



The Court Legacy

The Historical Society for the United States District Court
for the Eastern District of Michigan ©2017

Vol. XXIV, No. 1
July 2017

A History of Mike Lavoie and the Historical Society

By Judy Christie

Mike Lavoie served as President of the Historical Society for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan from 2004 to 2013. This unusually long term of service was due to Mike's outstanding leadership. He kept being re-elected over and over until he finally begged for mercy and was allowed to retire from his official duties, although he remained on the Board.

To say that Mike was merely an effective leader would be to understate the contribution he made to the Historical Society. With the help of his indispensable assistant, Lisa Haynes, Mike enthusiastically kept the Society's mission front and center in all its activities. Under his leadership the Board successfully completed several large projects including the following:

Smith Act Video. This educational video centered upon six leaders of the Communist Party in Detroit who were tried and convicted in the 1950s for conspiring to teach and advocate the violent overthrow of the government. Under the sponsorship of the Historical Society, executive producer Ronald Aronson produced a video titled "The First Amendment on Trial: The Case of the Detroit Six" in 2004. Subsequently in 2008, a Discussion and Teaching Guide for high school and college students was developed to accompany the video in classrooms across the state.

Portrait Restoration. The Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse boasts portraits of many of the judges who have served the Eastern District. The portraits of the two earliest judges, Ross Wilkins and John Wesley Longyear, were in great need of restoration. Under Mike's urging, the Historical Society formed a partnership with the Grosse Pointe chapter of the Questers, a historical preservation group, and the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society to fund the restoration of the portraits in 2007. That project was completed in 2009.

Presidential Wall. Mike led the committee to assist GSA in the creation of the Presidential Wall. The committee was charged with finding quotes from every U.S. President to go under each one's picture. The quotes had to be accurate, reliably sourced, 15-50 words and refer to justice, the Constitution, the rule of law, equality, the separation of powers, the importance of courts in a democracy or otherwise momentous words of wisdom. The structure was completed and unveiled on Law Day, May 5, 2010.

History of the Court. One of Mike's real interests was the history of the court. He was very proud of the final product: "The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan: People, Law and Politics," by David Gardner Chardavoyne, published by Wayne State University Press in 2012. A very proud moment is captured in the photograph below, taken on March 15, 2012, when the book was introduced in the Chief Judge's Courtroom in the courthouse. ■



Introduction of "The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan" with (l to r) Mike Lavoie, U.S. District Judge Avern Cohn and David Chardavoyne, author.



The Presidential Wall is located on the first floor of the Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse.

The Historical Society for the United States
District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan

Established in 1992

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

President

Alan C. Harnisch

Vice President

Matthew J. Lund

Treasurer

Jeffrey G. Raphelson

Executive Director

Judith K. Christie

Kimberly G. Altman

Elisa Angeli Palizzi

David Ashenfelter

Kevin M. Ball

Hon. Terrence G. Berg

Charles D. Bullock

David A. Chardavoyne

Hon. Avern Cohn (emeritus)

Thomas W. Cranmer

M. Ellen Dennis

Hon. Mark A. Goldsmith

Prof. Peter J. Henning

Gregory V. Murray

Jeffrey A. Sadowski

Matthew J. Schneider

Hon. Walter Shapero

Hon. Arthur J. Tarnow

I.W. Winsten

Advisor

David J. Weaver

THE COURT LEGACY

Co-Editors

Kimberly G. Altman

Elisa Angeli Palizzi

M. Ellen Dennis

Published periodically by The Historical Society for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Office of the Clerk, Room 216, Theodore Levin United States Courthouse, Detroit, MI 48226-2797.

Membership benefits include the Newsletter, voting privileges, and the Annual Meeting.

Papers are encouraged to be submitted to the Newsletter editor for consideration as MS Word (preferred) or WordPerfect documents to kimberly_altman@mied.uscourts.gov, m.ellen.dennis@gmail.com, or epalizzi@millercanfield.com

The Court Legacy reserves copyright to authors of signed articles. Permission to reprint a signed article should be obtained directly from the author and *The Court Legacy* should be acknowledged in the reprint. Unsigned material may be reprinted without permission provided *The Court Legacy* is given credit.

If Your Actions Inspire Others to Dream More, Learn More, Do More and Become More, You are a Leader.

~John Quincy Adams, 6th President of the United States

By Debra A. Geroux



Michael J. Lavoie

On October 13, 2016, my friend, colleague and mentor, Mike Lavoie, died unexpectedly mere hours after engaging in one of his passions – tennis. When I volunteered to put together a tribute to Mike, who served as President of the Historical Society for the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan for many years (and “nominated” me to the Historical Society’s Board along the way), I could not have envisioned the outpouring of tributes from those in his personal and professional lives, most of which were rooted in both such categories.

Indeed, thinking back on his life and all that he accomplished while drafting this article, I quickly learned that a few pages would never fully cover the life force that was Mike Lavoie. During his tenure as President of the Historical Society’s Board, Mike was instrumental in commissioning David Chardavoyne’s book, *The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan: People, Law, and Politics* (Wayne State Press, 2012) and spearheaded the Historical Society’s “Presidential Quote Project Committee,” to assist the Court in developing quotes attributed to each U.S. President for inclusion on the Presidential Wall in the lobby of the Theodore Levin Federal Court House. Reflecting on Mike’s enthusiasm for this latter task, the Honorable David Lawson shared the following:

[Mike] was the chair of the committee that put the flesh on the bones of that concept. Our task was to discuss the 44 presidents and identify a quote that best captured the essence of each man. There were five or six of us on that committee, and each, of course, had a favorite president or two. And one of our members, the venerable Judge John Feikens, personally knew at least two of them.

Mike decided that the only fair way to assign presidents was to establish a baseball-like “draft” session. He came equipped with a hat so we could draw lots, and we all took turns picking from the names that remained on the board. But, in the spirit of rigged elections, he made sure that Judge Feikens drew the names of the two he wanted.

Mike had us scour presidential writings – speeches, inauguration remarks, state of the union addresses, letters – to find three or four quotes from our “draftees” that best defined the presidents and their times. Then we met and voted. The result is the Wall of Presidents that adorns the first floor of the Levin Courthouse today. Every time I pass that display and admire our work, I think of Mike’s guiding hand. It was one of his labors of love.

The outpouring of sentiment that I received to memorialize Mike Lavoie's legacy was incredible. From attorneys and judges that knew Mike professionally and personally, to the members of his Burkina Faso "family," it is clear that Mike Lavoie touched so many lives through his witty banter, his tireless devotion to work and family and his unrelenting leadership. Words are inadequate to describe the life-force that was Mike Lavoie. A true humanitarian and community activist in his own right, long-time friend and colleague Retired Judge Fred Mester provided the following insight:

Words mean something; so it was with Michael. One such word is the one that Burkina Faso King Mogho Naba relied upon to help move his country forward – "Forgiveness." Forgiveness is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feeling and attitude regarding an offense; lets go of negative emotions, such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well. As Mike would say: Forgiveness is not forgetting but it is a process by which one can move on to a better life. From Moses to Paul; from Abraham Lincoln to Martin Luther King, Jr., King Mogho Naba and Michael Lavoie, that word has played an important role to each of them to help us all to move on to a better world for ALL.

In addition to a successful legal career, Mike found time to devote his attention to community service, the most notable of which were his lengthy service as a board member and officer of the Pontiac Alumni Foundation where he engaged in youth mentoring and related activities, and his tenure as President of *Friends of Burkina Faso* (FBF), a national association of former Peace Corps volunteers who served in Burkina Faso, West Africa. While Mike was not one to seek accolades for his services, his dedication to community efforts did not go unnoticed. As his oldest brother, Raymond Lavoie, notes: "[Mike] was . . . highly accomplished. . . . Only on the rarest of occasions would he even share a charitable action, or his commitment to another activity he was involved in or to announce a recent award or accomplishment. Rarely would he "blow his own horn", mostly I would hear from mutual friends or brothers of his latest achievement, article in the newspaper, or award; of which there were many both locally and abroad. His near-life-long work in Burkina Faso is unprecedented in terms of his help for the needy and unfortunate.

In retrospect, it is this work that I am most proud of and I will never forget. Mike was the kind of person that make great leaders of men and live, and walk in the image of God Almighty."

Attorney Thomas Cranmer, another long-time friend and colleague, with whom Mike served on the Historical Society Board, confirmed Mike's altruistic, if not affable, persona:

[Mike] had a great sense of humor and never took himself too seriously. He was bright and a great problem solver. In addition, he was a very gifted athlete. What I will remember most about Mike, however, was his unwavering commitment to help those who were less fortunate. That message always came thru loud and clear with Mike. Whether it was assisting disadvantaged students in Pontiac through the formation of the Gettysburg Group or assisting the people of Burkina Faso in Africa dig a new well or build a new school house – Mike was always there leading the charge. And he always helped for the right reasons. It was never to bring attention or recognition to himself. It was always because it was the right thing to do.

"Whether it was assisting disadvantaged students in Pontiac through the formation of the Gettysburg Group or assisting the people of Burkina Faso in Africa dig a new well or build a new school house – Mike was always there leading the charge. And he always helped for the right reasons. It was never to bring attention or recognition to himself. It was always because it was the right thing to do."

– Thomas Cranmer

Whenever Mike spoke of his "kids" that he mentored or of his "family" in Burkina Faso, one thing was clear – the pride and love for his accomplishments. Even I was not immune to his mentoring prowess. Indeed, nearly every day that Mike was in Oakland County office, Mike would come into my office (which he affectionately called the "pantry") with a coffee and a story, many times a prelude to work but often times simply to grab a treat and share a story. Mentoring was simply something Mike could not turn off. Judge Mester witnessed Mike the Mentor, collaborating with Mike in their Gettysburg Group in the Pontiac School District:

A mentor was understood by Mike to be someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself. Mike would say, "Let's go do it," not "you go do it." He understood the power of the partnership word: "lets." Mike possessed the greatest value of mentors – the ability to see ahead what others cannot see and to help them navigate a course to their destination. Mike reflected Benjamin Israeli, when he said: "the greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your nickel but to reveal to him his own."

As Steven Spielberg suggested: "the delicate balance of mentoring is not creating the mentee in your image but giving them the opportunity to create themselves." Michael was one of those well-balanced individuals – an excellent student of the law; a good athlete and a true friend. He was respected and loved by all. Mike exemplified Churchill's statement that: "we make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give."

As Judge Lawson surmised of Mike's benevolence: "Not surprisingly, in 2007 Mike received the *Frances R. Avadenka Memorial Award* by the Oakland County Bar Association; in 2008 he received the *Champion of Justice Award* from the State Bar of Michigan; in 2010 the *Leon Hubbard Community Service Award* by the Oakland County Bar Association; and at this year's *Fight True* Banquet, Mike quite fittingly received the coveted *Fight True Man of the Year* award. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, 'The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.' We are all thankful that Mike lived, and lived well. His good deeds have made the community in which we live markedly better."

Those that truly knew Mike would avow that he did not put on airs. Indeed, Mike was someone who treated everyone the same – irrespective of age, title or background. As friend and former Peace Corp volunteer, Bob Jackson astutely noted: "One could readily recognize that [Mike] was a man of integrity, that he respected the essential dignity of all regardless of station or provenance." A team player on and off the court and course, Mike had the unique ability to make everyone feel significant.

In Judge Lawson's view, "[t]he remarkable thing about Mike Lavoie – the most overwhelming part of his big personality – was his enthusiasm. When Mike was presented with or conceived a worthy idea, he was all in. He was at once serious and witty, driven and playful. But he was always engaged. And that trait was infectious. Once you were within his orbit, you could not escape the gravitational pull of his enthusiasm."

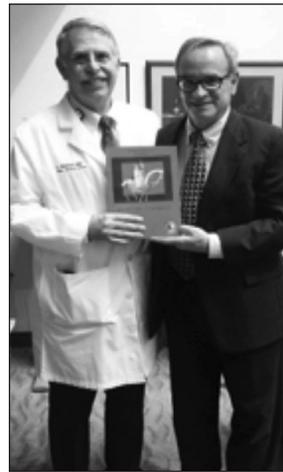
Mike had the innate ability to turn every relationship into one of trust and friendship, mixed in with a large dose of mentorship. Clients and co-workers were no different. As Dean Watson, former lead counsel for Dura Automotive Systems, expressed:

Mike was many things to many people. He was a man of the law. He was my good friend, mentor, and colleague. I met Mike about 10 years ago when I hired him as lead attorney for a contentious lawsuit I was managing as corporate counsel. I recall reading his profile and thinking, this guy looks like he has a lot of integrity. After a reference check, we connected. Looking back, it was one of the best calls I had ever made. From that time on we spoke frequently, if not daily. On Fridays we would have a status call. Preceding the meeting the initiating caller would race to say, "Happy Friday", because, we had made it through another week and were thankful "just to be". His next comment would typically be, "Did you see that?" while referring to some court filing or a surprising news release. After a few years of "Happy Friday" it morphed into happy 'whatever the day of the week' was. Today of course would be "Happy Monday", because we were simply thankful "just to be".

Mike had a profound respect for the human condition and was always working on ways to improve the opportunity for others, especially those who wanted but did not have the means. I suppose that is why he had such a profound respect for the people of Burkina Faso and those in Pontiac. Mike was a model of civility. As lawyers we speak of civility. Civility is easy when opposing counsel is civil. The true test of civility is when the opposition is not. Mike could find some good in almost any situation and had the uncanny ability to brush off the negative. As Mike would say, I am sure we can work it out Judge. . . . Mike made the people around him feel connected, even when meeting them for the first time. He also had a lot of advice to give, one of his favorites was, "Don't let perfection be the enemy of the good". Mike took pride in getting things done, and if you didn't get them started, they weren't going to get done.

When we weren't working on a case together we talked about work, family, philosophy, and life. Every time Mike would come back from a trip he would bring back a life lesson he had learned or an idea he had. On a trip back from Burkina Faso he told me about an experience he had with a villager friend of his. It was a hot and dry day, like 120 degrees hot. He was walking with his friend who seemed to be struggling in the heat. Mike told his friend to go sit in the shade, and his friend replied, it is better to be in the heat with a friend than in the shade without. "How about that," he said with a nod.

Judge Lawson comments: "The remarkable thing about Mike Lavoie – the most overwhelming part of his big personality – was his enthusiasm. When Mike was presented with or conceived a worthy idea, he was all in. He was at once serious



Mike Lavoie with Dr. Les Rocher, Beaumont Chief Medical Officer, in 2014.

and witty, driven and playful. But he was always engaged. And that trait was infectious. Once you were within his orbit, you could not escape the gravitational pull of his enthusiasm." Mike's gravitational pull and relentlessness is evidenced in his facilitation of a relationship between Beaumont Health Systems and Burkina Faso's National Health System, the Blaise COMPAORE Hospital, in 2013. Through a series of meetings in the United States and Burkina Faso with leaders from both hospitals and various dignitaries, including Ambassador Seydou Bouda of Burkina Faso, Mike established an on-going relationship between the two Hospitals.

Attorney Mark Werder, another of Mike's long-time colleagues, as well as one of his tennis and golf "buddies," contributed the following about Mike:

. . . I think he'd recoil at that term since he invested decades in both and regarded them as almost institutional rather than just recreational buddy time. I've known Mike well for his entire legal career since he joined the U.S. Attorney's office in the 80's and in that time only a select handful of things really captured him and got this deep immersion treatment. In those deep dives he became a character so invested in it that he was a main feature for all involved. As a tennis aside, for that group he coined the rotating "B&B" responsibility (providing balls and beers . . . then a snack, too) and often announced his own offering would take the group "where no man has gone before." But I'll limit this to golf, where . . . he truly knew no boundaries. Virtually singlehandedly, he developed the "Fight True" golf league, spawning a set of unique 'rules' which the USGA wouldn't have remotely recognized (such as 'The Rule in Lyle's Case' for tie-breaking and 'Hind Tit,' the penalty for finishing in last place); over the last couple years, he characterized himself as "Commander and Chief" of the FT league. Mike saw golf as a wonderful common denominator that brought judges and lawyers together on a level playing field where all manner of hardcore banter was permissible. He loved yanking the chain of all golf competitors and judges' chains were not off limits; he believed in his heart it was great medicine for both parties and that judges were often unfairly deprived of it by the height of the bench. Along that vein, with the historical society, he privately commented about what a rare opportunity it was for a lawyer to deal at the level of the ED bench outside the courtroom – without any of the tensions of advocacy, to sit among judges sharing their singular interests in the district's history while each was personally a living breathing part of its future. Mike greatly valued the gift of heartfelt communication stripped of legal nuance when dealing with things that struck close to home. He could do nuance but knew and valued far more highly words that were straight talk with dirt-under-your-fingernails and treasured the times when that happened

in judicial relationships. Mike's Fight True league with many lawyers and judges, however, was made more in the image of a deliberately designed zany tightrope walk between controversy and bedlam. 'Legal' grounds for dispute constantly arose over rules and scoring (and anything else worth dispute, such as attire). These issues were addressed in après golf proceedings dubbed 'manclaves' over which Mike presided – beer fueled townhall semi-democracy-style assemblies that could tweak the rules, change the results of a match by rule interpretation, impose penalties, etc. Miscarriages of justice could result from what he called 'torch and pitchfork mobs,' for which event Mike invented the "Remedial Manclave." He gave everyone in the FT family a reason to never get together without laughing, to tease each other endlessly, to make everything a competition where you could bet on the outcome, to ensure there were spoils for the victors, and to always remove caps and shake hands on the last hole.

To say Mike was an innovator would be a disservice – he was so much more. Lynn Helland, Assistant U.S. Attorney and Executive Director of Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission, put it best: "Mike had an absolute genius for framing an issue. . . . [if] someone complained about some sad state of affairs, as people often do, Mike perceptively, succinctly asked: "Compared to what?" is the situation so bad. . . . Mike liberally used his genius to "frame" his many friends' personal appearance and athletic abilities, and to generally make life more interesting for the people around him. That was the outward Mike. But what I most treasured was the inner Mike – the Mike with the gift for always finding good in others; for inspiring others to help improve a community somewhere; for just digging in and doing the grunt work needed to get the job done. We miss him, and will continue to miss him, more than we can appreciate."

In 2011, Mike was also appointed to the Michigan Community Service Commission by Gov. Rick Snyder. In short, President Adams' opening quote is one that exemplifies Mike. He was in the truest sense of the word a "leader." His constant push to "never quit early" and to think outside the box showed those of us who had the pleasure of knowing him that he didn't merely talk the talk, he walked the walk and did so with unbridled determination. Mike devoted his life to inspiring others, always leading by example. Mike was passionate in everything he did. In his career as a litigator, first as an assistant chief in the Criminal Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Detroit and later as a Shareholder at Butzel Long, Mike was a formidable opponent who never backed down from a challenge.

In his career and life, Mike embodied passion, energy, dedication and often times, impatience. Those attributes, however, propelled Mike from ordinary to extraordinary. Mike loved the law and everything it embodied. His success as an attorney exemplified that love. Equally true was Mike's devotion to helping others, often marrying these two loves together. Having spent more than 21 years as his legal assistant, Lisa Haynes witnessed first-hand Mike tireless efforts to get others, including clients and colleagues, to step up and get involved. "Mike was so passionate about everything he did whether it was his work as an attorney, a board member of the Historical Society, mentoring youth in Pontiac, or his work with the people of Burkina Faso. He would be talking with a



April 2016 presentation of Mogho Naaba Baongho, Empereur des Mossés's book, "Poèmes de L'Empereur" to the United States District Court, Eastern District of Michigan. Pictured, left to right, Souleymane Kabore, Mike Lavoie, Chief Judge Denise Page Hood and Mr. Issaka Kabore, photographer of the Mogho Naaba.

client about his experiences in Burkina Faso and before you know it, the client would be asking 'what I can do to help or how can I get involved?' It was contagious! Every time Mike told a story about his travels and experiences with Burkina Faso, you felt like you were right there with him. He was a great leader, teacher, mentor and one of my best friends."

From his early years in the Peace Corp digging wells in the land-locked West African country of Burkina Faso, to his mentoring of at-risk students in the Pontiac School District, Mike dedicated his life to action. I watched first-hand as Mike regaled judges, prosecutors, corporate leaders, educators and dignitaries of his humanitarian efforts in the small village of Namtenga in Burkina Faso and the many relationships he fostered between the Village and the United States. Arguably his greatest pride is the *Namtenga Project*, which was established in 2000 between the Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills and Namtenga to "foster independence and self-sustainability in the village and instills social responsibility and global awareness in Cranbrook students" through such endeavors as a pen pal program between Cranbrook's Brookside School and children in Namtenga and the 2007 creation of the *Namtenga Soundo Babisia* (the Weaving Sisters of Namtenga), a 15-loom weaving studio in the Village.¹ While I am fortunate to hold many great memories of Mike, the true testament to his character and the impression he left behind is best gleaned through the eyes of many who called him a friend and a colleague.

In tribute to Mike and his years of dedicated global community service, I have compiled the following comments from some of Mike's closest friends, family and colleagues in celebration of his life, accomplishments and contributions, and to encourage others to follow Mike's lead. As the following homages demonstrate, while he may be gone, his spirit will live on forever.

Simeon Baguian, Burkina national and son of host family during Mike's Peace Corp mission, sent the following thoughts about Mike:

Michel est un homme décidé, résolu et souvent têtue: un jour en 2007, nous voyagions pour aller à Namtenga avec ma petite voiture et notre roue a crevé sur un pont et nous avions risqué de perdre la vie ce jour. Pendant que nous changions la roue Michel a dit de façon ferme: « nous ne pouvons pas accepter que toute ce que nous avons fait comme efforts et souffrances soit vain. Jamais nous ne l'accepterons ». cela illustre la vie de cet homme plein d'abnégation en vue d'accomplir son idéal qui a su rester effervescent comme quand il avait 22 ans.

Devant le Moogho Naba, rois des mossis, quand il était venu pour remettre le prix des Amis du Burkina, il a dit en proverbe que « celui qui mange les éphémères [les éphémères ne sortent que s'il a plu préalablement le matin] ne doit pas oublier de remercier la pluie du matin.» Ici, il faut voir l'homme plein de rétrospection et de questionnement qu'il était. . . Cela veut dire que pour chaque chose réalisée, le mérite revient aux initiateurs.”²

Another Burkina Faso Peace Corp alumnus, Denny FitzPatrick, wrote on behalf of the Friends of Burkina Faso (“FBF”):

From humble roots as a Peace Corps well-digger in 1975, Mike developed his passion and energy for creative innovation. He had a strong commitment to helping FBF thrive and grow. Over the years, with a big heart and good humor, he paid attention to what each of us needed and wanted, making our participation easy and joyful. We would often work into the wee hours, crafting a catchy t-shirt design in order to best spread the necessary information and education. One shirt read: “Kwilga san golom, bi nyebhga golom.” (When the creek zigzags, the crocodile has to zigzag). Another read: “Mii neda sao mii tenga.” (Knowing a person is better than knowing a town.) He established the FBF Peace Award to enlighten others about the importance of world peace and good will. With 21 ongoing community-based projects, ranging from garden cooperatives to water pumps to libraries to scholarships, Mike made a difference. FBF has supported the entrance into primary school of 3,571 girls. He was a very fine leader. We will carry his passion forward, and honor his memory by contributing what we can in the days and years ahead, and always with peace and love and kindness.

Still another Peace Corp alumnus, Robert M. (Bob) Jackson, who only met Mike after they had served in the Peace Corp in separate regions of Africa (Mike in Burkina Faso and Bob in Niger) recounts of Mike’s passion for volunteerism and his mischievous persona:

He also had no peer when it came to bantering and teasing which he joyfully and liberally dished. One could not help but like him more when he trained his malarkey on you.

* * * * *



Mike Lavoie and Noelie Sandouidi Baguian circa 1975-77 in the Village of Namtenga, Burkina Faso during his tenure as a well-digger with the Peace Corp.

My career service [with the Peace Corp] is only important for the opportunity it afforded to meet and work with many former Peace Corps volunteers. So I say, with some credibility I hope that no other former Peace Corps volunteer accomplished what Mike did: school construction, water wells and small business development for and with the people of his former country of service. As importantly, he did these things with the support and engagement of students and staff of Detroit area schools and the community at large.

* * * * *

He was simply the very best at accomplishing the third goal of the Peace Corps: To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

* * * * *

Native Michigander Loret Miller Ruppe is still the longest serving Peace Corps Director. During her tenure in the 1980’s she would give a placard with words by Ralph Waldo Emerson to thank and inspire Peace Corps volunteers and staff:

“To leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”

With his life so well lived, clearly Mike met this standard for success. We are all the better for having known him.

Of Mike’s continued passion for bettering his community, Judge Lawson recalls:

Mike was well known for his community outreach, especially through the Gettysburg Group, which he formed with Judge Fred Mester. Mike and Fred planned monthly sessions with the kids in Pontiac middle and high schools, mentored and counseled them, and challenged them to reach beyond themselves. Mike invited various notables and public officials to the meetings to speak to the group. And he tied the presentations to community activities.

I had scheduled oral argument in a case that challenged the constitutionality of Michigan’s Proposal 2, a ballot initiative that banned affirmative action in public college admissions and government contracting. The case was a big deal at the time. Mike’s Gettysburg Group had been debating affirmative action, and he thought they should see first-hand how the system channels those debates into real-world applications. So he arranged for a few of his mentees to attend. Although the courtroom was packed, Mike secured front row seats for the students, who took in the full measure of the arguments. And after the arguments, Mike continued to stimulate their interest and enthusiasm, having them follow the litigation as the case made its way to the Supreme Court. I still see those students from time to time, most recently at Mike’s funeral, and they still treasure their experience.

Fellow attorney and friend, Joseph Papelian, writes:

Some of us are fortunate to meet someone who is a game-changer; someone who has a positive and lasting impact on people; someone like Mike Lavoie. It was more than his tireless energy, or his optimism, or his integrity that set Mike apart from most people. He had a magical

enthusiasm to inspire people to want to be associated with him and to help with the programs he cherished – programs like the Federal Court Historical Society, the Gettysburg Group, where he led a group of 26 forgotten at-risk students in Pontiac, and his passion for people of the Village of Namtenga in Burkina Faso, where he had served earlier as a Peace Corps volunteer.

I met Mike more than 35 years ago, as part of a group of young Assistant United States Attorneys who became close friends. The group expanded (later named by Mike as Fight True) and the friendship continued long after our government service until his untimely death last October. In the summers, many members of the Fight True Group got together regularly for nine holes of golf at a City of Birmingham course. Mike was the inspirational leader always bringing laughter and good cheer. Quite naturally, Mike was the emcee at the annual Fight True golf banquet held in January. We all marveled at Mike's commitment to ideals, and to speak with action. He left an indelible imprint on our lives.

Long-term friend and colleague, attorney Alan Gershel, reflects:

I had the pleasure of knowing Mike for over 35 years. All who had the good fortune to know Mike knew him as a special person who was committed to the welfare of others less fortunate than himself. He served as a mentor to many a young man needing guidance. For many years, long after Mike completed his service with the Peace Corps where he dug wells, Mike remained devoted to the people of Burkina Faso. There was also another side of Mike that illustrates his extraordinary character. In all the years I knew Mike I cannot recall a single instance when he was unhappy. Consider how extraordinary this was. Whatever may have been going on in Mike's life he never displayed unhappiness or moodiness. He never exhibited by word or deed that he preferred to not be bothered. Your concerns were his concerns. He always had time for you. No one could light up a room with his humor and turn of a phrase the way he could. His happiness and positive outlook were infectious and all of us who knew Mike are better for having learned and experienced these important life's lessons.

Tapping into the memoirs of Mike's friend and journalist Tom Kirvan, the multi-faceted persona of Mike was highlighted with humor and grace:

Several years ago, when Mike and his twin brother Rob celebrated their 60th birthdays on a Super Bowl Sunday, I discovered something about Mike that seemed a bit incongruous. He once was an altar boy. The thought of Mike, even as a youth, with a facsimile of a halo over his head didn't quite add up to the reality of the present day mischief-maker that we had all grown to know and love.

As one of his frequent golf partners over the past 10 years, I had grown accustomed to his penchant for pranks, wise cracks and good-natured barbs, and admired his quick wit and wry sense of humor. And yet, all that time on the golf course together also allowed me the privilege of seeing his decidedly softer side. He was a man of deep faith, who cherished his role in helping make the world a better place.

Rarely would [Mike] "blow his own horn", mostly I would hear from mutual friends or brothers of his latest achievement, article in the newspaper, or award; of which there were many both locally and abroad. Mike was the kind of person that make great leaders of men and live, and walk in the image of God Almighty.

– Raymond Lavoie

Now, as we all try to come to grips with the loss of a presence that seemed sure to be undying, I think that "halo" of his was indeed rightly placed.

Quoting the works of novelist Philip K. Dick, Judge Lawson sums up Mike's legacy best:

"[T]he true measure of a man is this: how quickly can he respond to the needs of others and how much of himself he can give." By that standard, Mike Lavoie was a man in full, and those who were privileged to know him (as I was) were all the better for it. ■

End Notes

1. Sources: <https://schools.cranbrook.edu/page/The-Namtenga-Project> (last accessed April 18, 2017); <http://www.namtenga.com/index.html> (last accessed April 18, 2017).

2. The English translation is as follows:

Michel is a determined, resolute and often stubborn man: one day in 2007, we were traveling to Namtenga with my little car and our wheel broke on a bridge. We risked losing our lives that day. As we changed the tire Michel said firmly: "We cannot accept that all that we have done as efforts and sufferings is vain. We will never accept it." It illustrates the life of this self-sacrificing man in order to achieve his ideals and who has remained as effervescent as he was when he was 22 years old.

In front of the Mogho Naba, King of the Mossi people, when Michel came to present the Peace Prize for the Friends of Burkina Faso, he said in proverb that "the one who eats the ephemera [mayflies which only hatch after the first rain of the rainy season] must not forget to thank the morning rain." Here one must see a man full of retrospection and questioning as Michel was. . . This means that for everything realized, the merits belong to the initiators.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Annual membership dues:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Bar Association Member | \$ 10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional/Member | \$ 25.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining/Patron | \$100.00
<i>or more</i> |

Please make checks payable to:

Historical Society – U.S. District Court – E.D. Michigan

Mail to Historical Society, c/o David A. Gardey, U. S. Attorney's Office, 211 West Fort Street, Floor 25, Detroit, MI 48226

Email: david.gardey@usdoj.gov

Telephone: (313) 226-9591; Fax: (313) 226-3265

Membership contributions to the Society are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____
DAY EVENING

This membership is a gift from: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

We would like to know about your interests and skills. Please fill in this questionnaire and mail it with your membership fee.

Legal practice area (*if applicable*):

Special interests in the field of legal history:

Yes, I would like to assist and/or actively participate in the following of the Society's activities (*Check as many as may apply*):

- Writing articles for the Society newsletter
- Conference planning
- Oral history
- Research in special topics in legal history
- Fund development for the Society
- Membership recruitment
- Archival preservation
- Exhibit preparation
- Educational programs
- Other (*please describe*): _____

Suggestions for programs or projects:

THIS FORM MAY BE DUPLICATED AND SUBMITTED WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP FEE

*The Historical Society
U.S. District Court
Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse
Detroit, Michigan 48226*

U.S. POSTAGE PAID NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION Permit #153 Wyandotte, MI
--

RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED