

HON. THEODORE A. McKEE
Class of 1975

Professor of Law Emeritus Thomas Maroney warmly remembers his former student and research assistant, Theodore (Ted) McKee: his dashikis, his “smart, steady and reliable” work, his distinct Afro hairstyle, and his beat-up blue Volvo. But those trappings do little justice in describing the essence of Ted McKee.

Educated first at the State University of New York at Cortland, Judge McKee distinguished himself at the College of Law, graduating *magna cum laude* as a member of the Order of the Coif and the Justinian Honorary Law Society. He also volunteered with the then-recently founded Prisoners’ Rights Project in Syracuse.

After two years in private practice in Philadelphia, Judge McKee began his long career in public service, serving as an Assistant United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Deputy Solicitor for the City of Philadelphia, and General Counsel to the Philadelphia Parking Authority. He was elected a judge of the Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas (the state’s trial level court) in Philadelphia in 1984. Ten years later, President Bill Clinton nominated him to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. He became Chief Judge in May 2010. Eligible to remain Chief Judge until 2018, he relinquished the position a year ago so another long-serving judge would have a chance to hold the office. That successor described Judge McKee “as a Chief who has demonstrated extraordinary leadership. He is exceptionally collegial, and both his collegiality and his judging exemplify his deep humanity.”

Judge McKee’s senses of compassion and humanity inform his life on and off the bench every day. He recalls one defendant who, after receiving a life sentence for homicide, thanked him for the respect shown even as he faced trial and imprisonment. “I never forgot that,” Judge McKee said. “It brought home to me that no matter how insignificant, through your interaction with someone you can make a difference in that person’s life.”

Always concerned with fundamental fairness, Judge McKee headed the Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission for four years, formed the Third Circuit’s Task Force on Eyewitness Identifications to reduce the risks of wrongful convictions, served as an advisor to the American Law Institute’s project to revise the sentencing provisions of the Model Penal Code, and served on the Criminal Law Committee of the United States Judicial Conference.

Judge McKee participates in a number of non-profit organizations, including several committed to helping direct urban youth away from crime and providing women offenders with drug rehabilitation, education, and job counseling. He is equally committed to improving the legal profession, having taught trial practice at Rutgers Law School and serving on the Board of Visitors of Temple University’s Beasley School of Law. But, first and foremost, he remains a big fan and avid follower of our College of Law, not just as an honorary member of the Board of Visitors. He tries to visit the College of Law at least once each year, has hired SU alumni, was the keynote speaker at the dedication of Dineen Hall, and regularly judges the final round of the Mackenzie Hughes Appellate Advocacy Competition. According to his nominator, there is “palpable excitement” when Judge McKee is in the building.

*In recognition of his distinguished career and compassionate public and community service,
Syracuse University College of Law is proud to honor*

Judge Theodore A. McKee with the Syracuse Law Honors Medal.