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## Chief Justice Amdahl—A Tribute

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## CHIEF JUSTICE AMDAHL—A TRIBUTE

HON. PETER S. POPOVICH†

Born and schooled in Mabel, Minnesota, a graduate of the University of Minnesota and Minneapolis-Minnesota College of Law (now William Mitchell College of Law), a private practitioner, assistant county attorney, Minneapolis Municipal Judge, Hennepin County District Judge, Associate Justice, and then Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, Douglas K. Amdahl has left an indelible imprint on the judicial history of Minnesota.

I first remember Chief Justice Amdahl as a trial court judge, but our paths and lives became more interwoven as I argued cases in the Supreme Court as a practitioner and then became the first Chief Judge of the new Court of Appeals and then a member of the Minnesota Supreme Court. In 1982, when the Chief Justice spearheaded the election campaign for the adoption of a constitutional amendment permitting the creation of the new Court of Appeals, he prevailed upon me and more than 3,000 other Minnesotans to join the cause for better administration of appellate practice. Little did I know then that I would become even more involved with him within the court system itself.

In May 1983, I received a call from Governor Perpich appointing me the first Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, with the advice to “go and see Chief Justice Amdahl as soon as possible because he has been after me to get the court organized and ready to commence operation by November first.”

It was only a few minutes later that the Chief Justice called me and, after preliminary congratulations, asked, “When are you able to get going? A lot of preliminary work has to be done!” He was already exercising his administrative responsibility under the statute, which provides, “The chief judge, subject to the authority of the chief justice, shall exercise general administrative authority over the court.” We met weekly from

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† Chief Judge, Minnesota Court of Appeals (1983–1987); Associate Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court (1987–1988); and currently Chief Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court.

then until I became a member of the Supreme Court, when we met daily. His insights, wisdom, encouragement, prodding, leadership, patience and good humor amazed me as each day passed. He was completely devoted to administering the courts in a timely and efficient fashion.

But equally important were his philosophy and concepts about the law and the judiciary. This is well illustrated by what he said when he swore us in as judges:

As the governor of this state, by his appointment, has given to each of you the right to wear the judicial robe and to exercise the power of decision which forms its ever-present mantle, so may God grant you the humility to recognize that no cause is so small but that it has importance to someone and the strength to know that no earthly power except the law is so great that you must defer to it.

As each of us must know, the law is made equally for all persons. Thus, the law can be no respecter of persons. Yet each person must respect the law or we will have no law. Therefore, as each person who wears this robe, this symbol of the law, discharges his or her duties to equality and justice, so will he or she merit the respect of our citizens and so will the stature of the law be measured.

We who work with you and those who appear before you and those whose cases you decide, will respect you and your decision—and when we call you “Your Honor” we will recognize that it is our honor you represent.

The Chief Justice is a modest man, and he would be embarrassed to be called a successful man. Yet, during his tenure the judicial landscape has changed significantly and for the better, with the creation of the Court of Appeals and Compensation Council, the reconstitution of the Conference of Chief Judges as the primary policy-making body for trial court administration, the unification of the trial courts, the addition of thirty-one new trial court judgeships, and the beginning construction of a symbolic home for the judicial branch of government on the Capitol Mall. Through the Conference of Chief Judges and the Minnesota District Judges Association, Chief Justice Amdahl has worked closely with trial judges to maintain Minnesota’s place as a national leader in judicial administration.

He is also a devoted son, husband and father. Responsible for his aging parents who still reside at Mabel in a nursing home, he has never considered it a burden. And to observe

the relationship with his wife, Phyllis, and their children is a joy. The mutual respect and consideration shown is so evident.

Chief Justice Amdahl—a friend and colleague—in my view is best illustrated by the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

To laugh often and much;  
to win the respect of intelligent people and affection of children,  
to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;  
to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others,  
to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;  
to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.

This is to have succeeded.

So we honor on his retirement Douglas K. Amdahl, who will never know how he touched so many of us in Minnesota. He has truly succeeded.

