

Message from Reese J. Peck 2021 Ralph A. Gabric Award Recipient DuPage County Bar Association



Reese Peck 2021 Gabric Award Recipient and Past President Wendy Musielak

I am greatly honored to have been awarded the Ralph A. Gabric Award for Professional Excellence. To be considered worthy of this award is truly an honor for which words cannot do justice. To have been given this recognition and the opportunity to address the bench and bar is the highlight of my career.

I have been in practice for 38 years, which makes the award particularly meaningful to me because it represents my career and, in a broader sense, it also speaks to the mutual respect

that members of the DCBA have for one another in not only the way they conduct themselves in the practice of law, but also in their service to the needs of the greater community. In so far that I have demonstrated qualities represented by this award, I am indebted to the people and challenges that shaped my life.

My early education gave me a strong foundation on which to build. My father, maternal grandmother, and her son were lawyers. My father died at an early age, but I was able to observe

and learn from my grandmother and uncle. I was blessed to be able to build on my early foundation with the guidance and influence of attorneys and judges the caliber of Ralph: those at Rathje Woodward, such as Al Woodward, and judges, such as Jack Darrah, with whom I had a close relationship.

Before starting at Rathje, Woodward, Dyer & Burt, I worked for Ralph. I interviewed with Rathje Woodward, but they were not hiring, and I was referred to Ralph. In April 1984, I was informed that Rathje Woodward was looking for an associate and, with Ralph's support, I interviewed and have been there ever since.

In my time with Ralph, he showed me the character traits of a consummate attorney. Among many lessons, Ralph taught me to be responsible for my work and to endeavor to be independent, *i.e.*, to row my own boat. For example, on my first day working for Ralph, he gave me a file that was set for jury trial in a few weeks. With the patience of Judge Helen Kinney, I tried the case to a successful verdict. It was a "trial by fire," but it was an exciting and invaluable experience, and it is the experience of performing under pressure that I try to give to the young attorneys with whom I work, as it was given to me.

Ralph prepared me for the responsibility of taking ownership of my work, which continued at Rathje Woodward. Shortly after starting with Rathje Woodward, I successfully tried a case to verdict in front of Judge Darrah, which gave me an experience I could not have gotten from playing a supporting role. I was fortunate to learn early on from Ralph and Rathje Woodward that taking responsibility and placing value in the quality of your work is essential for a successful career – which I want the young attorneys with whom I have been able to associate to understand.

The chance to row my own boat and take ownership of my work permitted me to develop the technical and practical skills of taking a case from beginning to end. It necessitated that I develop critical thinking and gave me the opportunity for personal development, including relationship skills, assertiveness, and self-confidence. As I work with young attorneys, I urge them to take ownership of their work and explain to them the importance of this in their personal and professional growth.

Early on in my career, I understood the importance of developing an honorable reputation, which requires a dedication to practicing law with integrity, honesty, civility, kindness, and respect for all. I have tried to impress upon the young attorneys with whom I work the importance of an honorable reputation in their professional and personal lives. I learned from my family, the attorneys, and judges whose examples I have tried to follow, and the challenges I have faced that in both the law and in life, regardless of the circumstances, one can maintain the attributes of an honorable reputation, as was so clearly manifested by Ralph in his service to the legal community as well as the community at large.

I became involved in serving the community several years ago, after recovering from a serious medical situation, which was my and my wife's salvation. Through the church we were attending I became a Stephen Minister which gave me the chance to come alongside people in distress. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to develop my service to others, and it is that and my faith in God that has fortified me as I have continued to face medical challenges. I hope that my service to others, my faith in God, and the strength He has given me have been an encouragement to others.

Ralph and what his award represents encompass making a difference in our community, as memorialized by Ralph having received the Illinois Bar Foundation Award for Distinguished Service to Law and Society. As exemplified by Ralph, it is our community service that makes a difference in people's lives which makes society a better place. As the DCBA has, I hope that I can carry on Ralph's legacy of social involvement and be an example of its blessings.

Proverbs offers instruction about being generous and helping those in need. It gives instruction on acting in such a way that people will see that you are honorable and that a good reputation is more valuable than riches. It speaks of the rewards of honesty and humility over pride and arrogance. Ralph personified these qualities, which live on through his award, and it is because of the personal and professional qualities for which this award stands that I am humbled and honored to have been deemed worthy of it.

May God bless you all and I hope that you all have a rewarding and fulfilling New Year. □