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Reflecting on 125 Years of Service: A Look Back at the LBA's History

In 2003, the LBA introduced the Trailblazer Award. The following excerpt is from the Bar Briefs announcement.

The LBA will present the first Trailblazer Award to Jefferson District Court's Judge Janice R. Martin, on Tuesday, February 18, at a reception at the Bar Center. The award was conceptualized by the LBA Diversity Task Force with the intent to honor those who have made significant strides in promoting diversity in the profession.

Task force member Judge Brian Edwards said, "The award was designed to honor an attorney who had served as a barrier breaker." Judge Olu Stevens added, "Part of the goal of the Diversity Task Force was to increase the level of minority participation and recognize those who have done noteworthy things." Judge Martin was the first female African American judge in Kentucky as well as the first female and African American to serve as Bar Counsel for the Kentucky Bar Association. Starting college at age 16 and graduating quickly into law school, Martin was the only African American female in her class.

After graduating from the University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law in 1980, Martin was a staff attorney for the Legal Aid Society. She went into private practice for three years, while also serving as an Assistant County Attorney. She then became the Chief Prosecutor of the Juvenile Division in the County Attorney's Office.

In 1985, Martin returned to the University of Louisville as an instructor for the Political Science Department. For three years, she taught Constitutional Law during her tenure as Bar Counsel for the KBA.



On February 18, 2003, Judge Janice R. Martin (pictured here with J. Michael Brown) became the first winner of the LBA's Trailblazer Award.

In 1992, former Governor Brereton Jones appointed Martin to the District Court Bench. Later that year, she was elected to and, 10 years later, still serves as a member of the Jefferson County judiciary.

Judge Martin is entrenched in numerous aspects of the community. She is currently on the Executive Committee of the District Judges Association, Chair of the Kentucky Implementation Task Force on Racial Fairness in the Courts and a board member for the Louisville Bar Association, Jewish Hospital and Project Women. She volunteers as a mentor for the Brandeis School of Law

and is frequently a featured speaker for a number of different groups.

On the national level, Judge Martin is involved in educating and training for the Judicial Institute, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. In this capacity, she teaches and trains with judges and attorneys from around the country in the area of domestic violence, stressing factfinding, decision making, writing opinions and orders, and ethics. "Anytime you have an opportunity to enhance your skills as a judge... you improve the public perception of the judiciary," said Judge Martin.

Judge Martin's reputation precedes her. She is recognized for her temperament, poise, preparedness and ability. Her husband, Paul Porter, says she is frequently approached in public and thanked for her kind nature and the respect with which she treats everyone she meets. Martin has even been stopped by former defendants from her days as a juvenile prosecutor who have introduced their families to her.

"The fact that you can sit on the bench and not have black robe fever and be so full of yourself that you forget you are talking to people who deserve as much respect as anyone else speaks very highly of her," said Porter.

What makes Martin shine is that she is "sensitive to the problems and needs of different classes and cultures of people." Stevens agreed, saying that she is very courteous to everyone, especially those in her courtroom.

Martin's attitude does not go unnoticed. Chief Judge Donald Armstrong acknowledges, "She's a leader. She is well-deserving of the award and is a trailblazer in most aspects of her life." ■