

By [Edd Pritchard](#)

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Judge Reader remembered as teacher and advocate for juvenile justice

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A Stark County resident since 1953, Reader was 88. He was born in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.

After serving in the Marine Corps Reserve in World War II and the Navy Air Force during the Korean War, Reader worked as a teacher and as an industrial oil salesman before pursuing a career as a lawyer. He was admitted to the bar in 1958 after graduating from the University of Akron School of Law.

"I always learned something every time I was with him, and it was always positive," retired Stark County Common Pleas Judge Charles Brown said of Reader.

Brown believed Reader's experience as a teacher paid off in the courtroom. As a young lawyer, Brown said, he found himself practicing before Reader.

"He taught me an awful lot about how to be a lawyer, my responsibilities to my clients, my responsibilities to the law," Brown said. "It makes all the difference to have a judge who is a teacher."

Retired Common Pleas Court Judge Lee Sinclair echoed Brown's sentiments.

"He was a good teacher," Sinclair said of Reader, noting the judge would offer advice after a case was completed. "It was always constructive."

Reader began his judicial career as a referee in Family Court's juvenile division, then served 22 years as the Family Court judge. In 1992 he won a seat on the Ohio 5th District Court of Appeals, where he served one term. Brown said that on several occasions he appointed Reader as a visiting judge on cases.

During the 1980s, Reader worked with Ohio legislators to revise the juvenile justice statutes. He also worked on a national level as a champion for juvenile justice programs. In 1989 and 1990 he served as president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Reader cited his work in family court when he sought the 5th District appeals court seat. He noted prior to the 1992 election that 25 percent to 30 percent of the cases heard at the appeals level were related to family law, and he believed the court would benefit from his experience.

Outside the courtroom, Reader's activities also were directed toward helping youth.

Brown said Reader was active in the American Legion Buckeye Boys State program. He took pride in working with participants and teaching them about the law, Brown said.

More recently, Reader worked with the Education Enhancement Partnership of Stark County as a board member, and worked with the Stark County Public Defender board.

Reader also was true to his years of military service. Sinclair recalled that Reader would bring a cake to his office each year on the Marine Corps' birthday. Brown noted that Reader worked with North Canton schools to record oral histories of military veterans.

"This was really a great man, he really was," Sinclair said of Reader. "We were so fortunate to have him in Stark County all of those years."

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Statement from Stark County Family Court judges on passing of retired Judge W. Don Reader

From: Judge Jim D. James, Judge Michael L. Howard, Judge Rosemarie A. Hall
Stark County has lost an icon. Judge W. Don Reader passed away last week after a life of service to children and families. He is well known in our community, the State of Ohio, and nationally for his passionate work in the area of juvenile justice. Although he ended his illustrious legal career as a Judge of the Fifth District Court of Appeals, his devotion to Family Court and its mission never wavered. In retirement he served as the Chairman of the Stark Education Partnership, where he continued to advocate for the success of children. As a young lawyer, Judge Reader was appointed by Judge McCarroll and Judge John R. Milligan to help hear cases in the juvenile and domestic relations court as one of the court's first Referees. He was elected to the court in 1970, and never looked back, working as a visiting Judge well into his 70's. With a career spanning five decades, it is very difficult to summarize all his accomplishments. Judge Reader worked tirelessly with the community to provide the best for the children and families in crisis. He and Judge Milligan welcomed the legal representation of juveniles first by Legal Aid and then by the Public Defender in the 70's when many juvenile courts around the country did not even see the need for attorneys in juvenile court. In 1982, he worked with the Junior League of Stark County to establish a volunteer guardian ad litem program that exists today as CASA, Court Appointed Special Advocates. These volunteer guardians provide an independent voice for children in the Child Welfare system. This also led to the formation of a Citizens Review Board, one of only a few in existence today in the state of Ohio. The Board reviews cases of children in the custody of Child Protective Services to ensure they receive needed services. Judge Reader and Prosecutor Robert Horowitz collaborated to form the sex abuse task force to ensure that the youngest of victims, children who had been sexually abused, received the best and most judicious handling of their cases. This task force led to the establishment of the Children's Network that received national recognition due to the work of Paula Smith of the Stark County Prosecutor's Office. Because of his long association with public education, Judge Reader recognized that school failure was a precursor to delinquency, and he demanded that Family Court staff work in cooperation with schools, annually hosting meetings to discuss truancy, drug abuse, and other related

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concerns. He continued this work until very recently, utilizing his role as Chairman of the Stark Education Partnership to campaign for educational enhancements for all students. Judge Reader was relentless in his pursuit of excellence, advocating before the Stark County Commissioners, the Ohio Legislature, and the U.S Congress to improve services and programs in juvenile court. He served as President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges, and he received awards from The Supreme Court of Ohio, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Ohio Association of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Over his long career, Judge Reader trained and mentored a line of Family Court judges that includes Judge Robert Mylett, Judge Julie Edwards, Judge Jim James, and Judge Michael Howard. Stark County's children and families were fortunate to have such a great advocate work and live in our community. Judge Reader will be missed by his family and friends, and the community has lost a passionate voice for children.

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