

Lavon's Legend

By Chief Judge Robert Henry

Lavon Irlbeck, 70, of Carroll, Iowa and formerly of the Arcadia-Westside area, passed away on Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2009, at St. Anthony Regional Hospital in Carroll. A daughter of Albert J. and Elizabeth (Hoffman) Irlbeck, she was born Feb. 8, 1939, at Carroll, grew up in Arcadia, attended St. John School there and graduated from Kuemper High School in Carroll in 1957.

She had been suffering from respiratory illness for some time. Fortunately, her passing was peaceful.

Lavon moved to Denver in 1960 and worked as a legal secretary. Fortunately for the Tenth Circuit, she left that position and joined our court family. We remember her as the Assistant Circuit Executive for the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, where she served from October 1970 until retiring in September 1999.

Lavon moved to Carroll in February 2008 area to be near family. She was a member of the Colorado Historical Society, and of the Tenth Circuit Historical Society. After she retired from the Circuit (technically at least), not content with all of the service she gave this court when we paid her, she donated countless hours and much skill to our Historical Society. (And I believe some time to the ACLU!). In addition to her countless efforts in making our lives easier, in her downtime, Lavon enjoyed writing poetry, quilting, embroidery, genealogy and traveling to Iowa in spring and fall.

Our appreciation of Lavon is best recorded by the words of the Judges for whom she tirelessly worked. As Judge Ebel noted, "Lavon was a remarkable person and a great and loyal friend of the Tenth Circuit. When she left our court employment many years ago, it has been reported that it took three people to replace her." She was, per Judge Tacha, a "court treasure", and per Judge Seymour, a "wonderful human being." She deserves, as Judge McWilliams keenly remarked, "unrestrained praise" for her services to the court, which were of the "highest order."

All our Judges agree that Lavon's attitude was always "can do," and was "never-failing" in its enthusiasm. She always got it done for the Tenth Circuit and its judges. As Judge Porfilio recalled,

To accomplish all she did for the Court and for us, Lavon never moved about at a leisurely pace. I will not forget sitting in the carpetless law library in the old building and listening to the machinegun-like sound her high heels made on the floor as she sped across the distance from one side to the other to get the Clerk's Office to take care of an assignment.

* This article about Lavon Irlbeck originally appeared in *Off the Record* Vol. 19, Issue 2, March/April 2009. It was written by Chief Judge Robert Henry who has graciously granted the Historical Society permission to publish it on its website.

I agree with Judge Porfilio's keen observation that "Lavon had only one lifetime goal: to take personal responsibility for the well-being of the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals and each of its judges."

Similarly, Judge Baldock recounted:

In the years that she was with the court she never said it can't be done. As a matter of fact she was the very one who would get it done for us, when others would say no and walk away. Some of us, as baby judges, seems like yesterday, knew that if we had a problem or needed some help in getting some equipment, like a typewriter or other office supplies she was the go-to person. We who knew her will truly miss her.

She embraced the newly appointed judges, and facilitated the transition to Chief Judge for at least six Chiefs. As Judge Holloway recalled.

When I became Chief many years ago, it was Lavon who flew down to Oklahoma City and helped to get me set up and encouraged me in every way possible. She also helped Helen with countless luncheons, meetings, and the like, and I am sure it took three or more people to replace her and her "to do" response to every request. We will keenly miss her.

Her talents were manifold and the above praise is "richly deserv[ed]." (Judge Holloway). Judge Anderson remarked about her "extraordinary service to the court and individual judges." He recounted an emergency trip that Lavon and he took to Washington, D.C., seeking funds from the A.O. to furnish the court's newly remodeled building. "Thanks to Lavon's tireless efforts in accumulating detail on costs, and her informed answers to the many questions that were asked, we succeeded in getting a very large sum of money for our court for the purpose intended. We have all been beneficiaries of that effort."

We can all learn from Lavon's approach to life. She didn't accept that things couldn't be done. The way she thought of Article III judges made us all want to be better so that we could attempt to partially come up to the standard she thought we met. "You're an Article III Judge," she would intone: "You have to have the tools to do your job!"

We all have Lavon stories. I recall her coming to help me buy furniture at the huge Mathis Brother's location in Oklahoma City. After being emphatically advised by the salesman that the price was as low as it could possibly go, Bill Mathis himself came by. Lavon got another 10 per cent! When I discovered an old desk in the abandoned Guthrie Courthouse that I knew was government issue for the courts, Lavon negotiated the perilous debates between the locals to recover it for the courts. She found an ancient inventory, proving we owned it, and the Postal Service threw in the towel. After the Oklahoma City bombing explosion blew out my windows, and the implosion pulled in my door, Lavon was on the quickest plane to get me running again, and then she started work on the district courts. She would often invite me from time to time to join her and Judges Seymour and Tacha for a libation at the Brown. We got to hear Lavon's views on non-office business on those occasions, and a good time was had by all.

In closing, Judge McKay's words come to mind:

Lavon was very good to keep in touch with individual judges after she left the court, and never-failing in her enthusiasm and continuing interest. She was sorely missed after she left the court, and will hold a special place in the hearts of all of us who knew her and benefitted by her generous efforts

Indeed, she will hold a place in the hearts of the judges of this court whom she helped with her mastery of the rules, her skill in setting up offices, her advice on all requests, her innate love of the Third Branch, and her hearty laugh.