

# JUDGE THOMAS M. SHANAHAN RECEIVES 2008 OMAHA BAR ASSOCIATION LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

By: Rich McGowan

When Judge Thomas M. Shanahan was asked to comment on his receipt of the 2008 Omaha Bar Association Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions as a private-practice attorney in Ogallala, Nebraska, a Nebraska Supreme Court Justice from 1983 to 1993, and a judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Nebraska since 1993, he jocularly responded, "I'm flattered to be named as a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award. Does this mean I've achieved my lifetime and the OBA knows something I don't know?"

Judge Shanahan took active senior status as a U.S. District Court judge on May 4, 2004. In February 2007 he took inactive senior status, about which he said, "To some that description might be a redundancy of terms." He further noted, "I'm not officially retired, so under certain

circumstances, I could wash the gravy stains out of my robe and climb back on the bench."

Such wit is found in his stories from his career. One example: he presided over a trial when the jury was given an instruction to, "be guided by the law, evidence and common sense." That jury then inquired what was meant by "common sense." Judge Shanahan was tempted to say, "If you're asking what it is, don't worry; you don't have it." Instead, the instruction was changed to have the jury "apply the law, evidence and their everyday judgements." Regardless of that humorous incident, he noted, "The juries were collectively intelligent and collectively sincere in satisfying their obligations as jurors."

Humbly and seriously reflecting on his judicial career, Judge Shanahan

said, "I hope people realize I continually tried to improve and always be fair to the parties, witnesses and attorneys. Whether that actually occurred, I leave to other people to decide."

Judge Shanahan married Jane Estelle Lodge on August 4, 1956, and they have four children: Catherine (a proud mother of four children); Thomas (a public defender in Kansas City); Mary Beth (a Columbia University Medical Center employee); and Tim (a public defender for Douglas County, Nebraska). Previous awards Judge Shanahan has received include the Nebraska State Bar Association's George H. Turner Award, which is awarded for furthering public understanding of the legal system and confidence in the legal profession, and being named the 1994 Creighton Prep Alumnus of the Year.