

ALUMNUS LEADER

JUDGE LEROY MARTIN JR. TRANSLATES LIFE LESSONS INTO SERVICE

“There is honor in being a public servant,” says **LeRoy K. Martin Jr. (History '81)**, presiding judge of the Cook County Circuit Court’s Criminal Division, about his most valuable life lesson. He also learned the importance of education, hard work and respect for others from his parents, former Chicago Police Superintendent LeRoy Martin Sr. and former teacher and elementary school principal **Constance B. Martin (MED '57)**.

Martin, 57, applies those lessons in his current role, especially the example set by his father. “I’m very, very proud of my father,” Martin declares. “He grew up during the Depression and did not have very much. But he did have desire and determination, and worked his way up the ranks. He believed you’re not finished until the job is done, and to take pride in what you do and take care of your family.” The judge emulates his father’s easygoing manner with people. “I have an open-door policy. I walk in the hallway and have ordinary conversations.”

His mother also was a great life teacher and cemented his decision to apply to DePaul, a school she loves, and, later, to go into public service. “She was a Chicago Public School teacher and principal at Tanner Elementary. My mother was very dedicated to the children there. Even to this day, she will run into students who speak about her so glowingly.”

Martin’s DePaul experience broadened his horizons. “You grow up in a particular neighborhood and that’s your world,” he says. “But I got to meet other students from other parts of the city, state and country. The liberal arts school offered a good opportunity to exchange ideas.”

After Martin became a judge, he spent eight



years in the Cook County Circuit Court’s Chancery Division presiding over a wide variety of cases, including class actions, injunctions and nonprobate trust cases. Martin was made the presiding judge of the Criminal Division in September 2015. In his first year, he started to put his stamp on a position held by his predecessor, Paul P. Biebel Jr., for 19 years.

“I think that to be in tune and in touch with changing times, we need to address the needs of society in general,” says Martin. “My predecessor recognized the need. Now that I’m here, I have an advantage because techniques have evolved. There are more services that the courts offer through mental health, veterans and drug treatment courts. Cases can be deferred so people can be treated.”

Despite improvements, the judicial system faces challenges. One of Martin’s goals is “to remind and emphasize to the public that they can and should have confidence in the system. With some of the things that have happened recently and over the years, people have lost confidence.” One of the ways he tries to build trust is to make certain that cases are assigned to judges randomly and very publicly in court. The judges under his direction enter information into the record to show that they are considering all factors in making their rulings—even with something as simple as giving a continuance.

“I’m very proud to say that I have a degree from DePaul,” Martin says. “DePaul allows students to fulfill their desires. It certainly has done it for me, even surpassing my goals. I knew I wanted to be a judge at some point in my legal career. I certainly never thought I’d be here presiding over one of the largest divisions in the system and one of the largest criminal court divisions in the country.”

LeRoy Martin Jr.’s advice on education

- 1 You will get out of it what you put into it.
- 2 Through education and hard work, there’s nothing we’re not capable of doing.
- 3 It’s wonderful to take your education and invest it in our city and our communities so that we can make Chicago the best Chicago it can be.