



## Service at the Pinnacle

Judge Joseph F. Murphy Jr.  
“absolutely loves the law,”  
and is “always available”  
for public service.

After 40 years of excelling at every level of Maryland’s legal profession, Judge Joseph F. Murphy Jr. ’69 has been named the 2010 recipient of the School of Law’s Benjamin L. Cardin Public Service Award.

Murphy, who is one of seven judges on Maryland’s Court of Appeals, the state’s highest court, finds it particularly gratifying that an award named for a Cardin is honoring a career started by a Cardin. The U.S. Senator’s brother, Howard, hired Murphy to his first job as a prosecutor. “There is no way in the world that I’d be here today if that had not happened,” says Murphy.

Murphy was raised by his bookkeeper mother, in Fitchburg, Mass., after his father died when he was a baby. He went on to earn an economics degree from Boston College and moved to Baltimore to work as an insurance adjuster. He then enrolled at the University of Maryland School of Law’s night school program.

“I really didn’t have a plan,” he recalls.

After graduating and passing the bar in 1969, he got his first taste of public service as a Legal Aid lawyer. The job involved criminal trial work that caught the attention of rival prosecutors. Howard Cardin hired Murphy in 1970 to join the Baltimore state’s attorney’s office. By 1975 Murphy rose to become deputy state’s attorney. A year later he entered private practice.

At White & Murphy, his cases often gained local headlines. But Murphy was thrown into the national spotlight in 1979, when he represented a nurse charged with murder for disconnecting the respirator of a critically ill patient. His legal strategy focused on proving that the patient was not “alive” and therefore could not have been murdered. The question hung the jury, and prosecutors eventually dropped the charges.

In 1984, Murphy was appointed to the Baltimore County Circuit Court bench, where he presided over trials for nine years. He was appointed to the Court of Special Appeals in 1993 and became its chief three years later. Then, in 2007, Gov. Martin O’Malley ’88 appointed Murphy to the Court of Appeals.

Created in 1776, the court decides the most important and controversial questions facing the state—including issues such as free speech, gay marriage, the death penalty, legislative redistricting, and the behavior of other judges.

Murphy—married for 44 years to a retired school teacher—has another outlet for public service: teaching. For nearly three decades the former president of the Maryland Criminal Defense Attorneys Association has taught trial practice at the University of Maryland School of Law.

The author of the *Maryland Evidence Handbook*, Judge Murphy also teaches evidence at the University of Baltimore Law School.

“The best thing about my dad is that he absolutely loves the law,” says his daughter Erin Murphy Ehman, an attorney with Silverman, Thompson, Slutkin & White, who has co-taught the evidence course with Judge Murphy for the past nine years. When it comes to public service, she adds, “he is always available. He never says no.”

—Doug Donovan