John D. Allen
(AS IT WOULD APPEAR ON SIGN OR FACILITY):

LIVING OR DECEASED
(CIRCLE ONE)

EXISTING BUILDING OR FACILITY NAME: New Government Center

REQUESTED SIGN LOCATION: above entrance on the building

OTHER TYPE: _____

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA, WHICH ARE USED IN THE EVALUATION FOR EACH REQUEST FOR AN HONORARY DESIGNATION. USE ADDITIONAL PAPER IF REQUIRED. IN ADDITION, HONOREE MUST BE OF GOOD MORAL CHARACTER.

HISTORICAL AND/OR CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF THE HONOREE ON THE CITY:

Honorable John D. Allen is a lifelong resident of Muscogee County, Columbus, Georgia. His life was dedicated to service of his country as a fighter pilot in Vietnam and service to his community and state as a Records Court Judge, a State Court Judge, and a Superior Court Judge. Many awards have been bestowed upon him. He worked hard to overcome many obstacles to become one of the first minority lawyers in Columbus and helped start the first biracial law firm in our circuit. He mentored many young lawyers, former Chief Judge, and recognized statewide as an honest, dedicated and respectful jurist.

PROVIDE PROOF OF SIGNIFICANT LINEAGE OR FAMILY TIES TO THE CITY:

JUDICIAL

JUDGE JOHN D. ALLEN



Tradition of Excellence Award

Introduced by
Judge Bobby Peters

It was my pleasure to nominate and my honor to be asked by the State Bar to introduce the Honorable John D. Allen.

Judge Allen was born in Columbus, Georgia in 1943, one of 7 children. He was the only boy, which explains with 6 sisters how he became such a great cook and diplomat. His dad was not around and the family had very modest means. It was a tough time for a young black man to achieve their dreams and ambitions. But he ignored the negative, stayed focused, and pursued his education and came out of public housing determined to succeed.

He graduated from Tuskegee University in 1966 with a degree in mechanical engineering. He joined the R.O.T.C. which designated him a 'distinguished military cadet' which won him a commission in the air force. While serving his country he gained top secret clearance, piloted an f-4 phantom fighter jet, and flew many missions in Vietnam with two tours in southeast Asia. He was decorated repeatedly, earning five distinguished flying crosses, 23 air medals, and two Air Force commendation medals. He was

honorably discharged in 1973 and went back to college and earned his law degree from the University of Florida in 1975 and returned to Columbus to practice in an almost all white legal community. It was not easy for him in the 70's.

He was a trailblazer and continued on the front line fighting for equality, fairness, and dignity for everyone. I had the honor of practicing law with Judge Allen in the early 80's which was the first time in the history of our city a bi-racial law practice was formed. The powers to be at the time were very selfish of their control of the courthouse. I saw first hand the obstacles and bad treatment he received. At his retirement ceremony, he told a true story of one day he was in a jury trial at the courthouse and he called me at the office and told me to come over and help him try the case. I said John, I don't know anything about the case. He said listen, I have an all white jury and a black defendant, just come over here, sit at the table with us and say something white every now and then, which I did.

I would jump up and offer some crazy objection so John said, you go

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Tradition of Excellence Award

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back to the office and send the secretary over here.

We also tried an armed robbery case in another circuit with the same situation, all which was not unique back then. The young black man was found not guilty. The judge was visibly upset over the verdict but then took the time to go on and on praising me for what a great job I did during the trial, no praise at all for John. I said, your honor, attorney Allen deserves all the credit, he is the lead counsel and he actually handled the trial. But the judge would not comment. He obviously was biased but I joked to John, think the judge felt sorry for me because you are so much taller than I am. I know that rejection hurt John but he refused to show it or respond to it.

Those stories are funny now but not then. It was a different world 30 years ago but Judge Allen stayed the course and overcame the odds. He helped get me elected to a citywide

council seat which then gave me the opportunity to nominate him for a citywide judgeship on our city court. A few years later, Governor Joe Frank Harris appointed Judge Allen to state court and later Governor Zell Miller appointed him to superior court.

For 26 years he has worn the robe with dignity and with the utmost respect, even to his earlier detractors whom today have only praise for him.

He became the first African American to be the Chief Judge of the Chattahoochee judicial circuit. The first African American to be the president of downtown Rotary in Columbus, the second largest rotary in the state of Georgia. He served on the executive committee of Council of Superior Court Judges, Chairman of the J.Q.C., appointed by the Supreme Court of Georgia. As a member of the court futures vanguard, he organized and runs the Mental Health Court, served on many civic boards, Special Olym-

pics, One Columbus, and all with a great temperament. His fingerprints are many projects and initiatives, too many to list.

He is no doubt one of the most highly respected judges in the state of Georgia. He has been true to his high principles, true to the judiciary, his family, his church, and to himself.

He is a remarkable man, a real leader among leaders. He ignored the negatives and pushed the positive. He has worked tirelessly to make equal justice for all a reality and not a myth. We are proud he is a product of the Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit.

His compassion for people and for the law has made him a fantastic jurist. He is a tradition in our community, a real life tradition, and the perfect selection for the Tradition of Excellence Award.

I present to you the Honorable, John D. Allen, Judge of the Superior Court.

Remarks by

Judge John D. Allen

Thanks to Judge Peters longtime friend and confidant.

I am Deeply honored by this recognition. I mean that with the deepest sentiments.

Before I get full of myself for being recognized by this august body, I thought I might need a reality check by consulting the insight of some great philosophers on the circumstance of being publicly recognized.

Being a judge of many years, I was sure I would find words of flattery for "a person of my station ---"

I checked the musing of a man of great insight H. L. Mencken. Googled: Judge - - - He wrote, "A Judge is a law student who grades his own examination papers." My ego took a hit and some air

came out of my balloon.

I needed a little balm after reading Mencken so I researched one of my other favorite philosophers, a sage among sages on insight into the nature of man in social setting. She has many number one publications over the past two decades. She is a paragon of diagnosing human nature.

I googled "Dolly Parton on exceptional excellence in the legal profession". I was immediately availed of her wisdom - in an insightful quote, "It's hard to be a diamond in a rhinestone world."

After that poke at what was left of my ego I concluded that I should best stop searching for validation, gush a little, graciously accept my award and be seated.

However, I feel obligated to share a little about



Judge Peters - personal file

The Honorable Judge John D. Allen was born January 17, 1943 in Columbus, Georgia to Beatrice & Daniel Allen. He is the only boy of 7 children, which with 6 sisters explains why John is proficient at cooking a gourmet meal. The Allen family was of modest means. John Allen grew up at a time society was tough on young black men trying to achieve their dreams and ambitions. But even with the odds against him, John tried to ignore the negative, stayed focused, and pursued his education.

He graduated from Tuskegee University in 1966 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. The R.O.T.C. designated him a "Distinguished Military Cadet" which won him a commission in the Air Force. While serving his country, he gained top secret clearance, piloted an F-4 Phantom Jet Fighter, and flew many missions in Vietnam. He served two tours in Southeast Asia and was decorated repeatedly, earning five Distinguished Flying Crosses, 23 Air Medals, and two Air Force Commendation Medals. After being honorably discharged in 1973, Judge Allen continued his education and earned his law degree from the University of Florida in 1975.

He opened his law office in Columbus at a time few minorities were practicing law in this area. He literally battled for his clients and began representing organizations which had the mission of creating diversity, providing equal opportunity for all citizens, and transforming our future into a united community, to prevent us from repeating the racial injustices of the past. However, he always fought for civil rights with a civil disposition. Never bending, never wavering, but always respectful and a true gentleman.

In the middle 80's, Judge John Allen and Judge Bobby Peters opened the first bi-racial law firm in the history of the Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit, which was not well received by some officials who had controlled the criminal justice system for a long time. This historic law firm represented hundreds of clients free of charge and filled a void to give a voice for many of the poor and oppressed which had

not had access to the court system in the past, or at least a level playing field.

Judge Allen used all his experience and talent to enforce the rights of the less fortunate, of all races. He pushed for public access for persons with disabilities to all government buildings and transportation, and won. Dial-A-Ride was established as a result of his personal efforts. He fought for equality at the polls and established new procedures and voting opportunities for all citizens. The legal and civic battles fought by Judge Allen are too numerous to mention. He has been on the front line fighting for equality, fairness, and dignity for everyone for many years. He has the respect of his fellow jurists, the legal community, and our entire community.

Judge Allen sits on the Executive Council of Superior Court Judges, which is the governing body for all Georgia Superior Court Judges. He is one of only two judges sitting on the Judicial Qualifications Commission, a seven member disciplinary committee for all Georgia Judges.

Judge Allen was active with others in establishing a community effort called "Columbus United Beyond 2000". The civic minded group, led by Judge Allen, advocated for diversity, inclusion, and encouraged and facilitated town hall meetings on the magnet school concept. Magnet schools were subsequently instituted in Muscogee County. The original idea of magnet schools was to improve the quality of education and further integration in the local school system.

Judge Allen also served as a Records Court Judge, State Court Judge, and now a Superior Court Judge. The Georgia Supreme Court selected him to work on the Court Futures Vanguard, drafting proposals to prepare Georgia's courts for the future. He has also served as a member of the Columbus Airport Commission, the Urban League, Area Ten Special Olympics Advisory Board, and the African American Historic Preservation Society.

Married to Victoria Allen and is the proud father of 3 fine sons: John Jr., a graduate of Fort Valley State College; Geoffrey, a graduate of Georgia Southern University; and Kevin, a graduate of Florida A&M

**John D. Allen, Judge
Superior Courts
Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit**

Graduate of Public Schools, Muscogee County, Spencer High School. (Product of Public Housing Projects – Columbus, Georgia) One of seven children.

Undergraduate Degree: Mechanical Engineering from Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama. At graduation was commissioned a regular officer in United States Air Force. Served seven years in military as F-4 Phantom – Pilot. Served two tours in Southeast Asia – highly decorated veteran. Honorable Discharge.

Entered law school after military service in 1973 at University of Florida, graduating in 1975, (J.D.)

Practiced law in Columbus, Georgia area 1976-1987. Recorder's Court Judge 1986 – 1987. Appointed State Court Judge in 1987 and served until October 1993 at which time, appointed Superior Court Judge for Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit, and presently serves.

Has served in community, variously with: Columbus Literate Community Program; 100 Black Men of Columbus; House of Mercy Board, River Center Board, Rotary-Board of Directors; House of TIME Board; St. Mary's Road United Methodist Church; Member Urban League, NAACP, and many many more.

Served at various times: Chief Superior Judge of six (6) county Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit. Council of State Court Judges, Superior Courts Long Range Planning Committee. Superior Courts Commission on Equality, Georgia Commission on Family Violence. Chair of Judicial Qualifications Committee (a seven-member body that gauges and punishes judges who violate ethical standards.) Co-chairs Georgia Supreme Court

Commission on Criminal Justice and Mental issues in the Courts. Chosen to sit Pro Hac Vice on Georgia Supreme Court.

Numerous Boards in community over past: Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors; First African-American on Muscogee County Airport Commission; Muscogee County Vocational Advisory Board; Columbus College Board of Trustees; Troy State University Advancement Board and Adjunct Professor; Performing Arts Center; President- Elect Rotary (many more).

Frequent lecturer with Institute of Continuing Judicial/Legal Education.

Chosen as one of “100 Most Influential Persons of Century in Chattahoochee Valley” by Columbus Ledger-Enquirer. Recipient of John Townsend Award at Columbus State University; Progressive Club-Man of Year; One-Columbus Award;

Was active and with others led a community effort called “Columbus United Beyond 2000”. The group led by Judge Allen advocated for and facilitated town hall meetings on the magnet school concept. Magnet schools were subsequently instituted in Muscogee. The original idea of magnet schools was to improve quality of education and further integration in the Muscogee County School system.

Married to Victoria Broussard; Proud father of three sons, John, Jr., a graduate of Fort Valley State College; Geoffrey, a graduate of Georgia Southern University; and Kevin, a graduate of Florida A&M University. Proud grandfather of one grandson, John D. Allen, III, and one granddaughter, Carson D. Allen.