

WISCONSIN Law Journal

Chief Justice Abrahamson honored with reading-room dedication, portrait released

By: Michaela Paukner, mpaukner@wislawjournal.com October 29, 2020 1:06 pm

The retired Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson was honored with a virtual reading-room dedication and portrait release on Tuesday.

Gov. Tony Evers signed an executive order naming the Wisconsin Historical Society Library Reading Room in her honor in August. Colleagues, friends and family spoke during the virtual dedication this week about Abrahamson's legacy and the lessons she imparted.

Abrahamson was the first woman to serve on the Wisconsin Supreme Court and first female chief justice. She retired in 2019 after 43 years on the state Supreme Court, making her the longest-serving Supreme Court justice in state history.

Abrahamson's son, Dan, appeared by video to share her appreciation for the honor.

"My mother was repeatedly drawn to the remarkable resources, both documentary and human, at the state historical society," Dan Abrahamson said. "My mother is humbled to have the main reading room named in her honor. She is also delighted."

Justice Ann Walsh Bradley recounted stories about Abrahamson's love of reading as a child, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg's tribute to Abrahamson last year, and Abrahamson's commitment to the people of Wisconsin.

"Shirley has been, and continues to be, a champion for fairness and equal justice for all, regardless of their station in life," Bradley said.

Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Evers, retired Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Janine Geske, Milwaukee County Circuit Court Judge Kori Ashley, Dane County Sheriff David Mahoney, former Gov. Jim Doyle and the political writer John Nichols, her friends and her grandson also spoke of their memories about Abrahamson.

"She has touched people all over the state," Geske said. "They all know Shirley, and they all wish her well."

The portrait of Abrahamson was painted by Julie Heffernan. Dan Abrahamson explained the significance of the things depicted in the portrait – from reports covering her first and final published opinions to Tootsie, her pet goldfish.

Dan Abrahamson said he's worked closely with the historical society to transfer some of Abrahamson's papers and other artifacts to the Historical Society for cataloging, preserving and eventual public access.

A replay of the event is available on WisconsinEye.

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A portrait of the retired Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson was released during a virtual reading room dedication in her honor on Wednesday.

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