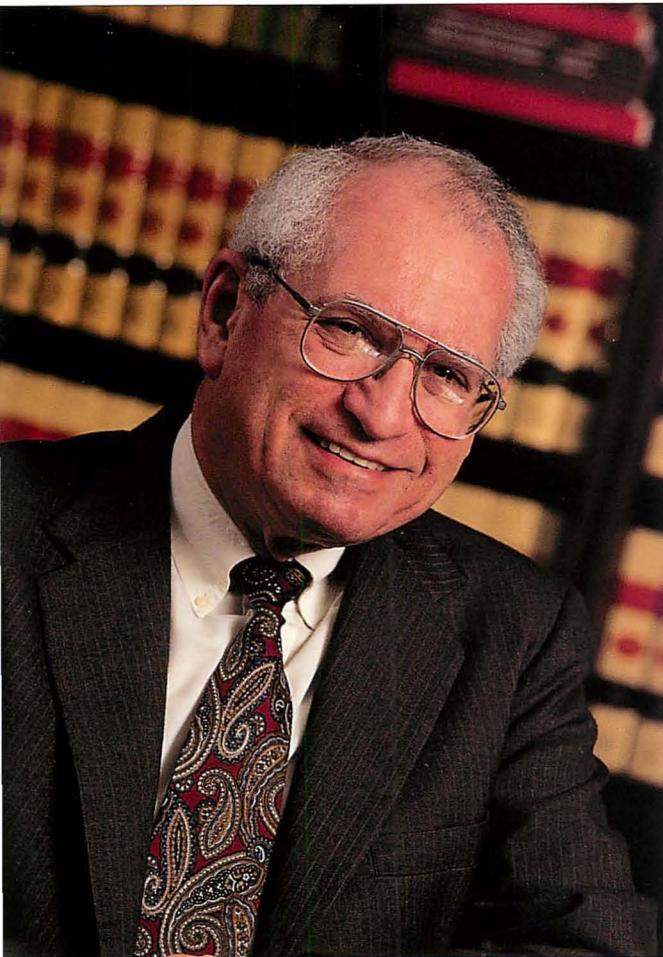


ALAN WILNER

1999 Distinguished Graduate Award

BY BETTY LYNNE LEARY



When Alan Wilner clerked for a trial judge during his final year of law school, he found the work intriguing yet couldn't fathom a judgeship in his own future.

"There were so few judges at that time that I never imagined it was in reach," he says. "I never gave it much thought after that."

Today the Hon. Alan M. Wilner '62 reflects on a career highlighted by 19 years as a Judge on the Court of Special Appeals, including six as Chief Judge. In 1996, he was named to the Court of Appeals and was recently voted the 1999 Distinguished Graduate by the University of

Maryland School of Law Alumni Association.

Wilner began his career at a small firm doing public utility and general corporate work before joining the attorney general's office where he represented a number of state agencies. Then, after practicing with Venable, Baetjer and Howard for four years, he moved to the governor's staff, eventually serving as Chief Legislative Officer. That position served as the stepping stone to the Court of Special Appeals where Wilner heard countless challenging

cases during almost two decades of work.

"The court hasn't changed much but the internal workings had to become more efficient over the years to keep up with an exploding case load," he explains. Wilner describes the judgeship as one of the few jobs in the legal profession where you explore almost every field of law due to the variety of cases that come before the court.

"It's very creative intellectually," he says. "There is a lot of variety so you must keep abreast of everything. You read a lot because the lawyers always tell us what they think the law is." When he's not on the bench, Wilner enjoys teaching a course at the law school on alternative methods of dispute resolution.

"It's more information sharing than a Socratic kind of thinking," he explains, noting that he finds today's students bright and that they like to be entertained. Wilner recalls his own time in law school fondly, although he states it was a tough challenge at the time.

"It was really a grind, working during the day, going to class at night," he says. "But I loved law school, I really did." The courses back in the early '60s were more basic, Wilner adds, noting that students today have a wider range of courses from which to choose.

"We knew a lot more about a lot less than today's students," he says, laughing. "We concentrated more on history, perception and how law developed. There's a lot more information now but less analysis." While Wilner prefers the old-school approach, he admits that the law school probably would not remain competitive in providing the kind of students law firms want if they reverted to the old style of teaching.

The old style served Wilner well, however, from the day he achieved the second highest score on the Maryland bar exam in 1962, to Maryland's highest court where he serves today, not only as distinguished adjudicator but as an honored and distinguished graduate of the School of Law.