

Remembering Bob Ravitz

By Judge Scott Rowland

Author's Note: The following is an excerpt of a eulogy I gave at the memorial service for Oklahoma County Chief Public Defender Bob Ravitz on Jan. 30.

I AM A FORMER STUDENT OF Bob Ravitz's, and so are all of you, whether you know it or not. Some of us were fortunate enough to have him as a professor in law school – he taught me criminal procedure and the law of capital punishment more than 30 years ago. Others worked for him at the Public Defender's Office and learned from him on the job. More than a few of us were schooled by him in the courtroom a time or two. I take the podium here today to tell you what you already know: Bob Ravitz was an extraordinary guy. Or, I should say, an extraordinary bunch of guys.

Besides teacher and professor, Bob was, of course, a criminal litigator, par excellence. He spent his entire legal career defending those whom many of the rest of us might deem indefensible, but Bob Ravitz knew that there is no such thing as a person who doesn't deserve to be defended, no matter the crime of which they are accused. He knew that having a capable, ethical, zealous lawyer speaking for each side is the very lifeblood of our criminal justice system and the due process that it demands.

As chief public defender for Oklahoma County, he hired and mentored the next generation of criminal defense lawyers, instilling in them the belief that only by protecting the rights of those we may like the least can we secure the rights of all.



Judge Scott Rowland with his friend and colleague Robert A. "Bob" Ravitz of Oklahoma City, who died Jan. 23.

He never turned his back on people with mental illnesses who found themselves embroiled in the criminal justice system. Many times he appeared in my office while I was first assistant district attorney with a cobbled-together plan to get such persons out of jail and into a mental health bed for their and the public's protection.

Beyond his litigation work, Bob was an essential county official in the broader sense, serving on every board, commission or committee of any consequence in Oklahoma County in the past three decades. Every policy, program or protocol implemented during that time has his fingerprints all over it, and most of the time, his were among the most valuable and productive contributions. It is impossible to know how many good laws have been passed or made better

because of his work, and because lawmakers were smart enough to seek his counsel, and how many bad laws never made it to fruition because of his guidance and influence.

But in addition to all of these versions of Bob Ravitz, indeed first among them, he was a family man, and I mean your family as well as his. He genuinely loved people, and that's foundational to all I've told you about him thus far – he loved seeing people prosper and helping them when they did not. We met for lunch twice or more each month, and they always began with him updating me about his family and asking about mine.

During more than 20 years as a prosecutor, I litigated many cases against Bob. He was an expert at representing his client while always being the consummate professional and a pleasure to deal with. When a case required trial by jury, I knew I was in for a very tough but very fair fight, and I saw in his lawyering the best ideals and best version of what a lawyer can be.

Bob Ravitz was a man of the utmost integrity and honesty, perhaps more than any man I've ever known. He was possessed of a love of people and justice and a disdain for unfairness, injustice and all things corrupt. The God whom I know has given him a huge promotion and transfer to the home office, and I know this is true. I just hate that he isn't here anymore.

Judge Rowland is presiding judge for the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals.