

Hon. Michael G. Heavican, Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court, is the 2018 OBA Robert M. Spire Award recipient for his lifetime of public service work in the Nebraska legal community. Chief Justice Heavican will receive the award at the 2018 Law Day Luncheon in Omaha on May 1st.

What do you get when you combine 16 years with the Lancaster County Attorney's Office (10 years of which as County Attorney) with 15 years with the U.S. Attorney's Office (5 years of which as U.S. Attorney) with 12 years with the Nebraska Supreme Court (all 12 years as Chief Justice)? You get what most of us would consider more than a few lifetimes worth of public service. However, in the case of Chief Justice Michael Heavican, you get only 43 years of his career, a career that is still going strong.

Born in Colfax County Nebraska to a farming family, Chief Justice Heavican spent his first two years after college as an English teacher in Papillion, before returning to the University of Nebraska Lincoln for law school, following the advice of family members. Upon graduation from law school, Heavican was hired on by the Lancaster County Attorney's Office to handle civil matters for the County. Rather than a grand plan executed to perfection, the Chief Justice's first job as an attorney was more a product of fortunate happenstance.

Today, with more than 40 years in practice, Chief Justice Heavican continues his service to the public through his work as head of the Judiciary Branch in Nebraska. Heavican's position puts him as the boss of over 1,000 state employees, including county clerks in all 92 of Nebraska's counties, and a growing number of state probation officers. Central to his post, Heavican oversees, presents, and champions the annual budget for the Judicial Branch, which requires advocating with the Legislative and Executive Branches to ultimately gain funding for operations of the judicial branch across the state. An unenviable task to some, Chief Justice Heavican commands a strong understanding of each part of the Judicial Branch's mission and function, and ably champions the important work done by his office for the benefit of all Nebraskans.

A number of priorities have been advanced under Chief Justice Heavican's tenure as head of the Nebraska Supreme Court, many of which have greatly helped the education of public about the legal system. Notable among the accomplishments during his time have been (1) the establishment the Self Help Desks in Douglas, Lancaster, and greater Nebraska counties, (2) establishment of the Office of the Public Guardian, (3) the advancement of Problem-Solving Courts, (4) the promotion of Limited Scope Representation legal services by Nebraska attorneys, (5) the growth of the forms for Pro Se litigants on the Supreme Court's website, (6) the allowing of cameras in the courtroom, and (7) the digitization of court records in a single online case management system, Justice.

Each one of these advancements is a significant achievement, and has in its own right been a large benefit for the public in its interaction and understanding of the legal system and Judicial Branch. Put all together, these accomplishments in 12 short years typify how effective Chief Justice Heavican has been in his role, and how fortunate the Nebraska legal community and public are and continue to be under his steady hand and watchful eye.

The Omaha Bar Association is proud to have Chief Justice Heavican selected as the 2018 Robert M. Spire Award recipient for his public service. Please join us in congratulating him on all his accomplishments and good works.