

EDWARD H. WARD '54

Nominated by: Laura Ward

It is my honor to nominate the Honorable Edward H. Ward (Clay High School class of 1954) for consideration for the Clay High School Distinguished Hall of Fame. The foundation that Judge Ward received at Clay High School set the tone for what has and continues to be a distinguished life focused on service to others, as a member of the military, educator, judge, and friend. Judge Ward graduated as an all-American basketball player from Clay High School in 1954, where he was class valedictorian. He matriculated to Bowling Green State University where he received his Bachelor's degree, was president of the men's National Leadership Society and voted Outstanding Senior Man. After college, he attended University of Michigan Law School, where he earned his law degree in 1961.

Judge Ward served our country as a Judge Advocate General in the United States Navy from 1961 to 1965. When he left the Navy, honorably as a Lieutenant in 1965, he began teaching at Bowling Green State University where he taught until 1971. During those years, he served as an Associate Professor and Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs, he also earned his MBA from BGSU. While in academia, Judge Ward greatly enjoyed connecting with, mentoring and helping students.

In 1971, Judge Ward left his great home state of Ohio and moved south to Florida to continue his passion for education and helping others. He was recruited to be a member of the faculty and administration at the University of Tampa. He worked as Associate Professor of Business Law, Executive Assistant to the President and University Counsel, advising the University on legal matters. In 1973, while working at the University of Tampa, Judge Ward became licensed to practice law in Florida. He continued to work at the University of Tampa full time until 1975, when he joined the State Attorney's Office as an Assistant State Attorney. Judge Ward sought to continue his commitment to serve students as an educator by teaching Business Law classes while also working at the State Attorney's Office.

Judge Ward was nominated and appointed by the Governor as County Court Judge for the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit in 1981. He was elected to the Circuit Court in 1986, where he served until his retirement in 2000. During that time, Judge Ward was active in the MacDonald Training Center, a local organization which empowers and assists people with disabilities, involved in many other charitable organizations and spent a great deal of time talking with young student groups about the law and the path to becoming a judge. While he was on the bench, Judge Ward had a reputation for being fair and treating everyone who appeared before him with kindness and respect. As can be seen from the attached recount of the case of Danny Alcantero, Judge Ward strived to make everyone feel that they had their fair day in court, and often times gave second chances to those deserving. After his retirement from the bench, Judge Ward worked as a mediator and arbitrator, which he did actively until last year. He celebrated his 50th year as a Florida lawyer in 2023, at which time he decided to officially retire from the practice of law. While Judge Ward no longer works as a lawyer or judge, he continues to serve and work on behalf of others.

In addition to helping others in his formal capacity as an educator and arbiter of the law, Judge Ward has spent countless hours over his lifetime informally helping friends and acquaintances with any issues and legal challenges. Because he is so kind to all that he meets, Judge Ward is the living embodiment of the saying “he has never met a stranger.” As such, he has found himself with the opportunity to dedicate hundreds of hours of pro bono service counseling and advising friends in legal disputes, homeowners issues and many other matters over the years.

As you can see from the letters included with this submission, Judge Ward has positively impacted many in the community, including the current mayor of Tampa, presiding judges, and the immediate past Chief Judge. The list includes dear friends, notably one who started out as Judge Ward’s bailiff more than 40 years ago and one who started out as Judge Ward’s AC service repairman several years ago. We hope these submissions will serve as an illustration of the overall impact Judge Ward has had within the community, on nearly everyone with whom he has had contact over the years. Judge Ward’s positive difference in the community is the reason why he is being nominated for this prestigious award, and is also the reason why he is deserving of such recognition.

Judge Ward recently celebrated his 87th birthday, and when asked how he felt to be getting a year older, he said, “I didn’t start to feel old until 86!” Even at this stage in his life, he continues to help others. He has his own health concerns that take up a considerable amount of time these days, but he still works to help others with any pressing issues and concerns that they may have. Recently, Judge Ward had a stay in the hospital and one of the nurses who only spent two shifts with him, astutely opined that he has a “very kind soul.” That so well sums up Judge Ward – he embodies kindness and always seeks to help others, in big and small ways.

In addition to his work in the community, Judge Ward has been a devoted and loving husband to his wife, Mary Ann, for 46 years and is the loving father of two daughters, Monica Ward, a doctor in Atlanta, and myself. He is also the doting “Baba” to four adoring granddaughters. I am proud to be Judge Ward’s daughter and through observing my dad’s lifetime of service to others, I, too, aim to work to help others. I am fortunate to currently serve as a Circuit Court Judge in Tampa and my desire to serve comes from the years and years of watching my dad and seeing his impact in the community. We believe my dad is worthy of this award due to his lifetime of meaningful contribution to the betterment of society. My dad has strived every day to put others before himself, whether it be through serving our country, teaching students in the classroom, working hard as a judge to fairly serve the community or helping to counsel and advise others, Judge Ward’s life of service has modeled and honored the tradition of excellence at Clay High School. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or if I can provide any additional information.