

An Honor and a Privilege

Honorary doctor of law presented to the Honorable J. Thomas Marten.

By Annie Flachsbarth, BA '07

The Honorable J. Thomas Marten, BA '73, JD '76, joined the ranks of other prestigious Washburn Law School alumni and friends when he received an honorary doctor of law at the May 2018 commencement. Marten received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Washburn University School of Law Alumni Association Board of Governors in 2016.

Marten was born in Topeka, graduated from high school in Onaga, Kansas, and moved back to Topeka to attend Washburn University. He worked his way through college and law school at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. After graduating from Washburn Law, Marten served as law clerk to retired Associate Justice Tom C. Clark of the United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. He then spent 19 years practicing law in Nebraska, Minnesota, and Kansas, including

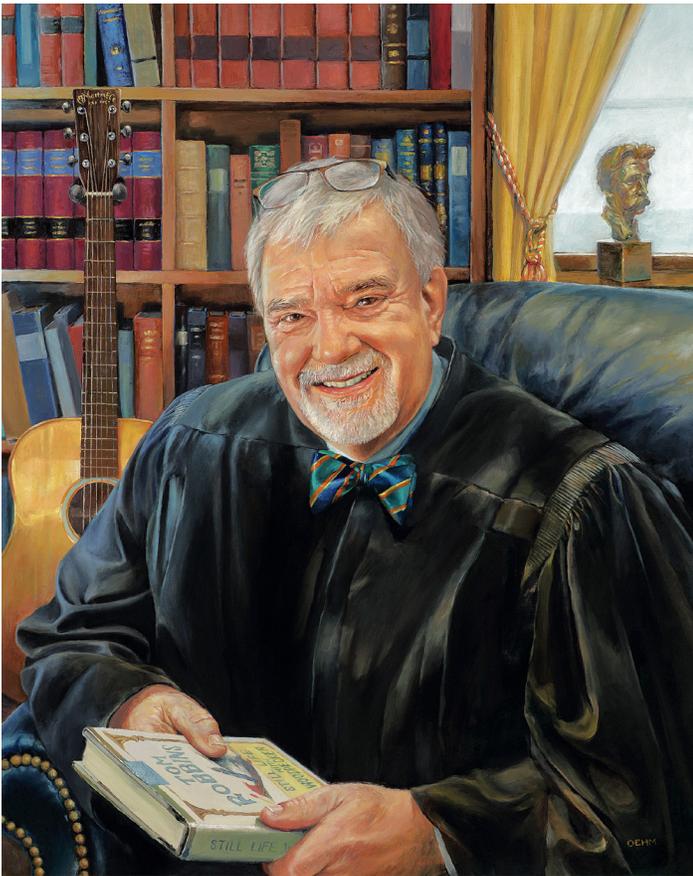
nearly 15 years as a member of Bremyer & Wise, P.A., in McPherson, Kansas.

President Bill Clinton appointed Marten to the bench in 1996. He served as chief judge of the District of Kansas from April 2014 until May 1, 2017. Marten has taught trial advocacy at various programs and workshops throughout the United States for more than 35 years — most recently at Harvard Law School in January 2018.

While Marten was chief judge, the district hosted the national Federal Court Clerks Association annual meeting and held a district-wide retreat involving all court offices and agencies. Finally, the district bench and bar planned and presented the Kansas Legal Revitalization Conference, a three-day conference featuring speakers from across both the legal profession and those outside of it, with the goal of re-energizing lawyers, to push them to think beyond their day-to-day tasks, to look at problems in different ways, and to find some of the idealism that sparked their interest in the law in the first place.

Marten is a founding member of the Wesley E. Brown American Inn of Court in Wichita — named after Marten's former colleague and friend. The organization has flourished with a committed membership and an exceptional partnership with the Wichita Bar Association. He has served as a Federal Judges Association board member and as a member of the Judicial Conference of the United States Committee on Information Technology. He currently serves as a member of the JCUS Federal Rules of Evidence Advisory Committee, is an advisory member of the Sedona Conference, and a judicial advisor to the New York University Law School's Civil Jury Project. He is a recognized national leader in reforming and preserving civil jury trials, and frequently speaks on those topics.

Delmas C. Hill, a 1929 Washburn University Law School graduate ("Uncle Buzz" to Marten and his brothers), was an early influence and mentor to Marten. Hill was appointed to the U.S. District Court in 1949; and to the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit in 1961.



Portrait of the Honorable J. Thomas Marten, BA '73, JD '65, H '18, by artist John Oehm



From Left – Washburn University President Jerry Farley, The Honorable J. Thomas Marten, BA '73, JD '65, H '18, and Washburn Law Dean Thomas J. Romig after the honorary degree ceremony. Photo by Earl Richardson

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Judge Hill was a brother of Marten’s maternal grandfather, who died young. Judge Hill stepped into the position.

“When I was growing up, Uncle Buzz was like a grandfather to me. I think it was expected that I would go to law school, but I never thought a judgeship was anywhere in the cards,” said Marten. Yet, as it turned out, “For 22 years, I was in the chambers he occupied; I use his desk, most of his office furniture. The courtroom that adjoins my chambers was his court room. He not only was a remarkable personal influence, he influenced my career direction to an almost unimaginable extent. He introduced me to Justice Clark, which led to my clerkship and much of what followed.”

Judge Marten is a man of many interests and is an accomplished musician and songwriter. One of his songs, “With Me Again,” written with Country Music Hall of Fame inductee Jimmy Fortune, appears on Fortune’s album “Lessons.” He and another Country Music Hall of Fame inductee, Don Schlitz (writer of “The Gambler” and “Forever and Ever, Amen,”) present a program together on “Concise, Colorful, Persuasive Writing.”

Marten notes, “if our days are filled with work that gives us satisfaction and joy, we want to get better at what we do. It is a blessing to awaken each day knowing there are opportunities to be of service.” Of his many blessings, Marten is most grateful for his three adult children — Sam, Zach, and Allison and his three beautiful grandchildren — Avery, Rylan, and Jace.

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