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The Fifth Annual TWITA Awards: Honoring the Profession's Best

TWITA, the acronym for "That's What I'm Talking About," is awarded annually to individuals and organizations for exceptional service to the legal profession and their commitment to just causes.

By **Marc Garfinkle** | September 09, 2019



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Truth be told, dear reader, this is only the *third* annual presentation of the TWITA, but hyperbole is fashionable nowadays, so fifth it is. God bless America.

TWITA, the acronym for “That’s What I’m Talking About,” is awarded annually to individuals and organizations for exceptional service to the legal profession and their commitment to just causes. The selection process takes months, as our Nominating Committee does it all by myself. Then, the Judicial Committee winnows the many nominees to one honoree in each category. Previous winners of the TWITA need no introduction.

In keeping with time-honored tradition, we first award the Organizational TWITA, and only then will we reveal that the winner of the Individual TWITA is the late Myron “Mike” Kronisch of Essex County and the world. But first—the TWITA award for the group or association who has exemplified the best of our profession. They won’t be happy about this, because they are a secretive society whose members prefer anonymity. But they have no choice; they won, fair and square.

Since its inception in 1994, the Committee on Character of the Supreme Court of New Jersey has certified to that Court that each admittee to the bar is of good character. Working in the shadows, the Committee guarantees the integrity and reputation of our profession and practitioners.

The members, all attorneys, are selected by the Supreme Court. Unlike similarly named committees in other states, our “COC” does not own a rubber stamp. They study and vet each applicant who seeks admission or readmission to the bar. At the core of the candidate’s record is the Character and Fitness Questionnaire (CFQ), submitted online, which probes the candidate’s personal, academic, employment, criminal and financial histories. Candidates’ records and testimony must clearly demonstrate the traits of honesty, integrity, financial responsibility and trustworthiness.

Issues that concern the COC are nondisclosure of information, academic dishonesty at any level, unlawful conduct of any kind anywhere, failure to file required tax returns or to pay taxes, financial irresponsibility, misconduct in employment, domestic violence, any evidence of moral turpitude, present psychotic condition and much more, all set out in RG 302:1.

The COC can review college, law school and job applications, employment files, tax and bankruptcy files, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages, civil court filings, criminal dossiers (including arrests, as well as expunged, dismissed and juvenile matters), telephone and credit card records, travel papers and more. These they review thoroughly for inconsistencies, irregularities, ambiguity, untruths and other “red flags.”

To appreciate why they earned this coveted honor, you would need to see them in action. A session with a Committee panel (RG 303 hearing) is how one might imagine a day at the Star Chamber—that formidable medieval English tribunal entrusted with the interrogation and judgment of political prisoners or defendants of wealth and influence. They may ask a candidate why one undergraduate application included a certain previous home address while another did not. They conjure the real reason a candidate left an old job or why she moved off-campus. The hearings are never hurried, and no candidate can say that s/he was not treated fairly.

Because they work so hard and so well at their critical task without recognition or pay, we are proud to present this year's TWITA award to the Committee on Character of the New Jersey Supreme Court.

Now, we present the individual TWITA Award, also known as "the Golden TWITA." There are lawyers who are great thinkers—innovative, transcendental, revolutionary. Often, they leave behind words of wisdom, inspiration or caveat. Their ideas grow and evolve in the minds of those that follow. Then, there are attorneys who are great doers, whose deeds and accomplishments have made the world or the profession a better place. Usually, their fame is fleeting even if their legacy endures. Finally, there are those who are mentors and role models, setting the example by living their word. These attorneys understand the importance of paying forward the goodness and knowledge which they, earlier in their careers, had received from others.

The winner of our Individual TWITA, Mike Kronisch, epitomized all of this. His passing earlier this year gave pause to consider what an extraordinary attorney he had been. A 1952 graduate of Rutgers Law, where he had been Managing Editor of the Rutgers Law Review, he became law clerk to Essex County Judge G. Dixon Speakman, before a stint as a trial attorney for Liberty Mutual and a clerkship under NJ Supreme Court Justice Nathan Jacobs. This led to his employment as an assistant prosecutor in Essex County, and then as a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

From there, Mike entered private practice, first handling petitioners' Workers' Compensation cases, and then he expanded into the fields where he earned his reputation as an outstanding litigator—medical negligence and product liability. In the early 1970's he pioneered the product liability exposure of pharmaceutical manufacturers with his

prosecution of diethylstilbestrol (DES) cases, seeking justice for victims of this dangerous drug which had been given to pregnant women to prevent miscarriage, often with horrible results. Success required surmounting many technical, legal and evidentiary hurdles.

Mike Kronisch served his bar and his conscience with equal vigor. He had been president of ATLA-NJ (now the New Jersey Association for Justice), was appointed by Governor Cahill to the New Jersey delegation to the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, and was a fixture on the Editorial Board of the New Jersey Law Journal. He was an arbitrator for the American Arbitration Association and active in the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists.

His quest for global peace was a lifelong commitment. He was an activist or leader of LANAC (the Lawyers' Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control), the World Federalist Association, Citizens for Global Solutions and the Center for War/Peace Studies, which sought to democratize the voting system in the United Nations by eliminating veto power. His dedication to these causes was unflagging.

For these reasons, and for others too numerous to include in this space, the Golden TWITA Award for 2019 goes to Myron "Mike" Kronisch. Rest in peace, Mike.

Tune in next year for the Tenth Annual TWITA Awards.

Marc Garfinkle *practices in Morristown, focusing exclusively on legal ethics, attorney discipline, bar admission and judicial misconduct. He is also an adjunct professor at Seton Hall University School of Law in Newark.*