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## 2008 Professionalism Award Recipient, Eighth Circuit Judge Gerald W. VandeWalle

When senior lawyers reflect on their careers, acknowledged motivations for beginning the journey through the legal profession are revealing. Some claim the desire to help their fellow man; others trace their motivation to a family member or close friend in the profession. Others are more candid and perhaps even more authentic. The Honorable Gerald W. VandeWalle, Chief Justice of the North Dakota Supreme Court, the recipient of the 2008 American Inns of Court Circuit Professional Award for the 8th Circuit, admitted in his case that "there was no noble calling or profound vision." An accounting major in undergraduate school, he took the required business law courses taught by "two very fine professors." Intrigued by the subject matter, he was "hooked." Those professors encouraged him to go to law school.

What one quickly learns about Chief Justice VandeWalle is that the honest, straight-forward, unvarnished truth is what to expect from him. Although he acknowledges that he did not enter the legal profession with an "altruistic purpose," he came to believe "that the highest calling for a lawyer is service to others. I have the highest regard for those lawyers who deal skillfully and compassionately with some of the most personal legal problems of their clients. Of course I expect lawyers to be ethical, professional, and competent." Those who know Chief Justice VandeWalle certainly attest to that, because many of them have heard his motto: "Much is expected where much is given."

Looking at his background, it is evident that he believes in that proverb. As his inspiration, he credits his parents, extended family, teachers, and the small community in which he was reared, attended elementary, and secondary school. Because many immigrants settled the area, people to him seemed hard working and self sufficient. His parents and family highly valued education: "Although the school I attended was small, the teachers were excellent,

and prepared us well for college. I instinctively knew that if I failed I would disappoint not only my family but the entire community. The community remains supportive to this day and I keep close ties with it."

Born and raised in North Dakota, Gerald "Jerry" W. VandeWalle graduated from the University of North Dakota receiving a Bachelor of Science degree *with honors* in Commerce with Accounting in 1955. He earned his Juris Doctorate *magna cum laude* from the University of North Dakota Law School in 1958. In his senior year of law school he edited the North Dakota Law Review.

Admitted to practice in 1958, he was appointed as a Special Assistant Attorney General working for the North Dakota Attorney General. He was appointed as First Assistant Attorney General in January 1975 where his portfolios included elementary, secondary, and higher education; the oil and gas division of the North Dakota Industrial Commission; and the State Retirement Systems. He was also the North Dakota delegate to the Legal Committee of the Interstate Oil Compact Commission, the Attorney General's appointee to the Board of the Public Employees Retirement System, and the legal advisor to the State Board of Higher Education, and many of the Colleges and Universities administered by the Board.

In 1978, he was appointed by Governor Arthur Link to fill a vacancy on the North Dakota Supreme Court, to serve until the next general election. Even though he did not have a substantial track record due to his short time as a member of the Supreme Court, the people of North Dakota placed their confidence in him by electing him to serve the unexpired term to which he was appointed. Subsequently he was elected without opposition to full ten-year terms in 1984, 1994, and 2004. His judicial colleagues on the Supreme Court and the District Courts

elected him to serve as Chief Justice effective January 1, 1993, which office he still holds.

A very active and engaged jurist, Chief Justice VandeWalle was appointed by Chief Justice Rehnquist to the Federal-State Jurisdiction Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States (1997-2004). He has also served as President and Member of the Board of Directors (2000-2001) of the Conference of Chief Justices; Past Chair (2000-2001) of the National Center for State Courts; Past Chair (1997-2000) of the National Center for State Court's Research Advisory Council; Past Chair (2001-2002) of the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association; Co-chair (1991-1999) of the American Bar Association Bar Admissions Committee of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar; and Chair (1996-1998) of the Federal-State Tribal Relations Committee of the Conference of Chief Justices. More important, he provided outstanding leadership to the North Dakota Judicial Branch of Government, constantly striving to promote the courts and to motivate the Legislature to properly fund them. Colleagues insist that there is no doubt that under his leadership the entire North Dakota judiciary substantially advanced in providing justice in a timely, competent, and appropriate manner to the people of North Dakota.

He is known throughout North Dakota as a warm and compassionate man; but he is renowned for a quiet dedication to the mentoring of new attorneys. One lawyer recounted advice the Chief Justice gave to a group of young, aspiring lawyers: "Personal self-respect is important. Lawyers are looked to set an example in their communities and when they don't, it's a big disappointment to the public." Spoken like a man who lives his philosophy, "Much is expected where much is given."★