

**A RESOLUTION BY THE
FRANKLIN COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
IN MEMORY OF JOHN F. "JACK" NELSON III, ESQUIRE**

WHEREAS, the members of the Franklin County Bar Association have gathered in a special meeting on October 13, 2009, to celebrate the life and honor the memory of our colleague and fellow member, John F. "Jack" Nelson III, who was called home by his Almighty God on October 8, 2009; and

WHEREAS, although saddened by his death, it is our desire and our tradition to share our recollections of Jack and honor him with a memorial resolution at this special meeting; and

WHEREAS, before offering this resolution, we want to offer a brief record of his life and career.

John F. "Jack" Nelson III was born July 30, 1951, in Apollo, Pennsylvania, the son of John F. Nelson II and the late Dorothy Urash Nelson. A veteran of the Pennsylvania National Guard, he graduated from Bucknell University in 1973 and earned his juris doctorate from The Dickinson School of Law in 1976.

Jack was admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania on November 9, 1976, and the Bar of Franklin County on February 8, 1978. Early in his career, he practiced with the Chambersburg law firm of Mower and Hoskinson. He also joined the Franklin County District Attorney's Office as an assistant district attorney shortly after his admission to the bar, working for then-District Attorney John Walker.

That move would be the start of Jack's long career as a prosecutor. In January 1986, after John Walker was elected to the bench of the 39th Judicial District, Jack was appointed district attorney. He won election in November 1987, and was re-elected five times, most recently in 2007. He was a member of the Franklin County Bar Association and the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association.

Not only did Jack distinguish himself in the courtroom during his 23 years as district attorney, but he worked tirelessly to improve the criminal justice system in Franklin County. He was instrumental in creating the Franklin County Drug Task Force, convincing county and municipal officials of how vital a resource it would be and getting them to contribute financially to the endeavor. He was involved in the establishment of Central Court, the Day Reporting Center, Central Booking at the new jail and much more.

He was concerned about the victims of crime as well, working with Women in Need and Legal Services to obtain funding to support victims' services, local law enforcement and his own office's efforts to more successfully pursue and prosecute domestic violence.

Outside the courtroom, Jack enjoyed fishing and was an avid Pittsburgh sports fan, particularly the University of Pittsburgh Panthers. He also was a big Jimmy Buffett fan, happy to be considered a "parrot head," the moniker by which Buffett fans identify themselves. He was dedicated to his family as well, following his children's activities as they grew up and sometimes coaching their sports teams. He also was a member of the Marine Corps League, the Charles Nitterhouse VFW Post 1599 and the Chambersburg Club.

There was a lot more to Jack than perhaps many in the public ever realized, as members of the bar showed in their thoughts about him in the days after his death. Yes, we will remember the mustache, the cowboy boots, the red Mustang convertible, walking up the street to the Chambersburg Club for lunch.

We also will remember the sharp legal mind, the mentor to younger attorneys, the commitment to doing the right thing, the ability to relate to people from all walks of life, the friend.

“It’s hard to really put into words the impact Jack had on our community and all of us who worked with him,” one member said. “He was an excellent DA. I always felt like I was learning something when I worked on a case with Jack. He was great in the courtroom and always strived to be extremely fair. He never let emotions control how the case should be processed. He handled everything in such an even-handed, equitable manner.”

“While I was always on the opposite side of cases from Jack, I very quickly came to respect his abilities as a trial attorney,” said a second member. “In particular, I was always amazed at his ability to remember case law. He must have had a photographic memory because he was almost always correct when he said he remembered reading a case on a specific point of law, and he could usually tell you where to find the case. As you can imagine, I did not like losing legal arguments to Jack in that manner, but I will surely miss his presence in the courthouse. Win, lose or draw, we were always friends and colleagues.”

“Jack had such great common sense and a way with all kinds of people that it’s easy to overlook what an intellectually brilliant guy he was,” agreed a third member. “He had clerked for Superior Court Judge Jacobs out of law school and was an excellent legal writer as well as trial lawyer. He was never a showboating prosecutor. As DA he had an instinct for the right thing to do and he unfailingly did it.”

“I worked with Jack in the DA’s office when he was an Assistant, many years ago,” recalled another member. “I have many fond memories of that time working with Jack, including his humor at the regular Friday after-work ‘meetings’ attended by our office, public defenders, defense counsel, Probation Department employees, etc. But the most amazing thing was that Jack’s formidable legal knowledge and talent never prevented him from relating to everyone in the courthouse and the community as a regular guy.”

“He had the ability to quickly discern the issues in each case, the Commonwealth’s burden and what could or could not be proven at trial,” said another. “In addition, he worked effectively with local government officials and law enforcement to ensure criminals were punished despite limited resources for his office and the entire criminal justice system.”

“When I was pregnant with my first child, I had a custody trial scheduled on my due date with Jack on the opposing side,” remembered another attorney. “My plan had been to keep working until the baby actually came. When I told Jack that the trial was on my due date, he quickly suggested a continuance and couldn’t have been nicer in accommodating my schedule.”

“I was fortunate to work on a few things outside of court with Jack over the years,” said a member. “I’ll never forget the time he sent me a letter at home when he was running for re-election. He included some of his ‘Re-elect Jack Nelson’ note pads and wrote on one of them: ‘Please pass these out to your friends, if you think I’m worthy of re-election.’ I thought that was such a nice, humble remark. Of course he was worthy, and it was our honor as attorneys to work with someone as professional, kind and competent as Jack.”

“Even though Jack got older just like the rest of us, I still thought of him as the dashing young prosecutor who wasn’t afraid to go the trial. It’s hard to believe that he won’t be with us anymore,” one member said sadly.

“Jack had a wonderful sense of humor and was a good friend. We will miss him,” another stated simply.

In addition to his father, Jack is survived by his wife, Tracy (Leidig) Nelson, whom he married in 1986; four children, Maureen Smith and her husband, Ryan, of Spokane, Washington, Kate Nelson of Baltimore, and John Colton Nelson and Samantha Nelson, both at home; and two sisters, Patricia Nelson of Pennsylvania and Judy Sykora and her husband, Steven, of Florida. We join them in mourning his passing, but also in celebrating the relationships we had with him.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the members of the Franklin County Bar Association express our sympathy at the loss of John F. “Jack” Nelson III, a husband, father, colleague and attorney at law. We will strive to keep his memory alive, for the strength, dedication and wisdom of those who have gone before us are the foundation for our future.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn D. Meyers
Memorial Resolutions Committee
Franklin County Bar Association