SIU Law gives ex-judge honor

Retired Judge Brocton D. Lockwood receives award for a career spent in judicial system, law enforcement

By Jerry Crimmins
Law Bulletin staff writer

Retired Judge Brocton D. Lockwood, a farmer, lawyer, policeman, judge, undercover investigator, crusader against methamphetamine abuse and author, received the “Distinguished Service Award” at the Southern Illinois University School of Law commencement.

“As we educate the next generation of attorneys and judges, we take very seriously our responsibility to instill values such as courage, integrity and service to the community,” said the school’s dean, Cynthia Fontaine.

“Judge Lockwood’s career stands as a tangible example of these values in action.”

Lockwood was twice a judge in Southern Illinois and a longtime trial lawyer there.

He came to statewide and national attention when it was revealed he had worked undercover for the FBI — while he was a judge — during the Operation Greylord probe of court corruption in Cook County in the 1980s.

In those days, downstate judges sat on the bench routinely in Cook County to help with the high caseload there. Disturbed by corruption, he was fired, and Lockwood went to the FBI.

Lockwood did not know the Greyfolds investigation of the courts was already underway. The FBI fitted him with a wire and he taped conversations with bagmen, police officers and attorneys.

The massive Greylord probe of which he was part eventually sent 15 judges and 49 lawyers to prison for bribery and tax fraud.

“My spy duties seemed extremely dull and tedious 99 percent of the time; the other 1 percent was filled with terror,” Lockwood said in the book, “Operation Greyfolds: Brocton Lockwood’s Story” (Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).

He left the bench in 1984 and returned to private practice in southern Illinois. He returned to the bench in Saline County from 2000 to 2006.

There he was asked to start a “drug court” to help addicts overcome addiction at a time when methamphetamine use accounted for more than 50 percent of the county’s felony drug cases.

Lockwood said he talked to judges all over Illinois about the problem and gave numerous speeches to the public in the 1st and 2nd judicial circuits in far southern Illinois.

“I’d talk to anybody that wanted to listen,” he said, “Schools, churches or whatever.” He estimates he gave 50 speeches on the subject.

Today, he said he believes, “we kind of stopped it (the meth epidemic) here in the 1st Circuit. It’s reduced substantially, just by awareness.”

Lockwood, 68, was raised on his maternal grandfather’s farm and apple orchard halfway between Carbondale and Murphysboro.

His mother was a professor at SIU. Lockwood became what would have to be one of the world’s youngest farm workers.

“I drove a tractor starting at age 3,” he said. The tractor had a hand lever for gas and a hand-operated clutch. Lockwood drove standing on the seat.

“I drove it down the rows and the workers loaded boxes of apples in the back” on a wagon behind the truck, he said.

He would stop when his grandfather told him to. To stop, he said, he moved the clutch by hand to take the tractor out of gear.

Retired Judge Brocton D. Lockwood (center) received the “Distinguished Service Award” at the Southern Illinois University School of Law commencement. He poses here with SIU School of Law Dean Cynthia Fontaine (left) and SIUC Chancellor Rita H. Cheng (right).

“I got in trouble with that thing all the time,” he said.

He said he drove a farm truck about age 6. His cousins asked him to drive the truck “while they were taking up hay about a mile from the house.”

“They had me stand on the seat. They put it in ‘granny gear’” (extreme low gear), he said. While others loaded hay in it, he drove the truck slowly across the field.

When he reached the end of the field, “I expected somebody to jump in the truck and stop it,” he said.

Nobody did and Lockwood couldn’t reach the brake. So, he said, he drove home “and drove around in circles in the barn lot until my cousins showed up.”

He got his bachelor’s degree at Oberlin College in Ohio and his law degree at Vanderbilt Law School in 1969. While in those schools, he worked as a police officer in Ohio and in Maine and as an investigator for the U.S. attorney’s office in Nashville, Tenn.

As a lawyer back in southern Illinois, he became what U.S. District Judge G. Patrick Murphy once called “the best courtroom lawyer I’ve ever seen.”

Professor William Schroeder at SIU’s law school said he worked with Lockwood on “at least half a dozen murder cases.”

Schroeder described Lockwood as “a man of perfect integrity. I can’t think of a single instance I saw him do anything that smacked of less than total honesty.”

“If others in the profession can do a tenth as much as he did for the profession, for his region and for the state, we will have a much better profession and a much better state,” Schroeder said.

Lockwood’s latest venture is a historical novel written with Gary DeNeal about the 1922 Herrin Massacre when members of United Mine Workers of America were acquitted of killing 19 strike breakers and the activities at that time of the Ku Klux Klan. The book is “Shades of Gray” (Wayne County Press, 2011).

The recommendation for the award Lockwood received May 12 cites his “contributions to the judicial system,” his work to improve local communities, his “documentation of local history” and “positive impact on the people of Southern Illinois.”

jcgrimmas@lbpccom