

2005 MARGARET BRENT AWARDS

Mary Ann McMorrow



Mary Ann McMorrow grew up in Chicago at the height of the Depression. Although times were lean, her parents always stressed education and values. Her innate sense for doing what was “right” coupled with a penchant to debate current events with friends led her to pursue a career in law. However, in the 1940’s a woman in the law was more of a dream than a reality; but not for Mary Ann McMorrow.

She enrolled in law school and was the only woman in her graduating class at Loyola University School of Law in 1953. Despite being the sole female in her class, twice she was elected by her male classmates as class president and associate editor of the law review. After completing law school, Chief Justice McMorrow was employed by her law school for a short time and then was appointed an Assistant State’s Attorney of Cook County. There, she was the first woman to prosecute major criminal cases. She left the State’s Attorney’s office in 1963 to enter private practice. It was very risky for a woman in those years to enter private practice, but Chief Justice McMorrow quickly established a client base and earned the respect of the practicing bar for her trial and appellate skills.

At a time when few women were elected to the bench, Chief Justice McMorrow was elected to the Cook County Circuit Court in 1976. In 1986, she was elected to the Illinois Appellate Court where she became the first woman to chair its Executive Committee. She topped an already impressive career by running for the Illinois Supreme Court and, in 1992, became the first woman in 173 years to be elected to that court.

In September 2002, Chief Justice McMorrow became the 115th chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, and one of only a handful of women nationwide to hold the distinction of chief justice. In her position as Chief Justice, she leads a court system of over 900 judges in 102 counties who dispose of an average of 4 million cases a year. Her tenure has been marked by an exceptional level of cooperation among the judiciary, the organized bar, and

the legislative leaders in advancing the interest of the citizens of Illinois. Chief Justice McMorrow has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the 1998 Myra Bradwell Woman of Achievement Award, the highest award of the Women’s Bar Association of Illinois, and the National Association of Women Lawyers’ Arabella Babb Mansfield Award in 2001. She was named by *Crain’s Chicago Business* as one of “Chicago’s 100 Most Influential Women” in 1996; by *Chicago Lawyer* magazine as “2003 Person of the Year”; and by the *Chicago Sun Times* as “The Most Powerful Woman in Chicago Law.”

Despite her honors and professional achievements, Chief Justice McMorrow remains warm, caring and approachable. She performs many charitable deeds out of the public spotlight, such as volunteering to work in soup kitchens and providing direct service to low-income individuals. In addition to her extraordinary involvement in state, local and specialty bar associations, she frequently inspires law students by speaking with them about professionalism and service to the public and to the legal profession.

In news reports following her unanimous selection as the next chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, Chief Justice McMorrow stated that “[w]hen I went to law school, women couldn’t even dream of such a thing [becoming chief justice]. I hope this [my election as Chief Justice] would forever indicate that there’s nothing that limits women in any job or any profession.”